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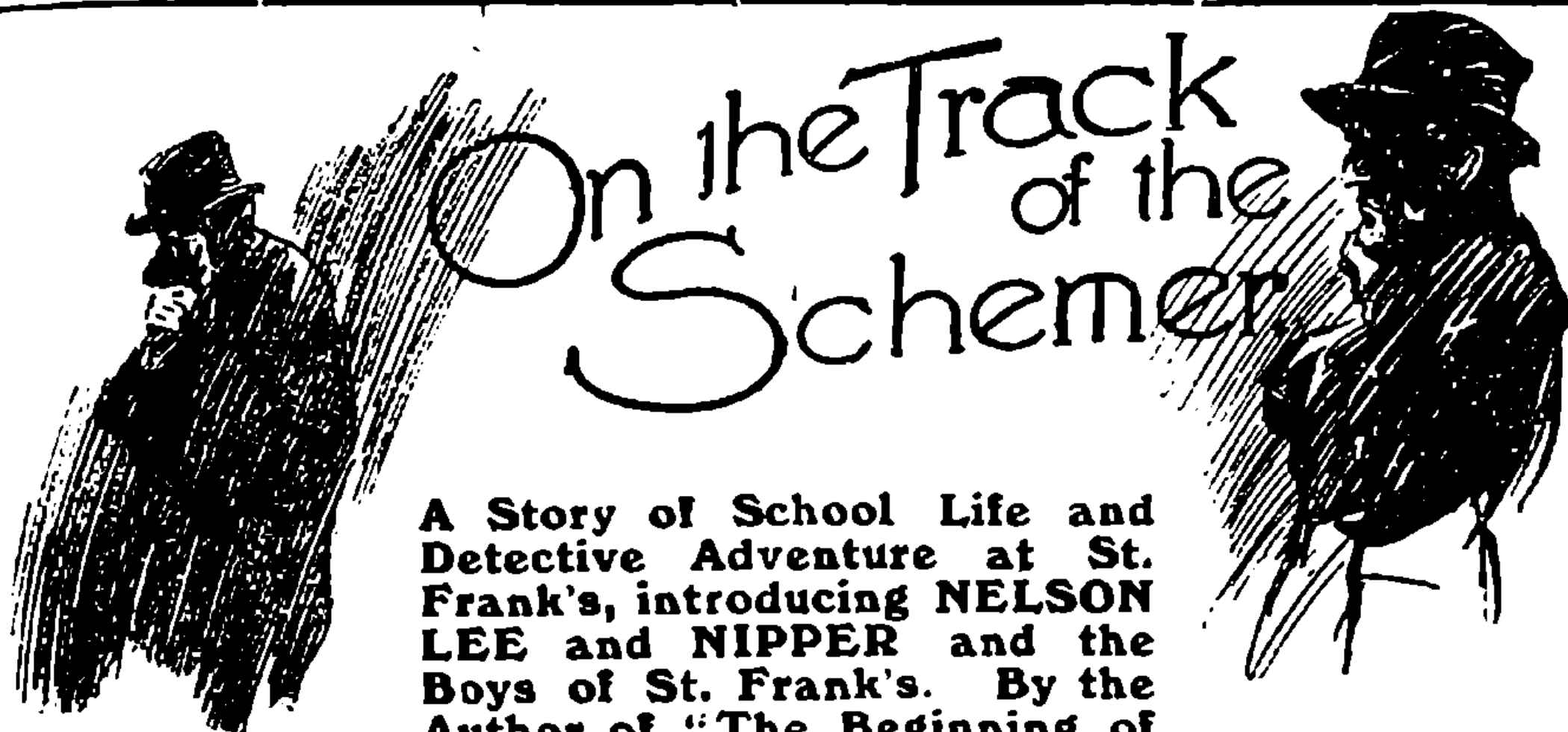
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**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)**

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MEETING IN BELLTON WOOD.

**M**R. SMALE FOXE frowned. He was sitting in the privacy of his study in the College House at St. Frank's, and apparently Smale Foxe was not in a very excellent humour.

The Housemaster of the College House, in fact, was intensely angry and irritated. He had received many setbacks of late, and he was beginning to feel that all his schemes would come to nought.

For Mr. Smale Foxe was a schemer—a cunning, scoundrelly man, whose sole aim in coming to St. Frank's was to cause all the damage he could. It was merely a simple question of a hatred which had been nursed through the course of many years.

And now that Mr. Foxe's opportunity had come he had seized it—only to be frustrated in many ways.

A good many years earlier Mr. Smale Foxe—then a young man—had held a position of undermaster at St. Frank's. He had been caught redhanded in some dishonourable affair, and naturally, had been instantly dismissed.

He had failed to obtain another post—for he had been blacklisted. For two years he had almost starved, and his hatred for St. Frank's had grown. He did not realise that his misfortunes were the result of his own folly.

Years had passed, and then Mr. Foxe's twin-brother, also a schoolmaster, had obtained a temporary position of Housemaster at St. Frank's. Mr. Smale Foxe had literally forced himself upon his weak-willed brother—and had stepped into the other's shoes. His time had come. He would take his revenge!

But, somehow, this was not so easy as it had seemed.

Mr. Foxe's idea was to bring as much disgrace and dishonour upon St. Frank's as he could possibly manage. He had had no real chance until Dr. Stafford had been called away, leaving the College House in the supreme charge of the Housemaster.

Then Mr. Foxe had acted.

He had given the boys their full liberty. He had told them that he wanted to make an experiment. He placed the boys on their honour, and informed them that there would be no rules or regulations as of old, and that they could do as they pleased. He would trust them to remain honourable and straightforward.

Mr. Foxe had known well enough that many of the boys would abuse their new rights, and thus bring disgrace upon the school.

This had actually happened.

However, Christine and Co., of the Remove, had taken a hand in the game. They had realised that the College House was going to rot. And so they had formed a secret tribunal, which punished the fellows who disobeyed the rules.

And, by this means, order was being gradually and steadily restored. Mr. Foxe's precious scheme had come to nothing. He had been foiled by the Remove.

Mr. Foxe had even been denied the satisfaction of blackmailing Lawrence, the schoolboy boxer. He had attempted to do so, but he had failed, and now, within a few days, the Headmaster would return. On that day Mr. Foxe would have to go, for he knew that he could not remain after the Head came back.

Therefore, if his plan was to be carried out, something drastic must be done.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that Mr. Foxe frowned. He was wondering if he would be able to carry out a plan which had already been devised—and which had been discussed by him and his brother.

This brother of Mr. Foxe's was no scoundrel. But he had been compelled against his will to perform actions which were totally against his principles.

"I wonder if the fool has done everything I told him," muttered Mr. Foxe. "I feel that I can't quite trust him, but he was the only man for the work. If only this plan succeeds the disgrace which will fall upon St. Frank's will cause a sensation throughout the country."

Mr. Foxe rose to his feet, and paced up and down for some time. Then he glanced at his watch, and passed out of the study. He had discarded his cap and gown, and was wearing a tweed overcoat and a soft felt hat.

It was evening, and dusk was already falling as Mr. Foxe crossed the Triangle towards the gates. It was quite a mild spring evening, and the sky was clear and bright. Everything looked fresh and green, and the juniors who were about seemed more than usually contented.

One reason for all this was that the Easter holidays would soon be at hand, and the fellows were always happier when holidays were near.

Mr. Foxe passed down Bellton Lane toward the village. But he did not go all the distance. When he arrived at the stile he crossed this, and turned into the wood. He continued on his way until he found himself in a very dense portion of the wood. Here he halted, waiting beneath a huge oak.

"He should be here within five minutes," muttered Mr. Foxe, consulting his watch. "I expect the infernal idiot will be late."

But he was wrong.

Two minutes had scarcely elapsed before a man came down the path from the opposite direction. He was attired in a thick overcoat, a muffler, and a soft hat. He wore large tinted spectacles, and a neat moustache on his upper lip.

This man was Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe, the brother of James Smale Foxe. The two men were strikingly alike—and it was for this reason that Ralph wore a slight disguise. He was compelled to by the order of his domineering brother.

"So you have managed to get here on time," said Mr. Foxe nastily. "Wonderful, Ralph! And have you done everything I told you?"

The other man looked at his brother coldly.

"You do not even possess the decency to wish me good evening!" he exclaimed, with a touch of bitterness in his voice. "There is no reason why you should sneer, James. I have done what you have suggested merely for the sake of peace, not because I approve of this wicked, preposterous—"

"Oh, don't start any of your complaints now," snapped Mr. Foxe. "They have no effect upon me whatever. I told you to rent the big old house on the outskirts of Bannington. It is to be let furnished, and I hope you have been successful in obtaining it for the month."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I have. By the aid of your cleverly worded references, and by paying the rent in advance, I succeeded. But why do you want this house, James? What earthly reason can you have for paying such a large sum for the accommodation which the house provides—accommodation for which you have no earthly use."

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"If I had no earthly use for the place I should not have rented it," he said. "You have done well, Ralph. I hardly expected to hear that the deal had gone through so smoothly. Have you got the key?"

"Yes."

"Good. Hand it to me?" said Mr. Foxe.

Ralph did so, and his brother transferred it into his own pocket.

"That is one step forward," he said—"a big step. Splendid, Ralph! I do not think we shall have any difficulties over the other part of my programme."

"And what is this programme?" asked Ralph. "Some vindictive plan, I'll warrant."

Mr. Foxe shrugged his shoulders.

"You call it vindictive, but I have a different name for it," he said. "I have made up my mind to pay my debt—my debt of hatred. And it shall be done before the end of this present week—before Dr. Stafford returns to St. Frank's. I will bring such disgrace on the school that the name of St. Frank's will be sneered at from one end of the country to the other."

"Why can't you give this up?" asked Ralph earnestly. "Why do you want to act in this way, James? Why can't you be content—"

"I want to hear no criticism from you," said Mr. Foxe curtly. "You will help me to carry out this scheme—although we cannot go into full details now. But my plan, after all, is quite a simple one. I shall lose no time in obtaining a complete roulette table, and one or two other similar necessities. These will be installed in the house at once. Do you understand?"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the other man. "Are—are you thinking of opening a gambling den in Bannington?"

"Yes."

"But the police—"

"The police will know nothing until I choose to let them," said Mr. Foxe, with a chuckle. "You do not seem to realise the depth of my scheme, Ralph. In a few words, it is merely this. Under some pretext or other I shall get a large number of St. Frank's boys to come to this house. They will enter all unsuspecting; and then, at the crucial moment, I shall ring up the police. Do you understand, my dear brother?"

"Good Heavens! You cannot mean—"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Foxe. "The police will arrive in force, and they will find the house overcrowded with St. Frank's boys—a house which is filled with gaming tables! What a sensation! You may be quite sure that I shall see that all the London papers get hold of the story, and it is published broadcast."

"It is terrible, James. It is terrible!"

"Maybe. I want it to be terrible."

said the other harshly. "Can you imagine what the disgrace will be?"

"Yes; it will be appalling!"

"That is precisely what I require," said Mr. Foxe. "St. Frank's will have to wait a long time before it recovers from this blow which I intend to deliver. It will be a staggering knock, and there will be no escape."

The other shook his head.

"Why don't you give it up, James?" he asked earnestly. "What good will it do you? Why should you make yourself criminal in this way—just for the sake of your revenge? Why can't you act sensibly, and give it all up? Sooner or later, you will regret this mad action—"

"I have told you before, Ralph, that I do not require criticism," interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I have made my plans, and I will carry them out. Whatever you say will make no difference. I have decided on my course, and I shall go on with it."

"And how do you propose to get the boys into this house?" asked Ralph. "I must confess that I do not think it will be easy."

Mr. Foxe smiled.

"Leave it to me," he said—"just leave it to me. I have a plan in mind which, I fancy, will be entirely successful. I have discovered that it is useless leaving it to the boys themselves. The only way to achieve my object is to set my own wits to work. And that is what I am doing. The result will be a triumph!"

"A triumph of villainy!" said the other curtly. "You must be careful, James, or you will find yourself in the clutches of the police—"

"By Heaven! If you betray me—"

"Please do not get into one of your tempers," interrupted Ralph. "I should like to know what your exact plans are, so that I may know what services you require of me. For, frankly, I detest this whole business, and I wish with all my heart that it were all over. You have taken a scoundrel's advantage over me, and—"

"You need not fear that you will be held responsible for anything that occurs," said Mr. Foxe. "After the damage has been done the truth will come out. And then you will be exonerated from all blame. As for myself, I do not care. I shall have achieved my object—and that is all that matters."

"But your plans?"

"I will tell you of them later—if I think it advisable," said Mr. Foxe. "On the whole, I am not certain whether I shall take you fully into my confidence or not. Possibly I shall be capable of carrying out the other part of my plan unaided. If so, all the better. We shall see, Ralph—we shall see. But you must hold yourself in readiness to come if you are required. That is quite understood."

"I do not like it——"

Mr. Foxe's eyes glittered.

"I do not care whether you like it, or whether you dislike it!" he snapped. "You will hold yourself in readiness, Ralph; and if I want you, you will consider yourself at my service. That is enough!"

The other man shrugged his shoulders rather helplessly.

"Very well," he said. "But I must say, James, that this thing is all wrong, that it would be far better if you gave it up now, before it is too late. It will not be such an easy matter to get a large number of St. Frank's boys into this house——"

"Bah! You do not know what you are saying!" interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "I have my plans all made, and I know exactly what I shall do. Within a day or two I shall be compelled to get completely out of this neighbourhood—but, when I do go, I shall take good care that I do not leave empty handed!"

"What—what do you mean?" asked the other twin.

