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THE NORTH TOWER WAS
STRUCK BY LIGHTNING!

THE PRISONER OF THE NORTH TOWER; OR, AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

A Stirring Long Complete Tale of ST. FRANK'S
School appearing in this number.



The boy from Hoxton was risking his own life for the sake of his greatest enemy. It was something none of the onlookers could understand.



The Prisoner of the North Tower;

or,
After Lights Out!

This is the concluding story of the stirring series relating to the adventures of Alf Huggins, who is really Alfred Brent, the son of Sir John Brent, -one of the governor's of St. Frank's College. In order to test what sort of reception he would receive at the school, Alf appears at St. Frank's as the boy from Hoxton, and the son of a bricklayer. Adopting a Cockney way of speaking, he meets with every kind of persecution from the snobs of the school, particularly from Mr. Snuggs, the new Remove master. Mr. Snuggs has a grudge against the boy, and eventually succeeds in getting him expelled

in disgrace. Alf, however, is befriended by Archie Glenthorne and, pending important investigations, he is induced to return secretly to St. Frank's and to live in hiding in the North Tower. How the truth comes out at last, and Alf is completely vindicated, is told in the absorbing story below.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER LIGHTS OUT.

BOOM—boo-o-oom!
Far away in the distance, a roll of thunder sounded. The echo of it came sounding and reverberating over the dark pile of St. Frank's College.

It was night—between eleven and twelve o'clock.

The great bulk of St. Frank's was asleep.

But in a certain bedroom in the Ancient House Archie Glenthorne sat in an easy-chair. It was his own private bedroom—for the swell of the Ancient House was granted this privilege. He did not sleep in the dormitory with the other juniors.

And Archie realised more than ever how useful it was to have a bedroom of his own.

"Gadzooks!" he murmured. "The hour

is getting late. I mean to say, before so very long the dark and sinister boom of midnight will proceed to roll forth. I wonder why the laddie doesn't come? I trust that everything is all serene and toppin'?"

Archie started.

"I mean to say, it would be dashed frightful if anything happened now," he muttered, rising to his feet, and pacing up and down. "Not only dashed frightful, but fearfully awk.! I must confess that the wind is proceeding to get up. Absolutely! Inside and outside, in fact!"

He glanced at the window, for following that rolling boom of thunder had come a distinct puff of wind, which caused the window-sash to rattle a trifle. There was every appearance of rough weather coming.

Archie was fully dressed—he had made no attempt to disrobe. Under ordinary circum-

stances, of course, he would have been in bed for a considerable time. But this was a very special occasion.

Archie, in fact, was up to some little game.

And that needs some explanation. Only a short time earlier, Alf Huggins, the boy from Hoxton, had been expelled in disgrace from the old school. He had literally been hounded out, by a horde of snobs and cads led by Fullwood, of the Remove.

He had been sacked because of an alleged assault upon Mr. Snuggs, the Remove master. Mr. Snuggs had been felled, and it was only by chance that his injury was not grave. And Alf had been found in suspicious circumstances. With blood on his hand, and with a confession that he had been with Mr. Snuggs, the thing seemed obvious.

And then, on the top of that, the Form-master had positively stated that Alf had struck him down. That was the thunderbolt which had descended upon the bricklayer's son. It numbed him. He had gone from the school, disgraced and dishonoured.

And all the worst fellows in the Remove had hounded him out.

But the truth was very different.

At the time of the affair, Mr. Snuggs had been talking with Fullwood in the woodshed. A crowbar had fallen from the rafters, striking Mr. Snuggs by accident. And the vindictive Form-master, seizing upon this chance, had laid the blame at the door of Alf Huggins.

But only Mr. Snuggs himself and Fullwood knew the truth.

And they both hated Alf—they detested him so much that they fairly gloated when he left the school. It was their triumph. They had worked for it—and they had gained victory.

Fate had helped them, it is true—for Mr. Snuggs would never have gone to such lengths. He had taken advantage of the accident. And this was the result. Alf had gone—gone in dire disgrace.

But the schemers had reckoned without Archie!

The Genial Ass of the Remove! The languid dandy who was supposed to be a mere brainless fop! It was Archie who had stuck to Alf Huggins through thick and thin—never believing for a moment that he was guilty. It was Archie who had worked with might and main during the day—and now awaited to hear the result of his scheming.

Archie's eyes were very bright as he paced up and down his bedroom.

For Alf was not in London—the expelled junior was not far away—he was here! He was actually in the school!

And this was Archie's work.

The elegant junior had planned it all—with the aid of Phipps, his valet. Archie was now waiting for Phipps. He was waiting to hear the news.

It had come about because Phipps had been ordered by the Head to wait upon

Mr. Snuggs, in the sick-room—for the rascally Remove-master was confined to his bed, his head bandaged up. He wasn't hurt so badly as he made out. Mr. Snuggs was malingering to a certain extent.

But there was no doubt that that blow had been severe. In his sleep, he had talked of the affair. And Phipps, in attendance, had heard certain words—words which clearly indicated the truth. The blow had been an accident—and Mr. Snuggs and Fullwood had plotted to entrap Alf Huggins.

As soon as Archie heard this he decided that something ought to be done. And Archie had rushed to London, he had got hold of Alf, and he had brought him back.

According to the plan, Archie ought to be in the school now.

The door opened with complete silence, and Phipps glided in.

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "What-ho! The old ghost! Dash it all, Phipps, you positively ooze about like the family spectre. How goes it, laddie? I mean to say, what news of the night?"

"All is well, sir," said Phipps quietly.

"Good!" said Archie. "Distinctly good! In other words, bally good! All's well, what? Good, watchman—I mean to say, that's the idea! I take it that dear old Alf is tucked away in his cosy cot? Our rallying round has panned out toppingly?"

"Exactly, sir," said Phipps.

"Well, of course, that's priceless!" said Archie. "Kindly detail the facts. The young master is anxious to hear all about it. Get busy, Phipps, and amuse me!"

"I carried out your instructions to the letter, sir," said Phipps. "Master Huggins is now in the tower, and there is practically no danger of him being seen or heard by any other persons in the school."

"That is excellent, old sportsman!"

"He is quite comfortable, sir, and will be safe until the morning. But I must confess that I cannot quite see what your exact idea is. What do you propose to do with Master Huggins to-morrow?"

Archie smiled serenely.

"I don't propose to do anything," he replied.

"But surely you have some plan?"

"Absolutely not!" smiled Archie. "You see, Phipps, I'm somewhat in the position of that priceless chappie in the book—Mr. Micawber. I'm bally well waiting for something to turn up."

"But that is rather vague, surely, sir?"

"Admitted, laddie—but I am optimistic," said Archie. "I've got a feeling down in the old bones that something will turn up dashed soon. And now I shall proceed to trickle."

"Trickle, sir?"

"In other words, I shall visit the prisoner in the tower," said Archie. "What-ho! That sounds rather frightful—what? Reminds you of chains and dungeons, and what not."

"I hardly think it advisable to go now, sir," said Phipps dubiously.

"Rats—I mean to say, rats in swarms!" said Archie. "Kindly allow the young master to know best, Phipps. I shall proceed."

And the elegant junior went to the door, and slipped out—intent upon seeing the prisoner in the tower.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TOWER ROOM!



TAP! Tap! Tap! Alf Huggins, seated on his camp bedstead, looked at the door with a bit of a start. Phipps had been gone for some time, and Alf had made no attempt

to undress.

He had been thinking.

And now, without warning, had come that tap on the door.

Alf was rather startled. Who could it be? Was it Phipps returning? If so, everything was all right. But supposing somebody else should turn up? Then everything would be all wrong.

In any case, he would have to risk it, and he got up from the bed, and moved across towards the heavy, ancient door. The tower room was a square brick place at the very summit of the main tower of the Ancient House. Just overhead lay the roof.

There were no windows here—in daylight it was pitchy dark within. And a small lamp was burning, hanging from a nail on the wall.

Alf reached the door, and turned the key in the lock.

"What-ho!" observed a soft voice, as he opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Archie!" said Alf, with relief.

"Absolutely!"

"You give me quite a start!" said the Hoxton boy.

"Sorrow, dear old lad," apologised Archie. "But I thought you would immediately guess that I was the jolly old visitor. This, I might remark, is somewhat priceless. In other words, not so dusty."

He looked round, and nodded with approval.

"Good!" said Alf. "I'm glad you've come, old man. I say, you ain't 'arf a brick! You've done all this for me, an' I don't know 'ow I shall thank you—blowed if I do."

"Neither, as a matter of fact, do I," said Archie. "The fact is, sweet one, I've done nothing to be thanked for. I mean to say, pray carve out this prepos. talk. It's absolutely ridic."

"It's all very well to say that, Archie, but I've got a feeling that your friendship is going to mean everything to me," said Alf earnestly. "You've done wonders."

Archie looked severe.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "I have repeatedly told you that I won't have it. Absolutely not! I don't exactly know what's going to happen to-morrow, but Snuggs will receive a large packet. And then everything will be all serene."

"What are you going to do about Snuggs?"

"I'm going to do a fearful lot!" replied Archie. "In the first place, I intend whizzing in to see the old Headmaster. I'm jolly well going to put it before him as man to man!"

"You'll tell him I'm here?"

"Well, not absolutely," replied Archie. "At least, not at first. Rather unwise, don't you think? Or don't you? I mean, the old lad might get somewhat huffy."

"But I can't stop up here for ever."

"Well, rather not!" replied Archie. "You see, my scheme is to tell the Head about Snuggs, and then a bally series of investigations will follow. Fullwood will be questioned—and I'll jolly well get the truth out of him. He'll confess, Snuggs will be trapped, and then everybody will be yelping for you."

"I don't know about that."

"But I do!" said Glenthorne. "Why, gadzooks, all the lads of the village will be yelling in lusty voices. They'll be requesting your presence. Then I shall simply yank you out, and a vast amount of conquering hero stuff will follow."

"It sounds lovely!" exclaimed Alf, with shining eyes.

"And it'll be better!" declared Archie. "No question of it, old dear. You don't seem to realise that we are gaining supporters every hour. When I returned to the fold this evening I found the bally chappies gathering round in squads—rallying to the old flag. I mean to say, they're beginning to see what priceless chumps they were."

"You mean, they believe in me?"

"Absolutely!"

"And yet there's nothing been proved yet," said Alf. "I say, that's grand. What I should have done without you, I don't know. Lumme! I don't know how I shall thank you!"

Archie hesitated.

"One way, dear lad, will be to polish up the old conversation," he said diffidently. "Pray don't think I'm personal. In fact, I've noticed vast improvements during the last week."

"I was a bit common in me talk when I first come, wasn't I?"

"You were—when you first came," said Archie gently.

"Oh, sorry!" grinned Alf. "That's right—came. If ever you find me going wrong, just pull me up."

"Good!" said Archie. "Now that I have your permish, I'll jolly well do so. Everything seems to be all right, and so I'll trickle back to the old blankets and sheets. I mean, a chappie must have a good assort-

ment of the old winks to brace the tissues for the battle."

"That's the idea," said Alf. "I'll get to bed, too."

He shook hands with Archie, and a minute or two later the elegant junior took his departure.

He passed down the circular steps, and let himself out through the big door at the bottom—which was now left unlocked. There was really no need for it to be secured—as Alf had locked himself in the tower room at the summit.

Archie was feeling very happy.

On the morrow he would demand a full inquiry. Alf was innocent, and it would be shameful to let the thing stand. Dr. Stafford, Archie was sure, would consent to a further inquiry after he had learned the news. And then the big triumph would come.

Archie got back to his own bedroom, slipped into the sheets, and before many minutes had passed he went off into a happy sleep. He instinctively knew that things were going to be better.

Little did Archie know of the dread events in store!

CHAPTER III.

IN MR. SNUGGS' BEDROOM.



FULLWOOD, of the Remove, lay awake in bed.

The dormitory was all quiet. As far as the leader of Study A could make out, all the fellows were sound asleep. The breathing was regular and even from the beds on all sides.

But Fullwood could not sleep.

He was worried—his conscience was at work. Or, if not his conscience, his fears. By the way things were going in the Remove, it looked as though a stir would be made.

And Fullwood wondered how he would fare.

He had decided, when going up to bed, that his only safe plan would be to have a word in private with Mr. Snuggs. And the only possible way to get that word would be to go along to the master's study when the rest of the school was all asleep.

And now after ages had passed, Fullwood slipped out of bed, and commenced dressing. He did so quietly. And, within a few minutes, he had his trousers on over his pyjamas, his slippers, and a dressing-gown. He moved towards the door.

Then he went out along the corridor, and crept like a shadow. Not a sound broke the stillness—except at intervals, the distant rumble of thunder. It seemed to be growing nearer.

But there was nothing in this. A thunder-storm seemed a matter of very minor importance to Fullwood just then. He was

thinking of his own safety—he was concerned about his own skin.

He arrived at the door of Mr. Snuggs' bedroom, and lightly tapped.

There was no reply.

Fullwood tried the handle, and found that the door opened. He slipped inside, and discovered that the room was in darkness. Steady breathing came from the bed.

The leader of the cads closed the door, and felt for the switch. Then he turned on the electric light. The room became flooded with brilliance. Turning, Fullwood saw that Mr. Snuggs was asleep in bed. But the switching on of the light had disturbed him.

The Remove master stirred, turned round, and then looked up.

"Why, what—what— Who is that?" he asked, in his thin voice.

"It's all right, sir; only me!" whispered Fullwood.

Mr. Snuggs stared at him with sleep-laden eyes.

"Good gracious me!" he ejaculated. "What is the meaning of this, Fullwood? What extraordinary freak of fancy has brought you here? I do not like this at all!"

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but I wanted a word in private," said Fullwood. "I thought you ought to know how things are going. It looks to me as though we might be in trouble."

Mr. Snuggs turned pale.

He was not a pleasant sight as he lay there in bed. At the best of times he was thin, weedy, and sour in expression. His lips were thin, and his eyes were watery.

Just now, with a big bandage round his forehead, and awakened from sleep, he looked almost repulsive. And Fullwood's words had sent an expression of fear into his eyes.

"What—what do you mean?" he asked nervously. "Are you mad, Fullwood? I am safe enough—and so are you! What nonsense is this? What possible trouble can arise?"

"I don't exactly know, sir."

"You don't know!" retorted Mr. Snuggs. "And yet you come to me in the dead of night, bothering me with some idle fancy!"

"It's not an idle fancy, sir," growled Fullwood.

"I do not agree—I certainly do not agree!" snapped Mr. Snuggs. "Good gracious! Am I to be pestered and bothered instead of sleeping? I am ill—I am still exceedingly ill! You will go at once! Supposing somebody should see you in here?"

"There's not much danger of that, sir," said Fullwood. "Nobody is likely to come at this hour of the night—"

"Listen!" muttered the master. "What—what was that?"

"Thunder, sir," said Fullwood. "There seems to be a storm about."

Mr. Snuggs pulled the bedclothes closer round him.

"I detest thunderstorms," he said nerv-

ously. "The lightning! The lightning is dangerous, Fullwood. People are killed through lightning! I detest thunderstorms!"

Fullwood looked at him rather contemptuously.

"I don't think you need be afraid of this one, sir," he said. "There's not much fear of it coming over here. In any case, we're safe enough. I want to tell you about the news."

"News! What news?"

"Well, sir, I'm uneasy about the talk that's going on," said Fullwood. "Lots of the fellows are beginnin' to side with Huggins now——"

"What nonsense are you talking?" demanded Mr. Snuggs. "How can the boys side with Huggins, when Huggins is not here? If you cannot talk sensibly, Fullwood, you had better not talk at all!"

"Huggins is not here, sir, but that makes no difference," said Fullwood steadily. "Lots of the fellows are beginning to say there ought to be another inquiry. And if it goes on they might find out that you met with an accident. They might discover that Huggins didn't hit you at all——"

"Ridiculous!" snapped Mr. Snuggs. "How can they find it out?"

"I don't know, sir; but once a gang of chaps get busy, they can do a lot!" said Fullwood savagely. "There's Nipper and Pitt and Archie. Lots of the boys are now saying that there's been trickery."

"They are saying that?"

"Yes, sir—and even worse!"

"Worse?" asked Mr. Snuggs nervously.

"I've heard some of them sayin' that they'll demand a new inquiry. They reckon that Huggins was expelled on our word—your evidence and mine. An' they say that we're not reliable. Talk of that kind is bound to get to the Headmaster sooner or later."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Snuggs.

But he looked very scared, all the same.

The possibility of a second inquiry was exceedingly startling. But, as Mr. Snuggs kept thinking, his composure returned.

"Bah!" he muttered. "You are merely a nervous boy! You have been getting all these fears for nothing. There is nothing to worry about—nothing whatever!"

"If you think so, sir——"

"I certainly do think so," interrupted Mr. Snuggs. "Do you suppose for one moment that the Headmaster will listen to the idle chatter of these junior boys? Huggins has been expelled, and the whole affair is closed. Go back to bed, and let me have no more of this nonsense."

"Then you think we're quite safe, sir?"

"I certainly do. And, remember, you must keep your tongue still!" said Mr. Snuggs. "Not one word, Fullwood! And if you attempt to make any profit out of this secret, I shall be severe——"

"Oh, don't talk!" growled Fullwood. "I'm not likely to make much profit out of you! I'll clear off!"



Fullwood wondered if Archie was walking in his sleep. But he knew that Archie had never before shown any signs of such proclivities. Besides, he was now tapping on the door at the top.

"Yes!" snapped Mr. Snuggs. "You had better do so!"

"And I hope you enjoy the thunderstorm, sir," said Fullwood softly. "It's comin' over this way, you know. Listen to that!"

A rolling boom sounded—much louder, and much nearer. Mr. Snuggs shivered, and lay down, pulling the bedclothes over him. Fullwood went out with a contemptuous sniff after switching off the light.

He made his way along the corridor, en route for the Remove dormitory.

Then, just as he turned a corner, he came to an abrupt halt. A figure was moving further along the passage—a dim, silent figure.

CHAPTER IV.

FULLWOOD DISCOVERS SOMETHING!



FOR a moment Fullwood was filled with alarm. Who could this be, prowling about the upper corridors at such an hour of the night?

He crouched back, and the figure came along to the end of the passage, and then turned off in the direction of the stairs which led to the high old tower. And Fullwood had obtained a glimpse of the figure as it turned.

"Glenthorne!" murmured Fullwood, in astonishment.

He was very astonished. What on earth could Archie be doing out of his bedroom at such an hour? It was quite astounding.

The leader of Study A hesitated only for a moment. Then he decided that he would investigate. There was something fishy about this. What could Archie be doing?

