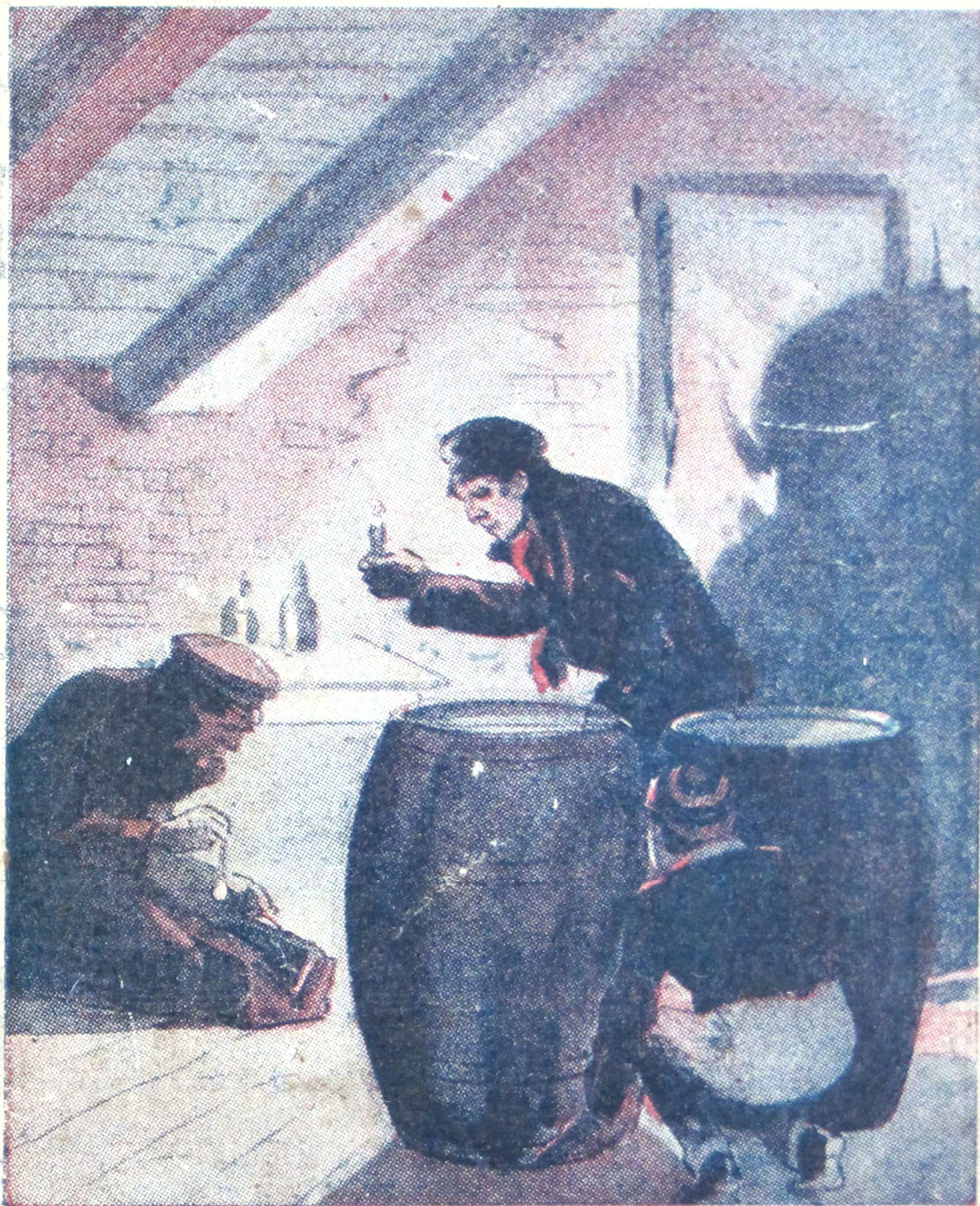


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

PLANNING AN OFFENSIVE.

THERE was a very thoughtful expression upon Bob Christine's face as he emerged from the College House at St. Frank's. He turned back after a few seconds, coughing and spluttering.

"Beastly fog!" he muttered disgustedly.

Christine, in fact, had been so deep in thought that he had wandered through the doorway without realising where he was going. He had come along from the junior Common-room, intending to go to his study.

"Now, what the dickens made me march outside?" he asked himself, as he stood in the lobby. "My hat! What a blanket—couldn't be better!"

That last remark was rather contradictory, considering that Bob Christine had referred to the fog as "beastly" only a moment before.

The evening was certainly an unusual one at St. Frank's. After a dull, heavy day a dense blanket of fog had come inland from the sea, three miles distant. It was white and cold, and so impenetrable that the Ancient House, across the Triangle, was totally invisible.

Such a dense mist was seldom seen at St. Frank's, and the majority of the boys did not care for it at all. For the air was raw and chill, and everything was miserably damp. The fog penetrated into the class-rooms and studies, and the electric-lights looked yellowish and weak.

There had been a rather severe frost a day or two before—quite an early frost—and some of the optimistic juniors had been foolish enough to imagine that skating would be possible. But frosts during the latter part of November are seldom lasting, and invariably slight.

This one had not stuck to the rule, for it had been hard—for about twelve hours. And now this fog had come hard on its heels,

dampening the juniors' spirits, and everything else at the same time.

But Bob Christine, the leader of the College House Remove, had been thinking deeply. He was wondering if capital could be made out of the inclement condition of the weather. He was inclined to think that it could.

And he strode into Study Q, and found his two chums, Yorke and Talmadge, getting ready for their prep. They looked up as Christine entered, and he could easily see that they were not in a very excellent humour.

"What's up with you?" growled Talmadge. "What do you want to come here with a face as long as a mile for?"

"Is it long?" asked Christine. "I've been thinking, my sons. And, what's more, I've been thinking to some purpose. I've got a number one, gilt-edged, spanking wheeze. What do you think of that?"

"This isn't an evening for wheezes," said Yorke tartly.

Christine stood with his back to the fire.

"That's just where you're mistaken," he replied. "This is the evening for wheezes—the finest evening we could possibly have."

"In this rotten fog?"

"Yes."

"A wheeze against the Fossils?"

"Exactly."

"And this is the finest evening we could have for it?"

"Certainly," said Christine.

Talmadge looked over to Yorke and tapped his head.

"It's beastly stuff, this fog," he said; "but I didn't think it would affect poor old Bob in this way. Sit down, old man, and take it gently. I'll go to the matron for some brandy if you're feeling weak."

Christine grinned.

"I'm not joking, he said. "We may not get another opportunity for weeks. This fog is pretty rotten, I'll admit, but it's all for the good, in one way. It's an ill wind which blows nobody any good—"

"What's the good of firing off mouldy old proverbs?" asked Talmadge tartly. "There isn't any wind, anyhow. And if you think you're going to fetch me out in this miserable mist, you're jolly well mistaken."

"Same here," said Yorke. "Shove that ink across, Tally."

Christine's chums were annoyingly indifferent, but the leader of the Monks did not lose his temper. After all, it was a beastly night, and Study Q was warm and cosy.

It would be necessary to explain the idea.

"You chaps needn't start work just yet," he said grimly. "You've got to listen to me. I'm your leader, and I've decided that the time has arrived for us to strike a blow at the enemy."

"Why can't you make the time arrive on a fine evening?" demanded Yorke crossly.

"Because a fine evening wouldn't suit our purpose," replied Christine. "Now, I ask you, isn't it time we showed Nipper that we're not going to stand being trampled on any longer?"

"He hasn't been trampling on us, you fat-head," said Talmadge.

"Not literally, but, figuratively speaking, we've been trampled severely," said Bob Christine. "For weeks and weeks we haven't struck a single blow. We've been lying in our trenches, idle, and nothing has been happening. Isn't it time we started an offensive?"

"Well, not exactly this evening——"

"Isn't it time we showed the Fossils that they are behind us when it comes to strategy?" demanded Christine, waxing enthusiastic. "Isn't it time we worked off some gorgeous stunt on them?"

"Isn't it time you turned off the gas?" suggested Yorke.

Christine banged the table with his fist.

"You chaps are supposed to be my generals!" he roared. "What do you mean by it? Are you going to shirk your duty because of a beastly fog? Are you going to let a fine opportunity for a raid slip by without lifting a finger?"

"I shall lift my whole giddy fist in a minute!" growled Talmadge.

"You're at liberty to lift both of 'em if you like!" said Christine. "Why is the College House under dog at St. Frank's?"

"Rate—it isn't!" retorted Yorke hotly.

"It is!"

"I say it isn't!"

"And I say it is!" bellowed Christine, banging the table anew. "The College House is miles behind the Ancient House—and I'll tell you why! I'll tell you exactly why we—Who the dickens opened that door?"

Several heads appeared in the doorway.

"Want any help in here?" inquired Nation politely.

"Because if so, we'll lend you a hand," Oldfield added. "What's the matter with Christine? There's no lunatic asylum nearer than Colney Hatch that I know of, but we might be able to take up a strait-jacket——"

"You silly asses!" roared Christine, glaring.

"Look out!" said Nation. "He's getting violent."

"Yes, I am!" snorted Christine. "Who wouldn't be violent with a set of sleepy fatheads like you? Come inside, all of you!"

"No fear!"

"We'll wait until you're a bit calmer——"

"You silly chumps, I've thought of a ripping wheeze, and these two dolts won't take any notice of me," snapped Christine.

"Come in and give me your support!"

Nation, Oldfield and Clapson entered Study Q, followed by one or two other juniors. They did so cautiously, keeping a wary eye upon Christine. Christine was all right so long as he remained calm—one of the best fellows breathing—but he was undoubtedly rather excitable.

"I was explaining why the Ancient House beats us every time," said Christine warmly.

"Then you must be mad!" declared Oldfield. "What the dickens do you mean by saying that?"

"Isn't it true?"

"No, it jolly well isn't!"

"Then we'll start the argument all over again," declared Christine grimly. "Goodness knows, I hate having to admit the thing—but it's glaring. It's positively glaring."

"You are!" remarked Nation.

"I'm what?"

"Positively glaring!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You look as though you were trying to bore holes through us," added Nation.

"What can I do with such idiots as these round me?" asked Christine despairingly, appealing to the ceiling. "Here am I, in the middle of a serious speech, and you can only make fatuous jokes."

"Which jokes?" inquired Yorke politely.

"I don't expect you to understand ordinary English!" sneered Christine. "I maintain that the College House ranks behind the Ancient House when it comes to strategy. Nipper is absolutely full of wheezes, and he's always up to something fresh. What do we do? We just look on—and do nothing."

"How can we do nothing if we're looking on?" asked Oldfield. "You might as well stick to the reasonable truth, Christine. Looking on is doing something, isn't it?"

Christine breathed hard.

"I'll tell you why we only look on—why we don't do things," he exclaimed fiercely. "The cause of it is apathy—apathy—apathy!"

"That's three apathies!" remarked Talmadge. "And what are they, anyhow? Something to eat?"

"I know jolly well that you're only laughing at me—but you know it's true," exclaimed Christine grimly. "The difference between us and the Fossils is that they're full of life and we're apathetic. Instead of showing the

Initiative, we remain in our shells and do nothing."

"What do you think we are—snails?" asked Yorke humorously.

Bob Christine banged the table.

"You couldn't have said a better word!" he declared. "It was meant to be funny, but it was the truth! Snails—that's just what we are."

"Are you calling me a snail?" roared Yorke, jumping up.

"I'm including myself as well, so you needn't get touchy!" snapped Christine. "And you needn't try to throw dust in our eyes."

"You're doing that," said Clapson. "How long is it since you shook this tablecloth? It's simply full——"

"I shall punch somebody in the eye in a minute!" snorted Christine. "Just consider the points. When the Fossils have worked off a trick on us we've worked off a trick on them. Isn't that so?"

"Of course it is."

