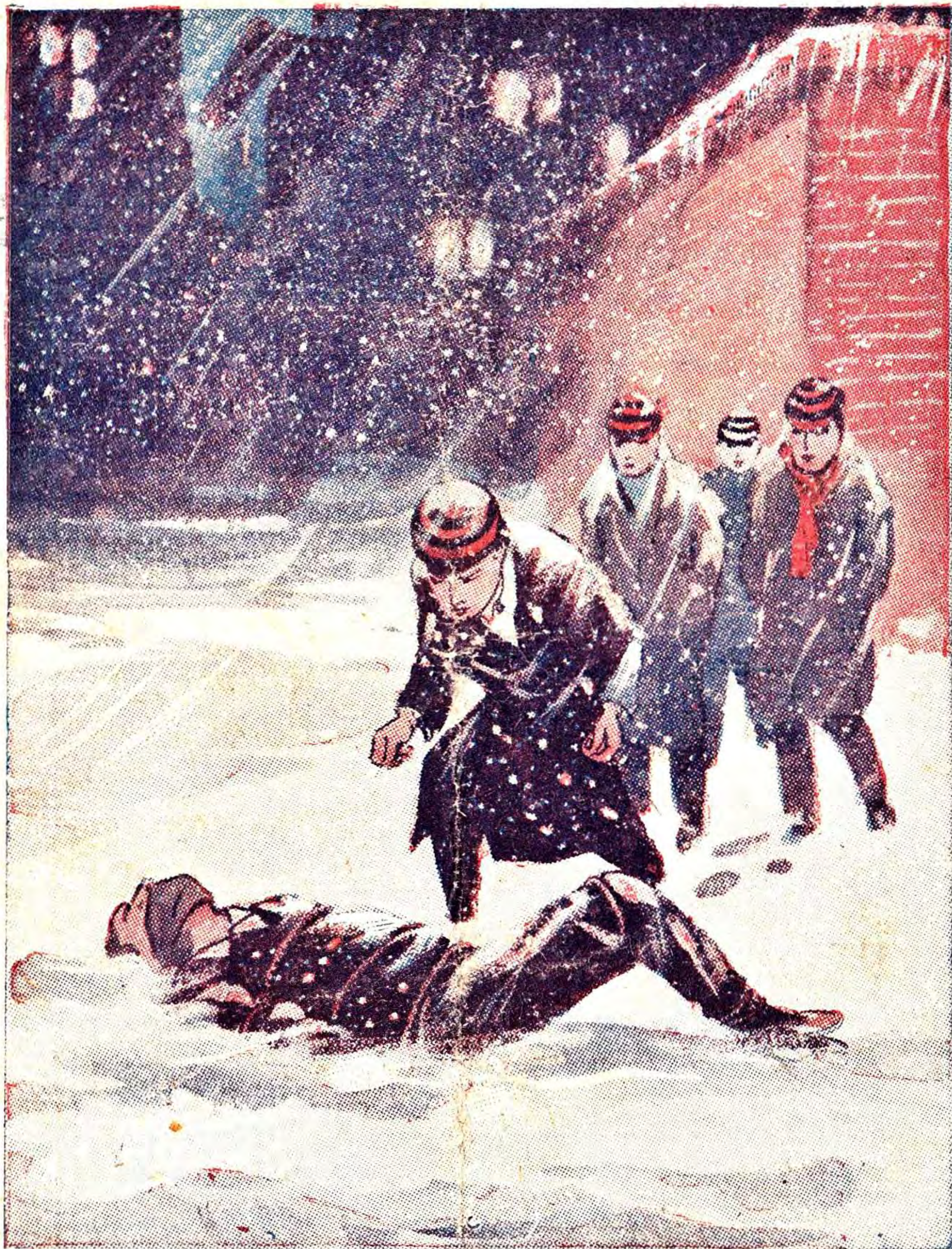


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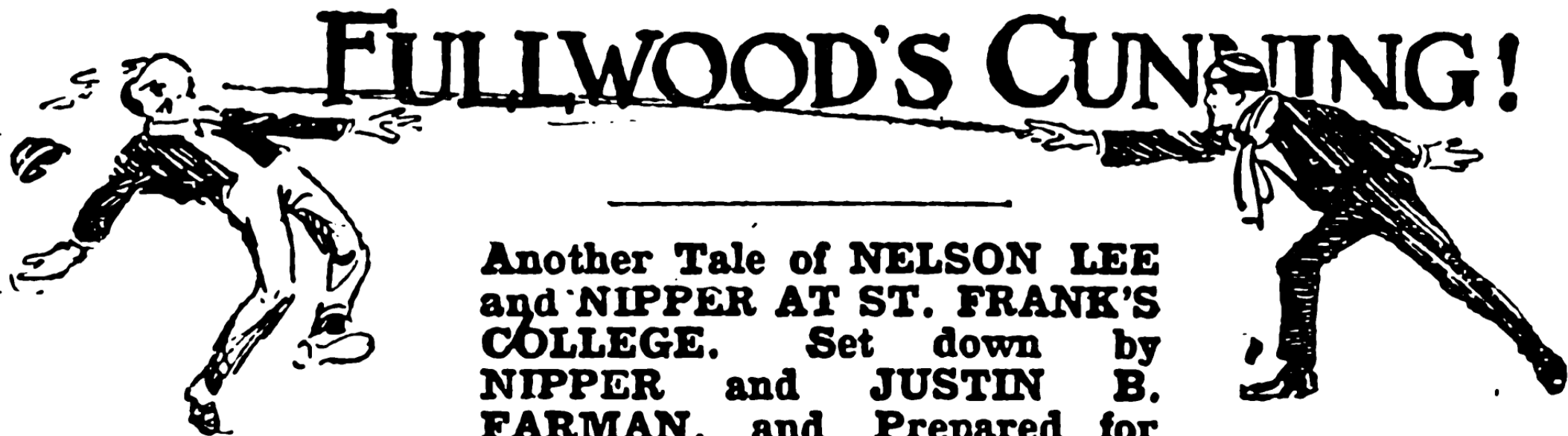
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Another Tale of NELSON LEE
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COLLEGE. Set down by
NIPPER and JUSTIN B.
FARMAN, and Prepared for

Publication by the Author of "Fullwood's Victory," "The Problem of the Copper Frog," "The Messages of Mystery," etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College, to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Secret Society, the Fu Chang Tong, whose hatred they have incurred. Although living in the school in the characters of master and pupil, Nelson Lee and Nipper, nevertheless, find many opportunities to utilise their unique detective ability in various mysterious and adventurous cases.

CHAPTER I.

(Recorded by Nipper.)

HARD LINES ON THE BOY FROM CALIFORNIA.

STUDY C, in the Remove passage at St. Frank's, was looking cosy.

It always looked cosy, as a matter of fact; but this afternoon the fire was blazing with exceptional brightness. Perhaps this was because the whole countryside was in the grip of a severe frost.

By glancing out of the window I could see the snow lying thickly in the Triangle, on the old elms and chestnuts, and on the roofs of the College House and other school buildings.

It was a half-holiday, but football was impracticable, owing to the thick carpet of snow which covered the playing fields. Bob Christine and I had arranged a House match, but this, of course, had been abandoned.

And so I was spending a lazy afternoon in Study C with my two chums, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson.

It was getting near tea-time, but we were all three lounging before the fire, reading, and eating chestnuts as they

roasted. Most of the Remove fellows were occupied in a similar way, but a crowd of fags were engaged in a noisy snow fight outside—Monks versus Fossils. The Ancient House kids were winning, I believe, although I didn't trouble to look. I judged from the yells.

I should have preferred to spend an hour or two with my esteemed guv'nor, Mr. Nelson Lee. But "Mr. Alvington"—to give him his assumed school name—had gone down to Dr. Brett's for a game of billiards. The doctor was a genial, youngish man, and he and Nelson Lee were very friendly.

I laid my book down, and glanced at the clock.

"We shall have to be thinking of tea," I remarked, yawning. "What have we got in the grub line, Tommy? The giddy cupboard's nearly bare, isn't it? I suggest eggs—Mrs. Hake's had a fresh supply in to-day, I believe."

"Anythin' you like, dear fellow," murmured Sir Montie, removing his pince-nez, and polishing them. "I'm not particularly hungry after all these chestnuts, but I'm ready to do my bit—Begad! Is it a raid? Are the beastly Gothas honourin' St. Frank's with a visit?"

There was a certain amount of reason for Montie's remark. A terrific din had suddenly commenced in the passage outside. Yells and laughter and bumps sounded, and I grinned.

"Somebody getting it in the neck," I said. "We don't want to interfere. One of the Nuts, probably. They're always looking for trouble, and finding it. Let's decide on the menu for tea."

The disturbance in the passage didn't last for long. The sounds died away in the direction of the lobby. But as I was getting up from my chair I heard the yell and laughter renewed outside in the Triangle.

And now I was rather curious. It wasn't quite usual for such a disturbance to occur. Somebody was evidently receiving a very severe ragging. Glancing out of the window, I couldn't help grinning. The Remove studies at St. Frank's were on the ground floor, and the snow-cled Triangle was in full sight.

Just outside the window of Study C a number of Removites were engaged in the entertaining task of rolling somebody in the snow. By what I could see, Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D, were the ringleaders of the ragging, but it was quite impossible to recognise the unfortunate victim.

There were other juniors partaking in the rag besides Handforth and Co., and everybody was entering into it with a will. My expression changed somewhat as I watched. This was no ordinary piece of junior horseplay; it was a terrific onslaught, and the fellow who was being attacked simply didn't have a chance.

He was rolled over and over time and again, and when he attempted to rise he was pitched down once more. Snow smothered him from head to foot.

"I say, this is a bit thick!" I exclaimed, frowning. "I'm blessed if I quite like it, you chaps. It rather reminds me of bullying. Handforth and Co. are giving this poor chap the very dickens of a time!"

"Poor chap!" growled Tommy Watson. "I expect he's Fullwood, or one of the rotten Nuts. The poor chap deserves all he's getting, I'll bet. Handy ain't a bully, although he is a silly ass!"

My two chums were looking on with me, and Montie put his head on one side.

"Bogad! It's a bit steep—it is, really!" he remarked. "Dear fellows, I

don't altogether approve. Even Fullwood——"

"It isn't Fullwood!" I interrupted, looking keenly out of the window. "I'm jiggered if I can recognise the fellow with all that snow smothering him—Why, great Scott! It's Farman!"

"Benny, you're mistaken, surely!" exclaimed Montie, wrinkling his brow.

But I wasn't mistaken, as both Tommy and Montie saw the next instant. For the victim had now been allowed to rise, and he was simply being pelted from every quarter with snowballs. He turned about blindly, and at last stumbled and fell.

He was the American junior in the Remove, Justin B. Farman. Now, Farman was a thoroughly decent chap in every way—one of the most good-natured fellows in the Ancient House. Somewhat weak-willed, perhaps, but a really splendid fellow.

I felt myself getting angry.

"Look here, old Farman doesn't deserve a ragging of this sort!" I declared grimly. "Handforth's going it a bit too strong! I'm going out to see what the trouble is. Come on, my sons!"

"You lead, dear boy—we follow!" murmured Sir Montie languidly. "You're Remove skipper, an' it's up to you to assert your authority. I've got an idea that there'll be some frightful trouble before long."

We hurried out into the passage, passed through the lobby, and emerged into the Triangle.

The ragging seemed to be over, and Justin B. Farman was talking furiously with his late tormentors. He and Edward Oswald Handforth were holding a very heated argument. I was angry, for Farman had been treated with a roughness which almost savoured of brutality.

"My dear chap, if you do rotten things of that sort, you've got to be punished!" Handforth was bawling, in his most lordly manner. "We've got to think of the honour of the House——"

"You blamed coyote!" roared Farman furiously. "I guess I don't stand such talk from you. I'll allow you're a real dandy feller when it comes to hot air, Handforth—and you sure reached the limit this time! But hot air don't hurt me any. You've laid hands on me—the hull crowd of you—and I'm goin' to smash blazes out o' this rampin' hoboc!"

"Who're you calling a hoboc?" bel-
lowed Handforth hotly.

"Say, I——"

"What's the trouble here?" I inter-
jected, stepping between Farman and
Handforth. "I saw the whole thing
from my study, Handy, and if you
haven't got a jolly good explanation,
you'll have to answer to me. It strikes
me you were bullying——"

"Bullying!" snorted Handforth.
"Look here, Bennett——"

"Yes, bullying!" I said curtly. "You
instigated this affair, Handforth—that's
obvious. Farman's been treated rot-
tenly, and I want to know why. He's
not the sort of chap to deserve such a
stiff ragging——"

"You clear off, Bennett!" howled
Church.

"Don't interfere!"

"Farman deserved all he got!"

"Buzz off!"

"You don't know anything about the
affair!"

All the juniors were very excited, and
they pressed round in a crowd. For
some reason they were quite against me
—and this, in itself, was quite unusual.
Without being vain, I think I may say
that I was fairly popular in the Remove,
and most of the fellows upheld me in
everything I did.

It was all the more astonishing to see
them standing up for such a well-known
cluffer as Edward Oswald Handforth.
Handforth was all right in the main, but
his high-handed treatment of everything
he undertook invariably led him into
trouble; and his fellow Removites stead-
fastly refused to take him seriously.

It was quite certain they had taken
him seriously this time!

"I'm not interfering—and I do know
something about the affair," I said, look-
ing round at the excited faces. "I saw
it all from my window, and I'm going to
get at the truth. Farman was treated
roughly—too roughly. I'm skipper of the
Remove, and I'm going to get at the
facts."

Handforth smiled pityingly.

"Skipper of the Remove!" he said,
with heavy sarcasm. "If there's one
chap at St. Frank's who ought to be in
that position, it's me! I'm best suited
to be captain, as everybody knows——"

"Rats!" howled a dozen voices.

"Didn't I lead in this business?"
roared Handforth, glaring round.

"Didn't I give Farman the ragging he
asked for? He's all right, generally
speaking. Personally, I rather like him
—but he simply had to be taught a
lesson——"

"Say, you're a fool-ijit, anyways——"
began Farman hotly.

"Oh, stars!" I groaned. "Can't you
dry up for a bit? Speak one at a time,
for goodness' sake. What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you in five words," said
Handforth angrily. "To begin with,
I'm always on the look-out for rotten
behaviour on the part of chaps who pro-
fess to be decent. And if I catch any-
body——"

"Is this what you call five words?" I
broke in. "Handforth, you're a hope-
less ass! Why can't you be brief?"

"I'm a chap of few words!" declared
Handforth firmly. "I always have been
—that's my strong point. I know what
I've got to say, and I say it. Nobody's
ever heard me speak a syllable that was
unnecessary——"

"Or a word that was sensible, dear
boy!" murmured Sir Montie.

"I don't want any of your sneers,"
said Handforth sourly. "This is jealousy
—sheer petty jealousy! I've taught
Farman a lesson, and you can do nothing
but jeer at me. That's all the thanks I
get! I'm blessed if I'll take the trouble
to uphold the honour of the House
another time!"