Like a shadow, Fullwood crept along in Archie's wake, and the latter had not the slightest idea he was being followed. This, of course, was taking place during Archie's visit to Alf—which I have already described.

If Archie could only have known the truth, he would not have been so happy in Alf's presence. For the very one fellow in the whole school who should not know this secret, was learning it.

That was the position.

Fullwood arrived at the tower door. It was standing open, and he could hear Archie softly ascending towards the tower room at the summit. The thing was becoming more and more astounding.

Fullwood wondered if Archie was walking in his sleep.

But he came to the conclusion that it could not be so. For Archie was a sound, healthy fellow, who had never shown any signs of such proclivities. Besides, he was tapping on the door at the top.

Then Fullwood heard the door open, and Archie spoke to somebody. The top door closed again.

"By gad!" murmured Fullwood. "Who the dickens can be up there? What's the game? I never thought Archie was one of the gay ones! But I wouldn't be surprised if they've got a card party up there! Glenthorne an' some of those rotten Fifth-Formers, perhaps!"

Fullwood thought he had discovered something of that nature. And he was determined to make sure. He ascended the stairs softly, until, at length, he arrived just outside the heavy door.

And he stood there, listening.

He heard Archie speaking and then came a voice which caused Ralph Leslie to clutch at the wall. He nearly fell down the steep stairs backwards. The voice was unmistakable.

"Yes, you're a good 'un, Archie," it said.

"I don't know how I shall thank you. Lumme! You're a brick!"

Alf Huggins!

Fullwood felt rather faint. This was the last thing in the world that he had expected or believed. It had taken him by surprise, and he was utterly staggered.

Huggins! The thing was unbelievable.

But it was true—that was the awkward part of it.

Alf Huggins, instead of being scores of miles away in London, was here, in the school itself! That was the astounding fact which struck Fullwood with the force of a physical blow.

"By gad!" he muttered. "What—what can it mean?"

He didn't want a minute longer, for at any moment Archie might come out. And Fullwood did not want to be caught in such a position as this. There would be no time to retreat.

Archie would find him, and then it would be all up.

Swiftly, silently, the spy descended the stairs. He arrived at the bottom of the tower, and then he crept away, and waited. He decided that he would stop there until Glenthorne came down. And his thoughts were busy. He was in a kind of maze.

His mind was in a state of chaos.

Of course, Archie had brought Alf Huggins back! All sorts of little things came into Fullwood's mind now. He remembered that Archie had been away all day. Archie had gone off, and had not explained his absence when he returned.

He had followed Alf to London, after the latter had been sacked. And he had brought the Hoxton boy back.

But why—why?

What possible reason could Archie have for making such a move? Fullwood was filled with vague uneasiness. There was something mysterious about this—something that was enough to unsettle anybody. And he knew that his visit to Mr. Snuggs had been fully justified.

Another rumble of thunder from outside rather startled him.

There had been a flash of lightning, too—a brilliant, searing flash which lit up the whole corridor for a second or two. It seemed that the very night itself was contributing towards the mystery.

And then, while Fullwood was thinking, he heard a sound.

He crouched further back into his corner, and he saw Archie Glenthorne come down from the tower. Then Archie went away towards his own bedroom. But Fullwood followed him to make sure.

Then he paused for a few minutes.

What should he do? Go back to Mr. Snuggs and tell him? No, that would be foolish—for the master of the Remove would get into a sort of panic. He was a contemptible sort of worm, anyway. Even Fullwood was ready to admit that.

He decided on another course.

"I'll go up to that tower myself," he muttered. "Yes, by gad! I'll surprise that cad, and give him a shock! Then I'll go an' raise the alarm! If he thinks he's goin' to stop there, he's made a mistake!"

If Fullwood had decided to raise the alarm at once, all the events of the night would have been changed. But he could not help pandering to that gloating feeling of triumph which surged through him. He wanted to meet Alf face to face.

And he would let the Hoxton boy know that the game was up!

Fullwood crept to the tower, and then he went up the steps. He arrived at the top, and saw a chink of light coming from underneath. Huggins had not gone to bed yet.

Tap! Tap!

Fullwood rapped his knuckles on the door, just as Archie had done. He heard the key turn in the lock, and the door opened.

Alf Huggins and Fullwood stared at one another.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF CAPTIVE!



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD walked into the tower room with a sneer on his face. And Alf stood back, his heart beating rapidly. He watched Fullwood, and a great rage

surged up within him.

"Very nice!" said Fullwood jeeringly. "Very comfy! An' I suppose you think you're goin' to stay here?"

Alf looked at him with fiercely burning eyes.

"How did you find out?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Never mind how I found out," replied Fullwood. "I make it my business to discover things of this kind. You plotting cad! So you think you can come back to the school, and stay here in secret?"

Alf turned his back to the door and closed it.

"Well now you're here, we'll have a word!" he said, with cold deliberation. "You're the bloke who got me sacked! You're the bloke wot got up that rotten affair to kick me out!"

"Well?" sneered Fullwood.

"Well!" said Alf. "Now you're going through it!"

"Look here, you fool——"

"You're goin' through it!" repeated Alf harshly.

Fullwood suddenly turned pale. It came upon him in a flood of alarm that he had been insanely unwise. It had only just occurred to him. And now it was too late.

Alf had his back to the door, and there was no way out.

Fullwood had come up here in order to gloat over his intended victim, and Alf was not prepared to let him go! And Fullwood knew very well that if it came to a

matter of fistic prowess, he was nowhere. The thoughts of a fight made him shiver.

"If you touch me, I'll yell like mad!" he panted.

"All right—yell!" exclaimed Alf. "D'you think I care? Listen to that! Can you hear it?"

In a muffled kind of way a booming roll of thunder sounded. The very school quivered with the shock. But in this thickly-walled tower the thunder only penetrated in a muffled way.

"Can you hear it?" repeated Alf. "Outside, that thunder is crashin' with a fearful din. How many of your yells are goin' to be 'eard? You can scream yourself 'oarse—nobody won't know!"

And Fullwood knew that Alf was speaking the truth.

What a mad fool he had been to come! It was only now—when all chance of getting away had gone—that he realised it. He decided his better course would be to adopt an easy manner.

"It's all very well to bluster like that," he said carelessly. "Look here, Huggins, I didn't come up here to quarrel with you. I just want to give you a word of advice."

"Ain't you kind?" asked Alf.

"Well, I don't know about bein' kind—but it's advice for your own good," retorted Fullwood. "Don't stay here—get out as soon as you can. If you don't you'll have another hounding out!"

"I've stood it once—I can stand it again," said Alf. "I expect you were spyin' on Archie—that's how you got to know. Well, you're not goin' back!"

"If you try to keep me here——"

"I sha'n't try—I'll do it!" said Alf. "Why, I'd be a fool to let you go! The fust thing you'd do would be to give the alarm! But I'm not goin' to let you do that, because you won't get away."

Fullwood laughed.

"I've got about ten other chaps outside!" he sneered.

"Oh, no, you haven't!" retorted Alf sharply. "If you 'ad ten other fellers outside you'd 'ave yelled before now. You wouldn't 'ave gone pale like you did! I reckon I've got you where I want you!"

"You—you dangerous madman!" shouted Fullwood, in a panic. "Are you goin' to attack me like you attacked Snuggs?"

"What!" shouted Alf hotly. "You infernal cur! So you've been sayin' it so much that you even think it's true! You know about Snuggs—you know it was an accident——"

"An accident!" muttered Fullwood. "How—how——"

"Oh! So it was an accident, then?" exclaimed Alf. "You let that out. We're gettin' nearer to the truth! It won't be long before everything comes out, you plotting blackguard!"

They stared at one another, and the thunder rolled outside again.

"You'll get kicked out of this!" snarled

Fullwood. "I'm glad I've discovered this plot of Glenthorne's! You'll get kicked out, and then all the fellows will——"

"Afore I get kicked out, I'm goin' to make you pay!" exclaimed Alf fiercely. "Lumme! You came here of your own accord, an' now you're goin' to git something you hadn't bargained for! Put up your hands!"

"Don't—don't dare to touch me!"

"Up with 'em!" snapped Alf.

Fullwood was compelled to defend himself. He yelled with fear, but it was hopeless. Alf meant business.

Crash!

Before Ralph Leslie could dodge, and while his guard was waving uncertainly before him, Alf's right thudded upon his jaw. Fullwood went over with a howl of pain. He wasn't badly hurt. But he lay there, whimpering and wailing.

"Get up!" exclaimed Alf. "You ain't done, I s'pose!"

"I—I'm not goin' to fight you!" gasped Fullwood. "I don't fight bricklayers!"

He didn't stir, and Alf looked down upon him with contempt.

"You miserable funk!" he said. "So you're going to give me best?"

"Hang you!"

"You're goin' to do me out of a fight, are you?" demanded Alf gruffly. "You knows I can't touch you now! It may be your way—but it ain't mine. I don't hit a feller when he's down!"

Fullwood said nothing.

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He was discovering that it would be far safer to stay where he was. If this had been out in the open, with a crowd of fellows round, Ralph Leslie would have made some sort of show. But there was nobody here to see. So what did it matter?

"I'll pay you out for this one day!" he muttered thickly.

"Yes—by some new kind of trick, I s'pose?" retorted Alf. "That's all you can do—stab a bloke in the back! You can't face him fair an' square—you 'aven't got the pluck! You can stay 'ere an' think things out by yourself. The very sight of you makes me sick!"

Alf Huggins tore the key out of the door, passed outside, and locked the door from there. There was no possibility of Fullwood getting out. The door was several inches thick, and made of solid oak. And the lock was one of those old-fashioned things that would even defy a modern locksmith.

Breathing hard, Alf passed down the circular steps.

"Help! Help!"

The shouts came from within the tower room. Fullwood was already yelling. He thumped on the door, too. But it was useless. Alf's face twisted into a kind of grim smile as he listened.

Even here—quite near by—Fullwood's outcry sounded muffled. In the inhabited parts of the school it would be inaudible.

Alf had done the only thing possible under the circumstances.

He crept away, and went straight to Archie's bedroom. He passed inside, and found the room in darkness.

A moment later, Archie was awake, with Alf at his elbow. The blind was up and the moon was illuminated every few seconds by brilliant flashes of lightning.

And the thunder roared almost continuously.

"I mean to say!" muttered Archie. "Is that you, Phipps——"

"No; it's me!" said Alf grimly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIGHT OF THE STORM!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE sat up in bed with surprising alacrity.

"Gadzooks!" he gasped. "Alf! Dear old lad! Really, don't you know! I mean to say dash it! What's the frightfully big idea?"

"I've come down—and left Fullwood up there!"

Archie gasped.

"Fullwood!" he repeated. "But—but I don't understand! The fact of the matter is, the old brain is buzzing like an alarm clock! What with this, and what with that, I'm frightfully mixed!"

Alf rapidly told him what had occurred.

And Archie Glenthorne listened, startled. He heard all, and by the time Alf had finished, he was in a state of considerable perturbation. He even got out of bed, and put on his dressing-gown.

"This, as you might say, is frightfully and fearfully poisonous!" he exclaimed. "I don't mind admitting, old lad, that the posish is foul. Dash Fullwood! Dash him! It appears that he's messing up the whole little game! It's ghastly!"

Boom—boom!

A terrible crash of thunder broke over the school.

The two juniors instinctively looked towards the window. They had not put the light on, for it was hardly necessary. The continuous flashes of lightning made the apartment brilliant every few seconds. And Alf and Archie could see one another clearly.

Alf went to the window, threw up the sash, and looked out.

"It's stuffy in here!" he said. "Come and stand by me."

They both leaned against the sill, and were rather awed by the might of the storm. It was a most curious affair. Not a drop of rain had fallen, and overhead the sky was intensely black.

But over towards Bannington the stars could be seen. And as Archie and Alf looked, the moon came out from behind the cloud-bank, and sailed in a perfectly clear sky. The whole scene became flooded with pale light.

The storm was right overhead—but it was passing.

And it was extremely terrifying. A thunderstorm is generally worse when no rain falls—for the rain acts as a kind of safety-valve. The inky clouds overhead were being split asunder by forked lightning. And the thunder itself was like the booming roll of heavy artillery.

"Dear old boy, it's all very well to look at the storm, but what about our posish?" asked Archie. "We've got to think of things. In fact, we've got to think of a frightful lot of things!"

"Well, we've got plenty of time," said Alf. "There's no need to get flustered about it. We shan't be disturbed during the night—and Fullwood's safe enough. Let's wait until the storm's over—we can't talk in this row."

Archie nodded.

"Perhaps you're right!" he admitted.

Alf lifted his hand, and pointed upwards.

"That's where he is!" he said. "In there, I suppose?"

"The tower, what?" said Archie. "Yes, dear old lad—right at the very top. In that little square bit at the summit. From below, nobody could suspect that a room could be planned up there. But there it is—absolutely. And Fullwood's in it!"

Archie's bedroom was in a different angle of the Ancient House. And from this window the two juniors could see the tower standing out completely against the clearing sky.

And then, as they watched, something happened.

There was a blinding, blazing glare. It was like nothing the boys had ever seen before. They were dazzled. And that blaze was accompanied by a hissing, searing noise—to be instantly followed by a sound like a mine explosion.

The whole school rocked and shook.

Lightning played up and down the tower—and, to the horror of the juniors, they saw the whole top of it split asunder. It was all over so quickly that they could hardly take it all in.

Great stones crashed down into the Triangle, and where the tower had been before there was now nothing but a partially demolished wreck. The top of the tower had vanished!

"Good heavens!" gasped Alf huskily.

The thunder was terrible—so fearful that Archie did not hear a single word that Alf uttered. That explosion had not been the thunder at all—it was the fearful sound that accompanied the lightning flash.

For the school had been struck.

And as the two boys continued to stare out in a fascinated way, a great puff of wind came blowing over from the open country. And still there was no rain.

The echo of the thunder died away.

But there was silence no longer. From every part of the school windows could be heard driven upwards. Sashes were thrown open, and all sorts of shouts were sounding.

One by one, in rapid succession, lights were switched on. St. Frank's was aroused—St. Frank's was getting up to see what had happened. The commotion became general.

And little wonder.

Every building of the school had rocked to its foundations. It was like an earthquake. Nobody had remained asleep after that fearful crash. And, suddenly, Alf clutched at Archie's arm in a fierce, impulsive kind of way.

"Fullwood!" he gasped, something gripping at his heart.

"Fullwood!" said Archie vaguely.

"Fullwood was in the tower—at the top!" shouted Alf. "Don't you understand? And the top of the tower is smashed! It's wrecked completely! Oh, my goodness! Perhaps—perhaps he's killed!"

Archie didn't know what to say.

Alf rushed to the door, careless as to whether he was seen or not. It didn't matter now. Nothing mattered! The only thing was to find out if Fullwood was safe. And, somehow, a horrible, ghastly fear came upon Alf that the cad of the Remove had been killed.

And, but for mere chance, Alf himself would have been in the tower!

Other fellows were out in the corridor, running about. But in the darkness all was confusion. Nobody even noticed that Alf Huggins was present. And he rushed away to the tower, running as hard as he could pelt. And Archie kept behind him. They

arrived at the door, and Alf tore it open—this was the lower door, with the stairs leading upwards to the tower's summit.

"Quick—we've got to be quick!" gasped Alf grimly.

And then, with a startled cry, he came to a halt.

The stairs were no longer there!

Nothing—nothing but a mass of smashed and broken masonry. The truth was too appalling for words. It came upon Alf and Archie as a kind of stunning blow.

"The stairs have vanished!" said Alf hoarsely.

"But—but I mean to say——"

"We can't get to Fullwood—we can't even see if he is still alive!" muttered Alf. "Oh, goodness! And—I might have been up there! It was only by pure chance that I wasn't!"

Archie grasped his shoulder.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured fervently.

"Dear laddie, thank Heaven!"

And they stared at the mass of debris in the same fascinated kind of way. It was impossible to mount—for there was nothing but an immovable mass of stone and brickwork. The tower was wrecked, and it seemed only too certain that Ralph Leslie Fullwood had met with a terrible fate.

Locked up in that tower room, he had perished in the crash of the storm.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOVERING WALL.



THE Remove dormitory was in an uproar.

"Great pip!" said Handforth faintly.

"There's been an earthquake!"

"My only hat!"

"What—what's happened?"

The juniors were leaping out of bed on all sides.

They were dashing to the windows and staring out. But from here there was nothing to be seen. As far as they could make out, the school was in the same state of preservation as ever.

But what had that crash meant?

"It was only the thunder!" said Church.

"Thunder often booms like that——"

"Ass!" interrupted Handforth. "Thunder doesn't make the whole place rock up and down! It was just like an earthquake! Great pip! Look—look there!"

Handforth was leaning far out of the window, and he pointed excitedly.

"I can't see anything!" said Church.

"There seems to be a pile of stonework lying in the Triangle!" shouted Handforth. "It is stonework! My only hat! One of the walls must have collapsed!"

"That's it!" gasped Church. "I can see it now!"

"We'll buzz outside and have a look!" roared Handforth.

Everybody decided on the same course, and the next moment the juniors were tearing into their clothing. The excitement was intense. And, in the middle of it, the door was flung open, and Willy Handworth entered.

"The tower's busted up!" he yelled.

"What!"

"The tower!"

"Smashed to smithereens!" shouted Willy. "Struck by lightning, you know! It's a good thing we weren't all killed in our beds! I'm going outside to have a look!"

"Hold on!" shouted Edward Oswald. "I'm coming!"

"Can't wait for you!" said Willy. "Before you get a move on we might get struck again! Snails don't suit me!"

Handforth snorted, and was in such a hurry that he tried to get into somebody's boots.

And by now the juniors were streaming up in twos and threes—all running for the stairs so that they could get outside. Prefects came along, but it was quite impossible for them to control the crowd.

They didn't even try.

They were nearly as excited as the juniors. Everybody seemed to have the idea of getting out into the Triangle—for from there the extent of the damage could be seen.

If it had been raining, the juniors might have hesitated. But the sky was clearing, and the Triangle was as dry as a bone. In this peculiar thunderstorm there had been no rain at all.

"Come on!"

"Let's get outside quick!"

The door of the Ancient House was open, and the juniors surged out. They rushed forward, and then turned and looked up at the big pile of buildings. At first there was nothing wrong to be seen. During the first glance it appeared that the school was just as intact as ever. Then somebody pointed an excited finger.

"Look at the tower!" he yelled.

And now they could see

The moonlight was quite brilliant. The massive, dense storm-clouds were passing away. And a fierce, buffeting wind was coming up. The top of the tower was in a most curious condition.