"But can you tell me the time when we've taken the offensive first?" demanded Christine. "That's a question for you to answer!"

"Well, I don't suppose we have thought much of planning a wheeze until Nipper's shown us the way," admitted Clapson.

"That's just my argument," said Christine. "To-night we have a splendid opportunity of getting the laugh over the Fossils. And when I suggested it to Yorke and Talmadge, they scoffed at me."

"I don't wonder at it," said Nation. "Do you think we want to choose a night like this—foggy and damp and cold?"

"An able general chooses the night which is most suitable for his purpose," replied Christine. "He doesn't worry himself about inconvenience and discomfort. He aims higher, and—gets there!"

"Gets where—higher?" asked Oldfield.

"No, he does what he planned to do," replied Christine. "And if you chaps are willing to back me up now, we'll make those Ancient House fellows the laughing-stock of the school. But I'll leave it to you to decide. If you think my wheeze is no good—well, we'll chuck it up. I'm an obliging chap."

"Let's hear the wheeze?" said Billy Nation.

And Bob Christine forthwith proceeded to outline the scheme which had caused him to walk out into the fog. His listeners became more attentive as he proceeded. Grins broke out on every face, and those were succeeded by broader grins. Finally Study Q responded with yells of laughter. Bob Christine's good humour was completely restored by this gratifying reception accorded to his plan.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked, at last.

"Great!" chuckled Clapson.

"And you'll back me up?"

"Every man of us—and we'll make it a success, too!"

And the Monks roared with laughter afresh.

CHAPTER II.

PITT ISN'T HAVING ANY.

MR. SIMON GRELL blundered heavily into one of the gateposts of the imposing entrance of St. Frank's. He came to a halt, and addressed a series of lurid remarks to the gatepost in question.

These remarks did no harm to the post, but they relieved Mr. Grell. The dense masses of white fog hemmed him in everywhere, and he could scarcely see his own unclean fist when held before his face.

"Like a blessed London partic'lar, down Wappin' way," muttered Mr. Grell, pulling his woollen scarf more tightly round his throat. "Still, it might come in handy for me, so I won't grumble. Fogs ain't all honey; but, then, they ain't all gall, neither. They have their uses."

The use of this particular fog was obvious. It concealed Mr. Grell while he made his way into the Triangle. It rendered him safe while he roamed about at will. If anybody came along, he would be unheard and unseen.

It was not possible for Mr. Grell to approach St. Frank's under normal weather conditions. He feared the boys themselves, and he feared the masters—particularly the Housemaster of the Ancient House, who was none other than Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective.

For Simon Grell had no reason to love Nelson Lee. Unfortunate to relate, Mr. Grell was the uncle of Jack Mason, of the Remove. Before arriving at St. Frank's, Mason had hailed from Bermondsey, and he was one of the straightest chaps in the Ancient House.

It had not taken me long to find that out. As captain of the Remove, I naturally took an interest in a new fellow. And Jack Mason was not only splendid in himself, but he was the greatest "find" in footballers the Junior Eleven had ever come across. He was undoubtedly the best outside-left in Remove history. And yet Mason hadn't really had a real chance. That was coming.

Just at present, however, he was somewhat worried over the presence of his uncle in the neighbourhood. Mr. Grell was a scally-wag, and he was not here for the mere sake of seeing his nephew. He had quite another motive.

For some reason he badly wished to obtain a gold locket which Mason possessed—or, strictly speaking, a half-locket. Grell was also after a sealed package, which was not Jack's property at all. Unknown to the boy, this contained the other half of the locket. But Mr. Grell knew it.

There was a certain amount of mystery concerning the affair.

That package was the property of Mr. David Strong, the benevolent old gentleman who was paying Jack's fees at St. Frank's. Mr. Strong had left it behind by accident, and it was owing to this fluke that Mr. Simon Grell had become aware of its con-

tents. And the man was extremely anxious to get it into his possession. He had already made several unsuccessful attempts.

Jack regarded Mr. Strong as his only real friend. It wouldn't be far wrong to say that the boy looked upon the old gentleman as a father. Certainly he had never experienced kindness from anybody until he had met Mr. Strong. That meeting had been rather dramatic, for Jack had saved Mr. Strong from being run over by a motor-bus. A great friendship had sprung up between the two, the ultimate result of which was that Jack came to St. Frank's to be fully educated—a dream which he had never thought possible of accomplishment.

But Jack was a sensitive fellow, and he would have felt his position keenly had he known that he was at the school on Mr. Strong's charity. So the old chap had played a little trick on his young friend, and had made Jack believe that the money was provided by a legacy left by some obscure relative.

Jack knew nothing of Mr. Strong's connection with the lawyers who were paying the fees and supplying Mason with pocket-money. Indeed, Jack fully believed that Mr. Strong was as poor as a church mouse.

Why Jack should have one-half of the locket and Mr. Strong the other—each of them remaining unaware of the other's possession—remained a bit of a mystery. But this was the fact, and Mr. Grell was anxious to obtain the two halves.

Jack's uncle had a friend staying with him at the White Harp Inn, in the village. This gentleman rejoiced in the name of Jake Starkey, and he and Grell had succeeded in getting hold of Mason, but not the locket. And Jack himself had slipped out of their fingers almost at once, owing to the timely intervention of Nelson Lee.

For a day or two Jack had seen nothing of his uncle, and had begun to think that he had left the neighbourhood. But Captain Jim—as Grell was known among his intimates had been lying low. He had no intention of leaving the district empty-handed.

This foggy evening presented a good opportunity of approaching the school without fear of interference or discovery. Grell had no actual plan in mind, but he was hopeful of something turning up.

The locket, in itself, was not worth more than a pound or two; so it was obvious that Captain Jim did not wish to obtain it for its intrinsic value. His motive was different. There was a message scratched upon the inside of the locket—in Arabic. It told of a treasure in precious stones which lay concealed in some far-away oasis on an African desert.

Grell knew well enough that the locket was probably worth tens of thousands. There was a faint chance that the jewels had been recovered by somebody else, but he did not think this probable. At all events, it was decidedly worth the trouble of obtaining the locket. A fortune was at stake, and Mr.

Grell was a bit of a sportsman—in his own opinion.

He was irritated and angry by this prolonged business. He had confidently expected that he would obtain the locket without the slightest trouble. But having failed at the start his efforts had led Mason to suspect that the half-locket and the sealed package were of great value.

Simon Grell was getting impatient and desperate. He knew well enough that the keen eyes of Nelson Lee were upon him, and he wished to get out of the neighbourhood at the earliest possible moment. To admit defeat was not in his nature, and he intended quitting victorious.

He found his way into the Triangle after some little difficulty. Dense white walls enveloped him everywhere, and all sounds were subdued and muffled. But he struck out straight ahead, and eventually saw the lights of the windows in the Ancient House gleaming dully before him.

"Yes, that is right," he muttered. "There here lower windows belong to the kids' studies. That young Pitt feller told me that. An' the fifth window from this end belongs to Jack's room."

Mr. Grell had made certain of that fact some nights earlier, when he had come up to find out the lie of the land. During that visit he had remained outside the school wall, and his object had been to get the position of Mason's window firmly in his mind. There was no telling when the information might be useful—and it seemed that it would be useful this evening.

The fog was a great help. Without it, Grell could not have entered the Triangle so openly. It was a public place, somebody or other constantly passing to and fro. In such a big school this was only to be expected.

Quite possibly fellows were out in the Triangle even now, but they were hidden from Mr. Grell, and Mr. Grell was hidden from them. Even if he was spotted he would be able to slip into the fog and get away easily.

He edged his way along the wall and soon arrived outside the window of Study E. It was closed, but in the dead silence caused by the fog—the silence from without—he could distinctly hear the voices of boys within the study.

Under ordinary conditions this would have been difficult, for sounds of all descriptions would have come from across the Triangle, from the lobby, from various quarters. But now everything was deadened by the dense masses of fog.

Listening, Mr. Grell heard the voice of his nephew. He leaned against the window-sill, and bent his head towards the glass.

"—all depends upon Nipper, I expect," Jack was saying. "He might give you a chance if you showed a strong inclination towards footer, Pitt. But you must admit that you've been rather slack up till now."

"I do admit it," came the voice of Reginald Pitt. "But I'm rather keen on

football, really. I don't suppose you'll believe me—"

"I'll believe it if you say so," interrupted Mason.

"Do you trust me so much that you'll take my bare word, then?" chuckled Pitt. "We haven't been getting on very well together, Mason, but that's been my fault. There's no reason why we shouldn't jog along smoothly."

Mr. Grell spat into the fog.

"What's the good o' this?" he growled under his breath. "I shall git chilled to the marrow, standin' here. How am I goin' to git a word with Jack alone? That's the question. Or it wouldn't be so bad if I could 'ave a little chat with Pitt. He's a tricky young cub, an' useful, too. Nice smooth tongue he's got. Seems as though he was as friendly as you please with my nerry, yet he'd betray him in two minutes for the sake of a quid!"

Mr. Grell had excellent reason for believing that. Reginald Pitt, known as the Serpent of the Remove, was indeed tricky. His career at St. Frank's had been somewhat lurid, and he had only escaped expulsion on one occasion by the skin of his teeth. He had performed an act of heroism, and this, in the eyes of the Head, had wiped out the stain.

Since then Pitt had been greatly improved. But he had commenced falling back into the old ways, as was evidenced by his connection with Mr. Grell. But Pitt was a queer boy, and there was really no telling what he would do next.

Mr. Grell listened at the window without enthusiasm.

"You haven't seen anything of your uncle lately, have you?" asked Pitt.

The listener became more intent.

"Not for three or four days," replied Jack Mason. "I hope he's gone out of the neighbourhood. It would be a great relief to me, anyhow. My uncle's a rascal, Pitt, and I don't mind telling you so."

"Oh, is he?" growled Mr. Grell, under his breath savagely. "They say that listeners never hear no good o' themselves—an' this don't seem to be no exception. I'll make the boy smart for them words!"

"My uncle wants to get that locket, and Mr. Strong's package, too," went on Mason.

"Yes, I know," said Pitt. "He won't get them now, old son. They're as safe as eggs in Mr. Lee's study. Mr. Grell might just as well clear off to-night."

"I'm glad I gave them to our House-master," said Mason. "He's locked them away in his bureau, I believe, and there's no possibility of my uncle finding them. If he ever catches me again I sha'n't breathe a word. But you understand, Pitt, that it's all private, don't you?"

"Of course," replied Pitt. "You can trust me, old chap."

Mr. Grell gritted his teeth.

The news he had just heard was not palatable. At the same time, he was glad

that he had heard it, for it put him in possession of a fact which he had hitherto been unaware of. The boy no longer had the two halves of the locket—they were being kept by Nelson Lee, of all people!

Captain Jim was also aware of the fact that it would be a sheer waste of time for him to bother about Jack any longer. The boy was obstinate, and even severe thrashings would not make him speak. And if he did speak—what then? Mr. Grell would simply hear the news that he had heard just now. Nelson Lee had the locket, and this piece of bad news made Grell savage.

He thought deeply, and decided to return to the White Harp in order to discuss the matter with Mr. Starkey. And then his eyes gleamed. After all, the news might be turned to account. Perhaps the situation was really improved. The subject needed careful handling.

Grell heard the study door open.

"Want you, Mason," somebody said. "Just come along to my study for ten minutes, will you?"

"Certainly," said Jack. "Sha'n't be long, Pitt."

The study door closed again, and Mr. Grell heard a soft whistle proceeding from within. Reginald Pitt was now alone, and he was probably lolling in one of the chairs whistling to himself. This was an opportunity which Captain Jim did not allow to slip by. Already a scheme was taking form in his cunning mind.

He tapped upon the glass of the window and waited.

The whistling ceased, but as nothing else happened, Grell tapped again. This time he heard a chair pushed back, and then the blind was drawn aside and the silhouette of Reginald Pitt appeared against the light.