"Never mind what I mean—you will know soon enough," said Mr. Foxe. "But I have a chance here that will not occur again. I have a certain mission to accomplish to-night, and I shall require your services, so that I shall be provided with an alibi."

"You want me to take your place?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Foxe. "You will meet me just outside the school in the dark behind the hedge opposite the main wall. Be there at ten o'clock!"

"And what am I to do?"

"I shall give you my cap and gown, and you will go straight to my study in the College House," said Mr. Foxe. "You will remain there until I return, which will probably be between two and three o'clock in the morning. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear," said Ralph. "But what is this mission you speak of——"

"You will learn about that later,"

said Mr. Foxe. "I do not wish to discuss it now. And you must come without your disguise—for you are to fill my shoes at St. Frank's. Furthermore, you will allow yourself to be seen as much as possible. I want this alibi to be absolutely cast iron."

Ralph shook his head.

"I have an idea that you are contemplating something of an unscrupulous character, James," he said. "Think well before you go on this mysterious mission of yours. And what if I refuse to do as you request? What if I refuse to become a party to this deception——"

"By Heaven, if you refuse, it will be the finish of all things for you!" snarled Mr. Foxe harshly. "Do not forget that! It is within my power to ruin your character—to wreck your whole career."

"You have apparently done that already!" said Ralph bitterly.

"Nonsense! When the truth of this matter comes out, you will be exonerated from all blame," said Mr. Foxe. "I do not mind bearing the brunt. I am prepared for it. But if you thwart me in any way, I shall take my revenge! Do not forget that! I shall so arrange things that the consequences of my misdeeds will fall upon your shoulders. Oh, I know it sounds harsh and brutal, but you are compelling me to speak out straight. It is the only way. Follow my instructions, and do as I require, and you will come to no harm."

Ralph had nothing to say. He knew well enough that his brother would carry out his threats. And Ralph was entirely in the hands of his rascally brother. He could do nothing but agree to everything that was proposed.

And so shortly afterwards the two brothers parted. And Mr. Smale Foxe went back to St. Frank's in a satisfied mood. But his was a grim satisfaction.

For many days past he had been making some plans, but now the time had almost arrived when those plans were to be put into operation.

## CHAPTER II.

### A GRIM DECISION.

BOB CHRISTINE nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, it's been successful—up to a point!" he said thoughtfully. "But we can't exactly call it an unqualified triumph."

"What do you mean, you ass?" said Talmadge. "The tribunal has been a roaring success all along. The College House is practically in its normal state again. The fellows daren't do anything against the rules, for fear of being hauled up before the tribunal. Not a triumph? You must be off your rocker!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Christine. "I'm simply speaking the truth. I'm relating the facts. The tribunal hasn't been as successful as I should like."

"Well, I don't know what you require," said Yorke. "We've collared dozens of chaps, and swished them in the tribunal chamber. We've put a stop to smoking in the College House, and to gambling, and to other rotten games of the same kind. We've even made Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, pull in their horns. They're as docile as anything now."

I nodded.

"That's quite right, Christine," I said. "I can't quite understand what you're getting at. How has the tribunal failed? Where has it gone wrong? And what are you grumbling at?"

"I'm not exactly grumbling," said Christine; "but things ain't right in the College House. And I don't suppose they will be right until Mr. Foxe has gone—confound him! He's the chap who needs a lesson—far more than the fellows. He's the cause of all the giddy trouble, and he wouldn't be getting more than he deserved if he was boiled in oil!"

There were several of us chatting in a corner of the gymnasium—Christine and Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House, and Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Reginald Pitt, and myself. And we were discussing the affairs of the College House Tribunal. This institution had been set up by Bob Christine some little time earlier—and quite a number of Ancient House fellows had helped.

Mr. Foxe, in his endeavours to bring disgrace upon St. Frank's, had given the boys in the College House their whole liberty. He had, in short, abolished all punishments, and they were allowed to do exactly as they pleased. Mr. Foxe assumed—quite correctly—that many of the fellows would ~~abuse~~ abuse their new rights, and consequently

bring disgrace not only upon their own heads, but upon the school.

There had been several questionable incidents, and St. Frank's was already beginning to be talked about when Bob Christine took matters in hand—when the tribunal commenced its operations.

These operations were quite simple. Any fellow who had broken the regulations was seized by the tribunal, and punished. And it was quite impossible for the culprit to discover the identity of the tribunal members, for all were disguised in long cloaks, cowls, and masks. These masks were of the Christmas party variety—weird and wonderful faces, with red noses, side whiskers, and so forth. The identity of the tribunal was completely hidden behind this effective disguise.

"Dear old boy, I must confess that I do not agree with you," remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, and eyeing Christine with interest. "In my opinion, the tribunal has been amazin'ly successful—it has, really. There is no more smokin' goin' on, no more gamblin', and the College House has been reduced to a state of quiet."

"That's just it," interrupted Bob Christine. "That's just where you're wrong, my son."

"Begad! I thought——"

"Let me finish," said Christine. "Things ain't quiet in the College House, not by a long chalk. The tribunal has been successful in putting down gambling and smoking and that kind of thing, but there are all sorts of irregularities going on all the time—dozens of 'em at once. Chaps go about whistling, singing, and creating all sorts of noises. They don't get in for calling over, they come up to bed in twos and threes, and some of them are over half an hour late very often. Then, in the morning, a lot of chaps don't take any notice of the rising bell. They slack about in bed until the very last minute, and get down late for breakfast. Everything is disorganised and wrong—and we can't deal with these cases; they're too numerous. Not only two or three fellows are responsible, but dozens; and we can't collar these chaps and haul them before the tribunal. In many cases the offence is so small that it's not worth a swishing. But it's all the lot put together—all the whole collec-

tion—that makes things bad. That's where the tribunal has failed."

"And I'm afraid it will continue to fail," I said, shaking my head. "You won't be able to restore complete order, Christine, whatever you do. You can put down smoking and gambling, but you can't make all the chaps get to bed at the right time, or get out of bed at the right time. There aren't any prefects or masters to look after the chaps, and they take advantage. As far as I can see, there's nothing that we can do—unless, of course, we go to extremes."

"What do you mean—go to extremes?" asked Christine.

"Well, there's one thing—one step we could take!" I grinned. "I'd be perfectly willing to lend a hand, but I'm not sure whether you fellows would like to chance it."

"We'd chance anything," said Bob Christine promptly.

"Well, we'll see," I chuckled. "This idea of mine is perfectly simple, and it could be put into operation without any trouble at all."

"And what is it?"

"I'm getting to that," I said. "It seems to me that Foxey himself is mainly responsible for all the trouble. You know that as well as I do. Well, what's wrong with the idea of collaring Mr. Foxe himself—"

"What?"

"And hauling him before the tribunal—"

"Great pip!"

"And giving him a good swishing!" I concluded.

"Great Scott!"

"Foxey himself?" said Bob Christine, taking a deep breath. "By Jove, you've got it, Nipper!"

"You're willing to do it?"

"Rather!" said Christine. "It's the very thing—the best idea of all!"

"You—you ass!" gasped Talmadge.

"We—we couldn't collar Foxey!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—because—"

"Because he's the Housemaster, I suppose?" said Christine. "That doesn't make any difference at all. I don't look upon him as a Housemaster—I look upon him as a rotter. He's not the usual kind; he's not a bully, and he's not a tyrant. But he's a wrong 'un, all the same. And Nipper

is quite right—the best thing we can do is to give Foxey a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry!"

The other juniors were rather startled.

"But—but how can we manage it?" asked Yorke.

"Easily," I said. "All we've got to do is to hang about to-night—after bedtime, for preference—and then we shall have everything quiet. There won't be any fear of interruptions. Mr. Foxe is bound to be in his study, or knocking about somewhere. Then we can pounce upon him, collar him, and take him along to the tribunal chamber. When we get him there, we'll put him through the mill."

"Swish him straight away?" asked Talmadge.

"Not necessarily," I replied. "We can take our time over that. As a beginning, we can jaw to him. We can tell him that his system is all wrong, that he's got to change it; in fact, we'll give him a chance."

"A chance?"

"Exactly," I exclaimed calmly. "We'll tell him that if he likes to reinstate all the rules and regulations from to-morrow onwards, we'll let him off."

"My only hat!"

"But, if Mr. Foxe refuses, we'll swish him until he agrees," I went on. "That's the idea. And we won't take his word for it, either. We'll make him sign a document—we'll make him promise in writing that he'll put an end to this present state of affairs in the College House. Of course, he'll refuse at first—that's only natural; but after he's had two or three good whallops with the birch, he'll probably change his mind. And then we shall have him on toast!"

"Great!" said Christine, with a chuckle. "Nipper, my son, your brain is worth its weight in gold! It's a first-class, gilt-edged notion. We'll get busy on this straight away; we'll make all preparations, and soon after bedtime we'll get to work, and collar Foxey!"

"Hold on," said Talmadge. "We shall be able to do it all right, but what about these Ancient House fellows?"

"Well, what about them?" asked Christine.

"How will they be able to take a

hand in it?" asked Talmadge. "They'll be in their dormitory——"

"Don't you worry, my son," I grinned. "There are more ways of getting out of a dormitory than through the doorway! Not that we shall be obliged to try any other method. We shall be here all right. We'll fix the time for half-past ten precisely. We'll all meet in the tribunal chamber—that is the old garago at the back of the Collego House—at ten-thirty to the minute. Then we'll get into our ceremonial robes, and start on to the business. It's all settled, you chaps. Ten-thirty to the minute. I'll bring some other fellows as well. It'll be much more effective if we have a big crowd."

"Right you are!" said Christine. "That's agreed upon."

We continued talking for some little time, and then broke up. I went into the Ancient House without delay, and went round to one or two of the studies, to give certain fellows the tip. Handforth and Co., of Study D, were three of these fellows. Edward Oswald Handforth, of course, was quite in love with the scheme. He went so far as to say that he had already thought of something of the kind, but had been unable to tell any of the other chaps about it.

"Just my luck!" said Handforth bitterly, after I had gone out of the room. "You may remember that I said that Mr. Foxe ought to be taken before the tribunal——"

"We don't remember it!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

Handforth glared.

"Of course, you wouldn't!" he snapped. "You never do remember when I think of something brilliant!"

"And that never happens!" said Church.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"If you can't speak in a proper voice, you'd better not speak at all!" said Handforth. "And if I hear you muttering again, I'll give you a punch on the nose! This idea about Foxey is a good one—that's why I thought of it first. We'll make him restore order in the Collego House. If he doesn't promise, we'll give him a terrific swishing. And I'll have the birch—Foxey won't get any mercy from me!"

"Wouldn't it be better to punch him on the nose?" asked Church sarcas-

tically. "You're well practised at that, Handy!"

"If you're going to try to be funny, you'll jolly soon feel what kind of a punch I possess!" said Handforth grimly. "Talking about Mr. Foxe, it's high time that something was done. I shan't forget what happened the other day, when I made that terrific discovery."

"Which terrific discovery?"

"Ah, you've forgotten all about it!" sneered Handforth. "I don't expect anything else from you chaps! What about when I went out and saw Mr. Foxe talking to himself?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Or, to be more exact, I saw Mr. Foxe talking to a second edition of Mr. Foxe," went on Handforth. "Nobody believes me, but, sooner or later, the truth will come out. And what about that time when I saw Foxey in Bannington, and you chaps declared that he was in Caistowe?"

"Oh, come off it, Handy!" protested Church. "You know as well as I do that there's only one Mr. Foxe. It wouldn't be possible for two chaps of his nature to be knocking about! One's enough, anyhow. The chap you saw in Bannington wasn't Foxey at all——"

"If it wasn't Foxey, it was his double," argued Handforth doggedly. "Do you think I'm an idiot? Do you think I'm blind? I saw both of them in Bellton Wood, as plain as I can see you. There were two men, and they were the same size, they had the same features and everything. They were as alike as two peas."

McClure grunted.

"Well, peas ain't always alike," he said. "Some peas are big and smooth, and others are shrivelled——"

"You—you ass!" roared Handforth.

"You know jolly well I was only using an ordinary everyday expression. I saw two Mr. Foxes—and if you don't like to believe me, you can do the other thing! And let me tell you this, my sons—I'm not going to be sneered at and laughed at by you chaps! I'm the leader here, and I'm going to have my own way!"

"Oh, there he goes again!" sighed Church. "Once he gets on the high horse——"

"Do you believe this or not?" de-

manded Handforth grimly. "Do you believe that I saw two Mr. Foxes?"

Church and McClure glared.

"No, we don't!" they said in one breath.

"What?" bellowed Handforth. "You—you— My only hat! I'll—I'll——"

But Church and McClure did not wait to see what Handforth would do. They had a very good idea that he would exercise his fists, and so they thought it advisable to make a hurried and undignified exit. They were quite near the door, and they wrenched it open and scooted out. Handforth came in hot pursuit, and he went charging down the passage.

When he arrived in the lobby, he found that Church and McClure had dodged out into the Triangle, and were now making full speed over towards the College House.

"Come back!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to punch your noses!"

"No thanks!" shouted Church. "We're not keen upon it just at the moment!"

Handforth gritted his teeth, and gave chase. Church and McClure went into the College House, and rushed along the passages. They were just turning a corner when they nearly collided with Mr. Smale Foxe, who was coming along that way. Handforth was just behind, and did not see Mr. Foxe—and, consequently, a violent collision took place.

Mr. Foxe and Handforth met at the corner, and there was no time to dodge past.

Handforth charged full tilt into the Housemaster, and Mr. Foxe went flying. He staggered back several paces, and then fell with a thud, floundering on his back. The breath was knocked out of him, and Handforth stood there, startled and somewhat scared. And, as it happened, I came along at that very moment, and witnessed the whole thing.