"You—you fathead!" I roared. "Tell
me what Farman did!"

Handforth waved his hand airily.

"Oh, that's what you want to know, is
it? Well, I'll tell you. I happened to be
going along the Remove passage, when I
saw Farman speaking to that cad Full-
wood. They were laughing——"

"Anything criminal in that?" I asked
warmly.

"My dear ass, they were hobnobbing
—absolutely hobnobbing!" said Hand-
forth firmly. "I suspected things at once
—I'm a keen chap, you know. It doesn't
take me long to spot things. Farman
and Fullwood went into Study A to-
gether. What do you think of that?
Farman went into that cad's study!"

"You've been in Fullwood's study
before now!" said Tommy Watson
pointedly.

"Oh, what's the good of talking?" ex-
claimed Handforth, in the same pitying
tone. "Don't you think I knew what I

was doing? Farman went into Fullwood's study, and a minute later I distinctly heard the chink of money. What did that mean?" he went on triumphantly. "What did that mean—eh?"

"It might have meant a lot of things."

"Oh, don't be potty!" snapped Handforth. "It meant that Farman was gambling with the Nuts. I guessed that in a tick—it doesn't take me long to guess things! I've got brains——"

"Why, you howling ass!" shouted Owen major. "You told us that Farman was gambling and smoking with the Nuts! Do you mean to say you only suspected it? You led everybody to believe that you'd caught Farman red-handed——"

"Well, it was the same thing, wasn't it?" demanded Handforth warmly. "Do you think I haven't got any sense? I know jolly well that the chink of money in Fullwood's study meant gambling——"

"You idiot!" I struck in angrily. "There was no proof in that. I had an idea you'd been acting in your usual high-handed manner, Handforth. You've made a bloomer, you ass. I'll bet Farman can tell us what happened."

The juniors were now pressing round with greater interest, and several of them were looking uncomfortable. They had thoughtlessly taken Handforth's lead, and it seemed as though the mighty Edward Oswald had made one of his usually idiotic mistakes.

Like a sensible person, Justin B. Farman had been saying very little. He presented quite a forlorn spectacle. Snow smothered him from head to foot. His collar was a rag, mud and snow was all down his neck, his face was smeared until he was scarcely recognisable, his well-cut Etous were completely ruined.

"Let's hear what happened, Farman," I said shortly.

The boy from California took a deep breath.

"Waal, I guess you saw most of it, Bennett," he said, keeping his anger back with difficulty. "Mebbe you wondered some? I've been at St. Frank's quite a piece, an' I don't reckon I've been handled like this before. These fellers ain't so much to blame. I guess it's Handforth I'm riled with. Say, I've met a few doggone boobs out West, but

Handforth is jest the biggest guy ever! I'm sure rattled!"

"You've good reason to be 'rattled,' old man," I put in. "But let's get at the truth. Handforth has said that you were hobnobbing and gambling with Fullwood and Co. I don't believe it. In any case, it's no concern of Handforth's—he's got no right to interfere!"

"That's how I'm thanked for upholding the honour of the House!" put in Handforth, with a sniff.

"Shut up, Handy!" I snapped. "Now, Farman, I haven't got any right to ask you for an explanation, and you needn't say a thing unless you wish. But, for your own sake, I should advise you to make matters clear."

Farman nodded, compressing his lips.

"Sure," he agreed. "What happened was this: I was coming along the passage, and Fullwood got around, askin' me if I had a heap of loose dollars. I guess he was needin' change for a five-dollar note—a pound note, you'd call it. Waal, I happened to have the silver, and I went into Fullwood's study to hand it out. I guess that's all. Handforth heard me counting out the coin."

"And that's all?"

"Sure thing!"

"You didn't gamble?"

"Say, I guess that question don't need answering," said the American boy quietly. "Mebbe you remember, Bennett, that I made you a promise? I told you that I'd never git around Fullwood's study for the purpose of playin' the fool. Say, I don't make a promise twice. It ain't quite squar to doubt my word——"

"I'm sorry, old man," I interrupted. "You've said quite enough."

Handforth was looking somewhat sickly, but he attempted to keep a bold front. The other juniors, rather unfeelingly, were grinning hugely. They seemed to see quite a large amount of humour in the situation.

"I say, Farman, we're jolly sorry!" grinned Hubbard. "We did rag you a bit, didn't we? It was Handforth's fault——"

"The silly ass!" chimed in Owen major.

"I guess I don't blame you fellows none," said the American boy, his good nature coming to the surface, in spite of the rough handling he had received. "Handforth got throwin' hot air around—an' you breathed it in. Waal, that was

surely unfortunate—for me! But if Handforth acts squar, and apologises, I'll let the thing drop. I guess I don't hanker after——"

Handforth snorted.

"Apologise!" he exclaimed loftily. "Not me!"

"Look here, Handy, you'd better admit yourself in the wrong!" I said sharply. "Why, you ass, you've made yourself absolutely ridiculous. You deserve a ragging yourself. Be decent, and apologise——"

Handforth was obstinate. He knew very well that he was in the wrong, but it was gall and wormwood for the high and mighty Removite to eat humble pie. He was thoroughly decent, usually, but just now he acted in a manner which earned the disapproval of everybody. Handforth hated singing small.

"I'm not going to apologise!" he shouted hotly. "As a matter of fact, what I said was right! How do we know that Farman was only changing a quid? We've only got his word to go on—and his word ain't any better than mine! He was gambling right enough!"

Farman's eyes blazed.

"Say, I guess you've said enough!" he exclaimed, clenching his fists. "I didn't think you were such an all-fired cad! I was willing to let the matter drop, but you sure need a whole heap of teachin'. We haven't finished yet, Handforth. Thing's'll happen slick—later on!"

"Oh, you're afraid to do anything now?" sneered Handforth.

The American boy went white with anger.

"I guess that's not true," he said quietly. "I'm not a funk—an' most fellers here know it. But scrappin' in the Triangle ain't allowed—an' it's one of my points to keep the school rules. But, say, I'll make you sit up good an' proper before the evening is out. Do you get me? Good an' proper! You'll sure suffer as I've suffered, Handforth!"

And Justin B. Farman, more angry than I'd ever seen him, strode into the Ancient House without another word.

I felt that he was quite justified in being furious. And nearly every other fellow shared my view. Edward Oswald Handforth himself looked stubborn. But he knew that he had deliberately asked for trouble.

He was certainly going to find plenty!

CHAPTER II.

(Set down by Justin B. Farman.)

TROUBLE FOR FULLWOOD.

SAY, if the people who read this are hankering after a swell literary style—well, I guess they'll need to hanker! I've been asked to set down this particular piece, and it's up to me to make the attempt. But don't get guessing that I'm going to write like a fellow who's always at the game. My job is to set down what occurred.

It's going to be a whole heap of trouble—I can sure feel that.

But Justin B. Farman—that's me—don't start a thing unless he's got a fair idea that he's going to finish it. Say, I'm not boasting. A guy who boasts ain't after my style.

Well, when I went into the Ancient House I was just about blazing with fury. It takes a whole heap to make me blaze. Maybe I'm kind of easy going. That's not a crime. But, now and again, a fellow reaches the limit.

I'd always got on well with Handforth. He was quite a decent sort. But this afternoon he had made a fool of me, and a bigger fool of himself. If he had done the right thing, and had apologised, I guess I should have been a heap pleased.

But Handforth had made things worse; he had practically called me a liar. And as I went indoors I shook with anger. Say, I told myself that I'd make pudding of his face; I'd knock it out of shape.

He deserved a thundering big lesson, if any fellow did. I hadn't been treated lightly; led by Handforth, the chars had just about mused me up good and well. I was surely fixed proper.

The fact that my suit was ruined didn't worry me any. I'd got three or four spare suits on hand, and piles of dollars in my pocket. Being the son of a millionaire, finances didn't trouble me a jot. But I was sore in every limb, and Handforth was to blame.

Up in the dormitory I stripped my things off quickly, and then got into a hot bath. I guess it was necessary to wash all over. Snow's all right when it ain't mixed with mud. But snow and mud together ain't exactly calculated to make a fellow's skin cleaner.

Well, that bath sure did me a heap of good.

By the time I was dry and in clean things, I was feeling myself again. And

I suppose it was only natural that my anger should subside. By the time I was fully dressed I grinned.

Maybe I was soft. But I couldn't help feeling just a little sorry for my outburst of anger in the Triangle. I'd told Handforth that I should make him suffer as I had suffered.

Well, I guess that was blamed silly of me.

For the words implied that I should roll him in the snow. That wasn't my intention. Snow-rolling was a rotten game, anyway. Besides, the trick couldn't be done. Handforth was a hefty fellow, and I couldn't very well get busy on the job alone.

No; it would have to be a fight. I was quite prepared to smash Handforth's face into lumps. But, somehow, I didn't feel inclined to do it. Don't get thinking that I'm a funk. I was willing to meet Handforth when and where he liked. If I went under, that would be my misfortune. But I fancied that Handforth would go under first.

At the same time I didn't want trouble. I'm a fellow who likes to be on good terms with everybody—if that's possible. Sometimes it ain't, and then things get going good and plenty.

By the time I was ready to leave the dormitory, I felt that I had acted like a jay. Handforth was a blamed boob, anyway. He just couldn't help it. I guess he was born that way—and that wasn't his fault. He was a mighty fine fellow for putting his foot into things—and he generally put it into the wrong place.

On this occasion he hadn't acted any sillier than usual—only it happened that I'd been the victim of his foolery. There wasn't a junior at St. Frank's who had a better heart than Handforth, of the Remove. He was a fellow who would punch your nose one minute, and lend you his last cent the next. I'd seen Handforth oblige a fellow with cash many a time—and go short because of it. And, as a rule, he forgot to ask for repayment.

Say, it isn't pleasant to be on bad terms with a fellow of that sort. Handforth had his faults—piles of them. About the biggest was that he just hated admitting himself in the wrong.

It seemed to me that something had to be done to square things. Now that I was comfortably clothed, I was anxious to drop the whole matter. But the Re-

movites would have turned on me if I had done that—sure. And so I decided that I would make things right by challenging Handforth to a glove-fight after tea, in the gym.

I felt easier in mind after I had come to this decision. I'll need to make it clear that my own opinion was that Handforth would go under in a knuckle fight. I was quite confident of smashing him up. But I didn't want to. A little punishment with the gloves would be O.K.

Just as I was descending to Study H I remembered that Fullwood owed me a matter of five dollars. I had handed out the change for him, but had been colared by Handforth and Co. before I could pick the currency note from the table. It was best to square the matter at once.

So I turned into Study A, and found Fullwood and Gulliver there. Their other study chum, Bell, was not present. The air was a trifle blue with tobacco smoke, and it kind of disgusted me.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood, as dandified as ever, lolled before the fire with a pink sporting paper in his hand. He put it down hastily as I entered, and scowled. Gulliver threw a freshly lighted cigarette into the fire—the best place for it.

"Why the dickens can't you give us warning?" growled Gulliver tartly.

"What do you want here?" asked Fullwood, before I could reply to the other question. "You seem to have got over your trouble, Farman. Those silly asses mauled you about pretty fairly, didn't they? I saw the entertainment from my window."

I nodded.

"I guess it was a real dandy entertainment—for the onlookers," I said. "But I'm not around here to discuss that, Fullwood. This study don't interest me any. You took that change from me, didn't you?"

"Yes," replied Fullwood shortly. "What about it?"

"I guess you'll be owing me a pound," I said. "Those galoots yanked me out before you could hand it over. We may as well complete the transaction straight away—before they get gay again."

Fullwood stared at me in surprise.

"What's the idea?" he asked deliberately. "Are you trying on a dodge, you rotten sharper? You stuffed the note in your pocket before you left my study

If anybody changes a pound for me, I don't pay twice."

Gulliver giggled, and I turned red and bit my lip. Fullwood's words were calculated to be offensive—and they were. I was real wild. I didn't remember taking the note, and was absolutely certain that I had not touched it. It had been lying on the table, and my fingers hadn't once been within a yard of it.

"Say, Fullwood, you've got a nice way of speaking!" I said calmly. "And I'd be real obliged if you'd stop being funny. I came here for that note—and you'll please me if you'll pay up right here and now."

"My dear chap, I gave it to you," replied Fullwood smoothly.

He turned back to the fire as though the matter had been dismissed. I could scarcely believe that even Fullwood would deliberately try to swindle me in such a barefaced manner. In any case, I don't think he realised the rascality of his conduct. He looked upon it as a good joke.

"Shut the door after you!" grinned Gulliver.

I stepped across, and grabbed Fullwood's shoulder.

"Say, what's the game?" I asked quietly. "That stunt won't work, Fullwood. I don't fancy a joke of this sort. I gave you four half-crowns and some smaller silver, totalling a pound. If you'll think carefully, you'll remember that I didn't take the note in exchange. You'll oblige me by paying."

Fullwood got to his feet, and stared at me.

"As a matter of fact," he said coolly, "you gave me sixpence short, Farman. But I don't take any notice of trifles like that. If you think you're going to get another pound out of me——"

"Another pound!" I cut in sharply. "Say, are you serious?"

"Of course I am!"

"You declare that you paid me?"

"Gulliver was here—he saw you take the note!"

Gulliver nodded.

"Of course you took it, Farman," he said. "You stuffed it into your purse."

I looked at the pair with my anger rising rapidly. But I took my purse from my pocket, and opened it. I guess it didn't matter a hang, anyway. I knew exactly how much I had, and I knew that Fullwood was trying to trick me. It wasn't the loss of the dollars which

worried me—I had a tidy few in my wad. But the idea of being deliberately swindled didn't appeal to me any. I wasn't going to let Fullwood put one over on me.

"Say, it's a bit queer," I remarked. "There don't happen to be anything in my purse except silver. I always keep my notes in a wallet—and it's been upstairs in my box all day. I guess I've only had loose change around me all the time. You've made a mistake, Fullwood. Look inside the purse yourself——"

"My dear kid, I don't want to look," drawled Fullwood. "You've been out of this study for some time—an' you could easily have taken the note out of your purse. These sort of games may be all right in America, but we don't cotton to sharpers in this country!"

My eyes blazed!

Just for a moment I scarcely knew what to do. If Fullwood had merely made a mistake it would have been excusable. But I guess the matter was worse. Fullwood had taken advantage of the situation to keep my money, and was now actually accusing me of attempting to swindle him! It was surely too steep.

"You've called me a sharper, Fullwood!" I said grimly. "Say, I don't want any trouble, but if you've got an ounce of boss-sense you'll just pay up good an' slick. Do you get me? It's not the money I care about—it's the principle of it. Say, you infernal black-guard——"

Fullwood jumped up, his face red with fury.

"Say that again, you little rotter!"

"Sure. You're an infernal black-guard!" I repeated deliberately.

There was a moment's tense silence.