He evidently recognised the man at once, for he softly pushed up the lower sash.

"You alone?" whispered Grell.

"Yes. What the dickens do you want here?" asked Pitt. "I—I say, you'll get into trouble if you're found—"

"This fog's as thick as soup!" interrupted Grell. "Come out here, boy, I want a few words with you."

"Sorry, but I can't."

"I'll make it worth your while," whispered Captain Jim quickly.

Just for a moment Pitt hesitated, then he nodded and stepped backwards into the study again. When he appeared he was wearing his cap and a muffler was round his throat. He switched off the light, climbed through the window, and gently lowered the sash. If Jack returned he would simply think that Pitt had gone out in the ordinary way.

"I suppose I'm an ass to come out," said Pitt. "What's the trouble?"

"We can't talk here, right against the buildin's," said Grell. "Wait until we git out in the road, then I'll explain."

With some little difficulty they made their way to the gates, losing themselves once or

twice before locating the gateway. The mist, if anything, was growing thicker, and it struck chill to Pitt, after leaving the warm study.

"Look here, I'm not going to stay out here for long!" he exclaimed. "I don't want to be laid up in the sanny for a fortnight with influenza. I'm an ass for coming out at all."

"Don't forget that you had three quid off me once," said Mr. Grell. "Three quid for doin' nothin'—"

"That wasn't my fault," said Pitt. "I performed the work we agreed upon, but fate was against you. That was your trouble. You wanted to get that half-locket and the package, didn't you? Are you still on the same game?"

"Durn you, boy, you know I am," snapped Captain Jim. "An', wot's more, I know that them things are in your House-master's study. They're locked away in a bureau, which ain't difficult to break into."

"Oh, so you were listening outside the window, were you?" said Pitt. "That was very thoughtful of you, Mr. Grell. But you mustn't forget that it's a pretty hard job to break into a school like this—if that's what you're thinking of."

Grell seized Pitt's arm.

"If you was a right-minded kid you'd know that you never earned them three Bradburys," he said. "But I won't ask you to do this job for nothin'. I'll give you another three quid if you're open to a little job which will be as simple as drinkin' tea out of a basin. Are you game?"

"I might be," said Pitt calmly. "Money isn't to be lightly ehucked away, you know. I never have too much in my pockets."

Simon Grell chuckled.

"You're the young shaver for me!" he declared, picturing an easy victory in his evil mind. "You'll be earnin' three quid easier than you earned the last three. Look here, Pitt, my lad. I'll be waitin' just outside the school wall—at this here very spot—at midnight."

"What for?" asked Pitt. "It'll be rather cold, won't it?"

"I've been in worse cold than this," said Mr. Grell. "I shall be waitin' for you, my lad. Your job is to git out o' bed when everybody else is asleep—at about half-past eleven, say. You'll go down to Lee's study, git those things out o' the bureau, an' bring them out to me. It'll be dead easy."

"No doubt about that," replied Pitt. "And what then?"

"I'll hand you the three quid, an' you'll be able to git back to bed without a soul bein' the wiser."

"And what will you do?" asked Pitt. "Those things will be missed, you know, and Mr. Lee will suspect you. If you're still at the White Harp you might find yourself arrested in the morning—"

"D'ye think I'd be such a durned fool?" chuckled Mr. Grell. "Me an' Starkey will

stay in that old ruined mill until the early mornin', then we'll jest walk into Banninton an' take the first train. We shall be in London afore anythin's discovered. Why, it's a splendid plan."

Pitt nodded.

"I don't see how it can fail," he remarked calmly. "But there's one thing about it, Mr. Grell, that might be altered."

"An' wot's that?"

"The three quid for me—"

"I might even make it four if you bring me the things I want," said Grell generously.

"I don't mean that. I think it's too much," said Pitt. "I wouldn't dream of taking three pounds. In fact I sha'n't take a penny!"

"By thunder!" exclaimed Mr. Grell. "You've changed, ain't you?"

"Well, I suppose I have!"

"An' why don't you want to take no money?"

"My conscience wouldn't allow me to," replied Pitt coolly. "Besides, I sha'n't earn it. At midnight, when you're waiting out here, I shall be fast asleep in the Remove dormitory."

Mr. Grell stared through the fog at his young companion.

"How can you be in the dormitory at midnight if you're goin' to hand me that locket?" he asked gruffly. "You're a young fool—"

"Not exactly," said Pitt. "You see, Mr. Grell, I should be a young fool if I had anything to do with this rotten scheme of yours. But I shall be in bed, because I haven't the slightest intention of doing what you want. I wouldn't do it if you paid me twenty pounds!"

"Wot!" snarled Captain Jim.

"I've been willing enough to lend you a hand in other occasions," went on the Serpent, "but it's a different thing when you want me to descend to burglary. No, thanks, Mr. Grell, that's not in my line!"

"Now, look here—"

"We shall only be wasting your time and mine," said

Pitt. "Sorry I can't oblige you, but I'd much prefer to be asleep in bed—thanks all the same. And I may as well inform you, Mr. Grell, that I think you're a dirty scoundrel, and I've been a confounded fool for having anything to do with you at all. And I sincerely hope that you will end up by breaking stones at Portland!"

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KAISER**

Simon Grell made a fierce grab at his young companion. But Reginald Pitt easily dodged, and Captain Jim only lurched into the fog. An amused chuckle came from behind him, and he twirled round. But Pitt was nowhere to be seen. Only the white walls of fog loomed up before Mr. Grell.

He swore furiously and at great length. But the Serpent had gone. He was walking across the Triangle, smiling serenely and feeling quite contented. Reginald Pitt was learning sense.

And the one fact which he had learned to-night was that it gave him far more satisfaction to thwart Mr. Grell than it gave him to lend assistance. Pitt had not felt quite so happy for weeks.

There was certainly a change for the better in this self-possessed junior.

CHAPTER III.

FIVE HUNDRED LINES.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave one of his expressive snorts.

Some funny idiot!" he exclaimed.

"Shouldn't be surprised if Fullwood and Co. did it. Looks like their foolery!"

"What's the excitement?" I asked.

I was just on my way to the Common-room from Study C, accompanied by Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. In the lobby, however, we found Handforth staring at the notice-board and making remarks at it. Church and McClure were there, too, and they all seemed to be interested.

"Have a look at this, Nipper," said McClure.

"Anything startlin', dear fellow?" inquired Tregellis-West languidly. "I hope it is, I do, really. I could just do with some excitement now to buck me up. It's been a frightfully dull day, an' this fog has a most depressin' effect upon a fellow. Don't take up all the room, old boys."

We stood in front of the notice-board, and then saw the cause of Handforth's forcible remarks. A square sheet of paper had been mysteriously pinned upon the board—I say mysteriously, because nobody knew how it had come there, or who had placed it there. And it simply bore the words, daubed in ink:

"LOOK OUT FOR SQUALLS!"

"That doesn't seem quite appropriate, you know," said Sir Montie critically. "How can there be squalls this evenin', dear boys? The air's perfectly still, an' I believe the glass is goin' up. But, then, we can't rely upon the barometer in the Hall. I really think somebody has been messin' about with it, because it always falls when it's fine, an' rises when it's goin' to be wet."

"What's the ass jabbering about?" demanded Handforth. "This notice hasn't got anything to do with the weather. It

doesn't mean that kind of squall you ass!"

"Really?" yawned Montie. "I'm shockin'ly dull, you know."

"Just about as dull as a razor blade," I said calmly. "But you like to make chaps think that you're slow, don't you? We all know your little ways, Montie, old son. But about this notice. I rather fancy that Christine and Co. could explain it."

"What's it got to do with those cheeky Monks?" asked Handforth.

"Well, it looks to me as though they took advantage of the fog to steal in and pin that to the board," I said. "Who else would tell us to look out for squalls? There's one thing about it, we're quite ready to welcome any old wind that blows from the College House quarter."

"I should think so," sniffed Handforth. "Do those asses imagine for a moment that they can get the better of us? Why, I wouldn't allow such a thing!"

"Of course you wouldn't," I said solemnly. "Why, if it wasn't for you, Handy, I don't know what we should do in the Ancient House. Things would crumple up in the most disastrous manner."

Handforth smiled.

"Well, I wouldn't go as far as that," he said modestly. "They'd be bad, of course. The Remove would go to pot, and all the rest of it, but I daresay you'd manage to pull along in some way or other."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned round, glaring.

"What the thunder are you cackling at, McClure?" he demanded.

McClure became very grave in a second.

"I—oh, I just thought of something!" he stammered.

"Well, keep your laughs to yourself," snapped Handforth.

"He might have been grinning at the thought of you leaving us in the lurch, Handy," I said. "He was probably picturing the peaceful condition of the Ancient House without your presence. Things would go with delightful smoothness. No longer would sounds of strife come from Study D; no longer would your dulcet tones echo down the passage; no longer would noses be in danger——"

"You silly idiot!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've been pulling my leg!" declared Handforth, in surprised tones. "You've been leading me on, you awful rotter!"

"Really?" I grinned. "Is that possible, Handy?"

"It's always the same; you seem to take a special delight in sneering at me," said Handforth bitterly. "Of course, I know the reason; it's obvious."

"Go hon!"

"You're jealous—it's nothing but rank jealousy!" declared Handforth. "If there was such a thing as justice I should be skipper of the Remove, and skipper of the Eleven, too. But I've ceased to expect justice from the fellows in this House."

They've all got warped minds—every one of 'em!"

"Hasn't it struck you that yours might be a warped one?" I suggested.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle away—split your silly faces!" said Handforth, with a snuff. "Do you think I care? I hope I'm above taking any notice of this ribald laughter. If you yell like that, Church, I'll punch your nose!"

Church proceeded to yell harder, but stopped very abruptly when Handforth's huge fist came in contact with his nose.

"Ow!" he howled. "Oh, you rotter!"

"Don't you laugh at me, then!" snorted Handforth.

"I thought you didn't care?" I grinned. "I thought you were above such petty things, Handy——"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Handforth, turning away. "Why, great pip! Look at those two beastly grinning monkeys!"

De Valerie and Burton and one or two others had entered the lobby by this time, and they were all standing by. But Handforth was staring at the big doorway. The door had opened without anybody noticing, and now we saw the faces of Yorke and Talmadge, of the College House, in the opening. The fog was oozing past their heads in little wisps.

"Shut that door, you cheeky asses!" I shouted. "Do you think we want all the fog in here? Buzz off—— Well, my hat!"

Yorke and Talmadge, far from buzzing off, had deliberately pushed the door wide open. They stood upon the step, grinning and making insulting gesticulations.

"Think yourselves everybody, don't you?" yelled Talmadge. "Why, I wouldn't belong to this moth-eaten old barn for anything! You're a lot of out-of-date fossils, and it's a wonder——"

"Are you talking to us?" bellowed Handforth, quite unnecessarily.

"Rather!" shouted Yorke. "Yah! Haven't got the pluck of a mouse—not one of you! Cuddle yourselves up because of a bit of fog! There's not one of you dare come outside——"

"Are we going to stand this?" asked De Valerie calmly. "Is it possible? Personally, I think that we'd better administer a prompt lesson—what?"

"Yah! You daren't!" yelled Talmadge.

The utter audacity of this insulting behaviour took us by surprise. No College House Juniors had ever dared to beard us in our den like this before. They were absolutely asking for it.

Without waiting another second we all made a rush. We fondly hoped to capture the pair and make an example of them. But they dodged back quickly, and vanished into the fog. We went charging down the steps in hot pursuit.

"Dear me! What——"

The voice came out of the fog, and the next second it changed into a cry of alarm. Watson and I, leading the way, had bowled

somebody over with considerable violence. We went flying ourselves, but all the other fellows checked in time, and came to a halt at the foot of the steps.

"Who's—who's that?" I asked breathlessly, scrambling up.