Mr. Foxe sat up, gasping.

"By Heaven!" he snarled. "You—you infernal young ruffian! I—I——"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Handforth. "I—I didn't see you, you know, sir!"

"You didn't see me?" bellowed Mr. Foxe, rising to his feet, and literally quivering with rage. "You confounded young fool! What do you mean by rushing about the passages, as though you were a madman?"

"Well, I don't see that you ought to

grumble, sir," said Handforth boldly. "After all, the fellows are allowed to do exactly as they like in this House, and there's no sin in hurrying along a passage!"

"Not another word!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "I shall report this affair to Mr. Lee, and see that you are punished. You must learn to be more careful in future!"

"I've apologised, sir, and I can't do anything more than that!" he exclaimed gruffly. "I didn't knock you over on purpose—it was quite an accident. I don't see that you need report me to Mr. Lee——"

"Be silent, boy!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "I will hear no more! Good gracious me! Look at my wrist——"

"Oh, your arm's bleeding, sir!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Smale Foxe glanced at his wrist. "Infernal nuisance!" he snapped angrily. "By thunder! I will make the boy suffer for this!"

"I was standing quite near, and I looked at Mr. Foxe's wrist closely. It was grazed on the inner side—indeed, even gashed. And I assumed that when Mr. Foxe fell he had caught his wrist upon a loose piece of flint on the hard stone floor. Even a tiny fragment of stone, with a sharp edge, would cause quite a nasty cut. And now his wrist was bleeding somewhat.

"Can I be of any help, sir?" I asked.

"Help?" snapped Mr. Foxe. "No!"

"But I have some court plaster here, sir——"

"I want none of your court plaster!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "It is only a scratch, anyhow!"

He stalked off, still fuming with rage, and Handforth turned to the other fellows and snorted.

"Just as if it was my fault!" he exclaimed. "Of all the nerve! How the dickens was I to know that Foxey was coming round the corner——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you grinning at?" demanded Handforth, staring round.

"Well, you might as well stick to the facts, Handy!" I chuckled. "I rather fancy that Mr. Foxe was walking—you were the fellow who was doing all the charging. You went round the corner like a whirlwind, and it's a wonder Mr. Foxe wasn't knocked into the middle of next week! It ought to

be a lesson to you not to go rushing about the passages——"

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth. "If you start preaching, I'll dot you on the nose! Where's McClure? Where's Church? I'm going to smash the pair of them to bits, the cheeky rotters!"

And Handforth went rushing off on his search. Unfortunately, he went in the wrong direction, for Church and McClure were taking shelter in the doorway of a study quite near by. Fortunately for them, Handforth was unaware of this fact, and he rushed away from the spot.

It was only a small incident, after all; but later we should have cause to remember it.

Mr. Smale Foxe went to his own study, and he rapidly attended to his wrists. When he had wiped the blood off, the wound proved to be a very trivial one—just a slight cut and a graze. The blood soon ceased flowing, and Mr. Foxe concealed the place by means of a piece of flesh-coloured court plaster. Having a stock of his own, he had declined mine.

Ten minutes later Mr. Foxe had forgotten all about the cut.

And he was pacing up and down his study, thinking deeply. He had been making very careful plans for this particular night—sinister plans. It was highly necessary that his twin brother should take part in the scheme, for, without the co-operation of Ralph, the project could not be carried out thoroughly.

As it was getting on towards ten o'clock, Mr. Foxe made certain preparations. From a locked cupboard he produced several curious-looking tools. These he stowed away in various pockets, and finally donned his mortar-board and gown. Then he went to the window and raised the blind. Anybody who happened to be in the Triangle could now see Mr. Foxe clearly, for the study was well lighted. This was what Mr. Foxe required. He sat down at his desk, and pretended to be busily writing.

"Publicity is what I require now—not secrecy!" he told himself. "And when Ralph comes in—when he steps into my shoes—everybody here will assume that I am still on the premises. The alibi will be complete and absolute. Without such a safeguard I would never risk this particular game!"

Five minutes before the appointed time Mr. Foxe rose to his feet, and made his way out of the study. He went leisurely down the passage, passed out into the Triangle, and then went through the schoolmasters' gate into the lane. Everything was dark and quiet. Not a soul could be seen in any direction, and Mr. Foxe made his way through a gap in the hodge and found himself in a meadow. He passed along for several yards, and then a dull form loomed up in the gloom ahead.

"You are here?" said Mr. Foxe. "Good! Now, Ralph, we must lose no time!"

The other man was Mr. Ralph Smale Foxe, and he was now wearing no disguise whatever. He looked exactly like his brother in every trivial detail. The resemblance was astounding.

"Yes, I am here, James!" said Ralph, grimly. "I wish you would tell me what mission this is you are about to embark upon. I have no doubt that it is a strange one——"

"In that guess you are probably correct," interrupted Mr. Foxe curtly. "But if you think I am going to give you any details, Ralph, you have made a mistake. I have no time to waste now—I must be off at once. And it is most important that you should show yourself in the Triangle and in my study without any loss of time. Speak as little as you can, but make yourself seen as much as you can. That's understood?"

"Quite understood," said Ralph. "But what does this mean, James? Why are you doing this? And when will you return?"

"I shall only answer one question—the latter one," replied Mr. Foxe. "I shall return, as near as I can judge, some time between one o'clock and two o'clock. You will remain in the study all that time, Ralph. Be reading, writing—anything you like—and leave the blind up, so that everybody can see you. Take a walk round occasionally; go into one or two dormitories before the boys are asleep. It is essential that there should be plenty of witnesses to prove that I—I, mind you—remained in the school on this particular night."

"But if I am to stay in the study, how can I go round to the dormitories——"

"Oh, do have some sense!" snapped

Mr. Foxe. "You will remain in the study after the school has gone to sleep, but, until about eleven o'clock, or just later, you can be walking about, showing yourself. That is all I need say. We have wasted quite sufficient time already. Here, slip on this gown and this cap!"

Two minutes later Ralph was wearing the cap and gown—and it would have needed a very keen-eyed individual to detect the change. In broad daylight, indeed—in glaring sunlight—it would have been well-nigh impossible to discover that the man who returned to the school was not the man who had emerged shortly before.

And Mr. Foxe went away into the night, on his grim mission!

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY.

"EVERYBODY here?" I asked crisply.

"Yes, I think so," said Bob Christine. "Sixteen of us—that ought to be enough!"

I nodded, and glanced round the old garage, which was situated at the rear of the College House. At the present moment the place did not look very much like a garage, for it was draped with heavy curtains, and only one shaded electric light glowed from above. The place was completely disguised.

And so were its occupants.

There were sixteen juniors altogether, including myself. These comprised Christine and York and Talmadge, of Study Q, Clapson and Oldfield and two more College House juniors. The rest belonged to the Ancient House—Tregellis-West, Watson, Handforth and Co., etc. It was quite impossible to detect the identities of the figures which stood about.

For every junior wore a long, flowing cloak, and these cloaks were fitted with cowls, which came completely over the head. Even the face was invisible, for this was effectually concealed by means of a hideous—or a humorous—mask. There were all kinds of masks—some with red noses and quaint whiskers, some without whiskers at all, and with high cheek bones, some with big, protruding teeth; in short, all sorts and

sizes of masks. And behind these it was absolutely impossible to detect the identity of the wearer. Familiar voices, of course, would give the game away, but the fellows had been warned not to speak. Most of the talking would be done by Bob Christine and myself, and we were capable of disguising our voices so that they could not be recognised.

"Well, what's the programme?" asked Handforth. "It's all very well to say that we're ready, but how are we going to get to work? How are we going to collar old Foxey?"

"It will be the easiest thing in the world," I said. "He's still sitting in his study, reading. Very obligingly, he's left the blind up, so that we can see everything in the room. The best way will be for us to take him by surprise, and cut off his retreat."

"And how shall we do that, dear old boy?" asked Montie.

"Eight of us will go to the window, and break in that way; meanwhile, the other eight will creep round through the passages, and enter by the door. It will be then impossible for Mr. Foxe to get away. We'll have him collared within two minutes, and he won't have a chance to shout for help."

"Good!" said Christine. "That's the ticket. Well, buck up!"

We all left the tribunal chamber, and emerged into the gloom of the night. It was quite dark outside, and rather chilly, but we did not mind. And the school itself was silent, for practically all the boys were in bed.

This was a daring step we were about to take; but we had considered it carefully, and we were certain that it was the best course. By seizing Mr. Foxe, we should be going to the root of things. We should put it to him quite plainly that unless he promised to restore order in the College House, he would be birched.

Naturally, Mr. Foxe would be furious, and he would threaten all sorts of dire punishments. But they would be idle threats, since Mr. Foxe would never be able to discover the identity of those who had captured him. He would probably guess the truth, but he would never be able to prove it. Therefore, we should have him completely in our power.

Bob Christine took seven fellows, and they made their way to the window of Study Q. It would be quite easy to

enter the house by this means, and then to slip along the passages until they arrived outside the door of Mr. Foxe's sanctum. Meanwhile, I took seven other fellows towards the House-master's study window.

We crept up like shadows, hardly making the slightest sound. If anybody had chanced to come upon us then, they would probably have received the fright of their lives; for, in the gloom of the night, we looked a terrible collection of unearthly beings.

I noted with satisfaction that the window was not fastened; it was, indeed, slightly open at the top. It would, therefore, be quite a simple matter for me to slip the lower sash up; then, when I did so, this would be the warning for the others to surge in by the door. If this proved to be locked they would wait out there until one of our number turned the key. Mr. Smale Foxe himself would not be able to get away.

"Good!" I murmured, as I peered through the window. "He's still sitting there reading, in front of the fire. We shall take him completely by surprise, and we'll have him down before he can recover his breath!"

"I'd like to get just one punch in!" said Handforth. "If I could dot him on the nose——"

"There'll be no dotting done to-night, Handforth!" I interrupted grimly. "This affair is going to be conducted in the right way, so don't you interfere. And remember, there's to be no speaking. Everybody has got to keep absolutely silent; not a single word is to be uttered until Mr. Foxe is in the tribunal chamber. And then I'll do all the jawing!"

Handforth grunted, and said no more. We were now collected just outside the window, and Mr. Foxe, within the apartment, had no idea that we were there. And, as a matter of fact, we were under a delusion, too. We believed that the man in the study was responsible for all the trouble in the College House; but, of course, this was not the case, for he was Mr. Ralph, the unfortunate twin brother of the rascally Housemaster. He was carrying out the instructions that Mr. Foxe had given him. But we weren't to know this—we had not the slightest suspicion of it.

"All ready?" I breathed. "Go!"

As I whispered the last word I sprang forward, clutched at the window sash, and flung it up. At the sound of the noise, Mr. Foxe started in his chair, and turned round. Then his eyes opened wide, in amazement and alarm. His face went quite pale for a second as he jumped to his feet and faced about.

For what he saw startled him enormously.

Weird and amazing figures piling into the study through the window—cloaked and cowed figures with awful, horrible faces! It was only after that first moment that Mr. Foxe realised that the figures were disguised—that they were wearing masks, and then, before he could properly find his voice, other figures of the same kind poured in through the doorway. It was a regular invasion.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Ralph Foxe. "What—what on earth——"

He paused as the figures came charging towards him.

"Good gracious me!" stammered Mr. Foxe. "Is—is this some practical joke? Speak! What is the meaning of this? What are you doing here——"

Not a sound came from the intruders; they simply flung themselves at the Housemaster, and he was sent flying. He went over on his back with a thud, the masks piling on top of him.

"Why, what—upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Foxe. "This—this is outrageous! Release me at once, confound you! Release me—ugggh!"

Mr. Foxe made an inarticulate sound, and then subsided into silence. This was quite necessary, since a thick muffler had descended over his mouth and nostrils, and had been drawn tight. And Mr. Foxe's struggles only lasted for a minute or two, for he was quickly bound, hand and foot, and, with his mouth closely muffled, he could do nothing. Even his eyes were closed, for the muffler went completely over his face. He could see nothing of what was now taking place.

He was bewildered, and he could not possibly imagine who had captured him, or why he had been taken prisoner. It was a startling adventure, and Mr. Foxe's mind was in a whirl. He felt himself lifted from his feet and carried, and he knew that he was being taken through the window. And not a word had been spoken all this time.

The prisoner guessed that these

masked and cloaked figures were those of schoolboys, and he also guessed that he had been mistaken for his brother. It was quite impossible for him to tell the truth. He could not save himself by telling his captors that he was not the right man.

He really had no idea how far he was taken, but it seemed that he was carried for quite a long distance, right away from the school. This was because we carried Mr. Foxe round the Triangle two or three times, in order to give him a false impression of his real destination. And at last he was placed upon his feet and allowed to stand perfectly still. He could not move, since his ankles were bound, and his wrists were also tied behind his back. The bandage, however, was removed from his eyes and mouth, and he could see exactly where he was.

Mr. Foxe stared round, rather bewildered.

He found himself in a curious apartment, hung with heavy curtains, and with only a dim light gleaming down from above. All round him, in a perfect circle, stood the sixteen extraordinary looking masked figures. Not a word was spoken, and Mr. Foxe stared uncomfortably. It was a most uncanny experience. Those set, expressionless faces were staring at him from all sides, some grinning, some snarling, others merely vacuous. Not a single face was lighted by an animated expression. The effect was decidedly disconcerting.