"Smash him!" advised Gulliver, from behind the table. "Chuck him out, Fully!"

"That's just what I am going to do—unless he begs my pardon!" snarled Fullwood, his eyes gleaming. "I'll give you one chance, Farman. Either you apologise to me on the spot, or——"

I banged my fist on the table.

"Say, that high-falutin' talk don't cut no ice!" I snapped. "There's one way out of this position, Fullwood—and I guess you know what that is. You've got to hand me the money you owe me—right now!"

"You fool!" said Fullwood harshly.

"You ought to be in jail!"

"Get!"

I simply gasped out the exclamation, and pushed up my sleeves. Not long ago I said that I was a peace-loving fellow. I guess that was true enough. But I also said that when peace wasn't possible there was a pile of trouble flying around. This was one of the times when that trouble got busy!

"What do you think you're doing?" sneered Fullwood uneasily.

"There's nothin' doin'—yet!" I replied grimly. "Either give me that pound, right now, or pay up after you've had your face ornamented. I guess it's just sweet now, but I'm willin' to add a few decorations. It's up to you to choose!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood laughed.

"You want an answer to that question?" he asked sneeringly.

"Sure!"

"Well—get out of this study!"

"Clear off, you American cad!" chipped in Gulliver.

I didn't move an inch. I knew quite well that Fullwood had said all he meant to say. He intended cheating me out of the money—and I intended just the opposite. My patience was absolutely exhausted.

Fullwood had his hands in his pockets, and was lounging easily on the hearth-rug.

"I'll ask you to put your hands up," I said quietly.

Fullwood laughed.

"I don't fight with low-born cow-boys!" he said coolly.

Say, that just about rattled me good and proper. My right hand came out, and Fullwood received a heavy slap on his cheek. He staggered a little, and was so surprised that he only gasped for a moment. His eyes gleamed evilly, and his face was flushed.

"You—you rotten gutter-brat!" he snarled. "I'll smash you!"

"I guess I'm waitin'—to be smashed!" I panted. "Get right busy!"

Fullwood had queer ideas concerning fighting. He lunged his fist out, and attempted to hack my shin with his boot at the same time. But I stepped aside quickly, and his toe caught the corner of the fender with a crash. And my right fist landed squarely on the Nut's eye.

He went reeling, but gathered himself up in a second.

"Lend a hand, Gulliver, you funk!" he snarled huskily.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Gulliver. "I—I don't want to soil my hands by touching the cad, you know! Let him go, Fully!"

Fullwood was real anxious to let me go, but I wasn't ready—by long chalks. I didn't intend to quit Study A until my fingers closed on the pound note. It was mine, and I wasn't going to be diddled out of it.

I will say that Fullwood had pluck—of a sort. He didn't shiver with fright like Gulliver. Instead, he hurled himself forward at me, and then we began to fight in earnest. Say, it was a dandy scrap.

I'm not saying that I escaped without a bruise. I didn't. Fullwood's fists were hard, and he landed one or two blows which made me gasp. But his fists never reached my face.

On the other hand, I was punishing him heavily. Both his eyes were puffing up, and his nose was already bleeding, and swelling painfully. Leastways, it looked painful. I guess it was a heap sore. Blood was streaming down over his gorgeous waistcoat, but this didn't worry me any. "Tapping the claret" was an everyday occurrence at St. Frank's.

Fullwood staggered about drunkenly, his fury giving way to funk at last. And he backed out of my reach, and caught Gulliver a heavy punch in the side.

"Why don't you help, you rotter?" he snarled furiously.

While he was speaking he thought he would take advantage of me, and tried to deliver a heavy upper-cut. But I stepped aside, and gave him another tap on the nose. At the same second Gulliver rushed round the table, and grabbed me from behind.

"Say, you'd best keep out of this!" I said curtly.

To emphasize my words I twirled round and pushed Gulliver hard. He collapsed in a second, and lay on the floor groaning. He was sure the biggest funk I'd ever struck. But Fullwood wasn't done yet.

"Will you pay up?" I asked.

"Hang you—no!" rapped out Fullwood. "My hat, I'll make you sit up for this, you cad! I'll make you smart!"

"It strikes me that you're the one whose's smartin'!" I said grimly. "Perhaps this'll make you smart a pile more!"

Smack!

For a third time Fullwood's nose received my knuckles. He howled with pain, but pulled himself together, and literally hurled himself at me with the fury of a tiger. He kicked and lashed out savagely, his fists beating the air in a wild manner which proved that he had lost control of himself.

I dealt with him easily.

Just as he was on the point of kicking my shin with terrible viciousness, my two fists thudded upon his face. His guard was so weak that I got through it without trouble. Smack! Smack! Fullwood uttered a howl, fell back, and stumbled headlong over the easy-chair.

He lay on the floor, gasping hoarsely.

"Had enough?" I asked, breathing hard.

"You—you——"

"Can't think of anythin' dandy enough, eh?" I said calmly. "What about that note, you hoboe? I guess I'm fresh, and just dyin' for another scrap. Say, I'd feel good'n mean ef I let you off now——"

"You American cad!" snarled Fullwood. "I'll—I'll pay up!"

"Good. But, say, you've got to admit that you tried to swindle me——"

"Rats to you! I'll give you the pound, and you can clear off," said Fullwood, sitting up, and dabbing his nose tenderly. "But I'll jolly well see that the whole school know that you've robbed me of a pound——"

"Gee whiz! You make me smile—you sure do!" I interrupted calmly. "It seems to me that you're still asking for trouble, Fullwood. That note's mine—and I'm going to have it. Savvy? An' you've got to admit that you've made a mistake over it. Guess that's puttin' it just sweetly!"

"I won't——"

I stepped over to Fullwood as he rose to his feet, and he backed away hastily. I was real angry, and he could see I was squaring up in a business-like manner. Fullwood had had just about all he could carry in the punch line. He shrank away from me with a scowl.

"I—I made a mistake, Farman!" he muttered, speaking the words with an effort. "It was your pound, after all. Here you are, you beast. Take it, an' clear out of this study!"

Fullwood snatched a pound note from his pocket, and I took it without a word. The value of the note was nothing

to me; and, indeed, I decided that I would post it off to the Red Cross Fund that very evening. Fullwood had a rotten tongue, and he was capable of spreading nasty stories. By sending the note away, I stopped that sort of thing.

"This note in going to be posted to the Red Cross Fund to-night," I remarked, with my hand on the door-knob. "You're sure a cunning feller, Fullwood. I'd advise you to let the matter drop—right now!"

Fullwood nearly choked with rage.

"By Jove!" he muttered fiercely.

"The matter isn't going to be dropped yet! I'll pay you out for this, you rotten outsider! By gad! I'll make you wish you'd never come to this school!"

I smiled, and passed out of the study. Ralph Leslie Fullwood's words didn't have the slightest effect upon me. I guess I could afford to ignore his foolish threats.

And I departed from Study A—satisfied.

There's a kind of idea lingering round my mind that Fullwood wasn't satisfied any. He certainly didn't appear to be!

CHAPTER III.

(Nipper resumes the narrative.)

HANDFORTH CLIMBS DOWN.

SIR LANCELOT MONTGOMERY TREGELLIS-WEST sighed.

"Dear fellows, what's the good of standin' here?" he complained. "It's tea-time, you know, an' there are frightful draughts blowin' through this lobby. Leave the notice-board until afterwards."

"Sha'n't be a minute, Montie," I replied shortly.

"Don't worry, ass!" said Watson.

Sir Montie sighed again, and didn't worry any more. He and Tommy Watson and I were standing in the lobby, looking at the notices on the big green-baize-covered board. At least, Tommy and I were looking.

It was nearly tea-time, and quite dark outside. We had been out to the little tuck-shop in the Triangle, presided over by Mrs. Hake; and had returned laden with new-laid eggs, cakes, and other edible articles. Tea, in fact, was rather late, but this was nothing unusual. Tea-time was never exactly fixed—unless, of course, we had tea in Hall. And that

never occurred unless a fellow was stony. On the way in Tommy had noticed that there were some fresh announcements on the board, and we had paused to read them. One concerned the postponement of a first-eleven match; another was connected with school bounds, and so forth. As Montie remarked, there was nothing urgent, and we were simply wasting time.

Except for ourselves the lobby was deserted, nearly all the fellows being in their studies, preparing tea, or partaking of it. But as we were about to turn into the Remove passage, Handforth emerged from the cloak-room. He was looking very thoughtful, and somewhat worried.

I regarded Handforth severely.

I hadn't said anything to him since the affair in the Triangle, a short while before. I had been quite disgusted, in fact. Handforth's behaviour had been pretty rotten, and most of the fellows condemned him.

"Let's go along to tea," I said shortly.

Tommy and Montie followed me as I commenced walking across the lobby.

"I say, Benny——"

It was Handforth's voice, and it was strangely subdued. I turned round and looked at him.

"Well?" I said curtly.

"I say, don't speak like that!" complained Handforth, looking miserable. "Hang it all, I—I——That is, there's nothing to be ratty about. Don't be a cad, Bennett, for goodness' sake!"

I looked at Handforth grimly.

"You're a fine chap to say that!" I exclaimed. "If anybody's a cad, Handy, you are. You did Farman a grave injustice, and then deliberately insulted him afterwards. You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

Handforth glared.

"Look here, you rotter——" He paused, and the glare disappeared from his eyes. "I'm not sure that you ain't right, Benny," he went on plaintively. "I—I do feel a—a bit ashamed."

My feelings underwent a change.

"Oh, if you feel like that, it makes a difference," I said. "You're a decent chap, Handforth, and I don't like to see you doing anything rotten. It's up to you to beg Farman's pardon, you know."

Handforth nodded miserably.

"Yes; I'm—I'm going to do it," he said, with an effort.

Sir Montie clung to Tommy's shoulders.

"Dear fellow, give me some smelling-salts!" he said weakly.

"Smelling-salts!" said Watson, staring. "What for, you ass!"

"Dear Tommy, I'm feeling faint—frightfully faint!" murmured Montie, rolling his eyes dazedly. "I must have somethin' to revive me—I must, really! Did you hear what Handforth said? Ain't it amazin'? The dear boy is goin' to apologise! Who said that miracles never happen nowadays?"

I grinned, and Handforth shifted his feet uncomfortably.

"Oh, I say, don't pile it on!" he growled.

"Dear fellow, you shouldn't spring these things so suddenly," said Tregellis-West, eyeing the unfortunate Handforth through his pince-nez with a critical twist of his head.

"It's a record for you to apologise, ain't it? I wasn't aware that you knew how to do it, begad!"

"Look here, you tailor's dummy——"

"Peace, peace, children!" I commented. "Montie, don't be a bigger ass than you can help. If you go on in that way you'll rub Handy the wrong way again. He's willing to do the right thing now, so don't laugh at him."

"Benny boy, I stand corrected!" murmured Sir Montie contritely.

Handforth grinned sheepishly.

"Of course, it's an act of grace on my part, I know," he said. "By begging Farman's pardon I shall be doing him a favour—but it's best to get the thing settled. I suppose I was in the wrong, strictly speaking. These things will happen, now and again. Goodness knows, it's not often I'm in the wrong! Nobody can truthfully say that I make bloomers!"

We all grinned.

"Of course not," I said soothingly. "We all know you, Handy. You're a bit of an ass—but you're a decent ass. If you're going to apologise to Farman, I should advise you to do it straight away."

"That's what I am going to do," said Handforth. "Hang it all, I don't want to fight him. It would be potty. He's a good chap, and I suppose I went a bit too far. I'll admit that."

"It's like a fairy tale, dear boys," murmured Tregellis-West. "It reminds me of a dream I had, begad! Here's Handforth admittin' that he's wrong, an' tellin' us that he went too far. Ain't it wonderful?"

"Oh, dry up, West," growled Handforth. "If there's one good point about me——"

"Is there?" asked Montie, in surprise.

"Is there what?"

"One good point about you, dear boy?"

Handforth grinned weakly.

"I'm not going to have a row with you, West," he said. "But you might ring off, you know! If there's one thing I always admire, it's to see a chap do the right thing when he's in the wrong. That's me. It's not often that I make mistakes, but when I do——"

"Yes, we know all about that," I interrupted. "But what's the idea, Handforth? What have you got your overcoat on for? Farman's not outside, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is."

"Why, it's tea-time," said Tommy Watson. "You'll find Farman in Study H, with Owen major and Canham."

Handforth looked gloomy.

"He ain't," was his reply. "Farman's waiting for me behind the gym!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy.

Both Montie and I chuckled, too. Handforth's uneasy attitude was now explained. Farman was evidently on the warpath, and had requested Handforth to meet him behind the gymnasium—the historic meeting spot for fights. All minor disputes were settled, with or without gloves, behind the gym.

"My hat! Farman must be 'rattled'!" I grinned. "Do you mean to say that he's waiting out there in the darkness, to scrap with you?"

Edward Oswald nodded uneasily.

"Yes, the silly idiot," he replied. "Five o'clock was the time he mentioned. I don't suppose he thought it would be dark. But the sky's cloudy, you know—more snow coming. My goodness, there goes five! Farman's a queer ass, sending me notes like that!"

"Sending you notes?" I repeated curiously.

"Yes; a note, anyhow. The fathead seems to be in earnest, too," said Handforth. "But I'm going to apologise, and settle the thing. Mind you, if he cuts up

rusty, and wants a scrap, I'm ready. He'll only have himself to blame for getting a thundering licking. But I shall give him a chance!"

"How obligin'!" murmured Montie. "You don't, by any chance, suspect that you'll get a licking yourself, Handy?"

Handforth waved his hand as airily as ever.

"Me?" he said ungrammatically. "A licking? My dear ass, it would take a better chap than Farman to lick me, I can tell you! If it comes to blows, Farman will have to take the consequences. But I don't want to hurt him. I'm not anxious for him to go into the sanny for a week. And so, for his sake—solely for his sake, mind you—I'm going to beg his pardon."

I chuckled.

"Of course it's for Farman's sake," I replied sweetly. "We all understand that, Handforth. But what were you saying about a note? You don't mean to say that Farman has sent you a written challenge?"

"That's it; and a jolly queer one, too," said Edward Oswald. "I was in my study alone—Church and McClure, as you know, were dropped on by old Crow's feet this morning, and he detained 'em from four till five. Well, I was in the study, feeling pretty rotten, when I heard somebody outside the door, and then saw a paper lying just inside. It was the note from Farman."

"Pushed under the door?" I asked curiously.

"Yes. Queer, wasn't it?"

"Thundering queer!" agreed Tommy Watson. "What the dickens was his idea? And what was in the note, Handy? Let's have a squint at it!"

"I chucked it in the fire," said Handforth. "No good keeping it lying about. In fact, Farman advised me to burn it. He just said that he would be waiting for me behind the gym at five o'clock exactly, and threatened to call me a funk before everybody if I didn't turn up. Of course, I'm going to turn up. And I shall have to buzz off at once! It's gone five."

Handforth moved away towards the main door.