Dimly in the fog I saw a gowned figure sit up in a dazed fashion. And then, to our horror, came Mr. Crowell's voice. In our haste to capture the flying Monks we had knocked our Form-master crashing over.

"How—how dare you!" gasped Mr. Crowell furiously. "This—this is most disgraceful—— No, don't go away—don't move an inch!"

"We're awfully sorry, sir," I began hastily.

"Don't dare to excuse yourself, Nipper!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "I am quite all right; you needn't help me up. Things have reached a pretty pass when it is impossible for me to enter the House without being knocked over with the utmost violence!"

"We didn't see you, sir!" came Handforth's voice through the fog.

"That is no excuse whatever," declared Mr. Crowell angrily. "In a mist such as this you have no right to charge about as though you were upon the football-field. Every boy who took part in this scene will go at once to the Form-room and remain there until the supper-bell rings!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Every boy will write five hundred lines during that time!" roared Mr. Crowell, with unusual heat. "It is necessary to teach you a lesson—to make you realise that you must not hurl yourselves through a dense fog, utterly careless as to who may be about. Go—every one of you!"

We saw Mr. Crowell stride off into the fog. I had little doubt that he was considerably muddled, and he was bent upon entering by the side door. And I had little doubt, either, that Yorke and Talmadge had been aware of Mr. Crowell's approach, and that they had deliberately insulted us so that we should bowl into the Form-master. It was their idea of a joke, but I didn't think much of it. We might have hurt Mr. Crowell quite seriously.

"I say, Church and I weren't in it, you know," said McClure, as we collected in the lobby. "We hadn't even got over the giddy step——"

"That doesn't matter," I interrupted. "You were rushing out with us, and you ought to take part in the punishment. We were all in it, and it's only right that we should obey old Crowsfeet's order."

"What ghastly luck!" remarked De Valerie.

"Why not find old Crowell and put it to him gently?" suggested Handforth. "Apologise, and all the rest of it——"

"Can't be did," I said. "He's in a ramping rage, and he wouldn't listen to us. No, my sons, we're detained till supper-time, so let's get along. If he finds us still here, he'll probably give us a gating as well."

"Begad! Let's be movin'," said Sir Montie, in alarm.

And we proceeded to the Form-room—eleven of us altogether. Burton and De Valerie had been right behind, but they had certainly been rushing out at the time of the collision, and their consciences told them that it was up to them to share the punishment—if only in sympathy for us.

There was nothing else to do but get to work, and we ground away at lines resignedly. It was a thankless task. The Form-room was cold and cheerless, and lines are never entertaining at the best of times. An hour passed draggingly, and we still had quite a lot to do. Besides, it was only just after eight, and there was a long time to go before the supper-bell would ring.

"Ain't it awfully cold?" shivered Handforth. "I say, Crowell's a bit of a beast, you know."

"He's worse than that!" growled Watson, rubbing his cold hands.

"A bit thick, ordering us into the giddy Form-room, anyhow," said De Valerie. "He might have let us do the lines in our own studies. It's like an ice-house here."

"Grumbling won't make it any better," I said shortly.

And with stiff hands, we continued our labours, our thoughts concerning Mr. Crowell being really too murderous to find expression in mere words. Another half-hour passed, and we felt happier when we realised that supper-time would soon be at hand.

And then the door opened and Mr. Crowell strode in.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "What is the meaning of this, boys? What on earth are you doing in the Form-room at this time of night, and in this chilling atmosphere, too?"

"What are we doing, sir?" I gasped. "Why, writing lines!"

Mr. Crowell gazed at us in amazement.

"I observed the light under the door, and came to investigate," he said. "This is surely extraordinary. Why are you writing lines in this cold room?"

We stared rather helplessly.

"Didn't you give 'em to us, sir?" growled Handforth. "We're nearly freezing, but you ordered us to come into the Form-room, and it wasn't our place to object!"

"What did you say, Handforth?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply. "I ordered you to come into the Form-room?"

"Why, of course you did, sir——"

"Nonsense!" interjected Mr. Crowell. "I am not quite so harsh as that. This room is icy cold, and I would never dream of ordering boys to sit here——"

"But you gave us five hundred lines each, sir!" I protested.

The Form-master shook his head.

"I do not pretend to know what this means," he said grimly, "but I can assure you, boys, that I have given you no lines whatever, and you were obeying no order of mine when you came to this room!"

CHAPTER IV.

A FIENDISH REPRISAL.

UTTER silence reigned for several seconds. We gazed at one another blankly, and Mr. Crowell looked on in as much mystification as ourselves. A twinkle was beginning to appear in his eyes, however, and he smiled good-naturedly.

"You're—you're dreaming sir!" exclaimed Handforth dazedly. "Didn't you give us lines for howling you over accidentally in the fog——"

"My dear Handforth, I have not stepped outside the House during the whole evening," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "It is only too obvious to me that some person, humourously inclined, has been playing a trick upon you. I do not think it will be necessary for me to make any inquiries. You had better go and warm yourselves up in the short interval before supper."

Mr. Crowell was now doing his utmost to prevent himself laughing, and as we trooped out of the Form-room he laughed in real earnest.

"Shiver my main-deck!" exclaimed the Bo'sun. "What do you think of this, mess-mates? I'm soused if we haven't been dilled?"

"That's no word for it!" I exclaimed bitterly. "Oh, of all the fatheaded asses! It is as clear as daylight now. And we fell into the trap——"

"Are you calling me a fatheaded ass!" demanded Handforth warmly.

"Yes, I am!"

"Then I'll punch your nose——"

"Oh, don't rot!" I interrupted. "We're all in the same boat—we've all been tricked. Those Monks will be cackling like a lot of old hens all to-morrow. It's a victory for them, and we can't deny it."

"The Monks?" repeated De Valerie. "By gad!"

"But it was Mr. Crowell who was bowled over!" exclaimed McClure. "We heard him—we heard him distinctly——"

"That's just it," I said. "We heard Mr. Crowell's voice, but the fog concealed the chap who was imitating it. Of course, the whole thing was a trick, and I wouldn't mind betting a cricket-stump that Oldfield was the chap we knocked over. He's rather good at imitating voices."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Handforth. "Then—then Oldfield was deliberately waiting out there, wearing a cap and gown, so that we should bowl him over? Oh, my only aunt! It's a proper swindle, you know."

I couldn't help grinning at Handforth's dismay.

"Of course it's a swindle," I agreed. "We must have been asleep to be dished so easily. It was the fog that did it, of course. Yorke and Talmadge were the decoys, and they lured us out into the fog. Oldfield—at least, one of the Monks—was waiting there, and he allowed himself to be bowled over. In the fog we couldn't see anything distinctly."

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "I can't

help admirin' the thing—I can't, really. It was a stunnin' wheeze."

Handforth sniffed.

"Some chaps have queer ideas!" he exclaimed. "If you call it stunning to sit for eight or nine hours in a beastly cold Form-room, with fingers and toes covered with frost, I don't!"

"It wasn't so bad as that, Handy, surely?" said Tregellis-West mildly. "I thought we only there for an hour an' a half, an' although my toes were cold, I don't remember any frost—"

"Fathead!" snapped Handforth sourly.

"Politeness is a wonderful gift," I exclaimed. "Getting wild won't make things any better, Handy. The Monks have scored a victory—and a jolly decent one, too. We shall be the laughing-stock of the Remove, but things won't be made better by getting wild. We've got to organise a reprisal and take the wind out of the Monks' sails."

"That's all very well," growled Watson. "There's no time for reprisals to-night; it's nearly supper-time already. Oh, my hat! Here they come!"

The Monks had probably been watching, and had seen the light extinguished in the Form-room. So they had made it known far and wide that they had triumphed. A yelling crowd of College House juniors stood just outside the lobby. Within five minutes the whole junior section of the Ancient House knew all about it.

Inquiries of a sarcastic nature were hurled at us. How did we like writing lines? Was it nice sitting in a cold Form-room? Didn't we know the difference between Mr. Crowell and a junior? These were merely a mild selection of the sarcasms which we were subjected to.

We, the recognised leaders of the Fossils, had suffered a ghastly defeat. We sought refuge in our studies, and plans for revenge were concocted by the dozen.

Handforth, in Study D, nearly turned his chums' hair grey by his wild proposals. Something had to be done, he declared, and he was the fellow to do it. There was no sense in delaying matters.

"Study D has been insulted!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I've been insulted, and a prompt reprisal is the only course. I vote we get Christine and Co. into the woodshed and lock them there for the night."

"Splendid!" sneered McClure. "How are you going to get 'em there?"

"That's a detail—"

"Plans can't be carried out without details," said McClure obstinately. "It's all very well to suggest getting Christine and Co. into the woodshed, but it couldn't be done. I think it's a potty idea."

"What!" roared Handforth.

"How the dickens are you going to keep 'em quiet?" demanded McClure. "Gag the whole lot, or stand there and talk to 'em until they faint with weakness?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you laugh at McClure's rotten jokes I'll punch you into next week, Walter

Church!" bellowed Handforth. "Who's idea is this—yours or mine?"

"I don't want it," said Church. "I wouldn't own it."

"Better bury it!" suggested McClure.

Handforth breathed hard.

"By the time I've finished with you you'll need burying!" he exclaimed, thumping the table violently. "As it happens, that idea was only a suggestion. I don't propose carrying it out. I've got another stunning wheeze."

"Same brand?" asked McClure politely.

"No, this wheeze is absolutely top-hole," declared Handforth. "Christine and Co. decoyed us into bowling Oldfield over, didn't they? Well, we're going to decoy them—"

"That's a second-hand idea!" said Church, with a sniff.

"Not the way we shall work it!" snapped Handforth. "I'll just explain. You two chaps have got to go over to the College House, kick up a row, and draw the Monks out into the Triangle. While they're attending to you I shall lead two or three dozen fellows into their studies, and we'll wreck 'em!"

"Oh, terrific!" said Church tartly. "But what about McClure and me?"

"You'll be outside in the Triangle, doing your part."

"Getting bumped and half squashed, I suppose?"

"Well, it's only natural that the Monks will give you a high old time," said Handforth. "But it's all for the good of the cause. I daresay you'll be black and blue by the time they've done—they might even duck you in the fountain—but that's nothing!"

"Nothing at all!" said Church.

"We love being ducked!" added McClure.

"We simply gloat over being made black and blue in every limb!"

Handforth glared.

"I didn't ask you to be funny!" he exclaimed. "This idea of mine is capable of being worked, and I shall expect you chaps to sacrifice yourselves—for—for the honour of the Remove. What do you say?"

Church and McClure exchanged glances.

"Well, I don't know whether there are words in the English language capable of describing what we want to say," exclaimed McClure. "But there's no need for two chaps to act as decoys, Handy. One's quite sufficient. Church needn't go."

"Well, I suppose you'd do the job all right," said Handforth. "Jolly good of you, Clurey. It's just the spirit I like—"

"My dear chap, I was thinking of you!" explained McClure.

"Eh?"

"You can be the decoy—"

"What!" roared Handforth, light dawning upon him.

"Do you think I'd be so mean as to deprive you of the honour?" said McClure generously.

"My dear chap, if you think that you've mistaken your man. I wouldn't be a mean beast like that; not likely! It's your wheeze, and I'll willingly sacrifice all the

honour so that you can come up smiling. Of course, you'll probably be black and blue, and you might even be ducked in the fountain, but that's nothing. It's all for the honour of the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Church.

"You—you blithering idiot!" he gasped at last. "Ain't I the general? Does a general go into action himself? It's my place to command—Hi! Come back, you asses! Where the dickens are you off to?"

But the supper bell was ringing, and Church and McClure thought it quite unnecessary to remain in Study D listening to the wonderful suggestions of Edward Oswald Handforth. It was quite surprising how Handforth saw the idea in a different light when it was suggested that he should be the decoy.