Three of the walls had vanished for about eight feet down—to the level of the floor of the tower-room. But the other wall remained standing—jagged, and utterly crazy.

The entire top of the tower had gone—that part which had formed the roof of the secret apartment.

"The tower's wrecked!"

"Yes, and it might fall, too!" yelled Arm-

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strong. "Better not get too near, you chaps! Can't you see that wall? It's absolutely swaying in the wind! It's hovering! It might smash down at any moment!"

Prefects were coming out now, and Nelson Lee and Mr. Langton and Mr. Pagett were out in the Triangle. They were all doing their utmost to quieten the excited fellows. But their efforts were of no avail. For the whole school was in a tremendous uproar.

And then, just as I was going a bit closer to see what had really happened, I came to a halt. It seemed to me that a cry had come from above. I listened again.

"Quiet, you chaps!" I roared. "I thought I heard a cry for help!"

"Yes, there's somebody up there!"

"What?"

"I can see him!" yelled Tommy Watson. "Look! Look! There's somebody hanging over the very edge!"

Other fellows saw the figure at the same moment. And, as though by magic, an intense hush fell upon the crowd.

"Help! Help!"

A low, moaning cry came down from the tower summit.

The school was transfixed. Amazing as it seemed—utterly impossible as it appeared to be—there was somebody up there!

"It's Fullwood!" screamed Gulliver.

"Fullwood!"

"Yes—yes!"

Nelson Lee came hurrying along.

"Boys—boys!" he shouted. "Is Fullwood here?"

"No, sir!" sobbed Merrill. "We haven't seen him!"

Nelson Lee flung up his hand.

"Silence!" he shouted. "For heaven's sake, be silent!"

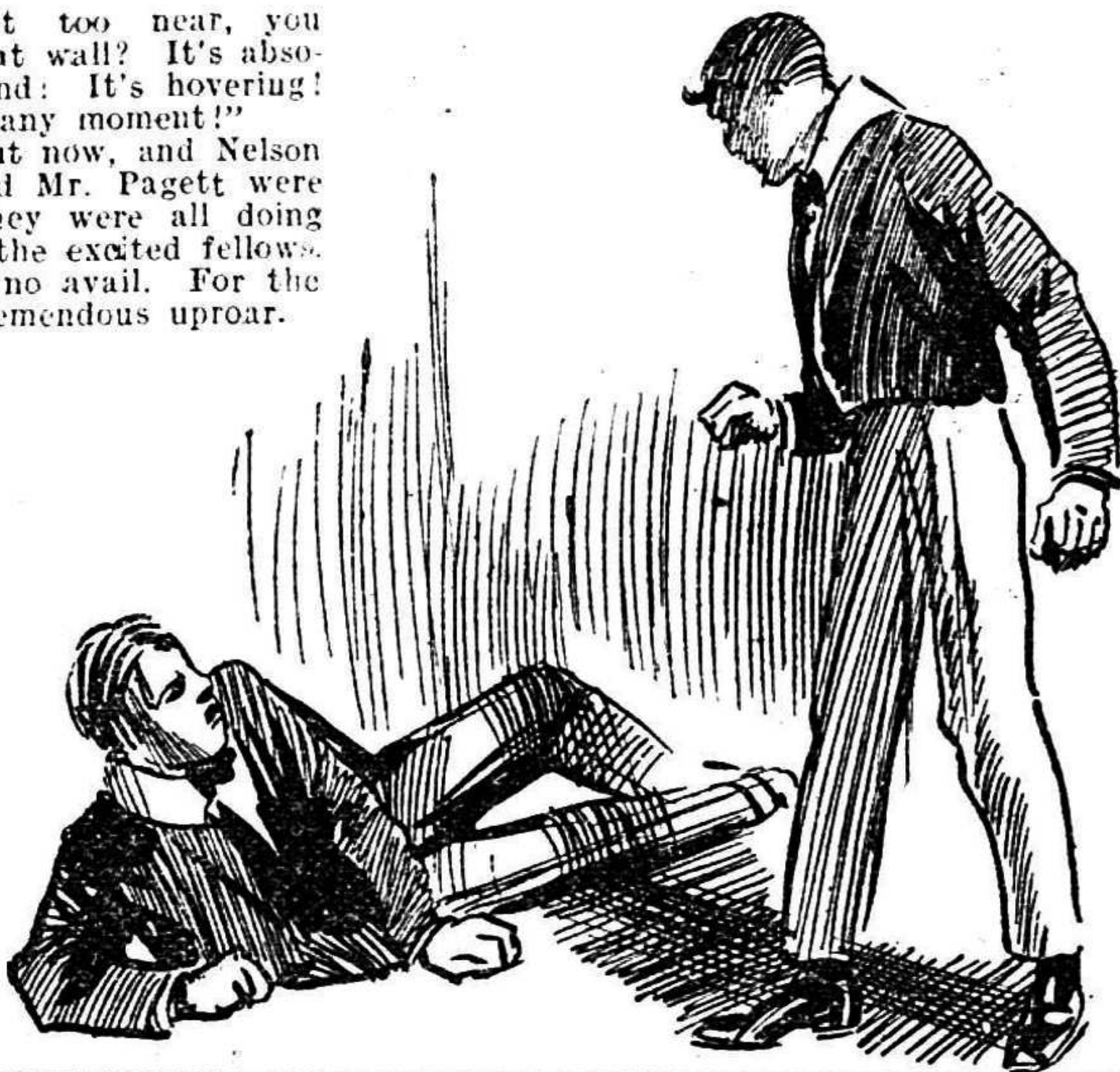
There was something in the gov'nor's tone that demanded instant obedience. The crowd became subdued. And Nelson Lee walked closer to the tower and looked upwards.

"Fullwood!" he called sharply.

"Help! Oh, I'm dying!" came down a moaning cry.

"What is the matter, my boy?" shouted Nelson Lee. "We will get help up to you at once——"

"I'm pinned down, sir—my left leg is caught under a heavy piece of stone!" came Fullwood's agonised reply. "I can't move!"



"Get up!" exclaimed Alf. "You ain't done, I s'pose!"

"I—I'm not goin' to fight you!" gasped Fullwood. "I don't fight bricklayers!"

And—and this wall's going to fall at any moment! Oh, save me—save me!"

His voice rose to a scream of panic-stricken terror.

And a kind of throb passed through the whole crowd. Now that their eyes had grown accustomed to the moonlight, the boys could distinctly see that Ralph Leslie Fullwood was in terrible peril. They didn't stop to ask themselves how he had got there. They only knew that he was in danger of a shocking death.

Of that there was no doubt.

The wretched junior was trapped—held tightly down by one leg. When the crash had come, he had escaped death by a miracle. The brickwork had fallen about him in a shower, but he had only been slightly bruised. Stunned and dazed by the dust and the noise, Fullwood had fallen.

A heavy lump of masonry had toppled over on his left leg. Try as he would, he could not shift. For the more he pulled the greater the agony. He was pinned there!

And, close against him, stood the one remaining wall. It was uncertain—crazy. At any moment this might totter and crash. If it did so, Fullwood would be crushed to atoms.

It was the wind that seemed likely to bring about this disaster. For with every

fresh gust that came along that tottering wall shifted visibly. It swayed like a leaf in the breeze. Yet it did not collapse. The suspense was dreadful.

This tower was the highest point in the school—there was no ladder long enough to reach. And the staircase inside was blocked. So that no help could reach Fullwood from that direction.

It seemed that he was doomed.

And Alf Huggins stood looking up from the Triangle, with a grim, fierce determination surging through him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACT OF A HERO.



him or not.

BOTH Alf and Archie had come out, joining with the throng, and in the general excitement nobody had even recognised the boy from Hoxton. He did not care whether they recognised

There were no shouts now—no uproar.

For Fullwood's deadly peril had brought a great hush upon the assembled school. It was ghastly to watch. And yet there was something fascinating about it—something which kept the gaze of the boys directed upwards.

That tottering wall was tantalising.

It did not fall—it simply swayed in the wind. But just one extra gust, and the end would be swift and terrible.

Nelson Lee had already sent three or four seniors in to dash to the inner stairway—although, even while doing so, Lee had suspected that the stairway would be blocked.

He had sent other seniors tearing round to the rear to find every available ladder. And Mr. Pagett had dashed indoors to ring up the Bannington fire brigade. Nothing that could be done was left undone.

Instinctively, Nelson Lee knew that it would be the fire brigade only. There were no ladders here that would reach—and the stairway was blocked. But it would be half an hour at the very earliest before the Bannington fire escape could arrive.

And was it possible for that wall to remain intact so long?

Alf Huggins did not think so. He was certain, in fact, that the wall would collapse within a few minutes. Even as he looked up, two chunks of masonry became dislodged, and fell to the ground with splintering thuds. And a kind of madness seized hold of Alf.

"Archie! Archie!" he muttered tensely.

"Dear old lad, it's too frightful for words!" muttered Archie. "Just think! You might have been up there."

"Yes, I know," replied Alf. "I ought to have been up there. It was me who locked Fullwood in that room. I put him

there. It was my doing. Can't you understand?"

Archie looked at him dazedly.

"Gadzooks! It wasn't your fault."

"No, I know it wasn't! But the fact remains the same," said Alf, his voice cracking with excitement. "I can't leave Fullwood up there. I've got to rescue him. Oh, I must! If he's killed, it'll be my fault—it'll be my doing!"

And before Archie could even attempt to stop him, Alf darted off. He pushed his way through the crowds, and for the first time he was recognised. The juniors stared at him amazedly.

"Huggins!"

"Great Scott!"

"What's Huggins doing here?"

"Look—look! He's going for the ivy!"

And there was no doubt of it. Alf, maddened by the idea that he had caused Fullwood to be in his terrible predicament, was rushing for the ivy-covered wall of the tower. This ivy went right up to the very top, clinging closely to the stonework.

But it would be madness itself to attempt the climb.

One slip, half-way up, and it would mean grave injury—perhaps death. For at the base there were hard, cruel flagstones. Alf did not care. He had to go—he had to do it.

He had brought this upon Fullwood—he had to save him.

"Stop him—stop him!"

A dozen fellows rushed at Alf, and prepared to drag him down. But they paused as a warning yell rang out. Another gust of wind had come, and the crazy wall tottered more than ever before. It would crash down, and kill anybody directly underneath.

But, although the juniors halted, Nelson Lee ran on. He could not allow this boy to risk his life on such a mad enterprise. It was merely making matters doubly as bad. For two lives might be sacrificed instead of one.

Nelson Lee reached the wall—just too late!

Alf was already seven feet up—and climbing steadily. He was beyond Nelson Lee's reach.

"Huggins!" said Lee sharply. "Come down!"

Alf didn't seem to hear—he climbed up and up and up.

"Do you hear me, Huggins?" shouted Lee. "Boy! You'll be killed! You must not proceed with this insane act."

But Alf didn't say a word. Indeed, it is doubtful if he even heard Nelson Lee's command. He only knew that he was climbing—that the ivy was holding him. And he continued the ascent. Now and again, the ivy would break. He would clutch again, and get a fresh hold.

It was the maddest thing I have ever seen.

But Alf seemed to bear a charmed life. It was practically a miracle. Nothing deterred him—nothing stayed his progress. He went upwards and upwards. And the

whole great throng stood looking on breathless. There was hardly a sound to be heard except the rustling of the wind in the old chestnut-trees.

Archie Glenthorne was transfixed with horror. At any moment he expected to see his dear chum lose his hold, clutch desperately, and then come crashing downwards to certain death.

But this did not happen—yet.

And if the juniors had time to think of anything, they were amazed by one astounding thing. Ralph Leslie Fullwood was the junior in danger—and it was Alf Huggins who was making this heroic attempt to save him. Huggins! Huggins—the boy whom Fullwood had hated all the term!

The boy from Hoxton was risking his own life for the sake of his greatest enemy. It was something that none of the onlookers could understand. But it was wonderful—wonderful!

And now Alf was nearly at the top.

He clung there, like a fly. And he mounted ever upwards. In the tense stillness, we could hear the crackling of the ivy. We could detect the tearing away of certain roots. And then, at last, came the most fearful moment of all. For Alf was within ten feet of the top.

I don't believe anybody breathed then. The silence was solid. All that crowd of fellows stood there, with their hearts in their mouths. Somehow or other they felt that Alf would meet with disaster on this—the very last second.

But Alf didn't.

He clutched at the stonework on the very top. His feet slipped from under him, and he hung there—hung by his very fingers!

A low gasp of horror sounded.

But Alf Huggins gave a heave upwards. His other hand caught the stonework. Then he drew himself up—slid over the edge—and he was safe. He was at the summit! He was standing beside Fullwood! His climb had ended in complete victory!

And the crowd broke into a thunderous, hysterical cheer.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"He's up! He's done it!"

But the cheers died away suddenly. For Alf was now bending over Fullwood. From down below the watchers could see that Huggins was trying to lift the block of stone which pinned Fullwood down. He was using all his strength.

And from the trees over by Little Side came a fierce rustling and shaking. Another big gust was coming.

"Now try—now try!" came out Alf's panting voice, clearly audible.

The watchers saw Fullwood move himself. He shifted sideways, wriggling. Then, to everybody's joy, Fullwood got completely clear. He half rose to his knees, and uttered a wild scream.

"Get back!" he shouted madly.

As he spoke, he flung himself back, and

the tottering wall collapsed in a crumbling heap.

Alf Huggins had been unable to get clear. At the last second he had made an attempt to do so—to follow Fullwood to the safe side of that precarious ruin. Fullwood escaped—he saw the masonry tumble down. But Alf Huggins had no time.

He fell—crushed—the cruel brickwork smothering him, and choking into silence the cry that left his anguished lips.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.



"O H!"

The tension was over—for the second, at least.

But the school was now in a state of wild consternation. Fullwood had been saved—he was up there now—shouting for help in a weak, terrified voice. But Alf Huggins was no longer to be seen. He had gone. No sound came from him.

The boy who had been in peril of his life was safe. The boy who had risked his own life for the sake of the other—he was buried in the debris. It seemed impossible that he could have escaped death.

"Alf! Alf!" muttered Archie Glenthorne. "Oh, dear old lads! Don't you understand? Alf's up there—we've got to get him down—"

"Steady, Archie," I said gently. "It can't be done. We've got to wait until the ladders come. Alf's a wonder—as brave as any fellow in the world. He saved Fullwood's life."

Handforth turned to the others.

"Do you understand, you snivelling cads!" he thundered, addressing the snobs. "That's Alf Huggins—that's the fellow you hounded out. He went to his own death for the sake of the very fellow who drove him out."

"We—we didn't know," said Merrell tremblingly.

"Didn't know!" rapped out Handforth. "You did know. Alf's always been true blue—he's always been one of the best." And now perhaps you're sorry—when it's too late."

The snobs were silenced.

They had nothing to say. They stood there, pale-faced and horrified. The boy they had persecuted—the fellow they had driven out of the school—had proved to them what kind of stuff he was made of. For he had not only acted as a hero, but he had saved the life of his enemy.

And then came another big excitement.

There was a roar from the lane—the buzzing of a powerful engine. And the Bannington fire escape turned into the gateway.

"Hurrah!"

"They've come—they've come!"

"Oh! Alf can be rescued now!" exclaimed Archie. "How frightfully ripping! I hope the dear chappies will buzz like fury!"

The firemen wasted no time.

The escape was put against the tower, and the long ladder was raised upwards, and extended. Then a couple of firemen ran swiftly upwards. The crowd below watched, hushed once more. Fullwood was safe—but what about Huggins? How had he fared?

The rescue of Fullwood was an easy matter.

He was brought down by one of the firemen—and immediately rushed indoors by four or five prefects, who carried him. Fullwood was hurt—but only slightly. His leg was rather nastily crushed, although the bone was not fractured. He was suffering from shock, too. The events of the night had been too much for him.

Nobody went in. Nobody cared much about Fullwood. It was Alf now—it was Huggins. The whole school wanted to know if Huggins was safe. And the whole school was in a fever of fear.

Two of the firemen were up there, lifting big blocks of stone away. They were uncovering the stricken junior. And then, at last, a big gasp went up from all the on-lookers.

"They've got him!"

The two firemen were picking up something limp and apparently lifeless. They carried it gently and tenderly.

And, with extra slow movements, they came down the ladder. There could be no question about the gravity of this matter. Either Alf was dead, or he was badly injured. He was like a limp rag in the hands of his rescuers.

Archie Glenthorne rushed forward, his face pale, his eyes glowing with anxiety.

"Stand back, Glenthorne—you can't come near," said Fenton of the Sixth.

"I—I mean to say," gasped Archie. "He—he's my pal, you know! You must let me through—you absolutely must."

"I can't," said Fenton. "You mustn't, Glenthorne."

And then there was no further time. Archie stared with fascination. For the firemen had reached the foot of the ladder. They did not pause. They carried their burden slowly towards the Ancient House doorway. And the horrified juniors caught a glimpse of a poor, crippled form—a face that was as white as chalk, with an ugly dark smear down one side. And it was a face that looked like death.

"He's dead!" muttered Handforth aghast. "Did you see? He's dead! Oh, poor chap!"

"It—it can't be true!"

"He can't be dead—not really!"

"And he did it all for Fullwood—he saved Fullwood's life at the expense of his own!"

"I say, what a hero!" muttered Marriott hoarsely.

"They're queer words, from you!" exclaimed De Valerie.

Marriott almost sobbed.

"I—I've been a fool!" he muttered brokenly. "Oh, I hope he's alive! I want to tell him what a rotter I've been. Poor old Huggins! He's one of the best!"

"He's one in a thousand."

Every single fellow in the school had only words of praise for Alf Huggins now. He was no longer despised—no longer looked down upon because he was a bricklayer's son.

For Alf had proved what he was.

And it seemed that he had given his own life for the sake of his enemy. That was the stunning part of it all. And when the fellows were ordered indoors, nobody thought of going to bed.

Probably the Head knew how impossible it was for the fellows to sleep. The very idea was out of the question. And so they were allowed to remain in the passages and in the lobby—to go into their own studies and the common-rooms. Nobody thought about the time.

What did the hour matter now?

There was only one question of any consequence. Would Alf Huggins live? Were his injuries grave, or were they only simple? These were the questions which the fellows asked themselves again and again.

And then came word.

Fenton brought the news to the Remove. He had come straight from upstairs—straight from the sick room. Dr. Brett had been on the spot. Nelson Lee's forethought had caused the doctor to be fetched—so as to be in readiness for any emergency.

"I've got instructions from the Head that there must be complete quietness," said Fenton, in a low voice. "There must be no shouting—no commotion of any kind. Huggins may be dying!"