"Hold on!" I said. "It looks to me as if Farman's in a bit of a paddy. It may come to a scrap, after all. I'll be your second, Handforth, and Tommy can be Farman's. Montie will look on."

"Oh, it won't come to a fight!"

"I'm not so sure of that, dear boy," said Sir Montie. "If I was a bettin' fellow, I should lay odds on the scrap comin' off. We'll come along an' see fair play. Tea will have to wait. But you'd better get rid of those eggs, Benny——"

"Don't trouble to come!" interrupted Handforth. "As a matter of fact, Farman asked me to go alone. I'd like you to come, of course——"

"If Farman says that, we'll allow you to go to the slaughter unaccompanied," I said cheerfully. "Take my advice, Handy, and don't ride the high horse. Rub Farman the right away, and then invite him to tea."

Handforth nodded, but he didn't look very hopeful.

And as Tommy and Montie and I turned towards the Remove passage, we little guessed that Edward Oswald Handforth was to meet with a very surprising adventure out in the pitchy dark Triangle.

CHAPTER IV.

(*Nipper continues.*)

A DEED OF THE DARKNESS!

"**B**EGAD, it's comin' down, dear fellows," said Sir Montie languidly.

I chuckled as I sipped my tea.

"Snow usually does come down, Montie," I remarked; "but it looks as though we're in for another big downfall. My hat, listen to it!"

The time was just twenty minutes to six, and tea in Study C was nearly over. I and my chums were taking things easily over the last cup or two, and for some time past we had heard the pattering of snowflakes upon the window-panes.

The fresh downfall had commenced at about a quarter-past five—soon after we had left Handforth.

I leaned back in my chair, and pulled the window-blind aside.

"By Jingo," I exclaimed, "it's jolly thick!"

The snow simply smothered the panes, being driven by a strong wind. I could see the flakes whirling round in dizzy eddies, coming like a myriad ghosts out of the darkness.

"Thank goodness we're nice an' cosy," observed Sir Montie, placing his feet luxuriously upon the fender. "D'you know, I always feel a bit mean an' selfish when it's snowin' like this."

"Selfish?" asked Tommy, stirring his tea. "Why?"

"Dear boy, we're comfortable an' warm," explained Tregellis-West gravely. "An' yet there must be lots an' lots of people out in the snow, you know, strugglin' against the elements an' havin' a frightfully rotten time. I always feel sorry for everybody like that, begad."

I smiled as I turned back from the window.

"My dear chap, you mustn't make yourself miserable on that account," I said. "Some people like being out in the snow, and others are forced to be—doctors and postmen, and such like. And don't forget the Tommies——"

Our little discussion was interrupted by the appearance of two troubled youths at the door. They were McClure and Church, of Study D. They glanced round the room as though in search of somebody or something.

"Sorry!" I said. "Bread's all gone, and butter's scarce——"

"We're not looking for grub," explained McClure. "That ass, Handforth, has mooned off somewhere, and we can't find him. We've searched the whole blessed house. And he hasn't had his tea yet. I expect the idiot's over in the College House."

"Hasn't he slaughtered Farman yet?" I asked.

"I reckon Farman ought to have slaughtered Handy!" growled Church. "Of all the asses, he's about the biggest. I'm fed up with Handy! He ought to have apologised to Farman for that affair this afternoon——"

"But they were going to fight behind the gym," put in Watson. "They've come in, surely? That was at five o'clock."

The two Removites came in and closed the door.

"Church and I were in the Form-room from four till five," said McClure. "When we went to our study, we expected to find Handforth there with tea all ready. Instead, we found nothing. The fire was nearly out, and the study was as cold as an icicle. So we got tea ready ourselves. And Handforth hasn't been near. What's that you were saying about a fight behind the gym?"

I explained, and Church and McClure grinned.

"Well, he asked for it—that's one thing," said Church. "A licking now and again does Handy good. If it came to a scrap, I'll bet Farman got the best

of it. But they can't be going at it all this time!"

I looked thoughtful. Surely Handforth and Farman were not fighting in the snowstorm. I concluded that they had gone into the gym, and were waiting for the snow to cease.

But this explanation didn't satisfy me. It wasn't probable that the two juniors would stop out in the gym just because of a snowstorm. I began to suspect that they were having a really serious fight. Quite alone, they would be hammering away at one another without the slightest interruption. And a really determined fight can continue for an hour easily—especially if the combatants are well matched. There was scarcely anything to choose between Farman and Handforth as fighting men.

I got up from the table briskly.

"It looks to me as though the asses are still fighting," I said. "We'd better go along and make certain. We've done our tea, anyhow."

"Fightin' in the snow?" asked Montie sceptically.

"No; in the gym, I should think," I replied. "Come on, my bucks! Here's a chance for you to get rid of that selfish feeling, Montie. If you go out into the cold, dreary snow yourself, you won't be mean, will you?"

Tregellis-West grinned urbanely.

"I'm willin'," he replied. "Anythin' to oblige. An' I'm rather anxious about Farman and Handforth, you know. They're scrappin' one another until they drop. That's been done often enough. They'll get into a frightful row!"

There was little hope of arriving in time to stop the fight, for it must have been proceeding for well over half an hour; but we should probably be successful in stopping the combatants before they did themselves any serious damage. If Handforth and Farman had quarrelled really seriously, there was no telling what might have happened; and, judging by the note which Handforth had received, Farman was intent on doing as much harm as he possibly could. Handforth, being an obstinate bounder, would certainly fight with pluck and endurance if goaded to it. Everybody knew that the high and mighty Handforth had plenty of grit.

We left Study C in a group, and met nobody in the passage. We had only paused to put our caps on, and plunged out into the snow and darkness.

The flakes were whirling down thickly,

and the lights of the College House could hardly be seen on the other side of the Triangle. Except for the wind, there was a strange, deadened stillness about everything. There's always this effect when snow is falling heavily.

The white blanket lay thick upon the ground, and the air was intensely cold. Since the fall had commenced, however, the temperature had risen a few degrees. This was only natural.

"The ass!" muttered McClure, as we plunged through the snow. "Oh, the hopeless fathead! There's never any telling what the dickens Handforth will do next! Church, old man, we shall have to shove Handy in chains!"

"He ought to be shoved in a lunatic asylum!" grunted Church.

By the time we reached the gym, we were all rather white, for the snow was clinging. The gymnasium was a building by itself, and at this hour of the evening it was usually deserted. And now we saw that there were no lights gleaming from the shaded windows. There were two doors—an outer leading into a lobby and a smaller door beyond.

We all passed in, and I switched on the electric lights. One glance, however, was sufficient to tell us that the gym was quite empty and deserted. Farman and Handforth were not scrapping here, and there was no sign of their having been in the place, either.

"Surely they can't be behind, in the dip?" I said thoughtfully. That's where Farman asked Handforth to meet him. But they wouldn't be fighting in this giddy snowstorm!"

Sir Montie shook his head sagely.

"Dear boy, there's no tellin'," he observed. "When two fellows get punchin' one another's heads, nothin' short of an earthquake 'll stop 'em. Begad, I'm rather amused."

I don't think Tregellis-West was amused, really. If Handforth and Farman were really fighting out in the snow, it would be a battle in earnest, and we lost no time in making sure.

We were all relieved when we turned the corner of the gym and found the little hollow at the back of it completely deserted. We could see nothing, of course, but there was no sound of any sort.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Church. "We've come on a fool's errand, after all. I expect we shall find the idiots in the House somewhere. Awfully sorry to have dragged you fellows out!"

"You ought to be sorry, too!" growled Watson. "I'm smothered——"

"Hold on! Keep quiet a minute!" I interjected sharply.

I fancied I had heard a sharp noise, but wasn't quite sure of it. It's always easy to imagine things when you're half expecting them.

"Dear Benny, I'm shiverin'——"

"Shiver in silence, then, you ass!" I snapped.

Montie sighed, and all was still for a moment or two; and then, quite distinctly, came a very curious, muffled gurgle. It was an extraordinary sound, and somehow it sent a kind of shiver down my spine. I saw my companions looking at one another in a rather scared kind of way. The gloom was not so deep now that we had got accustomed to it.

"Did you hear anything?" I said sharply.

"Rather!" said Tommy. "A kind of——of groan."

"My goodness!" muttered Church, with chattering teeth.

"Hold still a minute!" I went on. "Farman—Handforth! Are you asses anywhere there?"

The only reply was a repetition of the uncanny sound.

"Yes, there's something down there," I said briskly. "Come on, you chaps! We must have a look. Who's got some matches? Oh, it's all right! I've got my electric-torch on me."

This torch was a very small article, and I nearly always made a point of carrying it with me. On scores of occasions I had proved the use of so doing. I fetched it out quickly and switched it on. The battery wanted renewing, but it was still capable of giving a decent light.

The beam shot out dazzlingly upon the snow. We all plunged down into the dip, which was shaped into the form of a shallow cup. In spite of the recent amount of snow which had fallen, I saw at a glance that there had been many footprints in the old mass of lying snow. The fresh downfall had nearly obliterated the marks, but not quite.

"Anybody here?" called out McClure.

Another gurgle followed, and it now came from a spot within a dozen feet of us. I switched my light round, and then gave a gasp. The snow was moving, as though something underneath was trying to get out. And then we saw a human head and shoulders. Kicking feet were also visible.

"What the deuce——"

I broke off abruptly, and rushed to the spot, the others following me; and in a few seconds we made an extremely startling discovery. It was Handforth who lay half buried in the snow! His face was almost completely covered by a thick woollen muffler, and it was tied so tightly that speech was impossible.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, bending over him. "What the thunder can this mean?"

"It's serious, dear boy," said Sir Montie—"appallin'ly serious!"

Sir Montie wasn't far wrong, for Handforth's condition seemed to be grave. The other juniors were too startled to say anything at all.

Poor Handforth was lying helpless. His arms were secured to his sides by stout cords, and his ankles were bound. He had been lying fully exposed to the snowstorm, and was nearly frozen stiff with cold.

His face and hands were blue, and he was quite unable to speak when we questioned him.

"We shall have to get him indoors as quickly as possible," I exclaimed, taking command of the situation. "Church, you buzz off in advance, and tell Mr. Crowell. We can't keep this to ourselves; it's too serious. Handforth will have to go into the sanatorium—that's certain."

Church hurried away without a word; he was too startled to say much. Montie and Tommy and McClure helped me to rip the cords from the unfortunate Handforth, and then we carried him bodily out of the hollow, and round the gym.

The exercise warmed us up, and, incidentally, warmed Handforth, too. He was just able to speak before there was any sign of Mr. Crowell.

"Oh, the cad—the cad!" muttered Handforth. "Farman did this! He tried to kill me—to freeze me to death——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handforth!" I interjected sharply. "You don't mean to say that Farman tied you up in that rotten way——"

"He did—he did!" said Handforth in a hoarse whisper.

I looked at Montie and the others in a state of alarm. Could it possibly be true? Had Farman committed this terrible outrage? There was no time to speculate, for just then we heard Mr. Crowell coming across the Triangle,

and he soon appeared from amidst the snowflakes.

"My boy—my poor boy!" exclaimed the Form-master concernedly. "Church has told me an extraordinary story, and I really cannot believe it. I presume you fell in the snow——"

"Farman did it, sir!" muttered Handforth chatteringly.

"We found him behind the gym, sir!" exclaimed McClure, his voice shrill with anxiety and fear. "Oh, he was nearly dead with the cold—bound hand and foot, with a muffler round his face!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Crowell. "This is appalling—appalling! Upon my soul, I can scarcely believe it! Bring Handforth in at once, boys; he must go straight into the school hospital!"

We carried the half-frozen Handforth across the Triangle, and it was not so very long before he was wrapped in warm blankets, attended by Mrs. Poulter, the matron. The startling news had not got round yet, for Church had not met anybody on his way to inform "old Crowsfeet"—in other words, Mr. Crowell.

Somehow or other, Sir Montie and Tommy and I and Church and McClure were all in the sanatorium, waiting to hear the verdict. Mr. Crowell had not dismissed us, as we had feared. Probably he was too agitated to think of such a minor matter. In fact, he gave us permission to enter the little ward as soon as Handforth was snugly in bed.

"Is it serious, sir?" asked Church in a whisper.

"I don't think so, my boy," said Mr. Crowell. "Handforth will certainly develop a severe cold; but he is sturdily built and has a splendid constitution. I do not think it will be anything worse than a cold."

"Thank goodness!"

"It is indeed a matter for thankfulness that the poor boy is not really harmed," continued Mr. Crowell. "But how did this occur? Is it possible that Handforth was the victim of an outrage by fellow-schoolboys? I cannot believe it; it is too dreadful!"

Mrs. Poulter came across to us.

"Master Handforth wishes to speak to you, sir," she said. "He is quite capable of speaking now, and I am sure that by the morning he will be nearly himself. There is no sign of anything serious resulting, sir."

"Shall I send for Dr. Brett——"

"Oh, no, sir," replied the matron at once. "We don't need the doctor. Master Handforth will get over it very quickly. But if he had been lying in the snow very much longer the result might, indeed, have been very grave."

Mr. Crowell nodded.

"Your words are reassuring, Mrs. Poulter," he said. "I'm thankful that Handforth was found in time. And now I must hear what he has to say. Yes, boys, you may come to the bedside if you choose."

There was really no reason why we shouldn't. It wasn't as though Handforth was in a serious condition. He looked groggy, certainly, but nothing to be worried about. This, however, didn't lessen the guilt of the fellow who had perpetrated the outrage. If we hadn't found Handforth when we did, there might have been a different ending to the affair.

"It was jolly decent of you chaps to dig me out like that," exclaimed Handforth gratefully, and in rather husky tones. "I thought I was done for, and no mistake. Of course, I expect I should have called attention sooner or later; but you helped a lot. It was decent of you—thundering decent."

"Same old Handforth!" murmured Sir Montie.

"But tell us what happened, my boy," said Mr. Crowell gently.

"It was Farman who did it, sir," replied Handforth, his eyes beginning to blaze. "The—the rotten ruffian! It's a wonder I wasn't half killed. Farman deliberately tried to freeze me up——"

"Come, come," interjected Mr. Crowell sharply. "You mustn't speak like that, Handforth. "Indeed, I find it very difficult to believe that Farman had any hand in the affair whatever."

"It's true, sir," persisted Handforth hoarsely. "He asked me to go out behind the gym. We—we had a little dispute to settle. I went out there, and it was just beginning to snow. As I dropped down the dip I stumbled a bit, and slithered over. And then, as I was rising, Farman dashed up and threw a rope over my head and shoulders, and drew it tight. That's just what he would do; he knows all about lassoing and all that sort of thing."

"My dear boy, you must have been mistaken——"

"I wasn't, sir!" said Handworth

warmly. "Do you think I don't know Farman's accent. It was dark, of course, but he spoke to me, and said that he was going to pay me out 'good and proper.' Then he flung the muffler over my head so that I couldn't yell, and tied my feet up."