Meanwhile, in Study C—next door—a much more serious confab. was proceeding. At least it had been proceeding during Handforth's eloquence.

I was talking soberly to Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. As I explained, a reprisal was quite essential, but there was no need to have half the Remove in the wheeze.

"We'll do it ourselves—just we three," I declared. "It'll be all the better, because it'll come as a surprise to the fellows in the morning. They'll see that we've wiped out the stain. As captain of the Fossils, it's absolutely necessary for me to take revenge promptly."

"Splendid, old boy, but how's it goin' to be done?" inquired Sir Montie languidly. "How do you propose to wipe out the stain? I don't wish to be pessimistic, but I really can't see how anythin's goin' to be done to-night."

Tommy and Montie were rather sceptical, but their faces brightened wonderfully while I outlined the scheme to them. Finally, they chuckled with delight, and promised to back me up all along the line.

Just before supper I paid a flying visit to the Ancient House laboratory. In consequence of this I didn't arrive in Hall until supper was half over. But I was satisfied, and that was the main thing.

In the dormitory a considerable amount of chaff went on. Those fellows who had not shared our ignominy in the Form-room could plainly see the humour of the occasion. Fullwood and Co. were particularly sarcastic; but wished they hadn't been. They were pelted with articles of every description. It wasn't likely that we were going to stand sneers from the Nuts!

"They won't be able to cackle in the morning!" I whispered to my two chums. "It'll be a tremendous triumph for us."

Everybody got off to sleep at last—including Tregellis-West and Watson. Considering that they were supposed to keep awake, this was most inconsiderate of them. But they probably knew that they could rely on me, having done so on former occasions. As the clock was striking eleven-thirty I sat up in bed.

"Out you get, you lubbers!" I whispered. No reply.

I slipped out, pulled on some clothing, and shook Montie and Tommy. They sat up, looked at me in the dense gloom, and blinked.

"That you, Nipper?" mumbled Watson. "Blessed if I can see anything in this beastly darkness. I say, what's the time?"

"Half-past eleven!"

"Begad!" breathed Montie. "Ain't it shockin'ly cold?"

"Don't you think we'd better give up the idea for to-night?" asked Watson. "It would do just as well to-morrow, Nipper. It's awfully cold and shivery——"

"There's a jug of cold water almost within reach of my hand," I said grimly. "If you chaps are still in bed after ten seconds have elapsed, that water won't be in the jug any longer! Is my meaning clear?"

Tregellis-West and Watson were out of bed in two seconds.

"It's tyranny!" complained Montie. "But still, it ain't our place to grumble. Ours not to question why, old boy—ours but to do an' die! That's how Shakespeare puts it, anyhow!"

"Rats!" shivered Watson. "Tennyson said that, or something after the same style. I don't reckon it's right to break bounds just for the sake of playing a silly jape. It's all right in the summer-time, but in this beastly fog I'm inclined to jib."

"There's always that jug of water," I said grimly. "What's the good of making arrangements with chaps like you?"

"Pray don't include me, dear old fellow," said Montie. "Now that I'm out of bed, I'm as willin' as anythin'. But you'll be frightfully careful with that stuff, won't you?"

"You needn't worry your head about that, my son," I replied. "I've got too much respect for my own comfort to let any of it escape. It's all reserved for one purpose, and I wouldn't dream of depriving Christine and Co. of even a drop."

"Yes, by Jingo," said Watson, brightening up. "It'll be worth a bit of discomfort, won't it? Our own sleep will be interrupted for half an hour, but the Monks will be in misery for the rest of the giddy night! Well, while we are delivering a reprisal we might as well do it thoroughly."

By the time we were all dressed both Tommy and Montie were in excellent spirits. It is always the actual getting out of bed which is the worst minute. We little realised, as we crept out of the dormitory, that a much longer space of time than half an hour was destined to elapse before we tumbled into bed again.

Everything had been prepared in advance, and when we arrived in Study C I lit a small bicycle lamp. I had an electric torch, but there was no fun in running down a battery when the bike lamp would do just as well.

We donned our boots, overcoats, and caps. Since we were going out into the fog it was necessary to take a few wise precautions.

From the cupboard I produced three bottles. Each was carefully wrapped up, and we stowed them away in our pockets.

"I trust the corks are secure, dear fellow!" said Montie anxiously.

"Tight as a drum."

"Begad! I want to use this overcoat again, you know, an' if that stuff oozed out it would be frightfully destructive——"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "There's nothing destructive in it, Montie. If there was I shouldn't use it. I don't mind a joke, but I draw the line at destruction. This affair is just an offensive measure in payment for that jape."

Sir Montie nodded.

"You're quite right, old boy," he agreed. "An offensive measure is a perfect description, judging from the sample of the stuff you showed us before supper. But ain't we wastin' time?"

I blew the lamp out and felt my way across to the window. Pulling the heavy curtains aside I slipped up the lower sash. A mass of white fog rolled in upon me, and I could see nothing in the mist.

"My hat!" I breathed. "The fog seems to be thicker than ever. It's really all the better for us. If any masters are prowling about we shall be able to get away as easy as winking an eyelid."

"But can we find our way?" asked Watson dubiously.

"Leave it to your uncle," I replied. "I've found my way across London in fogs about twenty times as bad as this. After all, this is only a white mist, and not a greasy yellow mass like a London extra-special. Follow me!"

I led my chums across the Triangle, trusting to my sense of direction. By a piece of good luck I halted at the spot we had pre-arranged. There at our feet lay Warren's ladder. It had been placed there just before bed-time.

Without difficulty we carried it across to the College House. Some few minutes were spent in locating the window of the Remove dormitory. We didn't want to open a master's window by mistake.

At the foot of the ladder I pulled out my electric torch—it was necessary here—and quietly mounted the ladder. Arriving at the window, I easily opened it, for the catch was unfastened—the window already being open at the top. I noiselessly slid up the lower sash and stepped into the room. One flash of my torch showed me that we had made no mistake. I was standing in the Remove dormitory, and Christine and Co. were all soundly asleep.

"Up you come!" I breathed, leaning out into the fog.

It wasn't really necessary for Tregellis-West and Watson to come up, but they were anxious to have an actual hand in the jape, and there was no reason why they shouldn't. We all stood in the dormitory, and then proceeded to tie our handkerchiefs securely over the lower parts of our faces.

Then we took out our bottles, uncorked

them, and methodically sprinkled the contents over the whole dormitory floor. If any of the juniors awakened it wouldn't matter now—in fact we wanted them to awaken. But they all slept on soundly.

The latter part of our mission was accomplished with great haste, and for a very obvious reason. Even our mufflers were not exactly proof against the overpowering odour with which the dormitory was filled.

In short, we had sprinkled on the floor a diabolical chemical compound of my own manufacture. I had discovered it in the gov'nor's laboratory one day when we were at Gray's Inn Road. I still have painful recollections of the interview which followed when Nelson Lee arrived on the scene.

But now my invention was being put to practical use. The awful aroma was such that no mere words can possibly do justice to it. It was something like the rottenest of rotten eggs, only sixty times as bad.

We staggered back to the window, scrambled out, and nearly pushed one another down the ladder in our haste. I went last and slammed the sash down with a soft thud. Then I tore my handkerchief off and breathed deeply. The fog was perfectly delicious after the atmosphere within the dormitory.

"Oh, begad!" gasped Sir Montie, who was just below me. "Are you sure it's quite safe, Nipper, old boy? Won't it kill everybody in the room?"

I chuckled.

"It's guaranteed not to do any harm," I whispered. "There they go! Just listen to 'em! Revenge is sweet, and this is where we grin!"

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED.

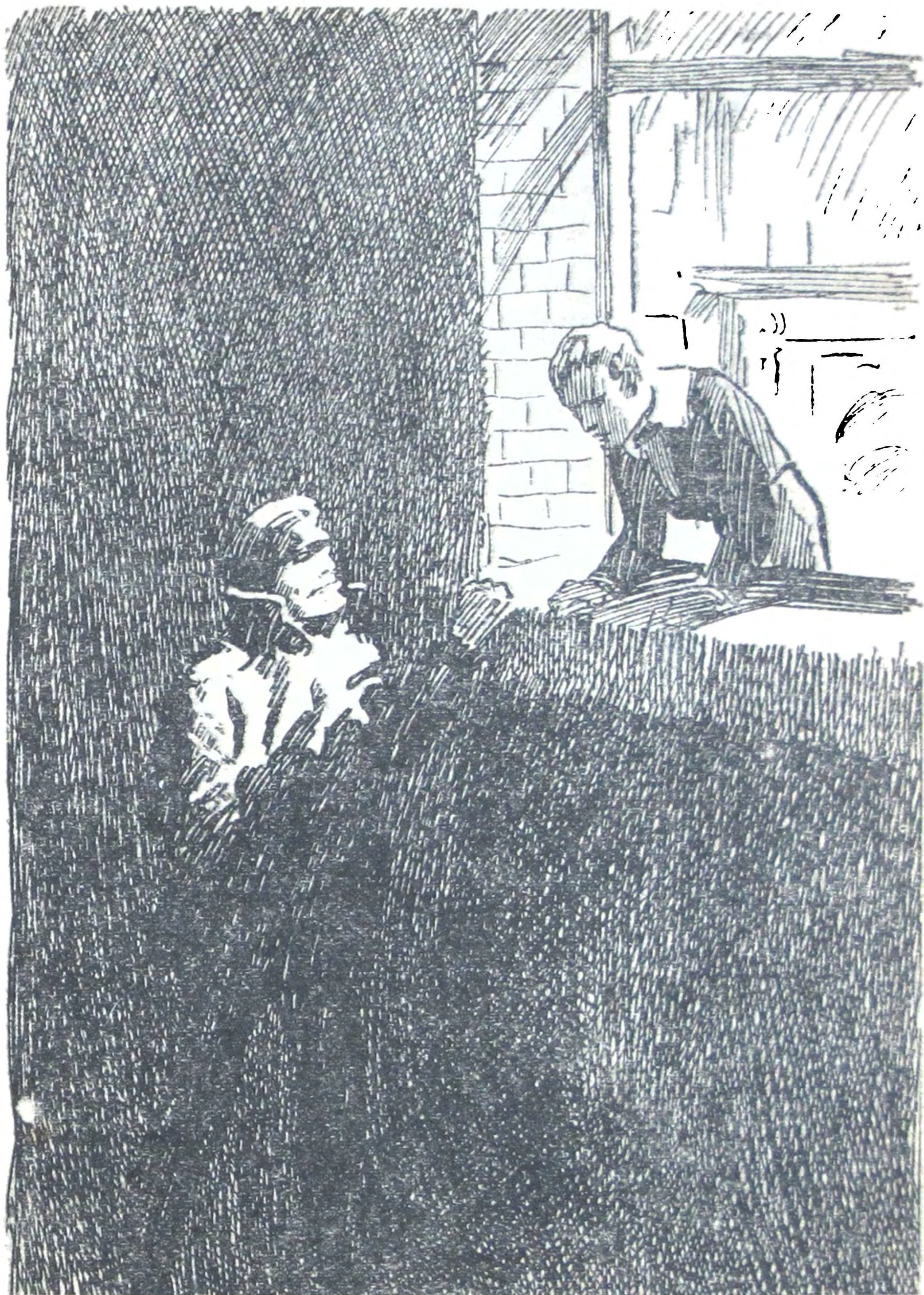
THERE was certainly a tremendous din proceeding in the Remove dormitory. Gasps and cries came to our ears. The sounds of hurried movements, collisions in the darkness, and general confusion wafted out into the fog.

"I'll bet they won't sleep in their little beds any more to-night!" I grinned. "Of course, it's hard-hearted, but Christine and Co. need a lesson. They must understand that it's a dangerous game to play japes on the leaders of the Fossils!"