"Oh!"

"It's not true, Fenton!"

"I can't tell you about Huggins' exact condition," went on Fenton. "We only know that he is suffering from terrible cuts and bruises, and his skull is fractured."

"What?"

"Don't—don't shout!" said Fenton sharply. "Huggins is alive, but his skull is fractured, and he may die before the morning!"

CHAPTER X.

A RACE FOR A LIFE!



"H—E—he may die before the morning!" said Handforth, in a tense whisper.

The Common-room was hushed.

That dreadful statement had made all the juniors nearly dumb with horror. It was something to know that Alf

(Continued on page 15)

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No. 23.

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May 12, 1923.

THE LEAGUE

OF THE IRON HAND



A Thrilling Detective Story of Nelson Lee's Greatest Exploits against a criminal confederation organised by the mysterious "Number One."

FOR NEW READERS.

PAUL HERMAN, millionaire and well-known figure in West End society, is the head of the League of the Iron Hand, a dangerous criminal confederation, which

NELSON LEE, the famous Gray's Inn Road detective, has set out to crush with

DERRICK O'BRIEN, the young Irish detective, and

COLIN MACKENZIE, the leading Scots detective, hailing from Edinburgh.

In order to facilitate their daring coups, the league steals a marvellous new airship invented by Donald Stuart. By its means they rescue one of their confederates from Dartmoor Prison while Nelson Lee and Mac are questioning the prisoner in the exercise yard. Being unable to manipulate the airship satisfactorily, Donald Stuart is kidnapped by the league for the purpose of disclosing the secrets of his invention.

(Now read on.)

A FIENDISH SCHEME.

THIS, however, was not the only result of Cundle's slip. As the three rolled downstairs, the shock dislodged the gag from Donald's mouth; and as Herman and Cundle scrambled to their feet,

Donald thrust his head out of the blanket and let out a pealing shout of "Help! Mac! Help!"

With a savage imprecation, Herman clubbed his revolver and brought it down on Donald's head with a violence that stretched the young fellow senseless at his feet. But by that time the mischief had been done.

Old Cornforth, who was as deaf as an adder, heard neither the crash nor Donald's shout for help. Mac, on the other hand, was awakened by the crash, and was in the act of scrambling out of bed, to ascertain its cause, when Donald's shout echoed through the house.

Quick as thought, Mac thrust his hand beneath his pillow, grabbed his revolver, flung open the door of his bedroom, and rushed to the top of the stairs.

"Donald! Where are you? What's happened?" shouted Mac.

Receiving no reply, the detective began to descend the staircase. Scarcely daring to breathe, Herman and Cundle raised their revolvers; and when they judged that Mac was half-way down the stairs, Herman pressed the button of his electric lamp.

The result of this manœuvre was that Mac's head and shoulders were suddenly bathed in a flood of light. Dazzled by the

glare Mac came to a halt; and even as he did so Cundle and Herman fired.

Crack! Crack!

The two shots rang out together, and the next moment the Scottish detective flung up his arms with a choking cry, and pitched headlong down the stairs. For an instant, but only for an instant, he lay writhing at his murderers' feet; then a convulsive spasm shook his frame, and all was over.

And so passed away one of the bravest and warmest-hearted men who ever walked the earth. Of the three detectives who had banded themselves together to exterminate the League of the Iron Hand, two only now remained. Colin Mackenzie was dead—slain by the men he had sworn to bring to justice.

And he had given his life in vain. For by the time that old Cornforth—awakened at last by the reports of the revolvers—sprang out of bed and rushed downstairs, Herman and Cundle had tossed their prisoner into the motor-car, and the latter had whirled through the gates at the bottom of the drive, and was speeding its way to Rycroft Hall.

When Donald came to his senses he found himself lying on a mattress on the floor of a white washed attic, whose only furniture consisted of the aforesaid mattress, a couple of chairs, and a rough deal table.

It was then broad daylight, and a flood of wintry sunshine was streaming through the tiny skylight in the roof, which was the sole means of illumination the attic possessed.

Two men were seated at the table, playing cards and smoking cigarettes. Though Donald did not know it, they were two of Fairfax's servants, who had been told off for the special duty of guarding the young Scotman. On the table, at each man's elbow, lay a loaded revolver.

From time to time the two men glanced across at their prisoner; and as soon as they perceived that he had recovered consciousness they threw down their cards, and rose to their feet.

"Feeling better now?" asked one of the men, covering Donald with his revolver. "That's right!"

"Stop that!" he exclaimed, as Donald made a feeble attempt to sit up. "You're not to get up. You've just got to lie quiet where you are for the present."

Without giving Donald time to reply, he turned to his companion, and handed him a key.

"Fetch No. 1!" he said. "Lock the door behind you!"

His companion unlocked the door, and opened it. After transferring the key from the inside to the outside of the door, he left the attic, shutting and locking the door behind him.

The first man still remained standing by the table, with his revolver raised.

"You can put down your revolver," said Donald, with a bitter laugh. "You've no-

thing to fear. Even if I had the will to go for you, I haven't the strength."

"That's as may be," said the man, "but orders are orders, and my orders are to keep you covered till No. 1 arrives."

"No. 1?" repeated Donald. "Who's he?" The fellow grinned.

"There's a good many people would like to know that," he said. "I'd like to know myself, for one; but I know no more than you. Nobody knows. He's No. 1, that's all."

"In other words," said Donald, "he's the head of the League of the Iron Hand."

"Guessed it in once!" said his gaoler.

"And I suppose you're a member of the League?"

"Of course. We're all members here."

Again the fellow grinned as he replied.

"And where is here? Where am I?"

"Maybe No. 1 will tell you when he comes, and maybe he won't. Anyhow, my orders are to tell you nothing, so you needn't waste your breath in asking any more questions."

In face of this blunt announcement, Donald wisely held his peace, and for some time silence reigned. Then footsteps were heard on the landing outside, and a moment later the key turned in the lock, the door swung open, and Paul Herman entered the attic.

The millionaire was still disguised in the same fashion—minus the black crape mask—as that which he had adopted when he and Cundle had broken into Donald's house at Wimbledon. Between his lips was a half-smoked cigarette, and in his hand was a silver-plated revolver.

"Leave us!" he commanded, addressing the man who had been mounting guard on Donald.

The man saluted, and withdrew. After his departure Herman locked the door on the inside, and put the key in his pocket. Then he seated himself in one of the chairs, crossed his legs, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Well, Mr. Stuart," he drawled, "I must begin by offering you an apology. I am sorry I had to stun you, though I am bound to add that your conduct left me no alternative. Why didn't you act sensibly, as I advised? Do you know what your obstinacy cost? It cost the life of Colin Mackenzie!"

Donald started, and turned deathly pale.

"What do you mean?" he demanded hoarsely. "Don't—don't say that you have murdered Mac!"

Herman nodded his head.

"Had to," he said calmly. "If you had only kept quiet, we should have been able to bring you away without any fuss; but when you roused your cousin by shouting for help—well, what could we do? We simply had to silence him at any cost."

"You killed him?"

"Shot him dead on the spot."

For a moment Donald stared at him in speechless horror; then a tempest of grief

swept over him, and he sobbed like a heart-broken child.

Herman calmly went on smoking, and waited until Donald's grief had spent itself.

"It was entirely your own fault," he said. "If you had acted sensibly, your cousin would still have been alive. You compelled us to shoot him. And now to business," he continued, after lighting a fresh cigarette. "Do you know who I am?"

"You are No. 1, I understand," said Donald.

Herman inclined his head.

"Quite right," he said; "from which, no doubt, you will gather that you are now in the power of the League of the Iron Hand."

"So I guessed," said Donald. "Where am I?"

Herman smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can hardly expect me to answer that question," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because," said Herman, "if you accept my terms, I intend to set you free in a day or two, and naturally I do not wish you to be able to tell the police that this place belongs to the League of the Iron Hand."

"If I accept your terms!" repeated Donald. "What are your terms?"

"Before I answer that question," said Herman, "I must trouble you with a brief explanation. You know, of course, that we—er—borrowed your airship?"

"I know you stole it!" said Donald bluntly.

"Well, a few days ago," said Herman, "whilst I was carrying out certain operations on board the airship, a gentleman who shall be nameless fired at me with his revolver. He didn't hit me, I am glad to say, but his bullet, after glancing off one of the steel masts of the airship, crashed into the switchboard, and severed one of the wires."

"You needn't be so ambiguous," said Donald. "I know to what you refer. It was when you rescued Cundle from Dartmoor Prison, and it was Nelson Lee who fired at you. Mac told me all about it last night. Both he and Nelson Lee thought for a moment that the bullet had wrecked some vital part of the airship's machinery, but they quickly found that they were mistaken, for the vessel soon righted herself, and bore you away in safety."

"That is true, so far as it goes," said Herman; "but although Mr. Lee's bullet did not actually wreck the machinery, it seriously damaged it."

He then told of the perilous voyage which he and Fairfax and Cundle had made from Dartmoor to Rycroft Hall—without mentioning any names, of course.

He explained that the airship would rise when the starting-lever was pushed forward, and would descend when the lever was pulled back, but that it was no longer possible to regulate the speed and distance of her ascent and descent.

So, for all practical purposes, the air-

ship is useless to us now," he concluded. "Several members of the league—all competent engineers—have examined her, but none of them can discover what is wrong, and none of them can repair the damage."

"Well?" asked Donald, as Herman paused.

"Well, that is why we've kidnapped you," said Herman. "We wish you to put the airship right, that's all. When you have done so, I pledge my word of honour that you will be blindfolded, taken away from here in a motor-car at dead of night, and set at liberty in the grounds of your house at Wimbledon."

"Are those the terms of which you spoke just now?" asked Donald quietly.

"Yes."

"And if I refuse them?"

Herman shrugged his shoulders.

"You won't be so foolish as to refuse them," he said.

"You think, then, that I will consent to repair the airship?"

"I know you will."

"Then you know wrong!" said Donald, with flashing eyes. "Repair the airship, and so render it possible for you and your confederates to continue your dastardly work. Never! I would die first!"

Herman rose to his feet and laid his hand on Donald's shoulder.

"Don't force me to take extreme measures, Mr. Stuart," he said. "Don't compel me to torture you."

Donald shivered at the word "torture," but the determined look in his eyes betrayed no sign of faltering.

"I am not a man who is easily turned from his purpose," continued Herman in his silkiest tones. "I have brought you here to repair the airship, and repair it you shall! If you will not do it willingly, I will make you!"

"You can't!" said Donald, between his clenched teeth.

"I can, and will!" said Herman. "But I would infinitely prefer that you did the work without compelling me to resort to torture. Will you?"

"Never!" said Donald firmly.

"Is that your final answer?"

"Yes. Now do your worst!"

Herman shook his head and heaved a regretful sigh.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I would willingly have spared you this if only you would have acted like a reasonable man. However, since it must be, it must!"

He unlocked the door, opened it, and clapped his hands. In response to this summons, Cundle and half a dozen of the servants entered the attic, bringing with them an assortment of implements and appliances, the sight of which made Donald's blood run cold.

It is no part of our purpose to harrow the reader's feelings. Over the events of the next two hours, therefore, we will draw a merciful veil, contenting ourselves with say-

ing that every device which fiendish ingenuity could suggest for inflicting torture without destroying life or crippling the sufferer was brought to bear on Donald Stuart.

But the hideous work was labour in vain. At the end of the two hours Donald lay on a mattress more dead than alive, limp and exhausted, racked with agonising pain, but with spirit unbroken and resolution undiminished.

Paul Herman was like one demented. He strode up and down the room, clenching and unclenching his hands, and quivering with baffled rage.

And then, to the surprise of his confederates, his anger vanished like a puff of smoke, and a look of exultation leaped into his face.

"I have it!" he muttered to himself. "Why didn't I think of that before?"

He strode over to Donald's side and regarded him with a malevolent smile.

"You say you won't repair the airship," he murmured.

"And I won't!" said Donald, in a feeble, but emphatic voice.

"Oh, yes, you will!" said Herman, rubbing his hands. "I am going to leave you now. How long I shall be away I cannot tell you at present. But this I can tell you. When I return you will grovel at my feet and implore me to allow you to repair the airship without a moment's delay."

"What's the idea?" asked Cundle, when he and Herman had descended the stairs, leaving Donald in charge of the servants. "Ow are yer gein' to make 'im mend the airship?"

"He has a brother," said Herman—"a boy of fourteen, who is now a pupil at St. Frank's—a public school in Sussex. This boy, whose name is Jack, is Stuart's only relative; and, according to all accounts, Stuart is passionately devoted to him. If report speaks truly, Stuart would lay down his life to spare his young brother a moment's pain."

"And so," he went on, after a brief pause, "I'm going to kidnap Jack Stuart, and I'm going to persuade his brother Donald to repair the airship by torturing the boy, or threatening to torture him, before his eyes."

NIPPER SMELLS A RAT.

ST FRANK'S, as my readers are aware, was a famous public school, situated near Bellton, in Sussex. As many of my readers are also aware, it is within the ancient walls of this famous school that Richard Hamilton, better known as Nipper, and Nelson Lee's ward, was sent to be educated.

Here Nipper, with his chum Tommy Watson, became acquainted with Donald Stuart's younger brother, Jack.

As Nipper and Watson belonged to the

same house as Jack Stuart, and as they were also in the same Form—the Remove—there was bound to be a certain amount of comradeship between the three boys. At the same time, though Nipper and Watson had always liked Jack Stuart, the latter had never been one of their most intimate chums.

When, however, Donald Stuart's airship was stolen by the League of the Iron Hand, and when Nelson Lee undertook the task—in conjunction with Mac and O'Brien—of exterminating the league—when these things happened it was only natural that Nipper and Watson and Donald Stuart's brother should be drawn together by the ties of common interest.

Henceforth, therefore, Jack Stuart became a close chum of Nipper and Watson, and spent most of his spare time with them, discussing the latest developments of the fight which Nelson Lee and his brother-detectives were waging against the League of the Iron Hand.

When a telegram arrived for Jack on Monday afternoon announcing that Donald had been acquitted of the charge of stealing the Marquis of Hummersea's jewels, the three boys were hilarious, and celebrated the occasion by a midnight banquet in the Remove dormitory. But alas! the joy was short-lived, for the very next day the world was startled by the news that Mac had been murdered at Donald's house, and that Donald had mysteriously disappeared.

It was perfectly true, as Paul Herman had told Cundle, that Donald Stuart and his young brother were passionately devoted to each other. Donald would have given his life to spare Jack a moment's pain, and it was equally true that Jack would have done the same for his big, warm-hearted brother. The reader, therefore, can imagine the youngster's heart-rending grief when the news arrived that Donald had disappeared in circumstances that pointed strongly to foul play.

The murder of Mac and the abduction of Donald took place in the early hours of Tuesday morning; but it was not until the following morning that the details reached St. Frank's. And it was not until after dinner that Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, summoned up courage to send for Jack and tell him the dreadful news.

As mentioned above, Jack was simply prostrated with grief, and for upwards of an hour he lay on the couch in Nipper's study sobbing like a heartbroken child.

"I know what has become of him," sobbed Jack. "He has been murdered, like Mac, and I shall never see him again!"

When his grief had somewhat abated, Nipper suggested—with the idea of distracting Jack's thoughts—that they should go for a quiet stroll; and shortly after three o'clock, Nipper, Watson, and Jack left the school and started off in the direction of the neighbouring village of Bellton.

It was about an hour after their departure that a motor-car whirled up to the

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

school and came to a halt outside the front door of Mr. Crowell's private apartments. There were two men in the car—a red-haired, middle-aged chauffeur, and a benevolent-looking old gentleman with silvery-white hair and beard.

Has the reader guessed who they were? Yes! The chauffeur was Cundle, and the white-haired old gentleman was Herman!

"Is Mr. Crowell at home?" asked Herman, when the butler answered his ring.

"Yes, sir!" replied the butler. "What name, sir?"

The Form-master inclined his head in token of assent.

"You have heard, I presume," said Herman, "that Mr. Stuart mysteriously disappeared in the small hours of yesterday morning?"

"Yes," said Mr. Crowell. "We heard the sad news this morning. It was a terrible shock to all of us, and poor Jack is heart-broken. He is convinced that his brother has been murdered. I trust you have not come to tell us that such is the case."

Herman gravely shook his head.



"I was saying that I'm almost certain you're disguised," said Nipper boldly. "That beard, for instance, is a false one!"

"Sir Charles Welbeck," said Herman. "Please tell Mr. Crowell that I wish to see him at once on a matter of urgent importance."

Leaving Cundle in the car, Herman followed the butler into the drawing-room, where he was presently joined by Mr. Crowell.

"I am Sir Charles Welbeck, of Huntley Manor, near Tenterden," said Herman, in a voice that shook with well-feigned agitation.

"You have a boy under your charge of the name of Jack Stuart," he continued. "He is the brother of Mr. Donald Stuart, whose airship was stolen by the League of the Iron Hand a few weeks ago."

"Though Mr. Stuart is not dead, I fear he has not many hours to live," he said.

"He has been found, then?" Mr. Crowell asked.

"Yes," replied Herman. "You will read about it in the papers to-morrow, so I need not enter into details now. It will suffice to say that Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective, discovered Donald Stuart about three hours ago in a house on the outskirts of Tenterden. I'm sorry to say, however, that Stuart received such treatment at the hands of his captors that he is practically in a dying condition."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "It will be awful news for his young

brother. You have come for him, I suppose?"

"That is so," said Herman. "I was able to assist Mr. Nelson Lee to a slight extent in his investigations, and when we discovered Donald Stuart's almost hopeless condition, he asked me if I would mind coming here in my car and taking young Jack to his brother's side as quickly as possible. I hope you have no objection to my doing so?"

"Objection!" cried Mr. Crowell. "Of course, I should never dream of objecting in such sad circumstances. I will send for Jack Stuart at once."

He rang the bell, and despatched a servant in search of the youngster. The servant presently returned with the news that Jack had gone for a walk along the Bellton Road with "Master Hamilton and Master Watson."

At mention of Hamilton's name, Herman started, and a curious expression crossed his face.

"Hamilton?" he said. "Is that the famous Nipper—Mr. Nelson Lee's ward?"

"None other," said Mr. Crowell.

"In that case, perhaps you will allow me to take him with me, as well as Mr. Stuart's brother? He would be company for Jack, and I'm sure Mr. Nelson Lee would be glad to see him."

"Take Hamilton by all means," agreed Mr. Crowell. "Will you wait here until the boys return from their walk, or would you prefer to drive out in the direction of Bellton, on the chance of meeting them?"