"And left you there in the snow?" asked Mr. Crowell in a hard voice.

"I think he went at once, sir. I couldn't see because the muffler was right over my eyes at the start. I worked it down a bit afterwards. I could only roll about and jostle from side to side. My hat! I've never been so cold in all my giddy life!"

Mr. Crowell stroked his chin grimly.

"But the whole thing is so pointless—so terrible," he exclaimed. "Why should Farman commit this basely malicious act?"

"Oh, that's easy enough," put in Tommy Watson quickly. "Farman and Handforth had had a row, and they were going to fight. Farman was waiting behind the gym.; we all saw that. But we didn't think he was waiting with a rope!"

"Let me hear the full facts," said Mr. Crowell quietly. "Conceal nothing, boys. Do not fear that you will be accused of 'sneaking.' In an affair of this sort it is essential that every fact should be brought to light."

The Form-master was quite right there. And, as a matter of fact, the question of sneaking never arose. Mr. Crowell knew practically everything, and nothing we said could have made any difference to the result. And if Farman had done the deed he thoroughly deserved extremely severe punishment.

I was furious. I had never suspected Farman of such extraordinary maliciousness. He had reason to be wild with Handforth. But an ordinary scrap would have settled matters. To have deliberately set a trap for Handforth revealed unthought-of brutality on the American junior's part.

He had lured Handforth behind the gym., and had then committed the outrage. Naturally, Handforth had not been prepared for such a sudden attack; and Farman had known that well enough. Everything had been planned with great cunning.

"You say that you received a note from Farman?" asked Mr. Crowell. "You had better give it to me, Handforth."

"I burnt it, sir," replied the patient. "You see, he asked me to—"

"Indeed—indeed!" interrupted the Form-master. "The reason for that is obvious. Farman did not wish to leave any evidence of his guilt. But the boy must have been mad. He must surely have known that you would tell the truth?"

"I don't know, sir," said Handforth. "It seems as though he went off his rocker for the time being. No sane chap would have gone for me like that. It was Farman right enough; all the facts prove that. Besides, he spoke to me."

"But you didn't actually see him?" I put in keenly.

"Oh, hang it all, how could I see him in the dark?"

"The point is of very minor importance, Bennett," put in Mr. Crowell. "It is quite clear that Farman is responsible, and he shall suffer very severely for the dastardly trick. I intend to take Farman before the Headmaster without any further delay."

And Mr. Crowell left the bedside and moved towards the door. Tregellis-West and I followed. McClure and Church remained by Handforth's bed. There was evidently very serious trouble in store for Justin B. Farman.

CHAPTER V.

(Justin B. Farman tells what happened in the Head's study.)

ACCUSED!

O WEN major grinned. "You're a decent chap, Farman," he remarked. "I had an idea that Handforth was wrong over that Fullwood business. After that pasting you gave Fullwood the chaps won't believe anything rotten about you, anyhow!"

"You might have called us," said Canham, collecting up the tea-things. "It's something unusual to see Fullwood's face all 'mussed up,' as you put it."

I smiled.

"I guess you'll see his face before long," I said uneasily. "I've got a few bruises myself, I'll allow, but Fullwood's a sure dandy picture. But, say, don't get gassin' any."

"You don't want us to say anything?" asked Owen.

"Waal, I figger it would be rather a



Fullwood and Co. wait for their victim.—(See page 15.)

good joke if the fellers got guessin' among themselves," I replied. "Nobody knows about that little affair except you and I. It was a blamed rotten truth to get out about Fullwood's swindlin' lay-out——"

"What about Handforth?" grinned Canham. "That's another fight on your hands, old son. Handforth's a hefty chap, you know."

"Gee! I'm tired of Handforth," I said impatiently. "I ain't got no use for a feller who writes me a note, makin' me go on a fool's errand. Say, when I hit his trail I'll sure give him a few details concerning his character——"

Tap!

"Come in, ass!" called out Owen major cheerily.

The door opened, and Mr. Crowell entered. Hanging around, behind, I saw Bennett and two other Remove fellows. I jumped up, and so did Owen and Canham.

"I'm awfully sus-sorry, sir!" stammered Owen. "I—I didn't know it was you——"

"I quite understand, my boy," said the Form-master gravely. "Farman, you are to come with me at once to the Headmaster's study."

I started, and wondered if Fullwood had been gassing.

"I guess I'm surprised, sir," I said. "It's not my business to ask why I'm bein' taken to the Head, but I'm real interested——"

"You wretched boy!" interjected Mr. Crowell coldly. "Have you the impertinence to profess innocence?"

"Innocence, sir?" I asked. "Innocence of what?"

"Didn't you play that rotten trick on Handforth?" demanded Bennett from behind.

"Keep quiet, my boy, please," said the Form-master sternly. "It is useless arguing here. The Headmaster must be acquainted with all the facts without delay."

"Say, I'm just longing to hear what's wrong," I said quietly. "I don't know anything about Handforth, sir. I guess I haven't seen him since this afternoon. Not so long ago I was searching around for him myself——"

"How dare you!" rapped out Mr. Crowell. "How dare you adopt this attitude, Farman? It is lucky indeed that your rascally conduct has had no serious result. But, I assure you, you

might have been responsible for Handforth's death!"

I stared in amazement.

"Gosh! I'm sure fogged!" I declared. "Believe me, sir, I haven't seen Handforth since I parted from him in the Triangle this afternoon. There were a lot of fellers around, and they saw me go on——"

"We saw you then," put in Bennett. "Haven't you seen Handforth since? Didn't you write him a note, Farman?"

I almost gasped.

"Waal, gee! That's qucer," I exclaimed. "It was Handforth who wrote me a note! Say, Owen and Canham saw it!"

Mr. Crowell looked rather astonished, and we were all a heap bewildered. Things needed sorting out some.

"What nonsense are you talking, Farman?" asked the Form-master curtly. "Handforth has positively stated that you wrote him a message, requesting him to join you behind the gymnasium——"

"Say, that's wrong," I broke in quietly. "I guess I haven't written Handforth a single line!"

"Upon my soul! How can you stand there and allow such base falsehoods to pass between your lips?" rapped out Mr. Crowell angrily. "Do not dare to deny this charge, boy! You not only wrote Handforth a note, but you sprang upon him in a most dastardly fashion, rendered him helpless, and left him, bound and muffled in the snow!"

I gasped in earnest this time.

"Gee whiz!" I panted. "I guess I'm all muddled!"

"You may well be muddled, Farman," said Mr. Crowell angrily. "It seems to me that you are deliberately saying these things in order to make confusion. You will do yourself no good by such clumsy tactics."

"I think it's only fair that you should listen to me, sir," I said. "You've accused me of an action which only a ruffian would perform. I guess that hurts—some. I'd like to get matters straight."

"Perhaps we can help you, Farman," said Owen major. "I don't think Farman did such an awful thing as you say, sir," he added, turning to Mr. Crowell. "Why, he's been with us, having tea, for a long time past. And he certainly did receive a note from Handforth."

There was no question of a meeting behind the gym, though."

Mr. Crowell pursed his lips.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he said uncertainly. "Heaven knows I have no wish to accuse you wrongfully, Farman. Let me see this note you speak of."

"Sure, sir," I said readily.

I bent over the table, and took up a sheet of paper which had been lying there. Of course, I don't reckon it's necessary for me to add that my story was just the truth. I'd sure be a guy to set down a pack of falsehoods in this statement. I didn't know a thing what had happened to Handforth.

I handed the note to Mr. Crowell, and he read it aloud. It went like this:

"We've got to settle things, Farman. Be at the gate leading into the playing fields at five o'clock exactly. You'll find me there. Don't fail to turn up, because I shall be waiting. Things have got to be squared."

"E. O. HANDFORTH."

"This is very strange," said Mr. Crowell, looking at me over the tops of his glasses. "This note was certainly written by Handforth. Did you go to the playing fields gate, Farman?"

"I guess so, sir."

"Well?"

"Handforth wasn't there, sir," I replied steadily. "I waited a bit, but the snow was just pilin' down in heaps. So I figgered that Handforth had given it up, and I came in and made inquiries for him. Nobody seemed to know where he was, so I came to tea."

"H'm! It is most extraordinary—most extraordinary!" said the Form-master, biting his lip. "And yet Handforth positively declared—One moment. Why was this note written? Why couldn't Handforth speak to you personally? You are both in the same House."

"That puzzled me, sir," I replied.

"And why did you write a note to Handforth—"

"I haven't written a word, sir," I stated quietly.

"Come, come! Somebody is prevaricating," interjected Mr. Crowell sharply. "I can hardly think that Handforth told me a pack of lies for the purpose of getting you into trouble, Farman. Church and McClure also bore witness to the fact that you sent a note—that you

delivered it by slipping it under the door."

"My hat! That's how this one was delivered!" exclaimed Canham.

"Oh, indeed?" said Mr. Crowell. "Upon my soul, this is a most extraordinary affair. Were you here when the note came?"

"No, sir. Farman was alone."

"Ah! Then you have no actual proof that the paper was slipped beneath the door?"

"We believe Farman, sir," said Owen major quietly. "He showed it to us as soon as we came in—and went out a few minutes afterwards."

"Where had you gone to?" asked Mr. Crowell, looking at Owen.

"Why, Gulliver called us out for some reason," replied Owen. "He wanted to buy some sugar off us for tea, that's all. We thought it was something important until we got to Study A."

"So you were alone when the note came, Farman?" said the Form-master keenly. "At what time did you go to the playing fields gate?"

"Why, at five o'clock," I replied.

"How long were you absent?"

"I guess I didn't look at the clock—"

"You left the study at about ten to five, Farman," chimed Canham, "and you came back at a quarter-past."

"By Jingo!" ejaculated Dick Bennett, with a whistle.

"Why did you make that exclamation, Bennett?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply.

Bennett looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"I don't want to say anything against Farman, sir," he exclaimed reluctantly. "But it's a bit queer that he should have been out of the study just at that time. He could have—"

Bennett paused, and Mr. Crowell tapped his foot impatiently.

"Finish what you were saying, Bennett," he ordered.

"I'd rather not, sir—"

"Boy, I command you—"

"I've got an idea that Farman's not guilty, after all, sir," said Bennett quickly. "You might think that my words are against Farman, and I'd rather not speak. I don't mean to injure Farman in the least, but I was only going to say that his absence from the House just then will prove jolly awkward for him. He could easily have been behind the gym well before Handforth got there

—which was about five past five. Farman returned at a quarter-past. That left him ten minutes to rope Handforth up, didn't it? But I don't believe Farman did it, sir."

"You are ridiculous, Bennett!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "You know as well as I do that Handforth heard Farman speak to him—while he was actually being bound."

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Bennett. "I'd forgotten that!"

I rubbed my hair in bewilderment.

"Handforth heard me speak to him?" I exclaimed. "Say, that's just more than I can carry, sir! I was never near the gym once—I guess I haven't been around that spot the hull day. And at the time you say Handforth was attacked, sir, I guess I was at the playing fields gate."

"That's an alibi, sir, ain't it?" asked Owen eagerly.

"It would seem so, Owen," replied Mr. Crowell. "But the statements of Handforth and Farman are extremely conflicting. I am greatly pained, for one or the other is lying—basely lying. Hitherto I have found both boys truthful, and this is a serious shock for me. Farman, did anybody accompany you to the playing fields gate?"

"No, sir."

"Did anybody see you while you were there?"

"I guess it was pitch dark, sir, and snowin' like blazes!"

"That is an absurd expression, Farman!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "Please refrain from such preposterous talk. I am becoming firmly convinced that you have manufactured this story for the purpose of providing yourself with an alibi. However, I do not wish to accuse you before the matter has been thrashed out thoroughly. Bennett, go to the sanatorium at once, and ask Handforth if he wrote Farman a note. I will wait here until you return."

Bennett hurried off, and I had just a little time to collect my thoughts. The whole thing was a mix-up. By what I could hear, I was fixed neatly. But how? Why was I ever accused of attacking Handforth? I guess it was just about the most curious thing ever!

While I was still puzzling, Bennett returned, breathless.

"Handforth says that he didn't write anything, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Dear me! Dear me!" said Mr. Crowell, gazing at the note afresh. "I am frankly amazed. Can it be that Handforth is prevaricating? This note is most decidedly penned in Handforth's handwriting. But I will place the matter before the Headmaster. Farman, come with me."

I followed Mr. Crowell out of the study, and left the fellows talking excitedly. I guess I was alarmed and indignant. A chap doesn't like to be accused of committing a brutal action when he's quite innocent. There was plenty of evidence, too, that I was innocent. Handforth had written to me, and I had done exactly as he asked. And now he had denied writing! It was a real muddle.

Upon arrival at the Head's study, I found Dr. Stafford talking with my own Housemaster, Mr. Alvington. They were both surprised to see Mr. Crowell bringing me in.

"I have brought this boy to you, sir," said the Form-master, "because I have every reason to fear that he has been guilty of a most scoundrelly attack upon one of his Form-fellows. It is a matter which is quite outside my province to deal with. If guilty, Farman must receive exceedingly severe punishment."

"I am sorry to hear this, Mr. Crowell," said the Head gravely. "I have always understood that Farman was a most honourable boy. Surely there must be some mistake?"

"I sincerely hope so," put in Mr. Alvington kindly. "I, too, have reason to commend Farman. I have been at St. Frank's since this boy's arrival, and have had quite a lot to do with him. He has always been exemplary in his conduct."

"I guess you're real kind, sir," I struck in eagerly. "There's been a big mistake—but I'm just fogged up to the neck. I didn't touch Handforth, sir—I swear I didn't!"

"That will do, Farman," said the Head, holding up his hand. "Sit down, my boy. Now, Mr. Crowell, please tell me what has occurred."

The Form-master did so at length, and as he proceeded both the Head and Mr. Alvington became exceedingly grave. I guess I felt a bit quaky as I looked at their faces. It seemed to me that the case was terribly black—and yet Mr. Crowell didn't speak in a prejudiced way.

The facts themselves were kind of black.

"That is the whole story, sir," concluded Mr. Crowell quietly. "Handforth positively declares that it was Farman who attacked him. It appears that Farman had a grudge against Handforth, and thus we have a motive for the assault. It is significant, also, that Farman was absent from his study—out in the snow, upon his own showing—at the exact time of the incident. Farman declares that he went to the playing fields gate, but we only have his unsupported word to go upon."

"For that matter," observed Mr. Alvington, "we have only Handforth's unsupported word with regard to the attack itself. We must not overlook that point, Mr. Crowell. We must be fair all round. And there is this note, too. Handforth asked Farman to go to the playing fields."

"Handforth denies having written the message.

"Judging by all the facts, I can only conclude that Farman is guilty," said the Head gravely. "Come, my boy, you will make matters much easier if you confess the truth straight away——"

I drew myself up obstinately.

"I guess I've told you the truth, sir," I exclaimed. "I didn't touch Handforth, and I didn't go near the gymnasium. That's surely my last word."

The Head frowned.