"I hope that stuff won't do any harm," said Watson doubtfully. "It's about five thousand horse-power, you know, and the dormitory won't be fit to live in for a month! They'll have to fumigate it, and——"

"Rot!" I interrupted. "I wouldn't do a dirty trick of that sort. We can go back to bed with easy minds. The chemical will be exhausted within five hours, and by breakfast-time there'll be no odour at all. That's the beauty of it. When the Head comes on the scene in the morning—as I suppose he will—there'll be nothing for him to sniff. He'll put it down to exaggeration."

"Begad! There ain't much exaggeration



"Come out here, boy," whispered Mr. Grell thickly, **"I want a few words with you!"**—(See page 5.)

about it now, old fellow!" said Sir Montie. "It's good to know that the stuff ain't dangerous."

"They could breathe it for hours and wouldn't come to any harm," I replied. "As a matter of fact, I believe it would do 'em good. It's invigorating—only I don't suppose they'll look at it in that light."

Confusion was certainly proceeding amongst our victims. The slam of the sash, which I had done deliberately, had awakened Bob Christine and two or three others. They sat up, gasping.

"Oh, my only hat!" said Christine faintly. "What's happened? Gimme some scent, quick! Oh, my goodness!"

"I'm—I'm poisoned!" panted Nation, burying his head in the clothes. "It—it must be fog! Great pip! Do you think it's poison gas drifting over the channel?"

"Worse than that!" spluttered Oldfield, jumping out of bed. "Who's been smashing rotten eggs up here? Oh, great Scott! I've trodden in some of it now—my feet are all wet! What's happened? Strike a light, somebody! I shall die in two minutes!"

Everybody was awake by this time, and the confusion we had heard outside was soon in progress. Everybody crowded out into the passage but, needless to say, the odour overtook them. The shivering crowd was by no means silent, and Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the College House, was soon on the scene.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, striding down the passage in his dressing gown. "What is the meaning of this, boys? Go back to your beds at once——" Mr. Stockdale paused, swallowing hard. "Dear me! What—er—— Upon my soul! There is a most abominable smell in this passage!"

"It's nothing, sir!" said Christine weakly. "You ought to go into the dormitory, it's enough to knock you down backwards! I—I think there must be something in the fog! It's frightful, sir!"

"Nonsense!" said the Housemaster sharply. "How dare you make such absurd suggestions, Christine. There is no — ahem — obnoxious effluvium in my own bedroom, so the fog cannot be responsible."

"Is—is that what you call it, sir?" asked Talmadge, holding his nose. "I think it's a horrible stink! Oh, great guns! It's coming out here now! Where the dickens are we going to sleep for the rest of the night?"

Mr. Stockdale snapped his fingers.

"This is most absurd!" he exclaimed. "You are exaggerating, boys. Go back to your dormitory at once, and I will accompany you."

"We can't, sir!" gasped Christine. "It's too awful for words!"

"Nonsense!" retorted the Housemaster again. "You will follow me at once, boys. I cannot allow you to stand out here in your night attire in such a cold atmosphere. Follow me immediately!"

Mr. Stockdale strode down the passage,

but nobody followed him. They preferred to face his wrath rather than face that smell again. The master entered the dormitory, stayed there about two seconds, and then doubled back, coughing and spluttering. It was some moments before he found his breath.

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "How—how utterly appalling! This is most singular—most extraordinary! Good gracious me! The smell in the dormitory is—is overpowering! Have you been experimenting with chemicals, boys?"

"On ourselves, sir?" asked Christine, shivering. "Do you think we'd loose that stuff in our own dormitory? We woke up and found it there, sir!"

"It is utterly disgraceful," said Mr. Stockdale. "You cannot remain in your dormitory to-night, boys. I am afraid you will find it necessary to make up beds in other dormitories, unless all the other rooms are similarly affected! But such a thought is too ghastly for consideration!"

Christine started.

"Oh, my hat!" he whispered to Talmadge. "I'll bet a quid it's those Fossils—Nipper and the others! They've done this—as revenge!"

"This is what comes of making the first move!" said Talmadge bitterly. "You've let us into a pretty pickle, you have! We can't sneak, and those Fossils will be cackling like mad to-morrow. Of course they did it!"

Outside, Sir Montie and Tommy and I, having completed our fiendish work, felt satisfied. Dire consternation and chaos reigned in the enemy's camp, and we felt that we had retrieved the honour of the Ancient House.

"We'd better get back to bed, my sons!" I breathed. "They'll be opening the window soon, and we don't want to be spotted."

We had already descended the ladder, and we now carried that article back to its place of concealment. Then we slipped across the Triangle in the fog to the Ancient House. But this time I overshot the mark, the first window I saw being that of Mr. Crowell's study. I was just about to turn back when I heard a sound further along the wall, although the fog hid everything.

"What was that?" I breathed.

"Sounded like somebody moving," whispered Tommy. "Who the dickens can it be?"

We edged along the wall, and then distinctly saw a haze of light coming out of a window further along. I knew in a moment that it was the window of Nelson Lee's study. A yell of alarm sounded, followed by the sound of a scuffle. Then we saw two figures come tumbling out of the window. They vanished into the fog, and I gave a quick gasp.

"Burglars!" I hissed tensely. "After 'em!"

But just as we were dashing forward a third figure came tumbling out of the guy'nor's study. We pounced upon it like so many wolves and bore it to the ground.

"Hold him!" I panted. "We've got one of the rotters, anyhow! Hold his legs, Tommy, you ass!"

"He's kicking!" roared Watson.

"Confound you, Nipper!" came a muffled shout from beneath me. "Get up at once! You infernal young idiot——"

"Oh, my hat!" I gasped. "It's the guv'nor!"

We jumped off our prisoner as though he had become electrified, and Nelson Lee staggered to his feet, fuming.

"Have you got no more sense than to spring upon me at such a moment as this?" he snapped furiously. "Confound it all! The fellows have escaped now—they are lost in the fog. What are you doing out of your dormitory at this time of night?"

"We—we didn't know it was you, sir!" I explained hastily. "We thought we were collaring one of the burglars! Have they pinched anything, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee calmed down.

"I will question you about your presence here later on," he said grimly. "Yes, the burglars have pinched something, as you put it. I am simply furious. The two men were Grell and Starkey. They took advantage of the fog, and they have completely escaped. I heard a suspicious sound, but I was too late to prevent the robbery. It is most unfortunate."

"Have they taken your money, sir?" I asked.

"That would not be at all distressing, Nipper," replied the guv'nor. "No, the rascals have gone off with two articles which were entrusted to my care by Mason, of the Remove—a half-locket and a sealed package."

"They've got them?" I gasped.

"Yes, and I am absolutely furious," replied Lee.

"By George!"

That exclamation came from above our heads, but we didn't hear it in the fog. But Reginald Pitt was at the dormitory window, having been awakened by the noise. He had heard practically everything which had been said.

"So that's the game?" he whispered to himself. "Grell's acted on his own hook? The cunning rotter!"

Meanwhile Nelson Lee had re-entered his study by means of the window, and we all followed him in. A chase through the fog was utterly impracticable. Grell and Starkey might be within a yard of us all the while, but we should miss them.

"There's only one course to pursue," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Hurry round and fetch that little dog of yours, Nipper. If ever he can be of use, that time has now arrived. He will be given an opportunity of proving his worth!"

"By Jupiter! That's a good idea," I exclaimed. "But how can we set Boz on the track, sir? He must have——"

"Don't waste time by asking questions, Nipper," said Lee. "Hurry off!"

Watson came with me, and we hurried round to the kennels in the rear. Boz, my little spaniel, was sound asleep in his warm bed, but he was as frisky as anything as soon as he discovered the identity of his disturbers.

Boz was a most remarkable dog, having a scent so keen that he could follow any trail with as much assurance as a trained blood-hound. Of course Nelson Lee and I had trained him, too, and he had been quick to learn.

Arriving back at the window of Nelson Lee's study, we found him waiting outside with Sir Montie.

"Good!" he exclaimed briskly. "Now, look here, Nipper, Grell and Starkey have got a clear start, and this fog has been a wonderful help to them. Indeed without its shrouding help they would have been unable to escape at all. Pursuit in the ordinary way would have been utterly pointless."

"Boz'll track them, sir," I said eagerly.

"Possibly, Nipper—possibly," agreed the guv'nor. "We must not overlook the fact, however, that the men may have bicycles, or even a motor-car. In such an event our efforts will be useless. But I must recover the package and the locket. If I fail, I shall never forgive myself."

"But they ain't valuable, sir, are they?" asked Watson.

"That is not the question, lad," replied Lee grimly. "Mason placed them in my care, and I gave him my word that they should be well looked after. And now I have allowed them to slip from my fingers! What will Mason think of me when he learns that I, his Housemaster, am unable to protect property which has been given into my safe-keeping? I am disgusted with myself, Nipper!"

"But you didn't know that burglars would come——"

"I ought to have placed the things in a more secure place than my bureau—and I should have done so had I the slightest suspicion that Grell would go to such criminal lengths. But, good, gracious me! We are wasting time."

The guv'nor, who was in an irritable mood, held something to Boz's nose. It was a portion of a woollen scarf. Nelson Lee had grabbed this in his attempt to delay the fleeing housebreakers. The scarf had torn, and only a small portion remained in his fingers. It was quite sufficient, however, for Boz.

Within a minute he had struck the trail, and trotted off across the Triangle with an eager little yelp. The scent was hot, and there was not much fear of Boz making a mistake so long as the trail remained unbroken.

"I don't reckon the rotters have got bikes, sir," I said keenly. "They've been staying at the White Harp, and I expect they went back there——"

"I think not, young 'un," interjected the

guy nor. "They know that I recognised them, and they would not be fools enough to return to their lodgings. However, it may have been their original plan. If so, they have certainly got no bicycles—and our chances are quite good. With the help of Box, it is quite likely that we shall overtake the rascals within an hour."

"Begad! I hope so, sir," said Sir Montie.

We continued our course. Contrary to my suggestion, the trail led along the road away from the village.

"They're making for the moor," remarked Nelson Lee shortly.

This seemed obvious, and we hurried on in the rear of Box with never a falter. The fog was dense, and we could see nothing before us. Our coats were already damp and clammy, but we took no notice of this.

"A bit of a surprise, eh?" murmured Watson. "It's a good thing we played that jape on Christine and Co. We should have missed the adventure if we'd stayed in our little beds. I say, do you think there'll be some excitement?"

"It's quite likely," I replied. "But I'm not making any guesses, Tommy. I hope we recover those things for Mason, anyhow. The guy nor promised to take care of them, and it'll be rotten if Grell gets away. Mason values that racket, I believe. And the package isn't his at all—it belongs to Mr. Strong!"

But Sir Montie and Tommy could not fully appreciate the situation. Neither, for that matter, could the guy nor and I. We did not know that Grell suspected the racket of being worth a fortune, and that it was well worth a little risk.

Box led the way past the gate of the Mount, the old house which stood close to the moor. We only dimly saw it, but it was the only house in the vicinity, so there could be no mistake. And presently we struck the moor itself.

Here the trail led over the coarse grass, and we had not progressed a hundred yards before Nelson Lee uttered a little exclamation of satisfaction.

"This is interesting, Nipper," he said softly. "Have you not noticed how the trail winds? We are now walking almost back on our own tracks—Ah! Now we are breaking away to the left. It is very significant."

"Of what, sir?"

"Surely Grell and Starkey have lost their way in the fog?" said the guy nor. "Otherwise, why this aimless wandering? The two men left the road—a foolish thing to do—with the evident intention of striking across the moor. But a fog is an awkward customer to tackle when there is an open space on every side, with nothing to guide one."

"Then the rascals may be wandering about even now?" I suggested.