"That would be the best plan," replied Herman. "With Donald Stuart in such a critical condition, every moment is precious."

"Very well, Sir Charles; then I will come with you, seeing that you do not know either of the lads by sight."

"It's extremely kind of you," said Herman, in a grateful voice.

"Not at all, Sir Charles. If you will kindly just wait while I inform my sister, I will rejoin you in a few minutes."

"I will wait for you outside," answered Herman. "I want to give my chauffeur a few instructions before we start."

The Form-master accordingly went off to interview his sister; whilst Herman returned to the waiting car.

"We're in luck!" he whispered to Cundle. "Young Stuart has gone for a walk with Nelson Lee's adopted son—Nipper! We are now going to meet them, and one of the masters is coming with us to point them out."

"An' where does the luck come in?" growled Cundle.

"It comes in with Nipper," chuckled Herman. "I'm going to kidnap him, too. And when I've done so, I'm going to send an ultimatum to Nelson Lee, threatening that if he takes any further action against the League, he will never see Nipper again. See the idea?"

Cundle grinned and nodded. A few moments later Mr. Crowell came out, and

seated himself at the back of the car alongside Herman.

The car started off, and, after passing through the school gates, turned to the left, crossed the stone bridge which spanned the River Stowe, and presently was whirling along the Bellton Road.

Half-way up the road three boys were seen approaching.

"There they are!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "That's Stuart, in the middle. Hamilton is on the left, and Watson on the right."

The car pulled up abreast of the three boys, and Mr. Crowell and Herman stepped out. In a few words Mr. Crowell introduced "Sir Charles Welbeck," and repeated the lying story which Herman had told him.

On hearing that Donald was dying, Jack was so overcome with grief that Mr. Crowell had practically to lift him into the back of the car.

"Now, Hamilton, jump in beside him, and take care of him," said Mr. Crowell, turning to Nipper.

But Nipper held back. Whilst Mr. Crowell had been repeating Herman's story, Nipper had been taking stock of "Sir Charles Welbeck." And there was something about this white-haired old gentleman which excited his distrust.

"Are you sure that everything is all right, sir?" he whispered to Mr. Crowell.

"Of course," said Mr. Crowell, in a surprised voice. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I don't like the look of these men," said Nipper. "For one thing, I'm almost certain that Sir Charles, as he calls himself, is disguised."

Herman caught the word "disguised," and a dangerous light gleamed in his eyes.

"What's that you're saying?" he demanded, coming a step or two nearer, and glaring at Nipper.

"I was saying that I'm almost certain you're disguised," said Nipper boldly. "That beard, for instance, is a false one!"

The look of rage and dismay which instantly leaped into Herman's face was more than enough to convince Nipper of the truth of his suspicions; and acting on the impulse of the moment, he suddenly sprang at Herman, grabbed his snow-white beard, and gave it a vigorous tug.

"There! What did I tell you?" he cried, as the beard came away in his hand. "I knew the bounder was——"

The sentence was never completed, for at that instant Herman lashed out with his fist and sent Nipper sprawling in the gutter.

TRAPPED!

FOR a moment Mr. Crowell and Tommy Watson were absolutely paralysed with amazement. Then the Form-master sprang towards Herman; but even as he did so Herman's fist shot out again, and Mr. Crowell measured his length in the middle of the road.

Then Herman pounced on Nipper, clutched him by his coat-collar, swung him off the

ground into the car, and sprang in after him.

The next instant the car was flying up the road with the speed of the wind.

As soon as it had turned the corner at the top of the road, Herman whipped out a revolver, and a pair of handcuffs.

Covering Nipper and Jack, he commanded them to hold out their hands, and no sooner had they obeyed than he snapped one link of the bracelets over Nipper's right wrist and the other over Jack's left.

"Now lie down!" he commanded, pointing to the floor of the car and brandishing his revolver.

What could the boys do? To shout for help was useless, for there was not a soul in sight, and the nearest house was half a mile away. To jump out of the swiftly-moving car, fettered wrist to wrist, would have meant almost certain death. Without a word, therefore, they lay down in the bottom of the car, where Herman covered them up and hid them from view with a sheet of tarpaulin.

It was then about half-past four, and the sun was setting behind the hills at the back of Otterdene. For some time past the sky had been clouding over, and by the time the car reached Warbleton, where a brief halt was made in order to light the lamps, rain was falling heavily. By the time Tunbridge Wells was reached, the downpour had increased to a perfect deluge.

On through the darkness and the rain, past Sevenoaks and Orpington, the car sped. Three hours and a half after leaving Cleveden it dashed through Bromley, and three-quarters of an hour later it glided over London Bridge. Leaving the City behind it, it scurried along the rain-swept roads, through Romford and Brentwood; and almost exactly on the stroke of half-past ten it whirled through the gates of Rycroft Hall.

The moment the car pulled up before the house, the front door opened, and Fairfax's butler, Barker, came out. A look of surprise crossed his face when he saw that Herman was minus his beard; but he was too well accustomed to "Number One's" changes of disguise, and was too afraid of him, to make any comment.

But when Herman dragged the tarpaulin aside and revealed the huddled forms of Nipper and Jack, even Barker's awe of Number One could not repress an exclamation of amazement.

"Two of 'em!" he gasped. "I thought you said one."

"So I did," said Herman, as he stepped out of the car. "When I left here I only intended to bag one bird, but when I got to Cleveden I changed my mind and bagged a brace; so you'll have two prisoners to look after instead of one. Take them upstairs, and stay with them till I join you. I have some orders to give to Cundle and Wilkinson."

Barker stepped into the car, and dragged

the two boys out. Then he forced them into the house and up two flights of stairs.

Halting outside a stout oak door, he produced a bunch of keys, unlocked the door, switched on the electric light, and pushed Nipper and Jack Stuart into a room whose only furniture consisted of a small camp-bedstead, a table, and a chair.

The bedstead was on one side of the room, and the door on the opposite side. On the third side was the fireplace, and on the fourth side was a window which was protected on the outside by iron bars.

"Humph!" grunted Nipper. "I don't think much of this place. It's evident you don't mean to pamper us with luxury!"

"What's wrong with the room?" growled Barker.

"Well, there's no fire, for one thing," returned Nipper. "Also, there's only one chair. And that bed is a tight squeeze for one, let alone two."

"Well, you see, we didn't expect two visitors," explained Barker, with a laugh. "My orders were to provide accommodation for one. But don't worry yourself. I'll bring up another bed by-and-by, and maybe another chair. Are you Mister Donald Stuart's brother?"

"No, he isn't," interposed Jack, speaking for the first time. "I'm Donald's brother. Is he here?"

"Perhaps he is and perhaps he isn't," said Barker evasively. Then he turned to Nipper. "And who are you, then?" he asked.

"He's Nipper, Mr. Nelson Lee's adopted son," said Jack, ere Nipper could stop him.

"Ah, now I begin to understand!" said Barker, glancing at Nipper. "That's why Number One collared you."

"Number One!" exclaimed Nipper, as a sudden light dawned on him. "So ho! I begin to understand, too! We've been kidnapped by the League of the Iron Hand!"

"Quite right, sonny," grinned Barker.

"And why have we been kidnapped?" asked Nipper.

Barker winked.

"That would be telling," he said.

"Where are we?" asked Jack. "What is the name of this place?"

Again Barker winked.

"Ask no questions and I'll tell you no lies," he said. "You'll learn all that's good for you to learn when Number One comes up."

"In the meantime," said Nipper, "you might take off these handcuffs. They're none too comfortable, you know."

"Mebbe they ain't," said Barker; "but, comfortable or not, you'll have to keep 'em on till Number One arrives."

Whilst this conversation was taking place, Number One, alias Paul Herman, was giving Cundle his orders.

"Take the car round to the back," he said, "and tell Armstrong to fill the petrol-tank, and get everything in order."

(Continued on page xii.)



The Case of the Eaton Square Mystery!

The Adventures of GORDON FOX, DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I

LORD MARISCOURT, a handsome old gentleman with a white moustache and imperial, had finished breakfast, and escaped from the confusing, wistful eye of Grindley, his butler. He retired to his library, which was at one end of the big house in Eaton Square, and, having lit a cigar, he slowly and thoughtfully paced the floor, pausing now and then by the window that opened on the garden, where flowers were blooming in the warm April sunshine. A bell pealed faintly, and a moment later the butler entered, and presented a card to his master.

"Mr. Herbert Courtley?" murmured Lord Mariscourt, with a glance at the slip of pasteboard. "The name is unfamiliar. I am expecting a visitor, though—lean, tall, clean-shaven man."

"This man does not answer to the description, my lord."

"He did not state his business?"

"No, my lord."

"Well, you may show him in, Grindley."

The visitor stepped into the room, closed the door, and silently bowed. He lifted a hand, and a false beard and moustache were deftly twitched off, revealing a man with colourless complexion, long features, and steel-grey eyes.

"Mr. Gordon Fox!" Lord Mariscourt exclaimed in surprise.

"At your service, my lord," said the great detective. "As your letter hinted at a deep mystery, I thought it best to come in disguise. By the by, I met a young gentleman round the corner, before I turned into the square, and I imagine that he had just come from this house."

"Describe him."

"He was perhaps twenty-five, with a small black moustache. He wore a morning suit of brown tweeds, a soft hat, and carried a gold-mounted stick."

"That was my nephew, Derrick Lumley. He is an orphan, and he makes his home with me. I give him an allowance of a few hundreds a year. But if you were around the corner, Mr. Fox, how did you know—?"

"By your nephew's cigarette. I caught a whiff of the smoke as I passed him, and when I entered your hall I noticed the same peculiar scent lingering there—the rich fragrance of strong Brazilian tobacco. But I am wasting your time. I spoke of this merely to test the value of my deduction. Why have you sent for me, my lord?"

"I have been robbed in a most puzzling manner, and I want you to find the thief."

"What are the facts? Please let me have the whole story."

"It is a very short one, Mr. Fox," replied Lord Mariscourt. "To begin with, I am a bachelor, and my household consists of my nephew, four female servants, Grindley, the butler and a pageboy of fifteen. The latter is Grindley's son. I am a collector of rare books, enamels, Empire bon-bon boxes, and other articles of vertu. I spend much time in looking for these things in odd corners of London and for that purpose I am in the habit of keeping a fairly large sum of money in the house."

He pointed to a small safe that was built into the wall at one end of the room.

"A fortnight ago," he continued, "a parcel of banknotes to the value of one hundred pounds was stolen during the night from that safe. How it was done I do not know, for the combination of the safe, written on a slip of paper, was in my watch-case. Unfortunately, I had not the numbers of the notes. I was greatly distressed, for it was evident that the thief was one of my servants. I changed the combination of the safe, making a mental note of it only, and keeping it in my head. But again, the night before last, a packet of fifty pounds was stolen in the same way, and in the course of yesterday morning, hanging to the back of a chair close to the safe, I found a handkerchief that belonged to young Joe Grindley, the pageboy. I summoned his father, and, with his consent, searched the lad's box, where I discovered ten pounds under a pile of clothing. Grindley swears that his son is innocent and I am inclined to believe the same, for how could the lad—or, indeed, anyone—have opened the safe when the combination was locked in my brain? He declares that he knows nothing

of the gold—that he was not inside the library; and at present he is a prisoner in his father's room. Now, what do you think of it all, Mr. Fox? I am afraid this will baffle you."

"It is very mysterious," admitted Gordon Fox. He examined the safe, which showed no signs of having been tampered with. "I should like to talk to your pageboy," he said.

"Certainly," replied Lord Mariscourt.

He led the way upstairs, and stopped for breath at the top of the first flight, facing a long passage.

"You sleep on this floor, my lord?" inquired the detective.

"Yes; that is my room on the left. The one in front of us is occupied by my nephew."

There was another apartment on the right, and as Gordon Fox passed it, on the way to the next staircase, a glittering spot at the edge of the carpet caught his eyes. Stooping down, he discovered several drops of hard candle-grease.

"Is this room occupied?" he asked.

"No; it has been empty for some months. I used to sleep here, but I changed my quarters in order to get more fresh air."

"I should like to look into it, if you don't mind."

"By all means."

The two entered the room, which was a handsomely furnished bedchamber. At one side was a small door in the wall, three or four feet above the floor, and the detective stepped over to it curiously.

"There is a history attached to this," said Lord Mariscourt, as he opened the little door, and revealed a closet. "A couple of years ago, after burglars had attempted to break into my house, I had a safe built in here, the size of the one in the library, and every night I placed my valuables in it. But subsequently I got tired of that. I removed the safe—the butler wanted it for his plate—and had this closet made instead."

Gordon Fox lit a match, and peered into the closet. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he observed marks in the dust that had collected.

"I wish to ask you a few questions, my lord," he said, closing the door. "On the night before the first robbery, had you been reading about any burglary in the neighbourhood?"

"I can't be sure," replied Lord Mariscourt, "but I think that was about the time of the daring burglary across the square."

"And the night before last, on the eve of your loss?"

"I remember that, Mr. Fox. On the previous night the residence of Mr. Bryant, four doors from mine, had been broken into, and I was reading an account of the affair before I went to bed."

"And now, if you will pardon me, for your nephew. What kind of a life does he lead?"

"He is rather extravagant, I fear, and perhaps a little dissipated. But that is to be excused in young blood."

"How do you pay his allowance?"

"Quarterly."

"Then the next payment is due at the end of the week. He is probably out of funds at present?"

"There is not much doubt about that," assented Lord Mariscourt.

"To continue, my lord, do you know if Mr. Lumley has any ill-feeling towards the pageboy?"

"Very likely he has. Some time ago, I recall, he came home intoxicated, early in the morning, and he told Joe, who admitted him, to say nothing about it. I had my suspicions, however; and later, when I questioned the lad, he was compelled to tell the truth. The result was that I threatened to curtail my nephew's allowance."

"At what hour does he usually return at night?"

"About one o'clock. I often sit up for him. But I don't understand the drift of this, Mr. Fox. I cannot for a moment permit you to suggest that Derrick Lumley, who, with all the faults, is the soul of honour—"

"I suggest nothing," interrupted Gordon Fox. "Your lordship has entrusted me with this case, and it is my duty to study it from every point of view. I have changed my mind," he added. "I think it would be time wasted to interview the pageboy."

"You have a clue to the mystery already?" inquired Lord Mariscourt.

"I am hopeful of solving it in a day or two," replied Gordon Fox; and a quarter of an hour later, after a few words in private with the butler, he had left the house.

CHAPTER II.

DERRICK LUMLEY GIVES A DINNER—GORDON FOX ON THE WATCH—A LATE VISIT.

THAT night Lord Mariscourt's nephew, with three fast young swells about town, dined at a fashionable restaurant in Piccadilly. They were a merry company, drinking unlimited champagne, and winding up with liqueurs and costly cigars. Derrick Lumley paid the bill, and on leaving he invited his friends to go with him to the Empire; two things that came under the observation of a gentleman with a light beard who was dining at a table not far off.

"That ran into a pretty figure, considering that the young man's quarterly allowance is within three days of being due," Gordon Fox told himself. "I am going to deal his lordship a heavy blow, but it can't

be helped. Crime must be punished, no matter what the temptation."

On the following evening, at eleven o'clock, the detective was ushered into the library of the big mansion in Eaton Square. Lord Mariscourt, who was reading in an easy chair, looked up in surprise.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Gordon Fox. "I must apologise for this late visit. I called this afternoon, but you were not at home. I wanted to tell you that I have not been idle, and that I expect to bring my task to a successful ending very shortly."

"I trust you will, Mr. Fox."

"I am confident of it, my lord. By the way, I don't suppose you have heard that another burglary—a most daring one—was perpetrated last night round in the next street?"

"What! Another burglary? But why have not the papers—"

"The police have hushed the matter up for the present, and I must beg you not to mention the affair to anyone."

"I shall hardly feel secure to-night."

"You may, for the neighbourhood is under surveillance. Don't trouble to remove the contents of your safe. Is there any money in it?"

"Yes."

"And the combination?"

"I have a new one fixed in my memory," replied Lord Mariscourt.

"Which is the best place for it. And now I'll be off, my lord. Good-night."

Gordon Fox left the library, closing the door on Lord Mariscourt, and a passage led him to the main hall, where he at once removed his boots. Here Grindley was waiting. He loudly opened and shut the street door, as if the visitor had gone; and then, followed noiselessly by the detective, he ascended the stairs. The two crept into the unoccupied bed-chamber previously referred to.

"You think Mr. Lumley will come home at the usual time?" inquired Gordon Fox.

"He is pretty sure to," replied the butler. "I'm relying on your promise, sir," he added. "Are you really going to save my boy, and clear his character?"

"There is hardly a doubt of it, my good man. Keep awake, if you can, and at the proper time—not before—slip down here with your son."

Grindley withdrew, and the detective was left alone and in darkness, comfortably fixed for his vigil in a big chair.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SILENT HOURS—THE MYSTERY REVEALED
—CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

A DISTANT clock struck twelve, and then one. The street door opened and closed, there were voices below, and shortly afterwards Lord Mariscourt and his nephew mounted the stairs, bidding

each other good-night as they entered their respective rooms.

All became silent. Two hours passed on. The clock struck three, and Gordon Fox was beginning to feel anxious, when his keen ears caught a creaking noise. Muffled footsteps pattered down the stairs, and when they were heard coming up again, the detective rose and slipped behind the window curtain. The next instant Lord Mariscourt entered the room. He had a lighted candle in one hand, and a small parcel in the other; he was clad in pyjamas, and in his eyes was a vacant, dreamy stare. He was walking in his sleep!

He stepped over to the closet in the wall, opened it, and put the parcel inside; and with that Gordon Fox crept up and touched him on the shoulder. The sleeping man awoke with a start.

"Hush, hush!" the detective bade him. "Make no noise! Don't be alarmed; it is all right!"

Lord Mariscourt barely repressed a cry.

"Where am I?" he gasped.—"How did I get here? And that packet of money—I must have brought it up from the library safe! By heavens, am I a sleep-walker? Have I been robbing myself?"

"You have, my lord, and somebody else has been profiting by it. Be quiet, I beg of you. The real thief is not far off. He may be watching and listening. Leave all to me. Follow my instructions, and you will see what you will see."

"I will—I will!" murmured Lord Mariscourt, who was now thoroughly awake.

"What am I to do?"

"Go quietly back to your own room, as if you were still asleep," whispered Gordon Fox. "Blow out your candle and get into bed, and wait. When you hear me talking loudly return here as quickly as possible."

Lord Mariscourt immediately withdrew, closing the door behind him. Again there was silence. Some minutes elapsed—perhaps a quarter of an hour—and the detective began to fear that his plan was going to miscarry. It was possible, he told himself, that the suspected person had been on watch to-night.