But Mr. Foxe took hold of himself, and clenched his teeth. He was angry, for he guessed that this was the work of a party of juniors. He looked round with flashing eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded huskily. "You confounded young rascals! Do you think for a moment that I am deceived. I know that you are junior boys belonging to this school! And you shall suffer for this outrage——"

"Silence!" The voice came from a masked figure which was sitting upon a kind of raised platform; and the voice was quite unknown to Mr. Ralph Foxe. It was deep and penetrating.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated the prisoner. "You—you dare to tell me to be silent——"

"You must only speak when you are directed to do so," went on the voice

grimly. "Please understand, Mr. Foxe, that you are in the hands of the College House Tribunal. The time has now come when you must answer for your various misdeeds. And, unless you decide to give the tribunal a distinct undertaking that you will alter your methods, you will be forthwith birched."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Foxe, startled.

"You will be subjected to twenty-five strokes!" went on the voice.

"This—this is scandalous," ejaculated Mr. Foxe hotly. "You young rascals! I quite realise that this is some kind of practical joke, but you will be well advised to give it up now—before you go too far. If you release me at once, without any further nonsense, I am inclined to overlook the whole affair. But——"

"Silence!" exclaimed the chairman once more. "You must answer the questions which are about to be put to you—and you must answer them truthfully."

Mr. Foxe swallowed hard, and said no more at the moment.

The chairman, of course, was Bob Christine. He was doing all the talking at the moment. I stood fairly close to Mr. Foxe, watching him rather curiously. For it struck me that our prisoner was not quite what I had expected. He was behaving differently, he was taking the whole affair calmly. I had expected quite a different attitude on Mr. Foxe's part.

"Now, prisoner, pay attention," said Christine, in his deep voice. "Have you, or have you not given the boys of the College House full liberty to do as they please?"

"Confound your impudence——"

"Answer the question!"

"Yes, I have given them their liberties!" said Mr. Foxe angrily. "But——"

"Enough!" broke in the chairman. "Answer the next question. Have you abandoned all rules and regulations in the College House?"

"Yes!"

"Very well," said the chairman. "Now think carefully before you answer this question. Has this experiment of yours been a success? Give me a truthful answer—your real opinion. Has this experiment been a success?"

Mr. Foxe took a deep breath.

"I will answer no more questions!"

he said between his teeth. "You may do as you please, but I will not be subjected to this humiliation."

"It will be better for you if you answer the questions without obstinacy," said Christine. "You will see that it is quite useless for you to resist. You are our prisoner, and we can do exactly as we please. I will waste no further time. The tribunal's object in bringing you here is a clear one. You must give a distinct understanding that you will restore all rules and regulations tomorrow. You must put a stop to this present state of affairs. Do you agree?"

"I will agree to nothing!" said Mr. Foxe angrily.

"Very well—we will see!" said the chairman. "Nos. 1 and 8, forward!"

I stopped forward with Reginald Pitt, who was number eight.

"Seize the prisoner by the wrists!" went on the chairman.

We did as we were commanded. We grasped Mr. Foxe firmly, and waited for further orders. And then I noticed something. Mr. Foxe's wrists were in the full gleam of the electric light. I looked at them closely, and then bent down so that I could see even more clearly. And when I drew myself upright my lips were pursed, and there was a gleam in my eyes.

"Bring the prisoner forward!" went on the chairman curtly.

But I held up my hand.

"Wait!" I said, in a thick, gruff voice. I left Mr. Foxe's side and mounted the platform. Then, bending close to Christine, I carried on a whispered conversation with him—so low that Mr. Foxe could not hear a single word.

"We must release the prisoner at once!" I breathed.

"Eh?" said Christine.

"We must not keep him here," I went on. "I will explain afterwards, old man."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" muttered Christine. "We've got him here now, and we're going to keep him—we're going to swish him, if he doesn't agree to what we say——"

"I tell you, we must release him. He is not our man!"

"Eh?" gasped Bob. "Not—not—What rot! You must be dotty, Nipper!"

"No, I'm not," I said. "We've got to let him go free!"

And I added a few instructions while Bob Christine listened in amazement. Finally, however, he nodded.

"The tribunal has come to a decision," said Christine, in his loud, deep voice. "Prisoner, pay attention!"

"You young rascals!" said Mr. Foxe. "This farce has gone far enough——"

"We realise that what you say is correct!" said the chairman. "Under the circumstances, Mr. Foxe, you will be given your liberty without any further delay. No more questions will be asked, and you will be allowed to go."

The other members of the tribunal listened to these words in blank amazement. They could not possibly understand why Mr. Foxe should be released. Indeed, many of the fellows were indignant. But it was impossible to speak out, for they would have given themselves away.

"No. 1, 5, 6, and 8!" commanded the chairman. "seize the prisoner, and muffle him once more. He must not be able to speak, and his eyes must be closed."

While this was being done Christine whispered instructions to several of the juniors, who were quite in the dark, but could do nothing but obey; and then Mr. Foxe was lifted from his feet once more, and carried out. He was taken out of the garage, round the Triangle once or twice, and finally found himself in another building. What this was he could not tell, for it was in pitchy darkness.

However, he was released from his bonds, and the muffler was taken from his face. He was now quite free, except for the rope which bound his ankles. This one had been left. It was a strong rope, and it was very securely tied.

And Mr. Foxe was left there, in the total darkness. He heard a door close, he heard a soft patter of footsteps, and then came absolute silence.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Foxe. "What—what an extraordinary adventure!"

Nothing had occurred to him! He had come to no harm, he had not been birched, as the tribunal had threatened. In short, it seemed to Mr. Foxe that the fellows had been rather afraid of carrying out their threat, and had given up the project halfway through.

It took him two or three minutes to

untie the knots of the rope—he had no knife handy. And when, at length, he rose to his feet, and stamped about, he struck a match. Then he discovered, rather to his surprise, that he was in the woodshed—a building tucked away in a corner of the Triangle.

Mr. Foxe came out into the Triangle and looked about him. Not a soul was to be seen. He had the whole place entirely and absolutely to himself. And the mysterious members of the College House tribunal had completely vanished. They had left no trace behind them, and Mr. Foxe, still bewildered, made his way back to his study.

Meanwhile, the tribunal had returned to the old garage to have a consultation. Most of the fellows were very excited, not to say incensed. They had taken all the trouble to capture Mr. Foxe, and then he had been allowed to go. He had been given his freedom before he had agreed to any undertaking.

Handforth was particularly indignant.

"You asses!" he snorted. "You—you blithering idiots! It's your fault, Christine, and yours, Nipper! What did you let Foxey go for? What's the idea? We couldn't say anything—you took advantage of us! You must be dotty——"

"Hold on, Handforth!" I interrupted. "I will explain the whole thing."

"I don't see how you'll do it!" said Pitt, warmly. "Personally, I think you're an ass, Nipper! I don't disagree with your actions as a rule, but this time you've positively astonished me. Why did you want to let Foxey go—just when we had him secure? We could have forced him to agree——"

"If you'll only give me a chance, I'll explain," I said. "But I don't think Christine believes me——"

"I don't," said Bob Christine. "You are off your rocker."

I looked round.

"All right—listen!" I said grimly. "You think that I have acted wrong——"

"Yes!"

"You have!"

"You've acted the giddy ox!"

"Well, I can claim that I acted in the only possible way, under the circumstances," I went on. "It would have been quite useless for us to keep Mr. Foxe here, because he wouldn't have agreed to sign any document."

"We should have forced him to agree!" said Christine promptly.

"Perhaps so; but that document would have been useless," I went on. "And to have birched the prisoner would have been grossly unfair."

"Unfair!" exclaimed Talmadge. "Unfair, after what Foxey has done!"

"Yes!" I protested. "That man we captured doesn't deserve punishment."

"Doesn't deserve it!" snorted Handforth. "Why, you—you——"

"Let me finish," I broke in. "The prisoner was not Mr. Foxe!"

"Eh!"

"What?"

"Not Mr. Foxe?"

"Oh, he's clean gone!"

"It was not our Mr. Foxe, anyhow," I went on grimly. "You can believe it, or disbelieve it, but I know what I'm talking about. The man we had here, in this tribunal chamber, was not Mr. Smale Foxe!"

"It's been too much for him! His brain's turned!" said Pitt sadly. "Not Mr. Foxe! Just as if we could make a bloomer about Foxey—with his clean shaven face and big nose! Nipper, old son, you need a rest cure!"

The fellows were absolutely astounded by what I said. And they all thought that I had suddenly taken leave of my senses. But I went on to explain.

"Do you remember when Handforth bowled Foxey over in the passage this evening?" I asked.

"Of course we remember it!" said Christine. "Handy sent him flying!"

"And do you remember that Mr. Foxe cut his wrist?"

"It was only a graze," said Handforth. "I couldn't help it, either——"

"I am not saying that you could help it, or anything of that kind," I went on. "But the fact remains that Mr. Foxe cut his wrist, and it was bleeding quite a lot at first. In fact, he had a distinct skin wound on his wrist. Under ordinary circumstances, that little place would have taken at least a week to heal up, and even then there would have been traces of it left."

"What on earth are you getting at?" asked Bob Christine impatiently.

"Simply this—the man we had in here—the man we thought to be Mr. Foxe—had no cut or graze on either of his wrists!" I declared quietly.

"What?"

"I looked at them both carefully," I said, "and both of them were absolutely whole, without the slightest trace of a cut or a graze. I was not deceived by court plaster, or anything of that nature. The man we had here was perfectly intact—he had no cut or graze. Therefore that positively proves that he was not Mr. Foxe."

"My only hat!"

"Are—are you sure, Nipper?" asked Christine incredulously.

"I am positive," I said. "I examined both the wrists with care. I even felt them. And I can tell you positively that there was no cut or graze. What does that prove? That gash couldn't have healed up in such a short time as this—you know that as well as I do. The man wasn't Mr. Smele Foxe!"

"I can't believe it!" said Reginald Pitt.

"Great pip!" shouted Handforth suddenly. "I knew it! I knew it all along! Nipper's right—it wasn't Mr. Foxe at all! By George! This proves it!"

"Proves what?" asked Christine. "What's the matter with you, Handy?"

"Why, don't you remember?" said Handforth tensely. "Don't you remember what I told you some weeks ago? I said that I'd seen two Mr. Foxes in the wood—two men, exactly alike in every detail? You wouldn't believe me then——"

"By jingo!" I muttered. "That's right. I do remember it!"

"You all yelled at me," went on Handforth. "You thought I was spinning a yarn, or that I had been seeing things, or something. But I knew I was right all along. I saw two men in the wood, and they were absolutely identical in appearance. Mr. Foxe has got a double—and we must have collared him to-night."

"Great Scott!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

The juniors were positively astounded.

"Yes, Handforth, you are right," I said. "That explains it. Our Mr. Foxe must be away somewhere, and he left this other man here as a substitute, so that nobody should guess. That's about the truth of it. I remember seeing Mr. Foxe go out at about ten o'clock, and he came back shortly afterwards. It must have been this other man who came back!"

"Of course!" said Handforth. "It's

as easy as winking to understand. And perhaps you fellows will beg my pardon now—perhaps you'll acknowledge that I'm pretty keen!"

"I certainly think we owe Handy an apology," I smiled. "We did ridicule his story when he told us about it the other day, but he was right, sure enough."

Handforth strutted about importantly.

"Of course, I don't want to boast, or anything of that sort," he said, with a careless wave of his hand. "But I think you chaps will admit that I did the thing properly. I've always maintained that I'm jolly keen when it comes to detective work—and I didn't make any bloomer this time. I was the first to discover that Mr. Foxe had a double—and now it's been proved."

"Yes, we know all about that, Handy," I said. "And we give you all credit for what you did. But what we've got to do now is to consider the situation. The man we got hold of was not Mr. Smele Foxe—we know that. Who, then, was he?"

"Goodness only knows!" said Pitt.

"I'll bet anything I've got that the man wasn't disguised," I went on. "He wasn't wearing any make-up at all. Neither was Mr. Foxe, for that matter. They're both alike—one is the double of the other. And the most natural explanation is that they are twins!"

Bob Christine shook his head.

"It's a bit thick, you know," he said slowly. "Are you sure about that cut, Nipper? It wasn't very big, you know, and you might have missed it——"

"I didn't miss it," I interrupted. "The man we captured had no cut or graze whatever. I've said it before. I don't pretend to understand it, but I mean to make investigations. Taking it for granted that this man is Mr. Foxe's twin brother we arrive at the conclusion that Mr. Foxe himself is absent from the school. He went out at ten o'clock, leaving his brother here, in his place."

"Why?"

"Simply because he wanted everybody to think that he still remained in the school," I said. "That's obvious. He's using his brother to provide an alibi. There's no doubt on that question whatever. And, when you come to think of it, it was rather strange that Mr. Foxe should leave his study blind up all the time. I can understand that now—he

wanted everybody to see into his room. He wanted everybody to notice that he was on the premises."

"Yes, by jingo!" said Christine. "That reminds me of another thing. Foxey went round to several of the dormitories. He looked into the Fifth and the Third! And he dodged into one or two studies, too, all very late in the evening. I'll guarantee anything that he did that just on purpose to show himself."

"Sure enough," I agreed. "There's a plot here, my sons—a deep-laid conspiracy! We've got to find out what it means. We've got to find out what has happened to the real Mr. Foxe!"

"And what are we going to do now?" asked Handforth. "What's the immediate programme?"

I rubbed my chin.

"We'll wait," I said slowly, "and see!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### NELSON LEE ON THE TRAIL.

**M**EANWHILE, Mr. James Smale Foxe was bent upon his grim errand.

He was not hurried in his movements. After proceeding down Bell-ton Lane—after he had left his brother—he turned into the wood, and made his way along the footpath. He was walking easily, and without any undue haste. He reckoned that he had three or four hours before him, and there was no necessity for him to worry.