"It is quite likely," said Nelson Lee. "Speak only in a whisper, boys, for there is no telling how near we are to our quarry. Once having lost their bearings, it will be extremely difficult for Grell and Starkey to

find them again. I remember wandering about Hampstead Heath in a fog for fully three hours—and then I found myself at my starting-point, having walked round in circles. A man in a fog is like a ship without a compass. But here we strike to the right again."

From the aimless manner of our progress it was now quite obvious that the fugitives had gone astray in the fog. Our chances of success increased, for it was quite likely that we should come upon the rascals at any moment. We now went forward silently, without saying a word.

And we noticed that the heavy mist was thinning slightly—or, what was more likely, we had walked into a thinner belt of the fog. Nelson Lee was leading, and quite abruptly he came to a halt. Box stood in front, barking excitedly.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie, running forward.

"Stop, boys, stop!" exclaimed Lee sharply. "There is danger!"

We all came to a halt just in the rear of the guy nor. I could not understand why he had called a halt, for there was no sign of the fugitives. The white blanket enveloped us on every side.

"We have found a quarry—but of a wrong sort!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Another step, and I should have blundered over the edge of this cliff. It is fortunate that Box is with us. Grell and his companion, I am afraid, have met with disaster."

And then I understood.

The old moor quarry lay right before us. It was a treacherous place, even on an ordinary dark night. In a fog it was a terrible danger. The quarry edge was not protected by any railings, and it was perfectly simple to walk over into space. And in some places the cliff was dangerous.

"The trail ends here," said Nelson Lee. "I think we can reconstruct what happened. Grell and Starkey, hurrying along, either forgot the quarry, or were unaware of its existence. They blundered over the edge."

"Then—then they're lying down there now!" I gasped.

"I'm afraid that such is the case," said the guy nor. "I did not hope for anything of this sort, Nipper. It is good to know that we have overtaken the rascals, but they may be gravely injured!"

Sir Montie suddenly gave a yell.

"Begad! Look out, sir!" he gasped.

We turned, and saw two forms coming out of the fog. They charged, and Montie and Tommy were sent flying over the edge of the quarry! They went down with yells. I followed before I could move a finger, and Nelson Lee rushed forward with the intention of fighting. But there were two against him, and a heavy blow from a stick struck his knee and caused him to stumble.

A violent shove sent him pitching over the edge. And Box, barking like fury, received a vicious kick which lifted him completely off his feet. He half fell over the edge, clung

desperately for a moment, and then fell backwards with a yelp.

Grell and Starkey, owing to the complete nature of their surprise, had won!

CHAPTER VI.

REGINALD PITT IS VERY CUTE.

REGINALD PITT was wide awake.

He stood in the Remove dormitory, close against the window. Those words he had overheard told him much. Mr. Simon Grell, having failed to induce Pitt to obtain the locket, had acted upon his own account. And, what was more, he had succeeded in getting away with his booty.

Starkey had been with him, and now the pair had succeeded in getting clear away into the fog. Pitt knew that Box was to be put on the trail, but he hadn't much faith in the little dog. Pitt, in fact, was almost certain that Grell would get clear away with the stolen property.

"By George! The cheek of the thing!" murmured the Serpent. "Coming here and burgling Nelson Lee's study! That giddy locket must be worth a bit—a fat lot more than Grell tried to make me believe. A man doesn't break into a house unless he has a thundering good cause."

Pitt remembered the plan which Grell had outlined to him.

The two rascals were to make their way to the old ruined mill on the edge of the moor. There they would wait until dawn, and slip across to Bannington with the intention of catching the first London train.

Had that plan been altered now?

Pitt did not think it likely, for Grell would assume that Pitt would be fast asleep in bed and would know nothing of the matter until the morning—when it would be too late to give any information. Moreover, Grell believed that Pitt would not dare to breathe a word, owing to his own complicity in former attempts to obtain the locket.

As a matter of fact Reginald Pitt had no intention of giving information. But he saw no reason why he should not take a hand in the game himself. The locket was worth an enormous amount, it seemed.

"And if I get hold of it, things will be heaps better," Pitt told himself. "Nobody will think that I played any part in the affair, and I sha'n't even be suspected. By Jove! I'll get busy!"

He knew very well that he would have to make haste. Grell and Starkey would make straight for the old mill. It was hardly likely that Pitt could get there first—he didn't hope for such a thing.

But he cunningly realised that the pair would snatch some sleep before dawn. And while they were sleeping Pitt could act.

He dressed rapidly, then hurried downstairs, and made his exit by means of the study window. He took his departure about five

minutes after Nelson Lee and the boys had passed out of the Triangle.

Although he hurried he heard nothing of us and saw no sign of us up to the time he reached the stile which led across the meadows skirting Belton Wood. By following the footpath he would arrive directly opposite the old mill—and he had no doubt that Grell and Starkey had passed that way.

As he halted he heard faint sounds, and smiled.

"Mr. Lee and those chaps have gone straight on," he murmured. "They've overshoot their mark—and that's all the better."

A moment later Pitt was hurrying along the footpath. His surmise that Mr. Grell had passed that way was wrong. The Serpent overlooked the fact that Mason's uncle was comparatively a stranger in the district. Grell was not aware of the footpath, and so had gone the longer way round.

Pitt himself made no blunders. He went swiftly, but not with undue haste. By keeping his gaze upon the ground immediately ahead of him he had no difficulty in following the footpath, in spite of the fog.

Once off the path, he would have gone astray, and he knew it. So he stuck carefully to the beaten track, and at last found himself upon the edge of the moor. He stood there for a moment, surrounded by the enveloping folds of vapour.

The footpath ended here, and there was nothing to guide him. The old mill lay directly ahead—he knew that. There was only a short strip of ground to cover before he reached the moor road.

His only course was to go straight ahead and chance it. If he lost himself it would be unfortunate, but he had no other choice. And so, meaning to get it over quickly, he ran forward in a straight line and was at once swallowed up in the fog.

Twice he stumbled over clumps of gorse, and he was sorely afraid that he had lost his bearings. As a matter of fact he did lose them, for when he struck the road he was some little distance from the mill and many precious minutes had been wasted.

But he had found the road—and that was the main thing.

Running lightly along, he at last faintly saw the old ruin looming up right against him. He found the door, and stood listening. Utter silence reigned within, and the door was slightly open.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Pitt. "They're not here."

His quick wits told him that the door would certainly have been bolted on the inside if Grell and Starkey had arrived. And the fact that they were not here caused him a moment of uneasiness. Had Mr. Grell changed his plan, after all?

It looked very much like it. But there was always the chance that the pair had lost themselves in the fog. And now Pitt was here he was certainly not going back without having a look round.

He entered the mill, leaving the door ex-

belly as he had found it. Then he felt his way to the first flight of steps and mounted. He pulled out a half-candle and lit it. He didn't know the mill well, and a light was necessary. But he meant to blow it out at the earliest moment possible.

One glance round the floor told him that this place was of not much use for sleeping accommodation. He mounted to the next level—and here his gaze met a different picture. A pile of straw up one side looked inviting; two handbags lay against the wall, and on an upturned box stood two or three bottles of beer, a loaf, and some cold meat.

Pitt grinned as he regarded the scene. Not only was it certain that Grell and Starkey were intent upon coming, but it was equally certain that Pitt had arrived first. This was eminently satisfactory.

The Serpent did not touch anything. The window had a large piece of sacking over it, and on the box, near the bread, stood two candles. Mr. Grell had prepared everything well in advance.

Pitt's eyes gleamed as he saw some old barrels against one wall. An examination proved that they were too small for him to get into. But there was a space behind, and he crouched down, and was practically certain that he would not be seen by the two men when they arrived. At all events, he would have to chance it.

He took the candle with him, and then carefully extinguished it with wet fingers, so that no tell-tale smell should arise from the hot wick. Then he waited, his heart beating rather rapidly. For he knew well enough that, if discovered, his position was likely to be precarious. Mr. Simon Grell had no love for Reginald Pitt after what had occurred that evening.

Fully fifteen minutes passed before any sound broke the stillness. The first indication Pitt received was a gentle thud which made itself felt through the flooring. The lower door had been closed and bolted.

Then he heard voices, and a moment later a match was struck.

"Well, we've done 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Grell, with savage satisfaction. "It's a damned good thing this fog's so thick, Jake."

"Fog ain't all honey!" growled Starkey. "We went over that blamed quarry pretty rough, didn't we. My arm's scratched 'orrible, an' I can't hardly use it."

"That'll be all right to-morrow," said Mr. Grell comfortably. "No sense in makin' a fuss over trifles, Jake. It'll be hours afore they git out o' that quarry, an' they'll never think of comin' here."

"I reckon we'd best clear off at once," said Starkey uneasily. "Seems to be too risky, Simon. Supposin' they come——"

Mr. Grell swore.

"We're best where we are," he snapped. "D'ye think I'm goin' to git lost in this bloomin' fog agin? I've had enough of it, old mate. We'll stick here until daylight—as we planned. We're as safe as eggs now."

"Oh, well, you know best, I s'pose," said

Mr. Starkey. "Let's 'ave some of this 'ere beer. The fog's got in my throat crool!"

Pitt listened while the two men partook of beer—by the simple process of swilling it out of the bottles. Then they had a supper of bread and cold meat, washed down with further beer.

"Our best course is to git to sleep," said Simon Grell. "There ain't much time, Jake, an' I dare say ye shall have a hard day to-morrow. Best git all the sleep we can while we've got the chance. I've got that locket safe——"

"Better put it in your bag, 'adn't you?" suggested Starkey. "If anybody comes we can chuck the bag out o' the winder into the fog. Then we could be searched, an' nothin' found."

"That ain't a bad idea," agreed Mr. Grell. "I'll do it."

Pitt nearly chuckled with satisfaction. Nothing could have suited him better. He had been wondering how on earth he could get the things from Grell without awakening the man. But now everything would be simple.

The candle was extinguished, and Pitt heard the pair rustling in the straw. Less than ten minutes later they were both sound asleep. The rascals little realised that their success was not so complete as they had imagined.

Pitt gave them another five minutes. Then he softly left his place of concealment and crept across to the spot where he reckoned the two bags to be. For five minutes he felt in them without success, and his patience was exhausted.

Grell and Starkey were snoring, and he decided that it would be safe to strike a match. He did so, and then had no difficulty in finding what he was looking for. Both the locket and the package were tucked into a side-pocket of the bag, which Pitt had overlooked in his fumbling.

He slipped them into his own pocket, and blew out the match. And at that very moment Simon Grell sat up with a sleepy bellow.

"Who's that?" he rapped out hoarsely.

Pitt's heart nearly stood still, but he did not lose his nerve. He quickly crossed to the trap-door and jerked at the iron ring, which was lifted up. But there was a bolt fitted, and this had been pushed home. Pitt had not reckoned upon this, and his escape was cut off.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped.

He felt for the bolt, found it, and shot it back. But as he lifted the door Simon Grell's hands grasped his shoulders and he was swung clear, reeling across the apartment to the other wall.

"A light, Starkey; get a light, you fool!" panted Grell. "There's somebody here!"

Pitt, who was crouching against the wall, did not lose his coolness even now. He crept forward, hoping to trick Grell before the light was obtained. But a match was struck before he had moved a yard and a candle was lit.

There was relief on Grell's face as he gazed upon the junior.

"You, is it?" he snapped. "You give me quite a turn, boy! What the thunder do you mean by coming here?"

"I was a fool to come," said Pitt steadily. "I'm jolly sure I don't want to stay. You'd better let me go—"

"E's bin at the bag, Simon!" exclaimed Starkey. "An' wasn't the doors all locked? E must 'ave bin 'ere when we come in!"

"By thunder!" exclaimed Mr. Grell savagely.

Pitt knew very well that his only chance of escape was by employing force. And how could he possibly hope to outwit these two powerful men? It seemed as though Pitt would be forced to give up his gains, after all.

"Now, look here, my young friend," said Grell. "You've just got to explain wot you was doin' here an' wot your game is. Have you been interferin' with them bags over there?"