But a moment later, without a sound, the door swung open, and the faint glimmer from the window revealed a dark form. It moved across the floor, while Gordon Fox stole noiselessly round the walls to the door and put a finger on an electric knob.

The nocturnal prowler was now fumbling at the closet. He turned back, and had reached the middle of the room when a glare of yellow light suddenly flamed out, revealing a slim young man in pyjamas. All the colour ebbed out of his face, and, with an oath, he let go of the parcel, which dropped to the floor.

"I've caught you, Mr. Lumley!" said

Gordon Fox. "You have played this game once too often. Stand right there until your uncle comes."

"Who the deuce are you?"

"I am a detective."

Desperate with rage and fear, Derrick Lumley promptly showed fight. He sprang towards the door, launching a hard blow between the eyes of the detective, who grappled with him, and got hold of both his arms. The struggle was fierce but brief, and the young man was subdued by the time Lord Mariscourt rushed into the room, to experience the worst kind of a shock.

Mariscourt, offering his hand. "You were innocent. I know that now. It was my nephew who put your handkerchief in the library and the money in your box. You will have the grace to admit this, Derrick?" he added.

"Have it as you like," was the sullen reply.

"Be careful, you young scoundrel!" warned Lord Mariscourt. "Mr. Fox, I thank you with an aching heart," he said, "but none the less sincerely. How did you solve this affair so quickly and shrewdly?"

"Were you addicted to sleep-walking in your earlier life?" asked the detective.



The next instant Lord Mariscourt entered the room. He had a lighted candle in one hand, and a small parcel in the other. He was clad in pyjamas, and in his eyes was a vacant, dreamy stare. He was walking in his sleep!

"Here is the thief!" exclaimed Gordon Fox.

"My nephew!" Lord Mariscourt cried, in distress. "Derrick, Derrick, I would never have believed this of you!"

The culprit stood silent and shame-faced, panting for breath. Footsteps were descending the upper staircase, and Grimley and his son appeared on the threshold.

"Joe, you're cleared," the butler cried hoarsely—"you're cleared! They've got the right one!"

"My lad, will you forgive me?" said Lord

"Not since I was a boy at school. I thought I had been broken of the habit."

"You were wrong, my lord," replied Gordon Fox. "It was only dormant, not dead. The spots of candle-grease outside this door, and what you told me of the closet in yonder wall, gave me the first clue. When I learned that you had been reading of burglaries in the neighbourhood, on the nights of the two mysterious thefts, I knew that my theory was correct. I was convinced that you had carried the money up here in your sleep, as you were in the

habit of doing for a time after burglars attempted to break into your house.

"Then to find the thief! My suspicion fell on your nephew, who occupied the next room to yours. I believed that he was aware of your nocturnal operations, that he was profiting by them, and I set the trap for him to-night with Grandley's aid. The story I told you of last night's burglary, by the by, was pure fiction. I invented it so that your mind should be in the proper state for what I wanted you to do."

The April day was dawning as Gordon

Fox drove away from Eaton Square in a cab, with a handsome cheque in his pocket. The pageboy was rewarded, and his wages were doubled, as compensation for what he had suffered through Lord Mariscourt's scapegrace nephew.

Derrick Lumley suddenly vanished from his London haunts. He was packed off to Australia, where he is now working out his redemption and learning how to live on one hundred pounds a year.

THE END.

"THE LEAGUE OF THE IRON HAND!"

(Continued from page vii.)

Leaving the astonished Cundle to carry out this order, Herman entered the house, and sent a servant to fetch Wilkinson.

The latter, who was another of Fairfax's servants, quickly arrived and respectfully saluted.

"How's Stuart?" asked Herman abruptly.

"He's going on all right, sir."

"Who are guarding him?"

"Spencer and Youle, sir."

"Has he recovered from the gruelling we gave him yesterday?"

"Very nearly, sir. He's still a bit shaky, of course."

"No doubt," said Herman drily. "Has he spoken about the airship?"

"Not of his own accord, sir. Spencer and Youle have mentioned the subject to him several times, and have advised him to do as you wish."

"And his answer?"

"Always the same, sir. He's quite obstinate, and swears that nothing will induce him to repair the thing."

A cruel smile flitted across Paul Herman's face.

"He'll sing a different tune to-morrow morning when he finds that his young brother is in our power!" he said. "Had your supper yet, Wilkinson?"

"I was just getting it, sir, when you sent for me."

"Well, go back and finish your meal as quickly as possible. I have an important letter to write before I go to bed, and I want you to go to London in the car, and post the letter at the G.P.O."

Wilkinson saluted and returned to the servant's hall, whilst Herman trudged upstairs to the room where Barker had taken Nipper and Jack.

"Well, young gentlemen, I hope you find your new quarters to your liking," he said.

"Do you?" said Nipper. "Then I'm sorry to say you hope wrong. We don't like 'em at all."

"Why? What's the matter with them?"

"Everything!" said Nipper. "However, it's no use complaining, I suppose. Whether we like 'em or not, we've got to put up with 'em, I expect."

"I expect you have," said Herman, with a meaning laugh.

"Have you searched their pockets?" he asked, turning to Barker.

"No, sir."

"Then do so at once."

Barker emptied the boys' pockets, and handed the contents to Herman. A telegram from Donald to Jack announcing the result of the trial, and a letter from Nelson Lee to Nipper were the only things of importance. Herman took possession of these, and tossed the rest of the things on the bed.

"And now you'd better fetch up another bed, and another chair, and some food," he said to Barker. "I'll stay here till you come back."

Barker left the room, and Herman, after locking the door, removed the handcuffs from the boys' wrists.

"Now I want you to understand the position thoroughly," he said. "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," replied Nipper. "You're Number One—the boss of the League of the Iron Hand."

"Quite so," said Herman calmly. "And do you know why I have brought you here?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," answered Nipper coolly.

"Then I'll explain," said Herman. "Your brother is here"—turning to Jack Stuart.

"Alive?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Alive and well," said Herman, producing and lighting a cigarette. "As you may have seen in the papers, we borrowed your brother's airship a few weeks ago, and it is now in the grounds outside this house. Unfortunately, something has gone wrong with the mechanism, and, as none of our men can put it right, I took the liberty of kidnapping your brother yesterday morning, and bringing him here, in order that he might repair the damage. Very foolishly he refused to do so, so I have brought you here in order that I may persuade him to do as I wish by threatening to torture you before his eyes."

"Don't be alarmed," he added, as Jack shivered and turned pale. "You won't be tortured. It won't be necessary. When your brother discovers that you are in my power, he will be only too glad to repair the airship; and as soon as he has done so, both you and he will be set at liberty."

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(Continued from page 14)

Huggins was alive; but it was appalling, at the same time, to learn that he was in the Valley of the Shadow. Fenton would not have made that statement unless it was absolutely true.

Alf was hovering between life and death.

And while the school went about on tip-toe—while all the seniors and juniors conversed in faint whispers, Alf Huggins lay upstairs on the bed. He was unconscious—he was still hovering.

And St. Frank's was hushed for this boy—silenced to such an extent that a pin might have been heard to drop in almost any corridor. It was for Alf Huggins that they were showing this consideration—for the boy who had been bounded out in disgrace only a bare day or so earlier.

How the school realised its terrible blunder?

Nobody believed it possible now that Alf could have committed that assault upon Mr. Snuggs. He wasn't the kind of fellow. Alf was true blue. He was one of the best.

And while the school whispered together, Dr. Brett was talking to Nelson Lee—beside Alf's bed.

"I dare not risk it, Mr. Lee," said the doctor quietly. "An operation must be performed at once! If it is not done within ninety minutes no power on earth can save the lad from death."

Nelson Lee's face was almost grey.

"And cannot you perform this operation, Brett?" he asked.

The doctor shook his head.

"Impossible!" he replied. "I am not a brain specialist, Mr. Lee. The boy's skull is fractured in the most vital part of the whole cranium. One tiny slip, and death would be instantaneous. Indeed, I very much doubt if his life can be saved!"

"This is dreadful!" said Nelson Lee. "You can do nothing, Brett, and I am similarly helpless. Does this mean that the lad will lie here and die, while we stand by—idle?"

"I don't know—I don't know," said Brett feverishly. "I can't think, Mr. Lee! If I make this attempt, I know that I shall fail! It is not my business to perform such operations. It is more than I dare do to take the responsibility."

"And you are certain that an operation is necessary at once?"

"Yes—at once!" said the doctor. "The sooner the better. I can't imagine—Wait! Wait!"

He suddenly broke off, and a deep flush suffused his face.

"I have just remembered!" he exclaimed. "I met Dr. Graystone, of Bannington, to-day—I should say, last evening. And he was telling me that the famous Sir Howard Britton is in Bannington just now—staying at the Grapes Hotel. He came down for a special operation at the Bannington Hospital."

Lee started.

"Sir Howard Britton!" he repeated. "He is one of our foremost brain specialists. Dr. Brett, this is no mere chance—it is Providence!"

Lee did not waste a second.

He hurried out, gave same sharp orders, and rushed to the telephone.

A few moments later he was talking to the night clerk at the Grapes Hotel, in Bannington. Yes, Sir Howard Britton was there. Lee gave orders that the specialist was to be awakened at once. He left a message.

And then, without even waiting to don a hat, he rushed outside. There, against the Ancient House steps, stood the schoolmaster detective's racing car. It had just been brought round from the garage. Lee jumped into it, and in a flash he was tearing across the Triangle.

The car shot out of the gateway, turned towards the village, and then came the loud, throaty roar of the fully open throttle. Lee had gone off like a rocket—speeding towards Bannington at breakneck rate. It was a race to save a life.

And St. Frank's remained in a fever.

"Did you see that?" asked Handforth tensely. "It was Mr. Lee. He's gone!"

"Gone?"

"Where to?"

"Gone to Bannington I believe," said Handy. "I'll bet anything you like he's going to fetch another doctor."

"Yes, that's it!"

It was the only explanation. Nelson Lee had gone off on an errand of mercy—on a desperate attempt to bring help to the poor lad who lay between life and death upstairs.

Would Nelson Lee be back in time?

Was it possible for him to return with a doctor? And, if so, would Alf Huggins be saved?

These were the questions which were asked by everybody—the questions which were passed from mouth to mouth.

And then, somehow or other, the truth came out.

And the school had a fresh shock. An operation had to be performed! It had to be performed practically within the hour! If not, Huggins would die, and no power on earth could save him.

And Nelson Lee had raced off to bring a famous brain specialist who happened to be in Bannington.

Never in the history of the old school had such suspense existed.

Sleep was absolutely out of the question. And yet St. Frank's lay as quiet as though every fellow was in his bed.

Only the gleaming windows told of the activity within.

Archie Glenthorne could not remain indoors.

He walked about the Triangle—wandering aimlessly to and fro. His misery was terrible. His anxiety was like some awful gnawing agony within. He wanted Alf—he wanted to go to his chum's side.

But this was out of the question.

The only thing was to wait, and every minute seemed an hour. St. Frank's could not contain itself. The anxiety felt for this bricklayer's son was astonishing.

Many other fellows were just like Archie.

They found the interior of the school stifling. They wanted to be out in the open air—in addition, they wanted to be the first to hear the low throb of Nelson Lee's car on its homeward journey. Ears were strained, and eyes stared out over the darkness.

And Alf Huggins' life lay in the balance.

CHAPTER XI.

AWAKENING CONSCIENCE!



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD lay in the Headmaster's study, wrapped in blankets, and deep in the recesses of Dr. Stafford's biggest easy-chair. He had not been put to bed—he had been brought straight to the Head's study because it was the nearest point.

And while Dr. Brett was treating him, Alf had been brought in.

Fullwood's injury seemed a triviality in comparison to the other one. It was nothing. For, after all, Fullwood would be able to get about within a day or two. At the end of a week he would be limping. At the end of two weeks he would have fully recovered.

He was in no danger—his life was not at stake.

And so he was allowed to stay in the Head's study. He was quite comfortable in his blankets—and quite safe.

Dr. Stafford was there, too—he was there, pacing up and down in a fever of anxiety and intense worry. The Head knew the truth. The Head knew that the next hour would bring the verdict.

And Dr. Stafford completely forgot Fullwood.

The latter lay in his chair, staring straight before him. His eyes were burning. He had heard, too. He had said nothing, but he knew Alf Huggins was lying upstairs with a fractured skull. Unless the operation was successful, Alf would die.

That was the dreadful truth.

Fullwood was a cad, and in him were the makings of a pretty fine rascal. But, slumbering somewhere, were just a few of the finer feelings. There is good in the worst of us. And Fullwood had his goodness come to the fore now.

He was not himself. He was changed.

For his conscience was at work. He felt pangs of remorse. And he could not bear to think that Huggins might die.

Alf had risked his life to save him—him, Fullwood! It was appalling—it was amazing, at the same time.

As Fullwood lay in the chair, he thought

of all the details. He remembered that scene up in the tower room. He remembered how he had gone in to taunt the bricklayer's son. Then he brought to mind the manner in which Alf had knocked him down.

Fullwood shuddered at the recollection of the disaster. His thoughts were confused about that.

He only knew that he had been blinded and dazed by that dreadful crash. And he had found himself pinned down, unable to get away. And he shuddered again as he remembered his nightmare time. That tottering wall, close against him—threatening to fall upon him with every second that passed. He remembered it all. And Alf!

Alf, coming up the ivy, risking his life in every moment of the climb. Then the final act—as Alf had lifted the stone. Fullwood had crawled aside. But Huggins had been caught by the crumbling wall. And Alf had done all this for him!

It was like coals of fire heaped upon his head.

Aided by Mr. Snuggs, Fullwood had worked with might and main to get Alf Huggins expelled. Between the pair of them, they had succeeded. They had plotted, they had schemed, and Alf had fallen a victim to their wiles. They had driven him out. And after being driven out, Alf had come back. And his first act had been to go to the succour of the one whom he had the most cause in the world to loathe.

Fullwood was thick-skinned, but he was not thick-skinned enough for this. Even his horny hide was penetrated now. Alf might die! And that thought cut Fullwood to the quick. It left him with a sense of horror.

For once in a while he felt a spark of decency.

It came gradually—and the spark flamed up. He couldn't do it! He couldn't allow Alf to lie up there, with that terrible stain still upon his character. It would be the act of an absolute villain.

"I've got to tell! I've got to speak up!" Fullwood told himself fiercely. "Yes, and I'll give Snuggs away. The crawling, snivelling scorpion! I can see it now! He's a beast!"

Fullwood surged with indignation as he thought of Snuggs. Yes, it was Snuggs who had led him on! In his darkness, Fullwood placed all the blame upon Mr. Snuggs' shoulders.

But it would make no difference.

If Fullwood confessed, he would be self-condemned. He would admit that he had been a party to that plot. And there could be only one result—expulsion!

Yes, it would mean the sack!

Fullwood would certainly be expelled from the school. The Head would never allow him to remain after discovering the truth. That was a certainty. It was impossible for Dr. Stafford to condone such an offence.

What should he do? Remain silent, and suffer agonies of conscience? Remain silent

and become ill with the pangs of remorse which stabbed into him?

Or should he speak out—and get himself the sack?

It was a severe test for the leader of Study A. At any ordinary time he would have chosen the one course. He would have suffered any mental agony rather than open disgrace.

But now he was different.

Alf's amazing heroism had changed Fullwood into another being. As likely as not, it was only a temporary change—for a leopard cannot change its spots. But for this brief period, at all events, Fullwood was like another person.

And, at last, he made up his mind.

"I've got to tell!" he said fiercely. "And if I don't do it now, it might be too late. I'd like Huggins to know that his name is cleared. If he's going to die, I want him to know beforehand."

And Fullwood tried to get up from the chair. His leg hurt him, and he sank back again with a slight gasp. Dr. Stafford, turning, saw the junior staring before him in a fixed, feverish way.

"Lie still, my boy—lie still!" said the Head gently. "Is there anything you want, Fullwood?"

Fullwood looked at him in a wild kind of way.

"I've got to talk to you, sir!" he said tensely.

"You must not talk——"

"I've got to, sir! Do you hear me?" said Fullwood. "I've got to! I've got to expose that crawling worm—Snuggs!"

"Good heavens! What are you saying?"

"Alf Huggins saved my life, sir—he saved me at the risk of his own!" said Fullwood, his voice becoming more steady. "And it was Snuggs and I who plotted and planned to get him kicked out of the school!"

The Head, in spite of his intense worry, was startled.

"My boy, you are feverish!" he said quietly.

"I am not, sir," said Fullwood. "Look at me. I'm not feverish; but I must get this off my mind. It's killing me—it's gnawing right into me. Alf Huggins may die, and he was expelled in disgrace! It wasn't right, sir! He never deserved it!"

Dr. Stafford's face became grave and stern. He sat down close to Fullwood, and looked at him squarely.

"Tell me!" he said, in a low voice.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFESSION!



"SNUGGS—he was the cause of it, sir!" began Fullwood. "He's a master, but he's a scoundrel!"

"You must not say that, my boy——"

"But I do say it, sir," insisted Fullwood.

"I want to tell you what happened that night—that night when Mr. Snuggs was struck down. I want to explain all the details."

"You mean when Huggins attacked Mr. Snuggs?"

"He didn't attack him, sir."

"But Mr. Snuggs distinctly told me that it was Huggins who attacked him," said the Head quietly. "It is impossible for me to doubt the word of one of my masters—"

"Mr. Snuggs is a liar, sir," said Fullwood. "It was a put-up job—it was a fake! I'm a liar, too! I'm a miserable, crawling cad! I helped in it, sir; and I helped to torment Huggins until the very last moment! Oh, I don't deserve all this!"

Fullwood dropped his face into his hands, and sobbed convulsively.

"Come, come!" said the Head gently. "This won't do, my boy! You are distraught! I do not think you know what you are saying. These statements are wild and —"

"Oh, they're true, sir," muttered Fullwood, looking up, his cheeks streaming. "It's—it's not often I blub, sir! But I can't help it now! I've never realised, before, what a detestable sort of cad I've been! But Huggins is the best fellow that breathes!"

Fullwood gave a wild kind of laugh.

"But perhaps he isn't breathing now!" he went on. "Perhaps Huggins is dead! Oh, sir, it can't be true! He won't die, will he? He mustn't die sir—he mustn't!"

Dr. Stafford placed a hand on Fullwood's shoulder.

"No, he mustn't die, Fullwood," he said quietly. "Have no fear. Heaven will not be so cruel as that. The boy risked his own life to save yours. He is terribly injured. At the very best, he will be a wreck for weeks and weeks. If you have done this bad any injury, your remorse is easily understandable. For Huggins returned good for evil—and that is the greatest test that we on this earth can have."