His place at St. Frank's was being filled by his brother, and, therefore, there would be no questions arising owing to his absence from the school.

But as Mr. Foxe went through the woods he was unaware of one very important fact.

Not very far behind him, but creeping along as silently as a shadow, came a figure. It was the figure of a man. It was so stealthy in its movements that it was an absolute impossibility for Mr. Foxe to know the truth. But, as a matter of fact, he was being shadowed!

All his movements were under observation.

Nelson Lee, to tell the truth, was on the trail.

The great detective had not been very

far distant when Mr. Foxe had met his brother, and Nelson Lee, who knew a great deal more about Mr. Foxe's affairs than one could guess, had taken up the task of shadowing the rascally Housemaster. He was now well on the trail, and he did not mean to lose his man. He would follow him wherever he went, and he would discover exactly what his object was.

The climax was near at hand, and Nelson Lee knew this.

It would only be a matter of hours now, before Mr. Smale Foxe came to the end of his tether. Mr. Foxe, himself, curiously enough, had not the slightest notion that his affairs were in such a bad way. He fondly imagined that matters were going very smoothly with him. And this is exactly what Mr. Lee required. The famous detective was allowing Mr. Foxe to live in a kind of false paradise. And then, when least expected, the blow would fall.

As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee had many grim suspicions about Mr. Foxe, but he lacked evidence. That was what he was after now. And something seemed to tell him that he would be provided with plenty of strong evidence before Mr. Foxe returned to St. Frank's.

The Housemaster did not take the direct route to Bannington. Upon arriving at the other side of Bellton Wood he made his way down the lane, skirting the village of Edgemore, and then he went across meadows and footpaths, joining the Bannington road, not very far distant from the town itself. And Mr. Foxe did not actually enter Bannington.

When he arrived at the outskirts he walked along for some little way, and then took a sharp turning to the left. This carried him along a small, little frequented lane. There were only one or two houses here, and these were of the large variety.

Upon the whole, the people of Bannington were not late birds, and nearly all the windows of the houses were dark. The householders were in bed and asleep. For now the time was very close upon eleven.

At length Mr. Foxe came to his destination.

At least, it appeared to be so. For he came to a halt near the hedge, just outside a big, rambling old house, which stood well back from the road, in its own grounds. These grounds were ex-



There was a dull, thudding bang. The cushions and the rugs went flying, and a cloud of smoke arose. Without waiting for it to clear, Mr. Foxe dashed across the room to the safe.

tremely well looked after, neat and tidy. The lawns were trimmed, and the flower beds were perfectly clean. The gravel paths had not a single trace of any weed upon them.

And the house, which was an old-fashioned one, had been recently redecorated from top to bottom. It was in total darkness, indicating that the household had gone to bed.

And Nelson Lee knew that this residence was that of Mr. Montague Forbes, J.P., one of the most influential men in the county. In addition, Mr. Forbes was extremely rich. He was a retired business man, and was somewhat elderly. Nelson Lee had met him on one or two occasions, and knew him to be a cheery, genial old gentleman.

What could Mr. Foxe's object be in coming to a halt outside Mr. Forbes's residence?

It was not so very long before the nature of the Housemaster's mission became obvious.

He waited there for some little time—until close upon midnight, in fact, and then, as silent as a shadow, he entered the garden, and slipped across the lawns towards a pair of big French windows, which were almost concealed by rose trees which grew near by. And, having arrived at the window, Mr. Foxe stood quite still for some little time, listening, and with his eyes wide open.

But he saw nothing suspicious. He certainly did not see a dim, shadowy form over by the hedge—the form of Nelson Lee.

The detective had a pair of night-glasses to his eyes, and he could distinctly see the figure of Mr. Smale Foxe as he stood there, crouching against the French windows. Then Mr. Foxe's movements became quite interesting. He produced two or three delicate tools, and commenced work upon the big glass doors.

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Burglary!"

There was not the slightest doubt that Mr. Smale Foxe was descending to this type of roguery. He was bent upon breaking his way into the house. And there could only be one possible object in his doing so. He was determined to burgle the place.

This was rather a new departure for Mr. Foxe, although Nelson Lee already knew that he was capable of such a crime. Nelson Lee remembered an in-

cident at the Mount, near St. Frank's, when Mr. Foxe had annexed a collection of pearls, hoping to put the blame upon Lawrence, of the Remove.

But that little affair had fallen to the ground, and Mr. Foxe had never been able to fathom the mystery.

The rascally Housemaster knew that he would be obliged to leave St. Frank's almost at once. He was well aware of the fact that he could not last much longer—and he thought he might as well line his pockets before leaving the district for ever. He could do so now in safety, while he would have a perfect alibi. Detection would be absolutely impossible. The police would be baffled.

And Mr. Foxe was making hay while the sun continued to shine. This would be quite a simple affair, and who would ever dream of looking for the burglar at St. Frank's? Mr. Foxe considered that there would be no risks at all, and he was perfectly aware of the fact that in Mr. Montague Forbes's safe there were many valuables. Mr. Foxe wanted them for himself.

The French windows did not prove to be a very heavy obstacle. With scarcely any sound, Mr. Foxe managed to force the catch. After all, it was a comparatively simple affair.

And then one of the doors swung noiselessly open. Mr. Foxe passed inside, and closed the door behind him. Everything was as still as the grave. And, before taking any action, Mr. Foxe remained like a statue for two or three minutes. He did not move, and he hardly breathed. He was taking no chances.

Upon his hands there were a pair of tight-fitting gloves. There would be no finger-prints left after Mr. Foxe had finished. He was armed with an electric torch, but he did not use this yet.

He felt cautiously in front of him, and found some heavy cloth curtains were drawn across the window. He silently moved these aside, and passed into the room itself. Then, after satisfying himself that the curtains were closely drawn, he switched on his torch.

One flash round told him that the room was empty. In the grate there were the embers of a dying fire, and the atmosphere of the room was quite warm. It was the library—as Mr. Foxe had known before entering. And in one corner of the room stood a stout, burglar-proof safe. It was not exceedingly large, but

it seemed quite powerful enough to resist the efforts of any ordinary safe-breaker.

Mr. Foxe only gave it slight attention at the moment. He had other things to think about. His first care was to go first to the door, and to turn the key in the lock. By doing this, he knew that he could not be suddenly taken by surprise, should any of the household awaken; and it was quite likely they would awaken before long, for Mr. Foxe's operations were not likely to be absolutely silent.

The Housemaster wasted no time.

Having satisfied himself that the door was secure, and having had a good look round the room, he went over to the safe, and knelt down before it. Then he proceeded to take many curious things from his pocket. The electric torch was now on the floor, switched on, and a beam of light directed upon the safe door.

One of the objects which Mr. Foxe took from his pocket was a compact little metal drill. He fixed this together, and was not long in getting to work. He oiled the bit thoroughly, and the drill worked with hardly a sound. But it was very hard labour, for the steel was toughened, and resisted bravely.

It was midnight before Mr. Foxe had finished his labours. And then quite a lot had been accomplished. But the door of the safe was by no means open, and it never would have been opened with merely the aid of that small drill. But he had accomplished the preparatory work. Now he prepared for the chief event.

In short, he took a small charge of high explosive and inserted it into the cavity he had prepared. There was a small length of fuse attached to the high explosive, and Mr. Foxe knew well that it could not fail.

He also knew that when the explosion came it would be far from silent. However, he would do his best to muffle the report. He would be prepared, even if the household was awakened.

For a few minutes would elapse before anybody could be on the spot. During those few minutes Mr. Foxe could ransack the safe, and make his departure.

He had planned it all over to the very minute, and reckoned that he was on perfectly safe ground. And there was always the possibility that the muffled explosion would not be heard at all. From

upstairs, in the bedrooms, the noise would be taken for the banging of a door—if anybody happened to be awakened. Whatever happened, Mr. Foxe was prepared.

He lit his fuse after packing a series of rugs, cushions, and other articles against the safe door. The explosion, after all, would be a small one, and it would be confined to that one little spot. There would be no other damage done in the room.

Mr. Foxe seized his torch, went to the other side of the apartment, and waited. His heart was beating rapidly now, and he knew that the next few moments would be the most important of all. It seemed ages before the explosion came. Once or twice Mr. Foxe believed that the fuse had spluttered out, and he told himself that he ought to have brought an electrically controlled apparatus. But that would have been difficult to get, whilst this was simple.

And then—

Thud!

There was a dull, thudding bang. It did not sound like an explosion at all. But, although the noise was not so tremendous, the force of that explosion fairly shook the floor upon which Mr. Foxe stood. The cushions and the rugs went flying, and a cloud of smoke arose. Without waiting for it to clear Mr. Foxe dashed across the room to the safe.

The moment was a tense one, and it seemed to him that the explosion must have been heard, but, so far, there was no sound of any movement outside the library door. And one glance told Mr. Foxe that his operations had been successful.

The safe door was a wreck, and it swung open at a touch. The door had been completely shattered.

Feverishly, Mr. Foxe searched in the interior of the safe.

He held the torch, and turned over papers, books, etc., with the other hand. There were drawers, too, to be examined. Mr. Foxe worked like lightning, and it was not long before his efforts were rewarded.

He was half choked by the pungent, acrid smoke caused by the explosion. But he did not care. At any moment he expected someone to come banging at the door.

In one of the drawers he discovered a large bundle of currency notes, and he stuffed them hastily into his pocket. And

in another drawer he came upon something that caused his eyes to glitter. For he had now discovered a prize well worth the taking.

Jewels--several magnificent diamond rings, three exquisite pendants, bracelets, and other articles of a like nature. They were all immensely valuable, and obviously the property of Mrs. Forbes.

Mr. Foxe stowed them into his pocket, and he was about to search in other parts of the safe when he was brought up short, standing absolutely rigid.

For thunderous hammerings had sounded upon the door of the library!

"Good heavens!" muttered the intruder huskily.

He had been half expecting it, but, at the same time he was startled; and he knew that he could not remain a moment longer. The lock of the door was only a flimsy one, and a good heave would send the door flying inwards.

There was no time for hesitation. Mr. Foxe left the safe, and slipped across to the French windows. He dashed the curtains aside, arrived at the window, and burst them open.

Then he went charging across the lawns to the outer wall. He did not care whether he left footprints or not. In fact, he was rather anxious to do so. For Mr. Foxe had not overlooked this most important detail. He was wearing boots two or three sizes too large for him--boots which were fitted with hob nails and heel irons.

And then, without the slightest warning, something happened which promised to upset the whole of Mr. Foxe's plans. A dim form loomed up out of the darkness, right in front of the fleeing man. It was impossible to recognise the form, owing to the gloom, and certainly Mr. Foxe had not the slightest idea that the stranger was Nelson Lee.

But the detective had been waiting outside--waiting patiently. He knew that Mr. Foxe would emerge before long. It was Lee's intention to seize his man then, but for the moment luck was with the rascal.

"Stop!" commanded Nelson Lee curtly.

Mr. Foxe did not even pause in his stride. He took in the situation in a second, and came to a swift decision. Almost unconsciously, he swung the drill out of his pocket, and he swung this with full force at Nelson Lee's head--and his aim was accurate.

Crash!

The drill hit Nelson Lee a grazing blow on the side of the head, and the famous detective had been quite unprepared for it. He had been expecting a struggle, and he had been almost certain that he would not capture Mr. Foxe without a grim, desperate fight; but never for a moment had he believed that the Housemaster would take such an action as this. Under no circumstances could he have been prepared for it.

Nelson Lee staggered back, half dazed for a moment. He tripped over a flower bed, and went sprawling. And Mr. Smale Foxe went straight on; he arrived at the wall, leapt over it like a panther, and found himself in the road. Then he sped away, running like a deer. Before long he dodged through a gap in the hedge, and away across the meadows, towards the River Stowe. At last he came to a halt, and stood quite still, breathing heavily. He listened, but there was no sign of any pursuit. He had succeeded in eluding capture. And on him he had the proceeds of his burglary. He had been successful, but it had been a narrow shave!

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee picked himself up, furious. His head was stinging, and it ached abominably. He picked up the drill, put it in his pocket, and then looked round. He knew that it would be useless to go in pursuit, for Mr. Foxe had got a good start; but, after a moment's consideration, Nelson Lee did not worry. He knew who his man was, and he was pretty certain that Mr. Foxe would go straight back to St. Frank's. For nobody would think of looking in the famous old public school for the burglar. It was rather a pity that Nelson Lee had been unable to effect Mr. Foxe's capture at once; but it would not matter in the long run. He would get his man before morning came--of that he was certain. So he did not worry; he made his way towards the house, with the intention of seeing Mr. Forbes, and explaining matters to him, and he would also be able to calm the householder.

But Nelson Lee had hardly moved four or five paces before three men came dashing out of the library. They were all hastily attired in trousers drawn up over their night attire, and Nelson Lee judged them to be a butler, a manservant, and probably a chauffeur.

"There he is!" shouted one of them excitedly.

Before he could even begin to explain the situation he was seized. He was held tightly—roughly. Nelson Lee was not annoyed—on the contrary, he was rather amused. After all, it was only natural that these fellows should assume that he was the burglar. And appearances were badly against him, for one of the men found the drill in Nelson Lee's pocket; he held it up triumphantly.

"This is the fellow all right!" he shouted. "The master has already telephoned for the police, and it won't be long before they're here. We'll be able to hand this man over to them straight away!"

"My dear friends, I think you have made a mistake!" put in Nelson Lee boldly. "I am not the man you are after——"

"The best thing you can do, mate, is to hold your breath!" put in one of the other men—obviously the chauffeur. "You've been caught red-handed, and it's no good you saying you're innocent. Take my advice, and say nothing."