"I don't think it is, Farman," he said grimly. "Why were you angry with Handforth? Why did you openly threaten to have revenge upon him?"

"Handforth's an ass, sir," I replied steadily. "He caused a lot of fellows to roll me in the snow this afternoon, and I reckon I was rattled——"

"You were what?" said the Head sharply.

"Rattled, sir—angry. I told the fellows that I'd make Handforth suffer as I'd suffered, but I didn't mean that literally. By the time I'd changed my clothes I guessed that I'd spoken a bit too strong——"

"That won't do, Farman," put in Mr. Alvington quietly. "You made the statement, and the subsequent events all go to prove that you were in deadly earnest. You threatened to make Handforth suffer as you had suffered. You were rolled in the snow—and now Handforth has been found lying in the snow, bound and gagged. It seems to me that

the punishment was made to fit the crime. I don't like to believe that you are guilty, Farman, but the facts are strikingly significant."

The Head nodded.

"I follow your argument, Mr. Alvington," he said, giving the Housemaster a keen glance. "You, of course, are capable of reasoning these things out with far greater ease than I can. But I can see your argument exactly. Farman revenged himself in such a way that Handforth was made to suffer cruelly. It was a dastardly outrage—an outrage which might have led to appalling consequences. But there is some little confusion. What are these notes you talk of, Mr. Crowell? It is strange, is it not, that boys in the same House should exchange written messages?"

"I didn't write a word, sir," I put in quickly.

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"Handforth also denies writing a word," he exclaimed. "What can it mean, Dr. Stafford? One of the boys is deliberately prevaricating—that is obvious. I must frankly confess that I suspect Farman."

"Just a minute, Mr. Crowell," said Mr. Alvington. "Will you please look at this handwriting?"

I looked on anxiously. I guess I had faith in Mr. Alvington. For his eyes were gleaming keenly. I could see that he had made some discovery or other.

Mr. Crowell looked at the note searchingly.

"The handwriting is Handforth's," he began.

"Are you sure?" said the Housemaster.

"Sure? I think I have seen many specimens of Handforth's caligraphy," said Mr. Crowell. "This example is quite a fair one. Handforth, I regret to say, writes shockingly, and I am always complaining about it."

"That is hardly the question, Mr. Crowell," put in Mr. Alvington. "Don't you understand my meaning? Such writing as this is extremely easy to copy. Upon the very face of it, this note is written in a disguised hand. I am quite certain, in fact, that Handforth told the truth when he said he had not written any message. Handforth did not pen these words."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, looking surprised. "Now that you mention it, I do observe a certain un-

tidiness about the lettering. Handforth's writing is, as you say, easy to copy. But who would have done this? I must confess that I am more greatly puzzled than ever."

Mr. Alvington thoughtfully lit a cigarette.

"And yet the fact that the note is false helps us very materially," he observed. "We have established Handforth's innocence—by that I mean it is clearly obvious that Handforth has spoken the truth. Now, there is a very simple explanation of all this. But it is an explanation which hopelessly condemns Farman."

"Then I guess you're off the trail, sir," I put in quickly.

"You are acting very curiously, Farman," said Mr. Alvington, eyeing me keenly. "By your attitude, I should judge that you are innocent, but every item of the evidence is very black against you. My boy, if you perpetrated this deed, I should advise you to tell us the exact truth——"

"I've already said that I'm innocent, sir!" I said firmly.

"Well, we will proceed," said the Housemaster, who somehow seemed to be doing everything.

The Head and Mr. Crowell just looked on. I had every reason to know that Mr. Alvington was as keen as a razor, and I don't reckon I was much surprised at the way things were going.

"Will you kindly explain, Mr. Alvington?" said the Head gently.

"Certainly!" nodded Mr. Alvington. "Now, for the purpose of argument, we will assume that Farman is guilty. I am not saying that he actually is, but it will make matters clearer if we go upon that supposition. Farman, therefore, was anxious to exact revenge upon Handforth."

"Well?"

"He set about his task cunningly," continued the Housemaster. "It was obviously his intention to commit this outrage upon Handforth, but to establish an alibi for himself at the same time. It was impossible for him to manufacture a positive alibi, but he did his best under the circumstances. Primarily it was necessary for him to get Handforth behind the gymnasium at five o'clock. To this end he wrote Handforth a note, requesting the boy to be there. You will remember that he stated that Handforth

should be alone, and that the note should be burnt.

"Apparently he made this request in order to destroy the written evidence. He could not make his request of Handforth personally without running the risk of having other juniors upon the scene at the same time. It was highly necessary to the success of the scheme that Handforth should be alone."

Mr. Alvington paused for a moment, and then went on.

"In order to give an explanation of his own absence," he continued, "Farman penned this note in Handforth's handwriting. That was quite a simple task. He produced it, as he admits himself, after Canham and Owen had returned to the study. There is nothing to prove that the paper was thrust beneath the door. It was possibly written in Farman's own study. He fondly imagined that the ruse would prove successful."

"But why did he do it at all?" asked the Head.

"Well, he knew that Handforth would state the facts, and he probably believed that his own story would be strong enough to bring him safely through the subsequent inquiry," replied Mr. Alvington. "If we can prove that this letter was written by Farman, we have the case complete. It reveals a totally unsuspected vein of extraordinary cunning in Farman's character."

"I guess I didn't write a word, sir!" I said firmly.

"I should like to believe you, Farman, but I fear that I cannot," said Mr. Alvington, rising to his feet. "I think, Dr. Stafford, that this matter can be settled almost at once. This sheet of paper is not of the type which the school supplies. It has been torn from a writing-block. The upper edge, indeed, is slightly uneven, and that fact should prove of value. I am anxious to find the writing-block, for it will make an end to all doubt."

"Glory!" I exclaimed desperately. "There's a writing-block in my study, sir, but I guess other fellers have them high-falutin' articles. It ain't proof at all! Paper's very much alike, anyway——"

Mr. Alvington looked at me sternly.

"This sudden alarm on your part, Farman, is significant," he exclaimed. "You are afraid of an investigation, I can see. Did you, or did you not, write this disguised message?"

"I reckon I've already said the truth, sir," I replied. "I didn't write it!"

Mr. Alvington did not say any more. He took the sheet and quitted the study. Until he returned, the Head and Mr. Crowell talked together in low voices. I guess I was feeling badly bewildered. My brain seemed all whirling, and I just couldn't think clearly.

And then Mr. Alvington returned.

"It is as I feared, Dr. Stafford," he said quietly. "The block from which this sheet was torn is here. I found it in Farman's own study, and Canham and Owen declare that it is Farman's property. There is not another like it in the school, for Farman brought it with him from America. He made a very sad blunder when he penned this message upon such——"

"I didn't write it, sir!" I panted huskily. "Oh, won't you believe me? I didn't touch Handforth——"

"Silence, you rascally boy!" thundered the Head. "Mr. Alvington has proven your guilt in every particular. This final link in the chain is irrefutable. You attacked Handforth maliciously and deliberately, and plotted to make yourself safe at the same time. For the last time, Farman, I command you to confess your guilt. Your punishment may be less severe if you——"

I breathed very hard.

"I guess I'm gettin' kind of tired, sir," I said quietly. "You'll think I'm lyin', of course. I don't figger I've got a leg to stand on. But I swear to you that I'm absolutely innocent of this charge."

Dr. Stafford rose to his feet angrily.

"You foolish boy!" he exclaimed. "You have disgraced your school, and you shall be punished with the utmost severity. You should go down upon your knees and thank Heaven that your crime was not greater. Had Handforth been a boy of weaker constitution, he would have been gravely ill. The fact that he has only caught a cold does not affect the question. Please take Farman away, Mr. Crowell."

I stared at the Head dazedly.

"Gee!" I gasped. "Am—am I expelled, sir?"

"I have not yet decided upon that point, Farman," replied Dr. Stafford coldly. "In any case, you will receive a public flogging before the whole school in the morning. And after that, in all

probability, you will be sent from the school!"

I left the study with Mr. Crowell, with my brain just whizzing round madly. I couldn't believe it. The sack! And I'd done nothing—nothing at all! It was just about more than I could stand.

CHAPTER VI.

(Nipper resumes the narrative.)

I REASON THINGS OUT AND COME TO A CONCLUSION—BUT THE GUV'NOB DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ENTHUSIASTIC.

"SERVE the cad right!" That was the general verdict.

Farman's unexpected disgrace and downfall had come like a bomb-shell to the Junior School, and most of the fellows hadn't an ounce of sympathy to waste. I couldn't altogether blame them.

The news had got about quickly. It was known that Justin B. Farman was in the punishment-room. That meant either a flogging or the sack—probably both. I was cut up tremendously.

The Ancient House was simply buzzing with excitement. Bob Christine and Co., of the College House, had, of course, heard the news. But they weren't so interested as we were.

I couldn't quite believe it. Try as I would, I couldn't credit the fact that Farman had committed such an utterly rotten action. I had been forced to tell Mr. Crowell something which seemed to go against Farman, and it had filled me with dismay. I've never been quite so miserable as I was that evening.

Montie and Tommy tried to console me, but their efforts were a failure. I was worried. I kept thinking that there had been a terrible blunder. If I knew anything of human character, then Farman was as straight as a die. He simply wasn't capable of such viciousness.

But the facts were all clear; the proof was positive. Even Tommy Watson and Sir Montie went by the general verdict. How could they think otherwise? It was known that Farman protested his innocence, but this fact merely earned him the general contempt of the Lower School.

"Why can't the cad own up?" asked Fullwood, in the common-room. "If you ask me, Farman thoroughly deserves the sack, and I hope he gets it!"

"Nobody asked you!" I said curtly.

"You'd better go away and hide your face, Fullwood! It's not pleasant to look at!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood scowled.

"Hang you!" he muttered, moving away.

His face was a picture, although he had done his utmost to conceal the fact that it had been badly knocked about. Somebody had been busy, it was certain. But I was too worried about Farman to give the matter a thought.

"Fullwood's right, anyhow," declared Hubbard. "Why, old Handforth might have been killed! I shall be jolly pleased if Farman gets kicked out. We don't want vindictive brutes like him at St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in a dozen voices.

"Oh, come along to Study C!" I growled, taking the arms of Montie and Tommy. "I want to think this matter out thoroughly. Everybody's down on Farman, and I don't believe he's guilty."

"Oh, rot!" said Watson. "The Head's shoved him in the punishment-room, and Teddy Long jolly soon found out that he's going to be flogged in the morning. Long's a cad, and he listens at keyholes. But it's as clear as daylight that Farman's guilty! Handforth says so himself. Handforth wouldn't accuse Farman unless he knew the truth."

"Benny boy, you mustn't worry your head, you know," said Montie concernedly. "Farman ain't worth it—he ain't, really! I always thought he was one of the best, an' it's a frightful surprise to know this about him."

I didn't reply, and we entered Study C. Tommy kicked the fire into a blaze, and then he and Montie looked at me uncertainly.

"Look here, Benny——" began Tommy.

"Shut up!" I snapped. "I'm thinking!"

Tommy said no more. For fully five minutes I remained completely still. I was racking my brain for an explanation. If Farman hadn't assaulted Handforth, who had? There wasn't another school who owed Handforth a grudge. So, if Farman hadn't done it, the whole thing was objectless.

I couldn't help thinking that the whole business savoured of Fullwood's cunning. But Fullwood didn't care a snap of his fingers about Handforth! If the plot had been against Farman himself——

And then, all of a sudden, I sat bolt upright, and my eyes gleamed.

"Fullwood's face!" I exclaimed excitedly.

"Begad, you startled me, dear boy!" gasped Sir Montie. "An' what of Fullwood's face? Don't drag such horrid things into this disoussion! By Jove, it's a discussion we've been havin' with our own minds, dear fellows——"

"Isn't Fullwood's face a perfect picture?" I demanded, jumping up. "Who did it? Who smashed him up like that? Farman, for a quid! It's the key to the whole mystery!"

"Oh, dear! You're shockingly bewilderin', old boy——"

"You chaps stay here!" I cut in crisply. "I sha'n't be a minute!"

I dashed out without another word, and ran down the passage to Study H. As I had expected, I found Canham and Owen major at home. They were both looking about as miserable as two juniors could look.

"Look here!" I said briskly. "I've got an idea that poor old Farman is innocent!"

"That's what we've been trying to think," said Owen, shaking his head. "But it's no good, Benny. It's as plain as my face——"

"Blow your face!" I cut in. "It's Fullwood's face I want to talk about. I've come to you chaps because you'll probably tell me the truth. Has Fullwood been fighting with Farman this evening?"

Farman's chums nodded gloomily.

"A terrific bust-up!" said Canham. "It was about that change, or something. Fullwood tried to swindle old Farman out of it, and there was a fearful row. Farman made Fullwood into mincemeat."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "That's all I want to know, thanks."

And I shot out of the study without waiting for the pair to say any more. I found Sir Montie and Tommy waiting for me curiously. I was now thrilling with excitement and hope.

"I believe I've got it!" I said, as I closed the study door. "Listen to me, my sons! I'm just going to outline the facts as we know them. First of all, Farman was rolled in the snow, and we heard him threaten to make Handforth sit up 'good an' proper.' Secondly, Handforth told us in the lobby that he was going out to meet Farman, and

later on he declared that Farman had attacked him. Thirdly, Farman's defence is as weak as water, for he admitted going out at about five o'clock, and produced a note which was obviously a fake. Fourthly, there isn't another soul in the school who has the slightest grudge against Handforth. That's the case in a nutshell, ain't it?"

"Well, what about it?" asked Watson curiously. "Farman's guilt is proved beyond doubt. He had a special reason for giving Handy a taste of snow; we know that. But we didn't think he'd go to such a rotten length as to leave him tied up in a snowstorm! He jolly well deserves the sack, in my opinion!"

I nodded.

"If he'd done it, he would deserve the sack," I agreed.

"If?" repeated Montie mildly. "Dear boy, there's no question about it!"

"There's a jolly big question!" I declared. "Look here, my dear chaps, a real detective is wanted on this job, and I'm filling his place!" I went on, rather enjoying the humour of the situation. "Everything points to Farman being guilty, but I'll wager my left boot he's not!"

"Don't be rash, dear fellow!" said Sir Montie. "Think how appallin' it would be to go about with only one boot——"

"Oh, don't rot now!" I said quickly. "I'm not satisfied, Montie. To tell you the honest truth, I don't believe that Farman had a hand in the business at all! He just told us the simple facts as he knew them. It's my opinion that Farman has been the victim of a cunning plot!"

"Oh, that's piffle!" objected Watson.

"You won't say so when I've done," I went on calmly. "Now, my idea is that Fullwood is at the bottom of this trickery—Fullwood attacked poor old Handforth behind the gym——"

"But Fullwood doesn't care a jot about Handforth, you ass!" roared Tommy, in exasperation. "Fullwood doesn't want to have any revenge on Handy——"

"No," I cut in keenly. "But Fullwood's got a jolly good reason for injuring Farman! And Farman, my dear kid, is booked for a flogging and the sack! That's Fullwood's revenge for the hammering he received."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie, staring at me.