Fullwood nearly choked.

"Don't, sir!" he muttered. "You're only making it worse for me! Huggins returned good for evil! He knew it was me up there! He had every reason to hate me—to loathe me! And yet he did that. He came up the ivy, knowing that it would probably mean his own life or mine. Why does a fellow do that, sir? I wouldn't do it—couldn't! I haven't got the pluck, sir! And that—that bricklayer chap saved me!"

"I am glad that you have realised the truth, Fullwood. And now we must not talk like this any longer," said the Head quietly.

"What were you saying about Mr. Snuggs? I cannot believe—"

"You must believe!" interrupted Fullwood quickly. "Mr. Snuggs and I were in the woodshed that night. We had gone there to fake up some rotten trick against Huggins."

"You had deliberately gone there to plan a trick?" asked the Head. "It was a plot between you and Mr. Snuggs?"

"Yes, sir! I swear it!"

"Go on!"

"And then I tripped against something, sir," said Fullwood. "It was all dark. I hit against the wooden wall of the place, and shook it. That iron crowbar fell down from the rafters. It hit Mr. Snuggs on the head. The whole thing was an accident, sir. Oh, don't you understand? It was an accident!"

"There was no assault whatever?"

"Of course there wasn't, sir. And Mr. Snuggs wasn't unconscious, either. He told me to go and fetch Huggins. He told me to send Huggins to the woodshed so that he could accuse the boy of having attacked him. You see, Mr. Snuggs took advantage of that accident to get Huggins expelled."

"And you deliberately sent Huggins on that dastardly errand?" asked the Head grimly. "Knowing Mr. Snuggs' intentions, you told Huggins?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Fullwood brokenly.

"Then the poor boy spoke the truth when he gave his account?"

"Yes, sir; he spoke the truth all the time!" said Fullwood. "I don't think he could tell a lie—he's too straight! I'm just realising it. He's true blue! He's as straight as a string! Oh, I'm glad I've told you! I don't care what happens to me! It's off my mind now!"

And the wretched junior sank his head into his hands again.

"So it was Mr. Snuggs who gave a false, lying account," said the Head, in a low voice. "And you Fullwood—you took part in that villainous scheme! It was dreadful of you!"

"Oh, I know it was, sir—I know it was!"

"But I am thankful that you have told me," went on Dr. Stafford. "I will tell you, my boy, that I am impressed. Your remorse proves to me that you are not wholly bad. And Mr. Snuggs is the chief culprit!"

"He led me on sir," muttered the junior.

"Of that I have not the slightest doubt," agreed Dr. Stafford. "Mr. Snuggs was your evil genius. As a master of this school it was his duty to teach you everything that was right. To lead you into the path of wrongdoing was terrible. You are greatly to blame, Fullwood. But I have a mind to be merciful. You have suffered. And I am proud of you for your frankness now. When one confesses his wrong, he partially atones for his sin."

"I expect you'll sack me, sir!" said Fullwood. "What does it matter? If Huggins dies, I don't want to remain here! I couldn't

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live in the place! He won't die, will he, sir?"

The Head looked away.

"Huggins' life hangs on a thread!" he said quietly. "It may be too late—or perhaps Mr. Lee will return in time. He must! No other thought is possible!"

"Has—has Mr. Lee gone to fetch somebody, sir?"

The Headmaster stood up.

"Yes," he replied tensely. "And Mr. Lee has returned!"

From outside came the soft, panting throb of a racing motor-car.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF ALF!



SIR HOWARD BRITTON entered the school beside Nelson Lee. He was a small, dapper little gentleman, and at the present moment there was an alert, business-like expression on his

face. He had been told how grave this case was, and he had come willingly and freely.

It mattered nothing to him that he was dragged out of his bed in the middle of the night.

He had come to St. Frank's in the hope of saving a human life. And if there was any possibility, he would drag Alf Huggins out of the Valley of the Shadow.

Many of the fellows saw Nelson Lee and Sir Howard hurry upstairs. And there was an immediate buzz of low conversation.

"It's the specialist!"

"Good!"

"We shall know soon!"

"I don't suppose it'll take him long," said Handforth. "And then they'll bring down the verdict. Poor old Huggins! He's got to live, you know! If he died, there'd be something awful——"

"Oh, don't talk about his dying!" muttered Church. "It's not going to be! Huggins is one of the best. I've been thinking about him all the time. I mean, the way he acted last week and the week before. When all the chaps were against him—persecuting him. He stood it like a brick!"

"Yes, rather!" said Armstrong. "I was a cad, too!"

"Good man!" said Handforth. "Open confession is good for the soul! I'm glad you know you're a cad!"

"The age of miracles hasn't passed!" said Pitt.

"Oh, don't sneer!" growled Armstrong. "At a time like this a fellow feels compelled to own up. I was just thinking of that little accident when Huggins took it on himself to repair my bike. He did it out of sheer kindheartedness, and then I came along and slanged him! I told him he wanted to pinch the jigger for his own use!"

"You rotter!"

"I know it—now!" said Armstrong. "But



"The stairs have vanished!" said Alf hoarsely.

"But—but I mean to say——" began Archie.

"We can't get to Fullwood; we can't even see if he is still alive!" muttered Alf.

somehow or other it didn't seem to strike me at the time."

"It's queer how you realise the truth afterwards," said Marriott. "We kicked him out of the study, you know. That chap!"

"A bricklayer's son!" said Handforth. Marriott flushed.

"What's it matter what he is?" he asked. "After this I shouldn't be snobbish even if a dustman's son came to St. Frank's! It's the chap that matters—not his upbringing. And Huggins is good right through! My hat! What rotten cads we were!"

And practically every other snob was just as willing to confess. Handforth and the

other fellows had never heard so many expressions of frank regret in all their lives.

Somehow, the knowledge that Alf was hovering between life and death made the juniors realise.

The thing came as a blow.

They had time to think—they did not merely jump to a hasty conclusion as hitherto. They knew the truth, and it was something that they had enough pluck to admit their faults.

Even Handforth began to feel rather drawn towards the fellows who had been so snobbish. After admitting their guilt, how could he possibly remain antagonistic.

Handforth had never been so subdued before.

I was astonished to find that he was really able to whisper. Hitherto he had always spoken in a kind of loud stage whisper. But now he only breathed his words.

The school was silent for the sake of Huggins.

And while everybody waited downstairs—waited in a fever of anxiety—Sir Howard Britton was bending over the poor, battered junior upstairs. He came to Nelson Lee after his examination, and his face was grave.

Dr. Brett was there, too.

"Yes, gentlemen, an operation is essential," said Sir Howard quietly. "You were right, Dr. Brett. The lad will die unless this operation is immediately performed."

"It will be dangerous?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Very dangerous!"

"But there is a possibility—a hope?"

"Oh, yes—most certainly," replied the specialist. "If I am successful, the lad will be in no fear of a relapse. He will probably recover consciousness within a few hours, and then will slowly mend."

Sir Howard quickly set about his preparations.

And still the suspense went on downstairs.

The minutes passed slowly. They dragged by. The juniors began to think that the news would never come. And yet, although they were supposed to be in their beds, sleep was not even thought of. I didn't see one fellow yawn. They were on the alert—waiting.

Archie Glenthorne came in.

His face was haggard. It was drawn into anxious lines. And he looked round with a kind of dull, listless expression in his eyes. Archie had grown tired of the Triangle. It seemed to him that this waiting was the worst suffering that one could have.

"Dear old lads," he said quietly. "How much longer?"

"Nobody seems to know," murmured Pitt.

"But it must come soon—I mean to say, one way or the other!" said Archie. "I can't think properly. The old brain appears to be dead. I don't know how you chappies feel, but I'm bally well dazed!"

"We're all a bit that way, Archie."

"We sha'n't be right until we hear the verdict."

We were in the common room, and, before Archie could say another word, Morrow, of the Sixth, came in. All eyes were turned upon him. Morrow was looking very grave.

"Is—is there any news?" asked Handforth.

He had been almost afraid to put the question.

"Yes!" said Morrow. "It's over."

"The—the operation?"

"Yes!"

Archie ran forward, and clutched at the prefect's sleeve.

"Don't!" he muttered. "Don't keep us waiting! What is it, old lad? What is it? How about Alf?"

"Huggins is alive!" said Morrow.

"Alive!"

"Oh, thank Heaven!"

"Then—then it's all right?"

"No—it's not all right!" replied Morrow. "The specialist has saved him from death—but he is still unconscious. The operation was a success. It will be weeks before he is himself!"

Archie Glenthorne nearly sobbed with joy.

"But—but, I mean to say!" he panted.

"It's all right, isn't it? He's saved, Morrow? Alf's saved. He's not in danger now, is he? Speak, old scout!"

"I've told you this quietly because I didn't want you to yell!" said Morrow. "You've had the truth, and so now I can speak a little more frankly. But don't let out any shouts. The doctors must have silence!"

"Is—is the news even better, then?" asked Pitt.

Morrow nodded.

"Yes, it's even better," he replied. "The operation was a complete success, and Huggins is in absolutely no danger. Of course, he's jolly ill. But the brain specialist says he'll mend rapidly. He's got a strong constitution, and he's bound to be all right after a rest."

"Hurrah!"

"It was Handforth who did that—but in just a faint whisper."

"If you don't cheer any louder than that it doesn't matter," said Morrow. "But don't forget yourselves and let out any yells—"

"Give us credit for a bit of sense, old man?" said Pitt. "Oh, thank goodness that suspense is over! The tension was terrible! Good old Alf! He'll be with us, after all!"

"Rather!"

"It's great, dear old chappies!" exclaimed Archie, his eyes shining. "I mean to say, I feel like dashing about and shaking every bally hand that I come across! I feel so frightfully bucked that I could buzz outside and push a few walls over! When a chappie gets news like this he bubbles somewhat!"

"Well, mind you don't bubble too much," said Morrow. "You won't need to bottle yourselves up for long. Huggins will go to-morrow—"

"Go!"

"Where to?"

"Why?"

"You don't suppose he can remain here, do you?" asked Morrow. "He'll have to go into a nursing home. Of course, there's the sanatorium here, but that wouldn't be quiet enough."

"Still, he'll come back, won't he?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, I don't know," replied Morrow. "Huggins was sacked. He left the school in disgrace. But it's quite likely this affair will wipe the stain out."

"Stain?" said Handforth aggressively. "What stain?"

"Don't be an ass, Morrow!" said Pitt.

"Huggins never committed that assault on Snuggs," went on Handforth. "It was all a put-up job, and I won't believe anything else!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Snuggs!"

"He's a mean, rotten worm!"

"A crawling reptile!"

"Good old Huggins!"

"One of the best!"

"Now then—now then," said Morrow sharply.

But, although the exclamations were numerous, all the juniors took care to speak in whispers.

It didn't matter what he was—it didn't matter what his parents were. If ever Huggins recovered, and if ever he came back to St. Frank's, he would be one of the most popular fellows the Remove ever had.

If Alf could only have heard all this, he would have been proud. For he had won his way through, in spite of all obstacles—in spite of all the plottings and plannings.

Without disclosing the actual truth about his identity, he had made a position for himself which would always remain secure. And he would be remembered as Alf Huggins, the bricklayer's son.

But Morrow didn't allow the talk to go on much longer.

"The best thing you youngsters can do is to get straight back to bed. The Head has given instructions that there will be no morning lessons—"

"Oh, good!"

"That's a relief, anyway!"

"Rather!"

"The whole school will get to bed, and it won't get up until about eleven!" went on Morrow. "There's a double reason for that decision, I believe. The Head wants you fellows to get your proper sleep, and he also wants quietness. Be good chaps, and slip away upstairs. I don't think I shall have to give any orders. You'll go, won't you?"

The juniors went like lambs.

And St. Frank's had perfect faith in Alf Huggins. Nobody believed in his guilt now—everybody scoffed at the idea that he had made that attack upon Mr. Snuggs. And so, even before the truth came out, the bricklayer's son had won all hearts.

He had made good on his own merits!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AMAZING TRUTH.



"ALF—dear old lad!" Archie Glenthorne murmured the words softly.

He was sitting beside Alf Huggins' bed. It was morning now—bright, clear morning, and before long Alf would be taken away in a special ambulance. He would be taken to a fine nursing-home on the outskirts of Bannington, where he would have proper care and complete rest.

All danger was over.

The operation, although fraught with such danger, had not been a deadly one. Once completed, Alf was safe. There was practically no fear of a relapse. And this morning he had recovered consciousness.

As a very special concession, Archie Glenthorne had been allowed to see him before his departure. And now Archie was looking into his chum's face with gladness and joy.

"Everything's all right, laddie," whispered Archie. "Dear old sportsman—it's frightful to see you like this, but I'm glad! I mean to say, I'm glad that you're pulling round like one o'clock."

Alf gave a wan smile.

"Thanks, Archie," he murmured. "I shall be all right. Just a week or two, you know, and then I'll be as strong as ever."

"Absolutely," said Archie stoutly. "I mean to say, you've bally well got to be! Why, dash it, I sha'n't live until you come back. I shall merely be in a state of existence!"

"Dear old Archie!" said Alf softly. "I say, I haven't been able to thank you for all you've done—"

"Gadzooks!" interrupted Archie. "What priceless piffle. I mean, it seems to me that you're the lad who has done all the doing! Absolutely every time! Why, good gad, you're a marvel!"

"Don't be silly, Archie!" said Alf.

"I mean, dashing up towers," said Archie enthusiastically. "Whizzing up lumps of ivy, and getting yourself bally well covered with bricks! All those sort of things want a frightful lot of doing!"

Alf tried to smile again. He was lying in bed propped up, and he was literally smothered with bandages. He had had a terrible time. But the worst was over. From now onwards he would gradually mend. And his strong constitution would enable him to recover with great rapidity.

"Of course, I'm not frightfully sure about Snuggs!" went on Archie. "As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten all about—"

"Archie, I've got something to tell you!" put in Alf.

"Really? I mean, absolutely?"

"The Head knows the truth!" whispered Alf, his eyes shining with gladness. "It's all right. The Head knows about that affair

with Snuggs. I'm not expelled. I have been reinstated!"

Archie nearly yelled with joy.

"You—you positively mean it?" he breathed.

"Yes—and when I'm well again, I shall come back," said Alf Huggins. "Then we'll have some good times, won't we? It won't be long, Archie—only just after the Whitsun holidays, I expect."

"That's absolutely priceless," said Archie. "Why, the bally holidays are just on us! A week or so, and then the school disintegrates. In other words, it breaks up!"

"Then we shall soon be together again!" said Alf. "Oh, you don't know how lovely

It was midday now, and the boys had not been up very long. Owing to the dramatic events of the night, the usual school routine was quite upside down. Not that this mattered a toss.

Everybody turned up.

And all sorts of discussions went on, in low, excited voices. The fellows decided that the Head was going to tell the school that Alf Huggins had been reinstated—that he was still a scholar of St. Frank's, and would come back as soon as he was well enough.

There was a hush when Dr. Stafford appeared on the platform.

And with him was Sir John Brent—the Chairman of the Board of Governors.

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it is to know that it's all over. Dear old Archie, you stuck to me through thick and thin. You're a ripping chum!"

Archie denied it strenuously. And then, shortly afterwards, he was compelled to leave, for the doctor would not allow him to remain. Alf had to be kept quiet, and Archie had spent his allotted time in the sick room.

But Glenthorne was happy now.

He had seen his chum—he had seen with his own eyes, that Alf was bright and gay and already on the road to recovery. That was what made Archie sing in joyous tones as he descended the stairs.

And soon after that the school was called together.

Sir John was looking very troubled and grave.

"I have some important news to tell you, boys!" exclaimed the Headmaster quietly. "There is no necessity for me to go into any details regarding the events of last night. You all know how Huggins acted with such wonderful bravery. You know that his life was in danger. And you know that all peril has now passed. Huggins is leaving the school this morning——"

"Oh!"

"But you need not be afraid!" went on Dr Stafford smiling. "Huggins will return—he will take his old place in the Remove Form. And the doctors are hopeful that he will mend rapidly."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Huggins!"

"Good old bricklayer!"

"Hurrah!"

The shouts and the cheers were very subdued.

"I cannot blame you, boys, for your warm demonstration," continued the Head. "Huggins has proved himself to be a youngster who is possessed of pluck, dogged grit, and wonderful loyalty. He has upheld all the finer traditions of this great school!"

"Hurrah!"

"And I may tell you at once," said the Head—"I may tell you that Huggins has been shamefully and despicably treated. For I have now learnt that his expulsion was undeserved."

"Oh!"

"We knew it all along!" shouted Handforth triumphantly.

"Hurrah!"

"Huggins was victimised by Mr. Snuggs!" continued the Headmaster, displaying much patience with the excited school. "It is not my intention to go into any details of that painful affair. It will be sufficient for you to know that the truth has come to light. Mr. Snuggs will not be seen any more—for he has gone."

"Oh, good!"

"What ripping news!"

"Thank goodness for that!"

"Mr. Snuggs has gone!" repeated the Head. "He was unworthy of the trust that was reposed in him. I am only too happy to state that the wretched man partially relented, and made a most humble and sincere apology. He begged the forgiveness of Huggins—forgiveness, I may add, which was freely given."

"Good old Alf!"

"With regard to Fullwood, he will resume his place in the school within a few days," continued the Head quietly. "And now, if you will remain quiet, Sir John Brent would like to address you."

Sir John stepped forward to the edge of the platform.

He was flushing warmly. From every side he heard nothing but demonstrations of wonderful enthusiasm for Alf. And it made him joyous. Alf had won the hearts of all. He was the idol of St. Frank's. Now, surely, was the time for the truth to be told.

"Boys, I think I have something to tell you that will come as a big surprise," said Sir John Brent quietly. "Dr. Stafford has been talking to you about Alfred Huggins—whom you have known as the son of a bricklayer. When he came to this school a certain number of you rejected him. You despised him and treated him with contempt. Possibly you have atoned for your snobbish behaviour now. And so I will not press that point. I think you are all of the same opinion with regard to this lad—"

"Rather, sir!"

"We're proud of him, sir!"

"St. Frank's is proud of him!"

"One of the best in the school!"

"I am glad!" said Sir John. "And now I will tell you the truth. This lad—this boy who has been with you for the past three or four weeks—is not the son of a bricklayer, as you believed."

"Not—not the son of a bricklayer?"

"Then—then who is he?"

"The lad is my own son!" said Sir John quietly.

CHAPTER XV.

STRAIGHT AS A STRING!