At that moment Mr. Montague Forbes himself appeared—stoutish, elderly, and wearing a dressing gown over his pyjamas.

"What's this—what's this?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "You've got him?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good—splendid!" said Mr. Forbes. "The rascal—the infernal scoundrel! Bring him here, and mind that he doesn't produce any weapons! He's probably a desperate character!"

"Have you sent for the police, sir?" asked one of the men.

"Of course I have! I 'phoned them at once," said Mr. Forbes. "They'll be here within ten minutes. Ah, so this is the rascal, eh?"

"I'm afraid your men have made a slight mistake, Mr. Forbes," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I had the pleasure of meeting you only last week, I believe. My name is Nelson Lee, and——"

"Eh? What's this?" shouted Mr. Forbes. "Mr. Nelson Lee? Good gracious! Why, so it is—so it is! Mr. Nelson Lee—the most famous detective in England!"

The three men who were holding Lee looked startled, and they dropped their

prisoner as though he had become suddenly red hot.

"You dolts! You confounded idiots!" roared Mr. Forbes angrily. "What on earth do you mean by seizing Mr. Lee? I'll discharge every one of you——"

"Please calm yourself, Mr. Forbes," interrupted Nelson Lee, smiling. "And do not be harsh with the men—they only did what they thought to be right. I attempted to explain matters to them, but they did not listen—and I can hardly blame them for that."

"We're very sorry, sir!" said one of the men. "We thought—we thought——"

"And while you're thinking, you let the burglar escape!" snapped Mr. Forbes acidly. "Good gracious me! What a parcel of blockheads!"

"I am afraid you must include me, too, Mr. Forbes," smiled Nelson Lee. "The burglar ran right into my arms, but I failed to hold him. If you can give me a short interview in private, I think I shall be able to explain matters. As it happens, I know who this burglar is, and I can assure you that I shall have him before the night is out—and I shall also be able to recover any property that may have been stolen."

Nelson Lee entered the house with Mr. Forbes, and very soon they were chatting together. Mr. Forbes was rather anxious.

"I earnestly hope that you will be able to find the rascal, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "He has succeeded in making off with a bundle of currency notes to the value of one hundred and twenty pounds."

"Is that the sole extent of your loss?" asked Nelson Lee.

"The sole extent?" said the other. "Good gracious, no! My wife's jewels have gone—diamonds, rubies, pearls! They are worth every farthing of three thousand pounds!"

"I do not think it will be long before they are in your possession again, Mr. Forbes," said Nelson Lee. "Now I will explain the affair to you, if you will listen. I cannot go into close details, but you will learn everything later on. I was on the track of this man who came here. I suspected his purpose, but I could take no action until I was certain."

And while Nelson Lee was talking

with Mr. Montague Forbes, J.P., Mr. Smale Foxe was hurrying towards St. Frank's. He was feeling easier, but by no means secure. He wanted to get into the school, and he wanted to stow his spoil safely away. Until then he would not be comfortable.

At last, just as the school clock was chiming one o'clock, Mr. Foxe slipped into the Triangle. Everything was dark and still—with the single exception of his own study window. This was lighted, and the figure of Ralph could be seen sitting back in a chair, reading. Mr. Foxe had no fear that he would be seen, for the whole school was asleep. Without making a sound, he crossed the Triangle, arrived at the window, and tapped upon it. In a moment Ralph was on his feet, and he crossed to the window. He raised the lower sash.

"Who is that?" he asked sharply.

"Not so loud, you fool—not so loud!" whispered Mr. Foxe. "Help me in!"

Within a few seconds Mr. Foxe was in the study, and he dragged down the blind at once. There was rather a hunted expression in his eyes, but, at the same time, a look of relief.

"You'd better go, Ralph—now, at once!" he said curtly.

Ralph looked at his twin brother curiously.

"What is the matter, James?" he asked. "You seem excited and agitated. Has anything happened? Where have you been all this time? What have you been doing——"

"Confound you!" rapped out Mr. Foxe. "Keep your infernal questions to yourself! You mustn't stay here now; it is important that you should go. Make your way to Bannington as quietly as possible—and you had better adopt that disguise in the wood."

"Yes, but I want to tell you——"

"We can speak the next time we meet!" interrupted Mr. Foxe grimly. "Go, Ralph—do you hear? You are endangering my safety by remaining. Clear out!"

Ralph smiled slightly—and it was rather a bitter smile. Two minutes later he had gone, and Mr. James Smale Foxe was left alone in the study. He sank down into a chair with a sigh of relief.

It had been rather a strenuous time, and he was glad of the breathing space. All he wanted to do was to sit there

and rest for the time being. He even had no inclination to examine his booty, which was stowed away in his pockets.

And as Mr. Foxe sat there he reviewed the situation, and he came to the conclusion that he was safe—absolutely safe. The smartest detective in the kingdom would never be able to trace the burglar to St. Frank's. And if by some miracle the police did come to the school, they would draw a blank, for there would be plenty of witnesses to prove that Mr. Foxe had been at St. Frank's the whole evening, right up till midnight.

"Yes, I am safe!" muttered Mr. Foxe, in a satisfied tone. "I'm as safe as houses!"

But even houses collapse sometimes!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE RIGHT MR. FOXE.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was fairly bubbling with triumph.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he whispered victoriously. "Didn't I say it all along? I suppose you'll admit now, you chaps, that I am a bit smarter than you thought?"

"Oh, dry up!" muttered Pitt. "Stop cackling like a giddy bantam! We give you credit, Handy, for what you discovered, and all the rest of it, but there's no need to keep on crowing."

Handforth glared.

"I've just been pointing out——"

"Yes, we know you have," I interrupted. "You've been pointing out the fact that you're a marvel—a living wonder. We know all about it, Handy. We think you're enormously clever. But this isn't the time for jawing; we've got to keep quiet, and watch."

But Handforth could hardly restrain himself. Only a few minutes before a dim form had entered the Triangle, and he slipped across to the window of Mr. Foxe's study. But that dim form was quite unaware of the fact that his movements were watched—and watched by many pairs of eyes. For, to tell the truth, the tribunal was waiting and watching. We had decided to remain in the Triangle, for we felt certain that the real Mr. Foxe would turn up before many hours had elapsed, and now, at

one o'clock, he had appeared. Our surmise had been correct, and our vigil had not been in vain.

We were all concealed in the shadows of the old chestnut trees, and we had a clear vision of Mr. Foxe's window. And, watching, we had seen Mr. Foxe cross the Triangle, go to the window, and tap upon it. And then, for a brief space, we had seen Mr. Foxe and his twin brother—we had seen them both together—and there had been no mistake. And then the blind had been drawn swiftly down, shutting out the vision from us, and now we were waiting for developments.

"I wonder where Foxey has been to?" whispered Tommy Watson. "Why has he been away all this time? What has he been doing, the rotter? I'll warrant he's been up to no good."

"Dear old boy, you are probably correct," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "In fact, I am pretty certain that Mr. Foxe has been doing something funny. Begad!"

Montie broke off as the blind was pulled up for a second, and then a form came out through the window, and dropped lightly to the ground. It crossed the Triangle, and disappeared into the shadows near the wall, and we knew that Mr. Foxe's twin had gone.

The right Mr. Foxe was now in the study!

"But what's the idea of it?" whispered De Valerie.

"Well, there's only one explanation," I said. "Mr. Foxe provided himself with an alibi—at least, he thinks he has done so."

"But why should he want an alibi?" asked McClure.

"Mr. Foxe knows that better than we do," I replied; "but perhaps we shall find out before long. It's pretty certain, though, that he has been up to something of an unlawful nature. This precious alibi of his isn't worth a cent, because we can prove that Mr. Foxe was absent for two or three hours. If he thinks he is safe, he is lying under a little delusion."

"And what are we going to do now?" asked Pitt. "We know that the right Mr. Foxe is now in the study, and he might go off to bed at any minute. It's late enough, anyhow."

Bob Christine nodded.

"The best thing we can do is to get busy on the job," he remarked. "What

do you say, Nipper? Don't you think it would be advisable to repeat our little performance?"

"Exactly," I said. "That is precisely what we shall do. We'll act in the same way we acted before—eight fellows will get in by the window, and eight by the door. We'll take Mr. Foxe by surprise, make a prisoner of him, and trot him off to the tribunal chamber. We shall have the right man this time, and we'll go through the whole programme."

"Good!"

"That's the style!"

"Buck up!"

The fellows were soon prepared, for they had their gowns and masks all ready, and, in just the same manner as we had attacked the study on the former occasion, we did so now. We carried out the plan without any alteration.

I crept to the window, with the other fellows about me. Then, at the word, the lower sash was flung up, and we hurled ourselves into the room. At the same time, Christine and his seven fellows entered by the door. It was a complete surprise for Mr. Foxe.

The rascally Housemaster was sitting in the chair before the fire, and he was just about to examine the spoil he had obtained from Mr. Montague Forbes' safe. He almost had them out of his pocket, and he suddenly whirled round, the colour fleeing from his cheeks. There came a look of startled amazement and fear into his eyes.

"What—what—Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

The masked figures closed round him relentlessly.

"What is this?" snarled Mr. Foxe, partially guessing the truth. "You—you infernal scoundrels! How—how dare you? If you touch me——"

He got no further, for he was not only touched, but firmly seized and borne to the floor. Then his ankles and wrists were bound, and his face was muffled in just the same way that the other Mr. Foxe had been muffled.

And not a word was spoken the whole time. The tribunal had seized Mr. Smale Fox, and it was a grim undertaking. The tribunal was not going to be satisfied until Mr. Foxe had agreed to all its demands.

Again the scheme was carried out.

Mr. Foxe was taken through the window and carried several times round the

Triangle. Then he was taken to the old garage at the rear of the College House; and the muffler was not taken from his face until the door was closed. And now Mr. Foxe saw that he was in a curious apartment, draped with heavy curtains, and with only one dim electric light shining overhead. All around stood the cloaked, masked figures.

Mr. Foxe was startled—far more startled than the fellows realised. For in his pockets lay concealed the proceeds of his burglary. And Mr. Foxe was beginning to realise that his alibi would not be good. He had been seen—these mysterious figures had witnessed his return to St. Frank's—and they had probably witnessed other things, too. Mr. Smale Foxe, in fact, was feeling desperate.

But he cunningly realised that no good purpose would be served if he flew into a rage, and if he resisted the efforts of these boys; for Mr. Foxe was quite convinced that his captors were juniors. He was not deceived. But, of course, it was impossible for him to know the identity of the fellows. The disguises were complete in every case.

"Mr. Smale Fox, you have been brought here for a special purpose!" said Bob Christine, in his deep disguised voice. "I am the chairman of the College House Tribunal, and you will please understand that you must do exactly as you are told, and without question. If you refuse—if you prove to be obstinate—you will be severely birched!"

Mr. Foxe caught his breath in sharply.

"You—you confounded young—what does this mean?" he exclaimed, choking back his rage with difficulty. "Who are you? Why have you done this? Release me at once!"

"You will be released in due course—if you agree to our proposals," said the chairman. "Matters in the College House have been bad of late. They must alter—they must be completely changed. Your experiment has been a complete failure—as you know as well as I do. It is not right that the boys should be given their full liberties—that they should be allowed to do exactly as they choose. The Tribunal demands that the full rules and regulations shall be brought into operation again at once!"

"By heaven!" said Mr. Foxe, glaring

round. "You—you dare——" he checked himself with an effort. "Well? What is it? Let me hear the finish of your proposal!"

"It is perfectly simple," said Christine. "To-morrow morning you must call the whole College House together and address the boys. You must tell them that the rules and regulations are to be restored in every particular—from that moment onwards."

For a moment it seemed that Mr. Foxe was going to choke.

"And—and what if I refuse?" he demanded thickly.

"If you refuse, you will be flogged—birched!" said the chairman grimly. "You will be laid across a box and subjected to corporal punishment. That is the decree of the Tribunal."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Smale Foxe harshly. "Very well—I agree!"

The Tribunal was quite astonished at this tame surrender.

"You—you agree?" said Christine, almost forgetting to disguise his voice. "You promise that the old rules shall be reinstated?"

"Yes!"

"Are you prepared to sign a document to that effect?" asked the chairman curtly.

The housemaster's eyes blazed.

"Yes!" he said, with an effort. "Yes, I will sign!"

The chairman of the Tribunal waved his hand.

"Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 8!" he commanded. "Step forward and release the prisoner's hands."

Four members of the Tribunal strode forward. It was quite a simple matter to untie the bonds which bound Mr. Foxe's wrists. Christine knew that it would be quite safe in doing so—Mr. Foxe would not be able to escape, or even make any attempt to escape. For his ankles were still secured, and he could not move a yard.

But, somehow, as I looked at Mr. Foxe I was slightly uneasy. There was a gleam in his eye which I did not like—a gleam which seemed to indicate that he was desperate and dangerous. I could not understand why he should be like this—we had not given him sufficient cause. But, of course, I did not know all the facts—then.

Mr. Foxe now had his hands free, and he looked round feverishly.

"I do not know who you are—but I can

guess!" he exclaimed harshly. "And you shall pay for this, you infernal young hounds! You cannot deceive me—I know that you are boys of the Remove!"