"Don't you understand?" I persisted.

"Fullwood's as cunning as a snake; this affair fits him to a tee. His scheme was to have revenge on Farman, and to keep out of the business himself completely. Don't you follow me? Handforth was merely an instrument. Fullwood's plan was to get Farman sacked—and it looks as though he's going to succeed!"

"But—but the notes!" gasped Tommy.

"Fullwood forged them, of course," I said. "The whole thing's clear. It's just the type of game Fullwood delights in. He must have been smashed about terribly, to judge by his face, and he vindictively schemed revenge on Farman. I tell you, my sons, Fullwood's at the bottom of the whole rotten trickery."

It didn't take me long to convince my two chums. But, as Sir Montie pointedly remarked, what could we do? I promptly suggested that I should go to Mr. Alvington and put my suspicions before him. This wasn't a question of sneaking. I believed there wasn't any necessity for me to mention any other names.

Having come to this decision, I hurried off to the gov'nor's study. By a piece of luck I found him alone. He was sitting in his armchair before the fire, looking extremely thoughtful and pre-occupied.

"Oh, it's you, young 'un," he said, as I closed the door. "Unless it's something important, Nipper, I should prefer you not to worry me now."

"It is important, sir," I said quickly. "It's about Farman."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I thought as much," he said quietly. "Well?"

"The fellows are saying that he's going to be flogged and sacked——"

"That is Dr. Stafford's decision, I believe."

"It's wrong, gov'nor—all wrong!" I said, going over and looking at Nelson Lee squarely. "There's been a mistake. Farman didn't do it at all!"

The gov'nor elevated his eyebrows.

"Indeed?" he exclaimed. "I fail to see how you arrive at that conclusion, Nipper. The facts are very plain—they are, indeed, conclusive. And, pray, if Farman did not attack Handforth, who did?"

I hesitated.

"I don't think I'd like to mention any names, gov'nor," I said, after a moment. "It wouldn't be quite square, you know. But I'm absolutely convinced that some other fellow planned all

this cunning trickery. And it wasn't done so much against Handforth as against Farman himself."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I really cannot spare you the time, Nipper, to discuss the matter now," he said. "Perhaps you are prejudiced in Farman's favour. He has hitherto seemed to be quite a splendid young fellow in every way. But it is at moments like that of this evening that a boy's real character is revealed. You may have put a wrong construction upon minor details."

"I haven't, sir," I said earnestly. "I'm sure that Farman is innocent."

The gov'nor looked at me and smiled.

"You seem very certain, Nipper," he observed.

"I am certain, gov'nor—I'm positive."

"And yet you can produce no proof?"

"No, sir. I only suspect things."

The gov'nor snapped his fingers.

"Suspensions, as I have often told you, are quite useless, Nipper," he interrupted. "You shouldn't come to me with mere conjectures. This matter has gone badly for Farman, and we must not concern ourselves. It is only right and just that the culprit should bear the punishment. He will bear it, Nipper—I assure you of that!"

And Nelson Lee settled down in his chair, lit a cigar, and bade me good-night. He had treated me in an off-hand manner, and I felt terribly disappointed. Even the gov'nor was against Farman!

There seemed to be absolutely no hope.

CHAPTER VII.

(Nipper concludes the narrative.)

IN WHICH NELSON LEE GIVES THE WHOLE SCHOOL A BIG SURPRISE—AND EVERYTHING ENDS SERENELY.

BREAKFAST was over, and St. Frank's was in a buzz.

It was common knowledge that the whole school was to be assembled before morning lessons. Everybody knew that Justin B. Farman was to be given a public flogging, and that this would be followed, in all probability, by expulsion.

Nearly every junior was feeling quite satisfied. Farman's action had earned him the sack, and there wasn't an ounce

of pity wasted upon him. The fact that he had always been decent hitherto only made matters worse.

I was seriously troubled. I had been awake half the night, puzzling my brain. But I could see no loophole. Farman was doomed.

And yet I was sure that Fullwood was actually guilty.

I hadn't got an atom of proof, and I should only have made myself ridiculous by going to the Head. Yet, in desperation, I felt like doing this. It would be simply appalling to see Farman sacked, when I knew, in my own mind, that he was innocent.

But, as the gov'nor had said, mere suspicions were useless—worse than useless, in fact.

Sir Montie and Tommy believed as I did, and they were just as troubled.

"I'll tell you what," I declared grimly. "I'm not going to calmly stand by and see old Farman sacked. When it comes to the point, I'll stand up before the whole school, and tell the Head what I think!"

"You—you ass!" said Watson. "You can't do that!"

"Can't I? You wait and see!" I replied. "This isn't an ordinary matter, and if the whole school accuses me of sneaking, I sha'n't care a jot. I'll tell the Head how Farman had a scrap with Fullwood, and that it was Fullwood who attacked Handforth as an indirect means of gaining revenge."

"Dear boy, you wouldn't do any good," said Montie quietly. "You might make things worse."

"I couldn't do that," I interjected. "Matters are so bad that it doesn't much matter what happens. But I'm certainly not going to see Farman flogged and sacked without making an effort to save him."

The very attitude of Fullwood and Co. made my suspicions into certainties. The Nuts were in high feather, and were chuckling among themselves continuously. They stood in a group on the steps of the Ancient House, and Ralph Leslie Fullwood was looking extremely happy. He and his two chums, Gulliver and Bell, chuckled loudly at intervals.

Their pals of Study G were there with them—Merrill and Marriot and Noys. These three were also of the noble order of Nuts, and were usually concerned in

all the blackguardism which emanated from Study A.

It was to be expected that they would gloat over Farman's downfall. They had always had their knife into the boy from California. Farman had persistently refused to join the Nuts' little parties, although they had invited him time and again. Farman had pots of money, and it was this that Fullwood and Co. coveted.

But their expressions of satisfaction were so obvious that I was certain they were feeling triumphant because of the success of their own plans. And I simply clenched my fists and swore to myself that there should be a different ending to the one which was generally expected.

At last the bell tolled rapidly—the signal that the school was to collect in big hall. There was no loitering. Everybody hurried in at once. A public flogging wasn't exactly a nice entertainment, but the boys were all eager to see it.

I took my place in the ranks of the Remove, with Tommy and Montic beside me. Just at that instant I noticed that Farman had been brought in, and he stood at the end of my own row. Many curious glances were cast upon him, but he held himself erect, and took no notice of the cold looks of his schoolfellows.

Fullwood and Co. attempted to start a hiss, but this was very promptly squashed by Morrow, the prefect. The Nuts received a hundred lines apiece on the spot, and they didn't make another sound. Hissing was rather too costly.

On the raised platform at the end of the great hall I could see the Head, and Nelson Lee and two or three other masters.

I held myself in readiness, for I was quite determined to carry out the plan I had outlined to my chums. And, at last, Dr. Stafford stepped forward and faced the school.

"Boys, I have a very painful duty to perform this morning," he said gravely, and without raising his voice in the least. "I find it necessary to inflict a public flogging upon one of your number. I think you all know the facts, but I will just briefly outline them."

The Head's voice carried clearly to every corner of the big hall, and seniors and juniors alike held themselves completely silent.

"A junior boy, belonging to the Remove Form, performed a dastardly outrage upon one of his schoolfellows in the early hours of last evening. This unfortunate boy, Handforth, was seized from behind, bound and muffled, and left to lie in the snow. Fortunately, he was discovered soon after his attacker had left him at the mercy of the snow-storm. Had he been left much longer the consequences would have been grave indeed."

The Head looked round him sternly.

"The boy who is responsible will now be called upon to step forward," he went on, his voice taking on a hard note. "He will receive a flogging, and will be afterwards sent from the school in disgrace."

I nearly groaned, but my decision was unaltered.

"Fullwood!" said Dr. Stafford sharply.

A queer kind of thrill seemed to run right through the school. I wondered if I was dreaming; I wondered if I had heard the Head pronounce the name aright. Fullwood! I stared round in sheer amazement.

Fullwood had been grinning, but now, quite suddenly, he turned a deathly white, and shivered as he stood. But he made no attempt to stand forward. Justin B. Farman was looking completely bewildered. And a thousand eyes were upon Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

"Did you hear me, boy?" said the Head curtly. "Stand forward, Fullwood!"

The quiver passed away, and everybody stared in silent astonishment. The whole school, from the tiniest fag to the most lordly Sixth-Former, had been expecting to hear Farman's name called. I myself nearly yelled aloud with excitement. Instinctively, I knew that the gov'nor had been getting busy.

Still Fullwood did not move. He opened and shut his mouth several times, but spoke as he saw a prefect hurrying towards him.

"Did—did you call me, sir?" he gasped hoarsely. "You—you meant Farman, didn't you, sir—"

"I did not say Farman!" exclaimed the Head curtly. "Fullwood, you will step forward to this platform at once. Morrow, conduct the wretched boy to me. He apparently is incapable of movement!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood shivered as Morrow touched him on the shoulder. I

had never seen a fellow so absolutely terrified. Every ounce of energy seemed to have deserted him. The shock had come upon him with the full force of the unexpected. A minute before he had been congratulating himself upon the success of his cunning scheme. And now the blow had fallen.

Fullwood staggered up the central aisle almost drunkenly, and at last he stood just below the platform. He seemed to realise the nature of his position now, as he uttered a low, husky cry.

"I—I haven't done anything, sir!" he panted wildly. "It was Farman—it was Farman! You know——"

"Silence, Fullwood!" rapped out the Head sharply. "My boys, the culprit now stands before you, and I am extremely pleased to state that a sad injustice was averted by a very narrow margin. It was believed that Farman, of the Remove Form, was guilty of the ruffianly attack upon Handforth. But Farman is totally and absolutely innocent. He has done nothing——"

The Head was interrupted by a wild and completely uncontrollable cheer from the ranks of the Ancient House Removites.

"Hurrah! Three cheers for Farman! Hurrah!"

The Head held up his hand.

"Silence!" he shouted angrily. "You may give vent to your feelings later on, boys. For the moment I wish you to listen to something which Mr. Alvington has to say to you. I wish to add that Farman's innocence has been made clear solely because of the efforts made by Mr. Alvington. By his singularly astute reasoning he has brought the truth to light."

"Good old guv'nor!" I gasped to myself, nearly off my head with delight. "Oh, my hat! This is a surprise, and no mistake! And I didn't give him Fullwood's name, either; I didn't tell him anything! How the dickens did he get on the track?"

Nelson Lee stepped forward with an easy smile, and I hugged myself meanwhile.

"Dr. Stafford has requested me to make a statement," he said in the easy way which had endeared him to every decent fellow in the school. "To begin with, I may as well inform you that Fullwood's guilt is completely proven. Last night it was generally believed that

Farman had committed the outrage. The evidence all pointed in his direction.

"Frankly, I was not quite satisfied. Although the evidence seemed conclusive, I had a lingering doubt that an act of injustice was to be done. Therefore, I considered that it was my duty to look very closely into the matter. I am glad that I did so, for the real truth has now come to light.

"Now, I am just going to argue the whole affair out as briefly as possible. One of the most significant points which struck me was a statement which was made by Handforth, the victim. Handforth declared that, when he was attacked, Farman spoke to him.

"Surely there was something gravely wrong there? Upon the face of it, it would seem that this was a piece of vital evidence. But was it? I ask you to put the question to yourselves. Had Farman been the culprit, would he have spoken to Handforth at such a time? Was it not more probable that the unseen attacker was somebody else—somebody who deliberately imitated Farman's well-known accent? The object of this trick was to make Handforth believe—as he did believe—that it was Farman who was assaulting him. The evening was intensely black, you must bear in mind, and Handforth could judge only by sounds."

Nelson Lee paused for a moment, and the whole school hung upon his words.

"That was one point which needed careful consideration," continued the guv'nor easily. "Again, the note which Farman produced, although seemingly damning, was really quite the opposite. It was assumed that he had written the note himself, for the purpose of providing an alibi. But, surely, Farman would not have used a sheet of his own paper. It was far more likely that another boy had torn the sheet from Farman's writing block for the sole purpose of throwing suspicion upon Farman himself. It was significant, also, that Handforth had been told, in the message he received, to burn the sheet. For, you must now bear in mind, this note was also a forgery—it was not penned by Farman. Thus we get to the fact that the two notes were prepared by somebody else. The instructions to burn the note had obviously been so that no comparison of writing could be made afterwards. This is rather a subtle point, as I will explain. Had the message purporting to come from Farman been re-

tained by Handforth, an examination would have shown that this was a fake. Farman, therefore, would have been obviously innocent. But Fullwood, who perpetrated the trickery, was anxious that the note purporting to come from Handforth should be kept intact. For the inquiry seemed to prove that Farman had been responsible for it. It was a very astute scheme—but it failed.

The gov'nor paused again, and I think everybody was following his argument clearly.

Fullwood stood just below the platform, listening dazedly.

"So far I have only mentioned suspicions," continued Nelson Lee. "I was quite sure that some other boy was guilty. The next thing was to find out the culprit. Who had conceived and carried out this intricate scheme?"

"One point which provided me with a direct clue was that the faked message was written with pure black ink. As you all know, the school is provided with blue-black ink. This was highly important, although the culprit missed the point. After the Remove had gone up to bed last night I went straight to Farman's study, and found blue-black ink in the pot. The same ink was in every other pot along the whole passage—save one. This one pot belonged to Study A, and my inquiry was narrowed down considerably.

"I now closely compared the disguised handwriting with a specimen of Fullwood's ordinary caligraphy," continued the gov'nor smoothly. "I established the fact that a similarity existed. Any handwriting expert will agree with me that Fullwood wrote the false message. To place the matter beyond doubt completely, I may say that I found, in Fullwood's waste-paper basket, several scraps of paper on which the boy had practised beforehand. Among these specimens are copies of Farman's own handwriting. In the basket also were some odds and ends of cords, which tallied exactly with the cords with which Handforth had been bound.

"My case was now quite complete—except motive. Beyond the shadow of a doubt Fullwood had perpetrated the brutal attack upon Handforth. But why? There seemed to be no reason. A brief talk with Farman this morning told me all that I wanted to know, however. Yesterday, it seems, Farman gave Full-

wood an exceedingly severe thrashing. Fullwood was infuriated, and he cunningly devised the scheme I have outlined in order to obtain his revenge. Handforth was merely the instrument by which the scheme was carried out."

Nelson Lee made one or two other points quite clear, and at last a great burst of applause broke out. Everybody in the school was amazed by the way in which the benevolent-looking "Mr. Alvington" had got at the truth. The fellows wouldn't have been surprised if they had known—as I knew—that the man who was facing them was none other than Nelson Lee, the world-famous criminologist! Intricate as this case seemed to the boys, it was mere child's play to the gov'nor. It had merely provided him with an opportunity of practising his astute methods.

"Fullwood, I call upon you to confess," exclaimed the Head sternly.