IT was like a bomb-shell on the school.

"My own son!" repeated Sir John. "His name is Alfred Brent, and I need hardly tell you how proud I am that my boy should have covered himself with such glory."

The fellows were gasping with astonishment.

Sir John Brent's son!

"Great Scott!"

"It doesn't seem possible."

"But—but he's Alf Huggins, of Hoxton!" said Gulliver, with a sickly look. "He—he can't be Sir John Brent's son!"

All the snobs were looking sheepish and dismayed.

"And you were down on him because he was common!" grunted Handforth. "My hat! Haven't you been spoofed? Just think of it. You despised him and loathed him because he came from Hoxton. And, all the time, he's the son of Sir John Brent."

"My only Sunday topper!"

"If the news came as a bombshell to the school, it came as an earthquake to the snobs. For they were confounded. All their theories and ideas were sent to the winds."

But Sir John was speaking again.

"No doubt you think it very remarkable that my son should come to the school in such an extraordinary way," he exclaimed. "Of course, it is remarkable. But I will explain the circumstances. It was Alfred's idea. At first I was totally opposed. He maintained that if he came here as a common boy—as the son of a bricklayer—he would be received with jeers and with loathing. My son declared that he would not be given a fair chance. He was quite certain that there would be a large element of snobbishness among the junior forms. And so he tried this thing as an experiment. As you have found, it was an experiment that nearly cost him his life."

The school was hushed.

"Endoubtedly, the whole sequence of events which led up to the adventures of last night was brought about by my son's fight against his enemies in this school." went on Sir John. "It seems that his

greatest enemy of all was Mr. Snuggs. That, I will grant, was terrible."

"A lot of rotters were against him, too, sir!" shouted somebody.

"They were down on him from the first."

"My son expected such treatment, and he was prepared for it," continued Sir John. "At the same time, he maintained that he would find some really true friends. He did find them. For there are boys among you who paid no heed to his breeding—or supposed breeding—and took Alfred for what he was worth. I hope that this whole affair will be a lesson to you."

"You bet it will, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Still, after all, blood will tell, sir, won't it?"

Sir John's eyes flashed.

"Yes—blood will tell!" he exclaimed. "It may interest you to know that my own father was a bricklayer."

"Oh!"

"Am I ashamed of it?" demanded Sir John. "Has any boy a right to be ashamed of his own father—or any man! Certainly not—if his father is worthy of respect and honour. His position in life matters nothing. A man can be honourable, no matter what his calling. Yes, my own father was a bricklayer. But I'm not ashamed of that. If any of you think the less of me, I cannot help it."

"We don't, sir!"

"We think more of you, sir."

"And Alf Huggins is almost the son of a bricklayer, after all!" roared Handforth. "He's the grandson of one, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In future, of course, my son will be known under his own name—Alfred Brent," said Sir John. "And now, if you so desire, you may give expression to your feelings in any way you choose. The doctors have informed me that cheering will not affect my son. Indeed, it will encourage him, and give him happiness. He will know that your enthusiasm is for him."

Handforth jumped forward.

"Then can we let it rip, sir?" he roared.

"As loudly as you like!" smiled Sir John.

"Hurrah!" bellowed Handforth enthusiastically. "Great pip! It's like a safety valve. I was nearly busting."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, you chaps—give him three cheers!" roared Handy. "Hip, hip, hoorah!"

It burst out in a perfect thunder—and the rafters of the old hall fairly shook and shivered. The cheering was heard in every corner of the school. Even the seniors joined in. They couldn't help themselves, for they had been worked up into a high pitch of enthusiasm.

And Alf Brent, lying in bed upstairs, smiled gladly to himself.

He knew.

Those cheers were for him—the fellows were glad that he had come through victoriously. He had started badly at St. Frank's, and then things had got worse and worse. But this was ample compensation. For now Alf was the idol of the school. His hour had come, and, in future, he would be free from persecutions and petty spites.

The snobs of St. Frank's had received a lesson that they would remember for many a long day. They had been taught that there is nothing manly or refined in being a snob. Every person should be judged on his merits—for that's all that counts.

"What does it matter whether a chap's the son of a bricklayer, a dustman, or a giddy duke!" shouted Handforth, out in the Triangle, after school had been dismissed. "What does it matter? It's the chap himself who counts!"

"Rather!"

"As for these snobs, I'm going to slaughter the lot!" declared Handforth. "I'm going round, and I mean to wipe them up!"

"Rats!" said Merrell. "I've been a beast—"

"You have!"

"I've been a cad—"

"Glad you know it!"

"I do know it!" shouted Merrell, red to the roots of his hair. "But, at least, I've got the decency to admit it! When Huggins comes back, I'll apologise. I'll beg his pardon!"

"Good man!" I said heartily.

Handforth glared.

"You rotter!" he snorted.

"Eh?"

"I can't punch your nose now!" roared Handforth indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the same, I'm jolly glad!" growled Handy. "If a chap's in the wrong, and he's got the decency to admit it, it's good enough for me! But I do hate an obstinate fellow who thinks he knows everything and won't take advice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that cackle for?" snorted Handforth.

"My hat!" said Pitt. "You must hate yourself a good bit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth didn't see the joke at all. And then Archie came up, blithely humming a tune.

"What-ho! What-ho!" he observed. "I mean to say, the jolly old thunder clouds have dispersed. The sun shines, the birds trill, and the world goes merrily on!"

"Absolutely!" grinned Pitt.

"Why, dash it all, I feel so frightfully bucked that I could dash up and down like this for hours," said Archie stoutly. "I mean to say, the old frame is simply bursting with energy. I want to do something. I want to whizz about, and fly

hither and thither. I jolly well can't keep still. The fact is, I'm somewhat overflowing."

"Yes, it does make you feel a bit like that, Archie," I smiled.

"Well, thank goodness, it's all over. And, thank goodness, that Snuggs has gone—"

Archie staggered.

"Don't!" he pleaded. "Kindly refrain from mentioning that name in my presence," he said. "I can't stand it. He was the cause of all the trouble. He has oozed into oblivion. St. Frank's knows the blot no more. And, as far as I can see, everything in the jolly old garden is priceless."

"Rather!"

"And let's hope that Alf comes back in a few weeks."

"He will!" declared Archie. "He's promised me that he's going to put a fearful hustle on, and give the good old doctors a surprise. Anyway, laddies, you can be quite certain that Alf will have a somewhat large-sized stab at it."

And Archie strolled indoors, and came face to face with Phipps in his study.

"Oh," said Archie, "so here you are! What about it, Phipps? What I mean to say, what absolutely about it?"

"I am glad, sir, that everything is over."

"Over!" repeated Archie. "I mean, what about the dear old lad? It strikes me that you were somewhat prejudiced against Alf. You thought he was the dashed son of a dashed bricklayer."

Phipps had the decency to hang his head.

"I must confess, sir, that I was greatly opposed to Master Brent for some little time," he said. "I was unduly influenced by the general run of conversation in the school. I am sorry, sir. I trust you will overlook it, sir."

Archie beamed.

"Well, since you put it like that, old can of tomatoes, good enough!" he said. "The young master extends a big load of forgiveness. It's all right, Phipps—absolutely!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"And now, what about the good old brew?" asked Archie. "I mean to say, things have become normal. You mustn't forget that I require light stimulation. Tea, old ducky, is the most priceless kind of stuff!"

Phipps started.

Then he went out to get the tea. It was the first time that his young master had called him "ducky," and it hit Phipps with something of a shock. He put it down to Archie's unusual exuberance.

It was some little time before the school became quiet.

Alf went away during the day—happy and content, in spite of his injuries. He would get well—he would mend rapidly, and then his time of real enjoyment would come.

As for Ralph Leslie Fullwood, he had escaped punishment—he had even escaped the exposure which he had feared. Nobody



Alf Huggins had been unable to get clear. At the last second he had made an attempt to do so. Fullwood escaped; he saw the masonry tumble down. But Alf Huggins had no time to get away.

ever knew exactly how the truth had come out. The Headmaster had considered that Fullwood had suffered deeply. And Dr. Stafford also believed that the bulk of the blame would be placed on the shoulders of Mr. Snuggs.

He had gone for good—much to the relief of the Remove.

And it seemed that a period of quietness would now settle over St. Frank's. But things are not always what they seem.

The Whitsun Holiday would soon be coming on and after that—

Well, after that some fairly astounding things were due to happen. But that's got nothing to do with this story. So I think the best thing I can do is to dry up.

And that, as Archie Glenthorne would say, is that!

THE END.

EDITORIAL



ANNOUNCEMENT.

My Dear Readers,

As I have a little more space than usual in which to tell you of all the important coming events at St. Frank's, the new features, detective stories, etc., I will first of all express my heartfelt thanks to those of my staunch supporters who have stuck to our wonderful little paper throughout the stirring times of keen rivalry, from which we emerge to-day triumphant and still smiling!

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN UP AGAINST!

Born in the early part of the Great War, we carried on successfully through those dark days, winning lasting friends in the trenches, on the high seas, and at home. At that time, we had to contend against a serious paper shortage, a limited staff, and uncertain distribution. Then when hostilities were over, we had to meet fresh troubles in the temporary dislocation of transport caused by the series of great trade disputes. After that came widespread unemployment, and with it a number of competitors in boys' papers. Knowing that we had many supporters who had stood by us so gamely in the past, I had no fear that our friends would desert us in our recent struggles, and this confidence has been justified. To paraphrase Tennyson's immortal lines, we can truly say of "The Nelson Lee Library" that

"Papers may come and papers may go,
But we go on for ever."

PROSPERITY COMING.

The pinch of economy, painful though it has been, has at last borne fruit in the coming reduction of taxation foreshadowed in the new Budget. The fog of uncertainty has lifted from the horizon, and we can discern steaming towards us an argosy of good trade, bringing with it, among other blessings, a big cargo of prosperity for all. Then, may we hope, our present troubles of unemployment will vanish with all those other evils that the war left in its wake.

A GRAND NEW HOLIDAY SERIES.

Whitsun is close at hand, and the holiday fever is upon us. What shall we do? Where

shall we go? These are questions everyone is asking. The famous juniors of St. Frank's have now quite settled the problem, and perhaps it may offer a suggestion to you, my chums. They have decided to go a-caravanning! The brain-wave occurs to Archie, and the Genial Ass purchases wholesale a travelling circus, and, with his characteristic love for luxury, converts the vans into travelling hotels. Of course, the performing animals, acrobats, and clowns are to be left out. They are quite unnecessary, for there never was a circus that could have provided so much free entertainment to the inhabitants of rural England as Archie's holiday party. Handforth alone could raise more laughter than a dozen clowns. These caravan adventures of the Juniors of St. Frank's will form our coming new series, the first story of which, "THE HAPPY CARAVANNERS!" appearing next week, will fairly make you rock with laughter.

OUR STUDIO PORTRAIT STUDIES.

I am purposely not calling this coming new feature a Portrait Gallery, as it will be something quite superior to anything of the kind attempted before. It will form a series of autographed portraits of our leading characters at St. Frank's, each one of which will be a work of art and a faithful likeness of the character depicted. The first of these Studio Portraits will appear next week, and will be a particularly fine study of Nipper. Every lover of our St. Frank's stories should make a point of collecting the whole series. I can promise you that they will be well worth keeping and framing.

THE DETECTIVE STORY SECTION.

As regards Our Detective Story Section, there will be next week another stirring and exciting instalment of Nelson Lee's adventures against the Iron Hand, and a brilliant, complete story of Gordon Fox in: "The Case of the Escaped Convict!"

With very best wishes,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

"A MILLION AT STAKE!"

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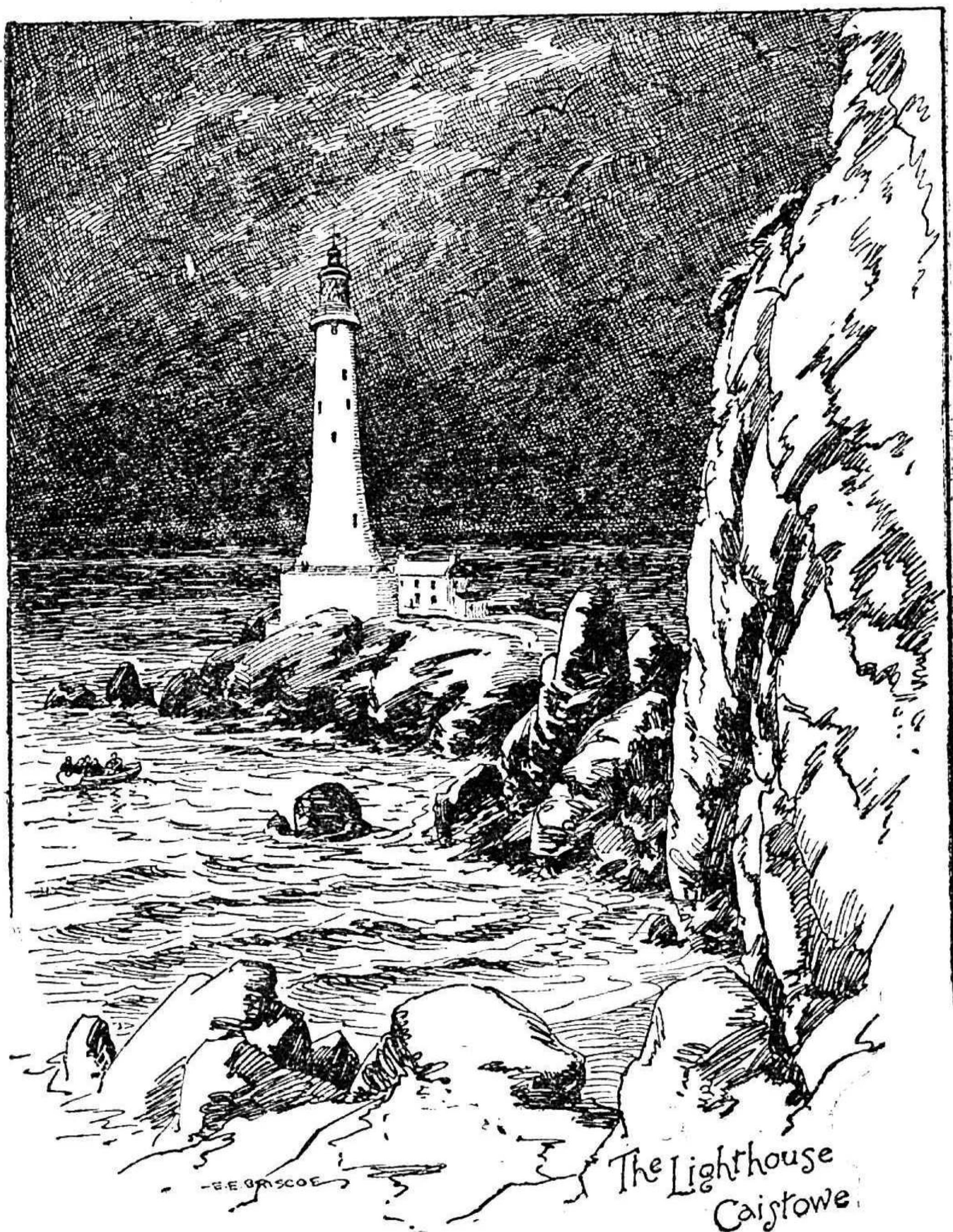
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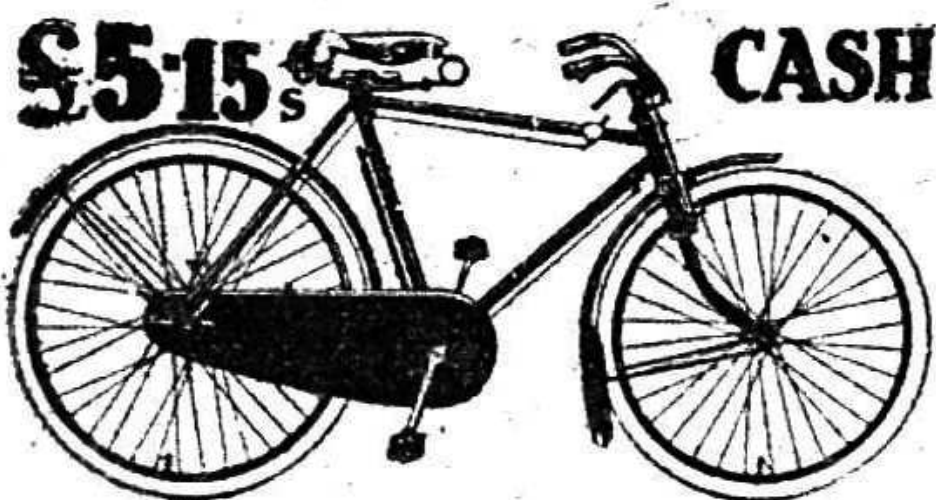
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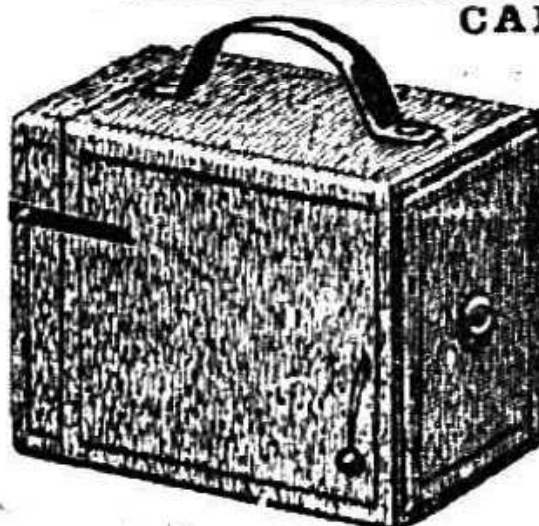
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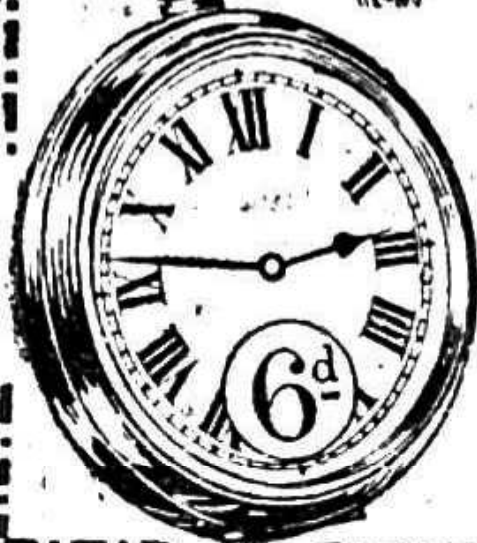
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