"Silence!" said the chairman sternly. "It is your place to speak only when you are spoken to. You must remember that you are a prisoner of the Tribunal. We intend to censure you severely for your conduct since you have been at St. Frank's——"

"Enough of this nonsense!" snarled Mr. Foxe. "Where is this paper you wish me to sign? Where is it, I say? Bring it to me—do you hear——"

He broke off abruptly, for he had been shaking his fists, and the effort had been rather upsetting his equilibrium. He attempted to keep upright, but his feet were tightly bound together, and he could hardly move. As a consequence, he toppled over, and fell headlong; and as he did so something rolled out of one of his pockets. And I saw at once that the something was a superb diamond pendant. There was also a ring set with rubies. Mr. Foxe snarled out an oath as he saw those objects lying on the floor.

The results of his burglary were being displayed before the eyes of these masked figures! It was a terrible calamity, and Mr. Foxe almost lost his head. He knew, in any case, that secrecy was now out of the question. It was even impossible for him to remain at St. Frank's. For these boys—as boys they certainly were—would talk. The whole school would be in possession of the facts on the morrow! And the police would get to know—the police would come—Mr. Foxe would find himself——

But his thoughts went no further. He only knew one thing—he must get away from St. Frank's now—without a second's delay! And the very fact that he was a prisoner, and helpless, drove Mr. Smale Fox into a frenzy. His plans had all gone wrong—they were completely upset; and this was because of the interference of the Tribunal!

"Help me up!" shouted Mr. Foxe, fiercely. "Do you hear? Put me on my feet again!"

He attempted to struggle up, and two or three members of the Tribunal assisted Mr. Foxe to his feet. I bent down and recovered the pendant and the ring. I handed them to Foxe, wonder-

ing at the same time what they were doing in his possession. For I could see that they were very valuable.

"You dropped these, Mr. Foxe!" I said gruffly.

The housemaster snatched them and put them into his pocket.

"Yes—yes!" he panted. "I did drop them! And now I have the upper hand! You will all remain still—perfectly still! The first one who moves will be shot down without mercy!"

While he was speaking, Mr. Foxe jerked something from his pocket—and the juniors saw, with sudden alarm, that it was a revolver! Mr. Foxe pointed this straight at the figure of the chairman, Bob Christine.

"My words are not idle ones!" he exclaimed tensely. "If any of your companions attempt to touch me from the rear I shall shoot at once—I am in no mood to be trifled with!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Christine in his natural voice.

He was staggered—and the other juniors were in a similar condition. I was surprised myself, and I realised that Mr. Foxe was in deadly earnest—this was no joking matter. Until a moment or two before the whole affair had been in the nature of a very daring jape. But it had completely altered its character now. It was grim—desperate—deadly.

"Hold still, every one of you!" I said urgently. "Mr. Foxe may be bluffing, but we don't know; we can't take any risks."

"I am glad that somebody realises the gravity of the situation!" said Mr. Foxe, his voice cold and cutting. "One of you will come forward and release my ankles."

Nobody seemed to care for the task, but I moved forward and bent down, then I proceeded to unfasten the rope which secured Mr. Foxe's feet. As I was doing so I realised that it was in my power to give those feet a sudden jerk and to send Mr. Foxe flying to the floor.

In that way it would be easy to capture him and to render him helpless. But I did not try any such trickery. I was convinced that Mr. Foxe was in earnest, and, even if I did perform the movement, he would probably fire away with the revolver, blindly and at random. But there were sixteen fellows present, and a revolver in the hands of a desperate man is an ugly weapon. Perhaps all his shots would go wide; but,

on the other hand, there was a distinct chance that somebody would be hit. And it wasn't worth risking. I did not feel justified in endangering the other fellows by taking any such chance.

A moment later the rope was untied, and Mr. Foxe backed away until he stood close against the curtains. He was now facing all the members of the Tribunal. The juniors stood there quite still, their hearts beating rapidly. They had never dreamed of anything like this. They had never imagined for a moment that Mr. Smale Foxe would adopt such methods. It was startling in the extreme.

"Now, my young friends, you will obey my orders!" said Mr. Foxe grimly. "One of you will open the door, and then you will all stand back, quite clear. If there is any attempt to intercept me, or to prevent my escape, I will shoot. This revolver is fully loaded, and it is fitted with a hair trigger!"

I turned my head.

"Don't move, you fellows!" I muttered. "He's desperate! Don't move an inch; I'll open the door!"

The juniors remained quite still, and I flung back the curtains and opened the door wide, so that it could be plainly seen by Mr. Foxe. It was very galling to know that our prisoner would escape in this way, but there was nothing else to be done. It would have been madness to take risks with this armed desperado—for that is what Mr. Smale Foxe had suddenly become.

I went back to the others and stood quite still. I could see that Handforth had his fists clenched, and he was fairly itching to go for Mr. Foxe. Handforth would have risked anything; he never took any notice of arms. And his main desire now was to dash forward and grapple with the prisoner. But I gave the impulsive leader of study D a word of warning.

"Hold still, Handy; you mustn't move!" I muttered.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I'm fed up with this. I'm going to punch him——"

"Don't be an ass!" I broke in fiercely. "He'll let fly with that revolver, and somebody might get hurt. For goodness sake keep calm!"

Mr. Foxe moved rapidly over to the door and passed out. As he did so he turned still keeping the Tribunal covered.

"Sooner or later I will make you pay for this night's work!" he said harshly.

As he stood there, Mr. Foxe realised what this sudden change meant. All his plans would have to be forsaken. He would not be able to carry out his complete scheme.

Indeed, he was even in a position of peril.

For his cards were on the table now, and there would be no rest for him. It was quite out of the question for him to remain at St. Frank's; because, after this incident, all secrecy was impossible. The boys would talk of that ring and the pendant; and it would be known, before many hours, that Mr. Foxe had been away from St. Frank's—secretly. The police would put two and two together at once, and would act in a drastic and a decidedly disconcerting fashion.

Mr. Foxe came to the conclusion that his health would be far better preserved if he put St. Frank's as far from him as possible. And his scheme to bring the school into disrepute would have to go by the board. He would not be able to carry out that project at all.

He felt furious, but it was quite useless for him to let his temper get the better of him. So he slammed the door and stowed his revolver away. He noticed that the door was fitted with an iron fastening, and a padlock lay there with a key in it. He slipped the padlock into place and locked it. Then he turned on his heel and vanished into the darkness. He knew that he would be able to get quite a long way away before the members of the Tribunal escaped from the garage.

But Mr. Smale Foxe had overlooked the fact that there was a door at the rear of the building. And this door was opened without any loss of time, and we streamed out into the open, having cast aside our cloaks and masks. The fellows were thoroughly excited, and hardly knew what to do.

"Leave it to me!" I said briskly. "I'll go straight to Mr. Lee, and tell him all about it. You fellows had better wait out here until I know exactly how things are going."

We hurried across the Triangle in the direction of the Ancient House. But suddenly we checked. For a figure was moving across towards us, and it stopped abruptly.

And, in spite of the gloom, I recognised the figure at once.

"The gov'nor!" I exclaimed tensely.

We had run right into the arms of Nelson Lee himself.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE END OF THE CHASE.

NELSON LEE frowned as the juniors surged all round him.

"Boys!" he exclaimed severely. "What is the meaning of this? What are you doing out here now, fully dressed, at this hour of the night? Upon my soul! This is really extraordinary!"

"Have you seen Mr. Foxe, sir?"

"He's just dashed away."

"And he was armed with a revolver, sir."

"He threatened to shoot us."

"He must have come this way, sir, and I expect you met him."

"Only two minutes ago, sir."

Nelson Lee held up his hand, for all the fellows were talking at once.

"Really, boys, you must calm yourselves!" he exclaimed. "What are you trying to tell me? What is this about Mr. Foxe?"

The famous detective, of course, was greatly interested. He had guessed that Mr. Foxe would return to St. Frank's; but he did not imagine for a moment that any of the juniors would be up and about. But it was fairly evident, from what Nelson Lee had just heard, that Mr. Foxe had come straight to the school. And the detective was determined to get the whole truth at once.

"Now, Nipper, you must be the spokesman," he said crisply. "Have you seen Mr. Foxe?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" I replied. "You see, we had planned a little jape, although I don't think I need go into any details about that——"

"Perhaps it would be just as well if you do not," said Nelson Lee grimly.

"Playing a jape, as you call it, against a Housomaster is decidedly reprehensible. But we will pass that for a moment. Go on, Nipper."

"Well, the fact is, sir, we made a mistake at first," I said. "We got hold of the wrong man—somebody who looked exactly like Mr. Foxe in every

particular. We thought it was Mr. Foxe at first——"

"As it happens you were quite correct—although he was not the Mr. Foxe you expected to find," said Nelson Lee.

"Mr. Foxe has a twin brother, I believe, and you probably confused him with——"

"Yes, that's it, sir!" put in Handforth excitedly. "I said days and days ago that there were two of 'em, but these fatheads wouldn't believe me——"

"Quite so, Handforth—quite so!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "But please remember that Nipper is doing the talking. You must be silent."

It did not take me long to put Nelson Lee in possession of the facts.

I explained how we had waited in the Triangle, believing that the real Mr. Smale Foxe would turn up, and I told the gov'nor how Mr. Foxe had appeared, and how he had entered the study window. Then I went on to describe the events which immediately followed. Nelson Lee listened intently, and with rather a grim expression in his eyes.

"A ring set with rubies, and a diamond pendant, eh?" he exclaimed, when I told him of that incident. "And these articles dropped out of Mr. Foxe's pocket?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I thought it was rather queer—although it was none of our business. But as soon as Mr. Foxe got to his feet he drew out a revolver, and held us all up!"

"It was frightfully exciting, begad!" put in Sir Montie. "We weren't expectin' anythin' like that, sir—we weren't, really! It was a shockin' surprise, sir!"

I finished the story, and Nelson Lee looked rather grim when I had finished the story. He was thinking deeply. He knew well enough that Mr. Foxe had now gone for good—that he would never dare return to the school.

"It is very unfortunate that you boys should have chosen this particular night for your escapade," he said at length. "I am afraid it has upset my plans considerably, but it cannot be helped. The climax will come all the sooner, that is all."

"Has Mr. Foxe been doing something bad, sir?" asked Pitt.

"There is no reason why you should not know, boys," said Nelson Lee. "But, at the same time, I must ask you

to say nothing about this to any of the other fellows. Keep it to yourselves—the matter will soon be quite public. I can assure you. Mr. Foxe is not what you have always thought him to be. He has committed a burglary to-night, and the ring and the pendant you saw are part of his spoils."

"A—a burglary?"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Foxey—a burglar!"

"The awful rotter!" said Christine.

"And—and he was our Housemaster!"

"He's escaped!" said Handforth.

"Oh, what asses we were to let him go! It was your fault, Nipper. We ought to have collared him, in spite of that revolver! We could have grabbed him without any difficulty——"

"No, Handforth. Nipper was quite right in what he did," put in Nelson Lee. "Mr. Foxe is desperate, and he would not have hesitated to use that weapon of his. And quite possibly the result would have been disastrous. It was far better to let him get away. You need have no fear—he will not go far. I shall soon succeed in rounding him up!"

"Hurrah!"

"Are—are you going on the trail now, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, Nipper, I am."

"And may—may I come, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee only hesitated for a moment.

"Yes, if you wish, my lad," he said.

"You can come."

Of course, all the other juniors wanted to come as well—that was only natural; but Nelson Lee put his foot down firmly. He would allow only two other juniors in addition to myself to join in the chase, and, naturally, those two juniors were Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. It was only to be expected that I should select my two personal chums. The others were rather disappointed, but extremely excited.

We were not long in getting off. There was only a very short delay while Nelson Lee telephoned to the police in Bannington. Meanwhile, all the juniors, with the exception of Tregellis-West and Watson and myself, were packed off to bed, and they were warned by Nelson Lee not to awaken the other juniors, and not to talk. But it was fairly certain they would talk—such a

secret as this could not be kept for long.

We were soon off to Bannington, and we went in Nelson Lee's racing motor-car. I was rather surprised to find that the guv'nor turned in the opposite direction—towards the moor. Bannington could be reached in this way, certainly, but the distance was at least three miles further.

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked.

"I have every reason to believe that Mr. Foxe will make for Bannington," replied Nelson Lee. "We do not wish him to know that we are on the way there, too. So, by taking this road, we shall avoid all possibility of that—and we have plenty of time in front of us."

"Why do you think Mr. Foxe will go to Bannington, sir?" I inquired.

"Because he has rented a furnished house there, and his brother is already on the spot, I believe," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think I am far wrong in assuming that Mr. Foxe will make straight for this house in Bannington. For, you must remember, there is no hue and cry after him as yet. At least, he is convinced that he is secure, so he will make straight for this house."

It seemed quite likely that Nelson Lee's shot would prove to be a true one. In any case, it was the only thing we could do at the moment.

"You seem to know all about Mr. Foxe's business, sir," I remarked.

"Exactly," smiled Nelson Lee. "I have taken good care to watch Mr. Foxe's movements very closely of late. He has been quite unconscious of these attentions on my part. I have rather suspected Mr. Foxe of shady behaviour, and now I have got my proof. It will not be long before the rascal is under lock and key!"

It was evident from what Nelson Lee had been saying that the guv'nor had been considerably active of late. Outwardly it appeared that he had been taking practically no interest in Mr. Smale Foxe. But the very opposite was the case. Working quietly, unobtrusively, Nelson Lee had been fully alive to the true situation all the time.

We arrived at Bannington without incident, and Nelson Lee brought the little car up in front of the police-station. Leaving us outside, Nelson Lee mounted the steps, and was quickly in the presence of Inspector Jameson.

This gentleman was looking very im-

portant—he was rather an officious sort at the best of times. But just now he appeared to think that he was the most important person in the whole town.