"I—I'm innocent, sir!" gasped Fullwood wildly.

"How dare you deny your guilt?" thundered Dr. Stafford. "Mr Alvington has proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that you carried out the plot against Farman. Your offence is greatly exaggerated by the fact that you attempted to dishonour an innocent boy's name—"

"I—I didn't do it alone, sir!" panted Fullwood, losing his self-control completely. "Gulliver and Bell helped me—we were all in it!"

"You rotten sneak!" I heard Gulliver hiss venomously.

"Gulliver—Bell!" commanded the Head. "Stand forward!"

The noble Nuts shivered with fright as they went down the hall. I heard Fullwood huskily explaining that he and his precious pals had intended releasing Handforth at six o'clock. They didn't think that the unfortunate Edward Oswald would come to any harm. And then Dr. Stafford gave us a bit of a surprise.

"I now find it necessary to deal with three culprits!" he exclaimed sternly.

"They all deserve expulsion—more especially Fullwood. But both Handforth and Farman have very charitably expressed a desire that these wretched boys shall be punished within the school itself. I feel it incumbent on me to respect their wishes, and I may say that, but for their intervention, Fullwood, as the ringleader, would certainly have been

expelled from the school. As matters now stand, all three boys will be soundly flogged, their half-holidays will be stopped for some time to come, and they will be restricted within the school bounds."

Upon the whole, Fullwood and Co. were getting off extremely lightly. But I and everybody else looked on with extreme satisfaction while the flogging was in progress. There wasn't a boy who expressed the slightest disapproval.

The surprise had been complete, for Nelson Lee had given no inkling of his investigations until the last moment.

Incidentally, Justin B. Farman was cheered heartily by every junior in the school—and a great many seniors, too.

The Nuts were hissed just as vociferously, and they crawled away with the contempt of the whole school upon them.

Fullwood's cunning plot had failed. He deserved the sack, and he ought to have thanked his stars—and Handforth and Farman—for being allowed to remain at St. Frank's.

But would he profit by his lesson? Somehow, I didn't think so. Edward Oswald Handforth was soon out and about again, and his very first task was to offer Farman a complete apology.

And thus the matter ended.

Fullwood's cunning had recoiled upon his own head—mainly owing to the detective ability of my esteemed guv'nor—Old Alvy.

THE END.

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BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

The Principal Characters in this Story are:

TOM CRAWLEY, light-weight boxer, and stoker on board *H.M.S. Flyer*, who has been captured by the Germans, and has met his father at Antwerp,

BOB RANDLE, who has been sent to France with his regiment; and

MARY THWAITES, daughter of old Fisherman Thwaites, with whom both Tom and Bob are in love. Bob is also at the prison at Antwerp, and when Tom is ordered to be shot for fighting one of the guards, he and Crawley take up their positions by his side. They are saved, however, by British aeroplanes, which bomb the prison. The three escape, and a kindly Dutchman gives them shelter in his house.

(Now read on.)

BOUND FOR ENGLAND!

"LOOK here, mate," said Fisherman Crawley, after drawing a deep breath, "we've got to talk this over. You're not going to sacrifice your life for us. You've already done enough. Show us how we can cross the frontier into Holland, and we'll make the attempt; but we're not going to stay here under your roof, when we know well that the Germans will be searching every house from roof to cellar to find us."

De Jong laughed. It was a musical, boyish laugh, and his bright eyes twinkled merrily.

"Let them come," said he. "We will be gone long before they reach here. Wait a moment." He left the room hurriedly, and when he came back he carried a heap of clothes in his arms.

"Most of 'em are old things of mine," he explained. "Some belonged to a mate, who left 'em here. Get out of those clothes, and into these. Sling your things into the river, where the tide will

carry them towards the sea. Within an hour I mean to have you all safely stowed away aboard my ship, the girl and all, and we'll set sail while we've still got the chance.

Tom felt his heart leap. The girl uttered a glad cry.

Fisherman Crawley's eyes burnt like fire.

Bob Randle, with a thoughtful look, said, "But won't they search your ship?"

"I think not. They've not done so for months. I'm trusted, you see. The Germans have reason to bless me for the cargoes I've brought here from Holland. I'm privileged. I may be stopped by a patrolling destroyer, of course, and boarded and searched. It's happened before, but the risk is small. I suppose you're prepared to take it?"

"Take it?" they cried. "We'll go down on our knees and thank you for the chance."

"Then choose your things, and change. Missy, you go and get ready for the journey, too. You're to pass as a cabin-boy, mind."

The English girl blushed, and smiled faintly, then obediently left the room, in which the three fugitives at once commenced to change.

An hour later five figures might have been seen making their way about the back streets of the town in the direction of the docks.

They appeared, at a casual glance, to be three seamen and two boys, one of the latter being small, and delicate in appearance.

They swung onward in silence, De Jong smoking, Fisherman Crawley with his hands in his pockets, the others casting wistful and anxious glances about them as they hurried through the gathering mist.

And at last they came upon the waterway, now seeing the shimmering surface near them, then having it blocked from their view by great warehouses. For two miles or more it seemed they walked be-

side the river, and at last the Dutch skipper led them to a quay, off which a ship was moored.

It was a steamer of small size, and she had her steam up.

Before her lay the Scheldt. It was a long run to the sea, and Fisherman Crawley, to whom the port was fairly well known, wondered whether they would ever be able to get away, and swing into the open waters without being held up by an enemy warship.

If the vessel should be searched they would be captured, and—

Crawley shuddered as he thought of what the skipper's fate would be then.

They dropped down into a waiting boat, and were pulled aboard.

First of all, the disguised English girl, who was surely the prettiest cabin-boy ever shipped, climbed the ladder of rope and wood struts which hung over the vessel's side.

One by one the others followed. As they stood upon the firm deck the fugitives breathed sighs of deep relief.

There followed a brief and animated conversation between the Dutch skipper and his mate. The boat was quickly drawn up to the davits and the word was given. Slowly the steamer began to move, and presently at quarter-speed she was swinging along on the bosom of a stiffish tide, and the banks of the river were speeding past, while they steamed and steered for the sea—and freedom.

It was a long voyage to the mouth of the Scheldt, where the broadening water let out into the ocean. They passed other vessels inward bound on the way, and met with no adventure.

Above them hung a silvery moon, now showing herself, now hiding bashfully behind swiftly drifting clouds.

And at last, before the day broke, but while the sky was lightening, they saw the open sea before them.

"Now," said the Dutch skipper, with a bright smile, "I think you are almost safe, my friends. Once I have landed you at a Dutch port there will be no chance of the Huns retaking you."

"But we shall have to remain interned on parole in Holland until the end of the war," muttered Crawley.

"Of course."

"Must that be? My home is in England. I want to get back. I want to help in the great work—"

"Impossible. Think of the risk. As sure as I attempted to reach the shores

of England my ship would be torpedoed by a U-boat. And she is my property. Even if I were saved, it would mean ruin."

"But help us on our way, De Jong. Since you have done so much, do a little more."

"What do you mean?"

"Take us out into mid-ocean beyond Middleburg. It is a bare hundred miles from there to the mouth of the Thames. Then set us adrift in a boat, and leave us to make our own way, or to be picked up by a passing vessel. No Hun battleship dare show her nose that far in daylight. I and my son could navigate the boat into port."

De Jong frowned thoughtfully.

"Why take the risk?"

"Because we would prefer it. My son, and Bob Randle here, will agree with me."

"The sea's calm; there's a favourable breeze blowing. Lend us a boat with mast and sail, and we can make the coast of England on our heads," grinned Tom Crawley eagerly.

"Very well. I'll let you have a boat. Promise to pay me her full value when you can."

"It's a promise. I pledge you the word of a British fisherman, and I'll keep my pledge."

Thomas Crawley stretched out his strong right hand, and the Dutchman grasped it.

"I am satisfied," said he. "I'll go out of my course. What matter? Every Hun warship, save her undersea boats, are shut up in port. It is safe enough."

So for two hours he steamed at full speed in the direction of England, lessening the distance the boat's crew would have to cover by thirty miles.

Seventy miles only remained for them to encompass ere the boat and its devoted crew would be safe in port.

So the steamer hove to, and one of her lifeboats was lowered, and its mast steeped and the sail got ready. Food and water, and a compass to steer by, were placed in her, and then down into her dropped Fisherman Crawley, followed by Bob Randle.

Tom Crawley was about to follow, when the girl, still wearing her disguise, ran forward.

"You are going home. Please—please take me with you," she pleaded,

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looking into Tom's face with such a glance of wistful appeal that he paused.

"No. You must come safely to Rotterdam with the ship," said the skipper sternly.

Down upon her knees she dropped, and knelt there on the deck with her clasped hands uplifted.

"Mr. De Jong, you saved me, and I owe you a debt I can never repay," she cried. "But let me go home—now."

He refused, she pleaded, and so eloquent was her appeal, and so hearty Fisherman Crawley's assurance that they would reach England in safety, that at last he gave way.

"Go, then, my brave lass," he said, "and Heaven guard you and watch over you."

So she slid down the rope into the boat, and Tom Crawley followed.

Then the boat was cast off, and the crew in her rowed gently away, while the steamer swung her stern about and headed towards the coast of Holland.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

"Heaven bless you, skipper!"

"Heaven bless you all, my friends!"

The steamer drifted slowly away from them, then gathered speed, her screws churning the waters lustily.

Up the fugitives ran their sail, and the breeze, catching it, heeled the boat over.

Fisherman Crawley seated himself in the stern-sheets, with the tiller in his hands. His son Tom stood by to watch the sail.

And so they set out—for England.

THE DEAR HOME-LAND.

IT seemed only a little while before the departing steamer had disappeared beyond the horizon, where a mist hung heavily. For a while afterwards the smoke from her funnel could be plainly seen; then that, too, vanished, and the small boat, with its crew of fugitives, was left at the mercy of the sea and air, but with two brave seamen to look after its destiny.

The favourable breeze continued, and she sped slowly towards the distant coast of England, now rising, now falling to the gentle swell.

The sea was one vast expanse of unbroken blue, without a sail or trail of smoke to be seen.

Few ocean-going vessels tracked that way. Most of the coming and going was between the near points of the coasts of Britain and France.

The spirits of the fugitives rose high. They had accomplished so much, thanks to the Dutch skipper De Jong, and their desperate venture promised well.

It would be a difficult job for enemy craft to pick up the little boat out there in the open sea, and even if they did, it was extremely doubtful that a U-boat commander would bother himself about her.

By the morrow, if not before, they ought to be within sight of the coast of England and in the track of steamers plying between the different ports.

"Tom—Bob, old man"—and Fisherman Crawley's eyes blazed—"we shall win through! I know it—I feel it!"

So they kept upon their course, and the girl, to pass the time, told them her story. It was a simple little story enough.

Her name was Hilda Moore. She was one of a family of seven, had three brothers who were fighting, and one sister. She had been born in London. Her mother had from the moment she left school set to work to secure her a position as governess or child's companion in a family abroad, and the position she had taken up in Antwerp had been the result.

There she had remained, carrying out her simple duties, and learning the language until the war had broken out. Upon the horrors of the invasion of Belgium and capture of Antwerp she dwelt very lightly, but her gratitude to the gallant Dutch skipper, De Jong, found expression in a burst of heartfelt gratitude.

"He is one of the simplest, the bravest, and the best men I have ever known," she cried: nor were they backward in endorsing her opinion.

They ate their first meal three and a half hours after the departure of the Dutch steamer; their second just as night was falling.

Then the girl, being tired, nestled down on the bottom of the boat, and closed her eyes wearily.

They had been given some tarpaulins and some sheets of canvas with which to cover themselves for the night, and these were badly needed, for presently the wind dropped completely, and a gentle drizzle, which increased as the night

(Continued overleaf)

wore on, threatened to drench them through.

As the night lengthened, the girl shivered and complained of feeling cold.

Bob Randle instantly went to her, and, taking her in his arms, set her head against his shoulder, and so held her until she passed into the land of dreams.

Young Tom Crawley looked earnestly at Bob while the drizzle fell upon his face, glistening already from the rain that covered it and matted his hair.

"She's just like a little baby, isn't she, Bob?" he observed.

"Yes, Tom. And she's very pretty and very brave."

"You seem to like her, old man."

"Wouldn't you? I feel so sorry for her, Tom."

Tom Crawley said no more, but his thoughts flashed away to Weathersea and Mary Thwaites. What about Bob and her? Recently Tom Crawley had brought himself to believe that Mary was lost to him for ever, and he had been trying to brace himself to make the sacrifice; but now a glimmer of hope shone for him, and his heart leapt within him.

So, while Bob nursed the sleeping girl, hardly daring to move lest he should waken her, though his limbs became cramped and his muscles stiff, Tom and his father smoked the pipes and tobacco the Dutch skipper had given them and took it in turn to steer the boat.

In this way the night passed and the dawn broke.

And what a dawn it was! Not a breath of wind stirred, and, although the drizzle had ceased, a veil of fog blotted out everything but a small expanse of the heaving sea around them.

Hilda Moore awoke, and breakfast, a frugal meal, consisting of biscuits and cheese, was served. Then Fisherman Crawley ordered Bob Randle to the sheets.

"You take the tiller, lad," he cried. "Tom and I will pull."

So, with the compass to guide them he and Tom took the oars and pulled lustily until they passed out of the fog bank, and saw the watery sun show his face shyly between the heavy, drifting clouds.

And there, far away from them still but

clearly discernible, was a white and irregular coast—the coast of England. "There she is, my lad!" bellowed Fisherman Crawley, leaping to his feet and waving his cap frantically above his head. "There's the coast of England, the dear old land, and with a bit of luck to-morrow we shall be safe home Weathersea!"

Now a slight breeze rippled the face of the ocean and filled the tiny sail. The oars were dispensed with, and Crawley took his place at the tiller.

THE MURDER-BOAT'S LAST FIGHT.

WHEN two hours had passed away the coast looked perceptibly nearer. They could see distant trails of smoke to north and south of them.

About four miles away some trawlers were drifting. Near in by the shore a steamer was steaming on her way to the Thames mouth, a cargo boat.

Seaplanes could be seen flying like gnats near and beyond the cliffs, while a silver airship, terror of the German submarines, was swimming gracefully in the blue.

"See that, Tom lad!" roared the fisherman heartily. "That's the way Britain is winning the war!"

Hardly had the words left his lips ere he uttered a cry of dismay and pointed shorewards.

"Look! Look!" he exclaimed. "A U-boat! And she's going to sink that cargo steamer over there!"

At first the others could not pick up the sinister hull of the enemy vessel, so like to the sea did she look. At length they saw her, and at the same moment the guns of the U-boat, which were trained on the steamer, opened fire despatching shell after shell upon its fateful mission.

To the huge joy of the beholders, the steamer replied in kind.

Shells burst near and around the U-boat, but without hitting her.

They saw the submarine alter her position, and knew that she was about to discharge a torpedo.

(To be concluded.)