For Inspector Jameson had just come away from the residence of Mr. Montague Forbes. He had, in fact, been investigating the robbery—and it was very seldom indeed that Inspector Jameson had a decent case to work on.

"Ah, Mr. Lee, I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed, shaking hands. "I understand that you know something about this robbery? Mr. Forbes has told me that you were somehow connected with it."

"I was on the spot at the time, certainly," agreed Nelson Lee. "And, as it happens, I know the identity of the thief."

"Oh, indeed!" said the inspector. "That's splendid, Mr. Lee—splendid! Who is the rascal? Probably some well-known London crook——"

"On the contrary, the thief is Mr. James Smale Foxe, a Housemaster of St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee quietly.

The inspector started.

"A—a Housemaster of St. Frank's?" he ejaculated. "Good gracious me! Surely you are not serious, Mr. Lee?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said the detective. "But, if it is at all possible, Jameson, I should like this affair to be kept out of the newspapers. Mr. Forbes, I know, will be agreeable. But we can discuss this later on. At the moment, we must set about another task. I have every reason to believe that I can lay hands on Mr. Foxe quite easily, and I want you to help me."

"Most certainly, Mr. Lee—most certainly!" said Inspector Jameson. "If we can get hold of this man now, all the better."

"I think it is quite possible that Mr. Foxe will be found in a certain house on the outskirts of the town," went on Lee. "I know for a fact that Mr. Foxe and his brother rented this house only a few days ago. Foxe went straight from St. Frank's, and I do not think he would go straight out of the district to-night. He imagines himself to be fairly safe, and so his first move would be to join his brother in this furnished house. If we go there at once, it is quite likely that we shall find them together."

And Nelson Lee went into further details, while the inspector listened in-

tently. Finally, arrangements were made, and a strong party of police was got ready.

And then a definite move was made.

Nelson Lee joined us in the motor-car, and we were soon on our way to a quiet road near the outside of the town, and it was in this road that the furnished house was situated. This house had been rented by Mr. Foxe, and Nelson Lee's surmise that the Housemaster would make for the place was not entirely wrong.

As a matter of fact, at the very moment when the police were stealthily surrounding the building, Mr. Smale Foxe was inside, facing his twin brother. He had arrived only a few moments before, and he had no suspicions that capture was so near at hand. He had entered the house by means of his latch-key, and had found Ralph asleep in bed. But the two brothers were now down in the sitting-room, and the gas was alight. The blind was closely drawn, but from outside it could be seen that there was a light in the room.

"What is the meaning of this, James?" Ralph was saying. "Man alive, you look scared! What have you been doing? Why are you not at St. Frank's?"

"Because things have gone wrong—badly wrong!" snapped Mr. Foxe, curtly. "I must get out of this district at once—I must be quite clear of Bannington before daylight comes. But I came here first because I want your help. I must have a disguise——"

"But why?" asked Ralph, astonished. "What have you been doing? Good heavens! You have not set yourself against the law——"

"The situation is desperate, I tell you!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Look here—look at these!"

He took from his pockets the results of his burglary—the bundle of notes, the rings, pendants, and other articles of jewellery. Ralph gazed at them, horrified. He guessed at once what his brother meant.

"You—you have stolen these?" he said.

"Yes, confound you—don't look so startled!" snapped Mr. Foxe. "Do you think I was going to leave St. Frank's—leave this district—empty handed? If everything had gone right, there would have been no trouble at all, but, owing to those interfering boys, my whole

plan has been upset. And now I've got to flee. I must hurry away!"

Ralph was almost dumbfounded.

"But—but this is terrible!" he panted. "You must be mad, James! Think what this will mean if you are caught——"

"Oh, I sha'n't be caught!" interrupted Mr. Foxe. "Have you got your clothes here? I want a complete change, another suit, and then, afterwards, I must disguise myself. Your clothes are upstairs in the bedroom?"

"Yes."

"Right! I will be down in about ten minutes' time!"

Mr. Foxe passed out of the room, and found himself in the dark hall. He was just making his way to the staircase when he paused. He could see dim figures ahead of him, and two of those figures were wearing helmets!

The police!

Mr. Foxe went rigid. He clenched his teeth, and stood perfectly still. He had been trapped, after all. This was the end. Somehow or other, the police had entered the house, and they were here, right upon him!

As a matter of fact, Inspector Jameson had led his men into the house stealthily. A window had been found at the rear, which had been easily forced, and now there were several constables in the hall itself. They moved forward rapidly as they saw Mr. Foxe come to a halt.

"By Heaven, you sha'n't take me!" shouted the Housemaster fiercely.

He turned about, and rushed to the door, which was just near to him. It came open, and Mr. Foxe went dashing through. He slammed the door behind him, and the next moment he went tumbling down some steps. Inadvertently, he had walked into the cellar.

But when the cellar was searched a few minutes later, it was found to be empty—the bird had flown! And it was not long before the searchers found out how Mr. Foxe had escaped. There was

a heavy grating at one end of the cellar, and it had been a comparatively simple matter for the fugitive to push this grating aside and to get out into the open.

There had been police on the watch, certainly, but they had not been on the look-out for a stealthily creeping figure under the bushes. And so Mr. Smale Foxe escaped. Although the grounds were thoroughly searched, no sign was found of him; he had slipped away into the night.

"Of course, it wasn't your fault, guv'nor," I said. "You led the police to the place, and put them right on the track. They're to blame for letting old Foxey escape. But thank goodness the police have recovered the stolen property."

"Yes, that is quite excellent," said Nelson Lee. "And I do not think it will be very long before Mr. Foxe himself is arrested. He cannot get far."

Without a doubt, Nelson Lee had triumphed.

Mr. Smale Foxe's scheme had come to nothing. He had been compelled to forsake his spoil, and he was now a hunted criminal—a fugitive from justice. His career at St. Frank's was at an end, and within a day or two probably everything would be normal.

Mr. Montague Forbes' property was restored to him intact, and he immediately agreed that the matter should be kept quiet and not made public in any way. He even went so far as to state that he did not wish to prosecute, and he requested the police to make no attempt to capture the fugitive Mr. Foxe. It would be better if the rascal was allowed to go free, since, if he was arrested and charged with the crime, the whole thing would become public and the disgrace would be reflected upon his brother, and upon St. Frank's. More harm than good would be done.

But, as it happened, St. Frank's had not seen the last of Mr. James Smale Foxe even yet!

THE END.

**NEXT WEEK!**

**FOOLED AT THE FINISH!**

An amusing story of April Fool's Day at St. Frank's, and a surprise visit from Lord Dorrimore.

## Start To-day This Grand New Australian Serial



## AUSTRALIAN TALE OF ADVENTURE BY AN AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR

## INTRODUCTION.

Jack Maxwell and Jim Harding have come to settle in Australia from the Old Country. They go to Cairns, where Jack has an uncle, Professor Maxwell, the naturalist and explorer. Hearing that the professor has been absent in the interior for some months, the young Englishmen decide to try and find him. They are joined by Tom Anson, an Australian, with whom they have struck up a friendship. Accompanied by Snaplus, a black tracker, they start off across the desert until they come to a dried up water-hole. Here they find a message from Jack's uncle, directing them to the Secret Valley, some of the wonders of which you will read in the ensuing chapter.

(Now read on.)

## Exploring the Secret Valley.

ALL that part of the cliff lay in shadow, but in a little while Maxwell discerned a dark shape slowly descending the face of a precipice towards the lake shore. Though he could not make out exactly what it was, Maxwell guessed, and when presently the creature reached easier ground and passed through a patch of moonlight, he saw that his guess had been right.

It was a bear of no very great size, very light in colour, it appeared to be in good condition. Maxwell watched, keeping perfectly still, but the animal did not even glance in his direction. All its attention was fixed on the spot where lay the carcass of the bunyip.

The tailed men's hacking had diminished its bulk but little. Maxwell glanced at it, and saw something move, something that glistened in the moonlight. There were other movements on the mud, in the water, a moment's staring identified the creatures as crabs. They were large, huge, in fact, so big that they would have drawn a great crowd had they been lying on a London fish-

monger's slab instead of crawling among their native slime.

Maxwell smiled as he remembered the reckless way in which they had lain in the water of the lake.

"Very mixed bathing!" he repeated, and turned to watch the bear.

Bruin was creeping stealthily forward, halting every now and then, as he moved from rock to rock. It was noticeable that he did not touch the surface of the water.

"Is he scared of those crabs?" thought Maxwell. "Certainly, they're a big crowd."

More and more appeared. It was as though the glad tidings had gone abroad, and all the crab tribe had come to the feast.

But Bruin was hungry also. Suddenly he appeared to make up his mind. Gathering himself together, he hurled himself forward, reached the carcass, and struck out right and left, sweeping the swarming crabs from the meat. Then he fixed his teeth, and, by sheer strength, dragged off a huge fragment. He turned, smashed a few more of the crustaceans, and began his retreat.

As though the word had passed, the crab army dashed at him. The whole lake shore seemed alive with them. Bruin saw them scrambling over the rocks ahead of him, paused, wheeled, and passing almost immediately underneath Maxwell's perch, approached the foot of the path by which the party had ascended.

Maxwell leaped to his feet, grabbed a flaming brand from the fire, and thrust it at the beast just as he began to ascend. With a whoof of fright, it turned away, and, crashing into the undergrowth beyond, disappeared, while the crabs returned to their interrupted meal.

"Whew! That's a pretty object-lesson! No camping near the water!" said Maxwell to himself, and sat down again.

The rest of his watch was not interrupted, though once he heard a wild roaring in the distance that suggested feeding-time at the Zoo.

Some unfortunate creature had been pinned by some carnivorous brute, perhaps

one of the same sabre-toothed tiger-lions that had greeted the arrival of the party.

About an hour before dawn Anson took charge, but as Maxwell was not sleepy, he busied himself preparing breakfast. When the others had awakened and eaten, they made ready for a start. All was quiet along the lake shore. The bones of the bunnyp lay clean-picked; there was never a sign of a crab or anything noxious, and after a careful survey, they descended, filled their water-flasks, and keeping close to the rock wall, began their march.

A tree kangaroo bounded up from a patch of scrub, and would have scudded up the rocks had not Snaplus brought it down with his boomerang. This cheered him up tremendously. He began to hum some tuneless ditty as he retrieved the beast and slung it over his shoulder.

"This fellow all same fellow as my country," he announced and patted the limp fellow-countryman affectionately.

The bush was thick with many tangled thickets. In order to advance at all they had to keep close to the foot of the cliff, a rough trail, encumbered by stones which had fallen from above.

There was much game in the bush. Time and again they heard the rustle of something retreating before their advance, and more than once a growl made them stand ready to repel an attack.

But none came. They were glad of this, for they wished to husband their precious cartridges.

"We must rely on Snaplus as much as possible," said Maxwell. "He should easily be able to supply all we need, though it might be as well if we made bows and arrows and did a bit of archery. There is no telling how long we may be here. Ah! What is that?"

He halted, pointing to a small object that lay on a patch of open ground a few yards ahead, instantly recognisable. A shot cartridge! That could mean only one thing. The man whose trail they had followed had been here, and that only a few days before at most, for the colour on the exposed part of the shell was only slightly faded, and not bleached as it would assuredly have been had it lain long.

"My uncle!" exclaimed Maxwell. "Perhaps we will find him to-day."

"Don't be too sure. There are a good many miles of this place, so far as I can see," replied Anson. "Here, Snaplus, see what you can make of this."

The black fellow examined tracks that were almost invisible to the eye of the white men, and wagged his head knowingly. Then he cast to and fro hunting for further signs, and came back to the place he started from.

"Old fellow track," he remarked nonchalantly. "Three day, four day old fellow. Me follow um."

"Go ahead, then! What are you waiting for?" asked Anson.

Snaplus was examining the rocks overhead with searching eyes.

"Black fellow been up there. Don't like um black fellow," he muttered. "Too much black fellow."

"Oh, we'll deal with any black fellows!" snapped Maxwell impatiently. "Get on!"

Thus adjured, Snaplus got under way, but slowly. From time to time he halted to stare up at the beetling crags that seemed to threaten the adventurers from their frowning bastions.

"We'd be in a rotten position if there were any blacks aloft, old man," said Harding, after they had marched for some time. "They could give us a hot time by dropping stones, and we could do nothing to stop 'em. The bush is so thorny we should be brained before we could break into cover."

Maxwell, who had been thinking much the same thing, was about to suggest a retreat, when Snaplus halted, and pointed to the ground. Even the whites could see that it had been much trampled by someone wearing boots. These tracks were overlaid and in part obliterated by the imprints of small feet. Evidently there had been a struggle here. There were ominous brown stains on some of the stones.

"One fellow white fellow, heap fellow black fellow," intoned Snaplus. "Black fellow catch white fellow; take um that way."

He pointed up a narrow path which slanted along the face of the cliff like a ledge about a hundred feet aloft.

"Then up we go to teach black fellow not to meddle with white fellow," said Maxwell resolutely. "We will be no worse off up there than down here. Better, in fact, for the rock overhangs that ledge, and they wouldn't be able to drop rocks on us. On, merry men!" And, so saying he drew his pistol, and started up the path.

The others followed, Anson bringing up the rear with his gun at the ready for a shot should any appear to bar their passage.

*(To be continued.)*

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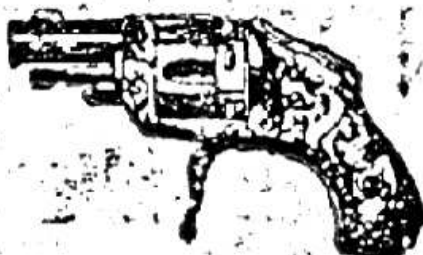
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