"Find out!" said Pitt calmly.

"You cheeky young whelp!" roared Mr. Grell. "Hold him, Jake—"

Pitt acted. Once held, all hope would be gone. He dashed forward, butted Mr. Grell violently, and nearly succeeded in reaching the opening in the floor. But Grell recovered his balance just in time, and seized the junior by the collar.

"You stand aside, Jake!" he snarled. "I'll attend to this cub. By gosh! I'll half smash him!"

There was no doubt that Grell's intention was a violent one. His fist came round, and the blow would have knocked Pitt silly had it gone home. But the Serpent was not exactly misnamed. He twisted sideways with incredible speed, and Grell's fist whizzed past his shoulder.

At the same second Pitt's own fist came in contact with Captain Jim's nose. The man uttered a bellow of fury and pain. But he was more dangerous now than ever before, and things looked bad for the Removite.

If Mr. Grell had only delivered the blows he aimed, Pitt would have been half-killed. But he was saved, curiously enough, by one of those very blows. And, what was more, he was enabled to escape.

For Captain Jim, with a roar of rage, drove his fist at Pitt's chest. The punch only partially succeeded, but it sent the boy hurtling backwards. One foot went into space, and the next moment he dropped headlong through the trap-door opening down to the floor beneath.

"You've killed 'im!" gasped out Starkey.

But Pitt was very much alive. He had fallen upon his feet—heavily, it is true, but the distance was not very great, and he only collapsed in a heap on the floor, considerably shaken and jarred, but otherwise unhurt.

And he acted promptly. Before he struggled up he grasped the foot of the ladder and pulled with all his strength. It was secured to the floor, but the wood was rotten with age and the fastenings loose.

The ladder gave way with a crumbling

crack and came crashing down almost upon Pitt himself. This ladder had been upright against the wall, and had therefore allowed Pitt to drop clear.

Grell was a big man, and it would take him some time to drop down to the lower floor. He was roaring out imprecations at the top of his voice—not that these did much good.

Pitt, rather shaky, hastily made for the other trap-door, and he descended to the ground floor. He had hardly reached the outer door when heavy thuds above him told that both his enemies had dropped down. They were simply furious that the boy had been able to get free—and solely owing to one of Grell's own punches. Captain Jim had actually helped Pitt to escape!

The boy knew that it was still touch and go. The outer door had to be unbolted, and he hastily struck a match in order to discover his bearings. Above him the men were descending rapidly.

The sudden gleam of flickering light revealed the door, with its two heavy bolts. Pitt tugged at them with all his strength, for they worked stiffly. The first one had just been conquered when Grell's feet appeared at the top of the ladder—at least, Pitt heard them. His match had been thrown away by this time and he was working in darkness.

As he pulled at the top bolt he was almost seized with despair. It seemed impossible that he could have the door open in time. But the thought of being recaptured within a hair's-breadth of escape gave him added strength.

Thud!

The bolt slid back in its rusty socket, and Pitt pulled at the door with all his strength. Even as he did so Grell came charging across, almost mad with fury and alarm.

"Got you, you young bound!" gasped Captain Jim savagely.

And it really seemed as though the words were true. Pitt felt the man's fingers brush his shoulder. But he had got the door partially open by now, and wriggled through like an eel.

Mason's uncle, in the darkness, probably thought that the door was wide open, and the result of that mistake was disastrous. He crashed heavily into the edge of the door, catching his head with considerable violence against the woodwork. His fingers, already tightened upon Pitt's shoulder, relaxed in a moment.

The Serpent dashed away into the fog, stumbling heavily over some stones which lay near. When Simon Grell pulled the door open, to the accompaniment of violent oaths, he found himself staring into the thick fog.

"After him, Starkey!" panted the man. "He's only just out there. Quick, or he'll git completely away!"

The precious pair rushed out into the fog. But that friendly vapour now turned upon them cruelly. It had previously been their protector, but now it was their enemy. Pitt was swallowed up in its wreathing masses,

and Grell and Starkey floundered about helplessly.

Reginald Pitt was cute. He only moved a few yards, and then came to a halt, crouching low. Grell, pausing to listen, heard nothing, but Pitt was in no danger, because he knew exactly where the men stood.

They finally went off towards the rear of the mill, and Pitt quietly and calmly walked over the rough ground until he reached the road. Then he set off at the double to St. Frank's.

The half-locket and the package were in his pocket. He had completely defeated the designs of Mr. Simon Grell.

And Pitt didn't mind his aches and pains in the least.

CHAPTER VII.

MOST MYSTERIOUS!

"BEGAD!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered that ejaculation in a gasping tone of dismay and pain. Considering that he was in an inverted position, half-buried in loose earth, this was not very surprising.

I was near by, but I had managed to alight on my feet, and was now knee-deep in the sloping gravel of the quarry. Tommy Watson was somewhere far below us, having failed to stick, and having rolled down the slope like a human ball.

"Where's the guv'nor?" I gasped, spitting out a mouthful of sand. "I say, guv'nor! Are you hurt?"

The fog confused us a lot, for we couldn't see a yard in any direction. But a voice came from a point within a few feet of me.

"I was unable to speak before, Nipper," spluttered Nelson Lee. "I was unfortunate enough to fall awkwardly, and for the last minute my head has been completely buried. It is extremely lucky that my coat flew up and protected my face, otherwise I should be badly scratched. But where are the others, Nipper?"

"I'm here, sir," said Tregellis-West. "I believe poor old Tommy's right down at the bottom. I'm frightfully worried about him."

"Watson!" shouted Nelson Lee anxiously.

"I'm all right, sir!" came Tommy's voice through the fog. "I ain't hurt a bit—only bruised in about fifty-six places! Have you collared the rotters who shoved us over?"

The guv'nor gave a short laugh.

"I wish I could answer that question satisfactorily!" he exclaimed tensely. "The fact is, boys, Mr. Grell has caught us; we have been completely outwitted. What an absurd flasco!"

"But it wasn't our fault, sir——" I began.

"Tut-tut!" snapped the guv'nor. "It is foolish to talk that way, Nipper. It was most decidedly our fault—or, to be more precise, my own preposterous carelessness. I was utterly incautious."

"But how, sir?" I asked.

Nelson Lee had extricated himself, and now loomed up through the fog. I saw that

he was hugging Boz, who had fallen practically on the top of him. But in the excitement of the moment I did not give two thoughts to the little spaniel.

"How, Nipper?" repeated the guv'nor. "I was incautious because I ought to have been prepared for such a trick——"

"But the awful ruffians didn't lay a trap for us, sir?" asked Sir Montie, in mild astonishment.

"No, I do not say that, Tregellis-West," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "But Grell certainly took advantage of the situation. As we have discovered, this cliff is only sheer for about five feet, and then slopes, the surface being soft and loose. Consequently, we fell without harming ourselves to any particular extent. Grell and his companion probably walked over in the fog, and rolled over to the very bottom, just as Watson has done."

"I'm all right, sir," came a panting voice through the mist. "Oh, my only aunt! I thought it was all up for a minute or two!"

"Begad! It was certainly all down!" remarked Montie.

"We must make haste to reach the top once more," said Nelson Lee. "I am afraid we cannot accomplish that purpose at this spot. We must follow the example of our quarry, and edge round to a spot where the slope extends to the top."

"But how did they catch us like that, sir?" asked Watson.

"My dear lad, that question is surely unnecessary," said Lee. "The two rascals heard us approach the quarry-edge, and rushed out through the fog upon us and hurled us over, knowing that we should not be particularly harmed. I must acknowledge that the move was an astute one, for they now have quite a good start."

I laughed.

"Why, there's nothing to worry over," I exclaimed briskly. "The rotters will probably lose themselves in the fog again, and Boz will lead us along the trail all right. We shall overtake the rotters within twenty minutes."

But the first move was to reach the top. And we edged our way round the slope, Nelson Lee leading the way with Boz in his arms. I couldn't quite understand why the guv'nor was carrying the little spaniel, but it was very thoughtful of him.

And at last we stood upon the moor again, the fog slightly thinner, but still enveloping.

"Boz will easily pick up the trail," I began.

"I am afraid not, Nipper," put in the guv'nor quietly.

"But it's as fresh as paint, sir——"

"No doubt, but our poor little tracker is placed hors de combat for the time being," said Lee. "I am convinced that he is of no further use to-night."

"Why, what's the matter with him?"

I stepped to the guv'nor's side anxiously and peered through the fog. Then I saw that Boz was tenderly licking his front legs

against the knee joints. There were some signs of blood, too.

"Poor little Beggan!" I exclaimed. "He must have fallen heavily——"

"I hardly think that Boz would be so clumsy as all that. Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "You may remember that he gave a yelp of pain—but possibly you were too engaged at the moment? It is rather difficult to notice other sounds and occurrences when one is falling headling through space. But Boz, I am convinced, received a brutal kick upon his forelegs."

"Oh, the awful cads!" I exclaimed angrily.

"Are his legs broken, sir?" asked Watson.

"Oh, no. But they are badly bruised, and are already swelling in no uncertain manner," replied the detective. "Indeed I think it will be difficult for him to walk at all. But we will give him a test."

The gov'nor placed Boz upon the ground, and the little dog whimpered with pain as the weight of his body rested upon his injured legs. He made no attempt to walk, but stopped down and licked himself again. Then he looked up at us in an apologetic sort of way and wagged his bushy tail.

"You see, boys, he is telling us quite plainly that his services are no longer available," said Nelson Lee. "Boz must be carried home; it is quite impossible for him to follow the trail of the thieves any longer."

"Then we're helpless, sir!" I exclaimed blankly.

"Not exactly; but I fail to see how we can do very much," said Nelson Lee in a grim voice. "Grell and his companion have the advantage of the fog, and without any direct means of following we are greatly handicapped. However, there is just a chance that the scoundrels are still wandering about, and we may run across them. It is most essential that we should maintain complete silence; and we must pause occasionally, in order to listen."

This plan was carried out. I held Boz in my arms, and we walked about the moor slowly and silently. But we heard no suspicious sounds, and our aimless wanderings brought no result.

Nelson Lee, I knew, was very anxious. He had undertaken to keep Mason's property safe for him. And now he would have to confess to the boy from Bermondsey that both the locket and package had slipped out of his fingers. It was most aggravating, quite apart from the possible value of the articles. Only Pitt and Mr. Grell knew that the package contained the other half of the locket.

The gov'nor hated the prospect. It would be gall for him to admit that he had failed in his trust. It was only a small affair—at least, it seemed to be small upon the surface—but that really made no difference. Luck had gone dead against us that night, and Nelson Lee was inclined to blame himself.

In the morning, of course, he would inform the police, and would do his utmost to have Grell and Starkey arrested before they had got far. But even this would not be entirely

satisfactory, for there was no guarantee that the stolen property would be recovered. It is sometimes easy to arrest a criminal, but the recovery of his loot is a different matter.

"Come, boys, this is futile," said Nelson Lee at last. "We might spend the whole night in wandering about in this fashion. We must acknowledge defeat with the best grace possible."

"It's horrid, sir—it is, really," said Sir Montie.

"I agree with you, my boy. But the men are probably miles away by this time, and it would be foolish for us to continue this perambulation."

And so we turned in the direction of the school. It was considerably past midnight now, and another half-hour elapsed before the gates of St. Frank's loomed through the fog.

The great school lay in complete silence. Even the College House was quiet. I wondered how Christine and Co. were faring, but had little doubt that the Monks had found other sleeping accommodation by this time. That incident seemed very paltry in comparison with this other excitement.

The window of Nelson Lee's study had been left unfastened, and the gov'nor pushed up the sash and entered the room. As soon as he switched the light on I laid Boz in the easy chair and nuzzled him.

"You had better get off to bed, boys," said the gov'nor. "I will rub some lotion upon our little friend's legs. Nipper, and you need have no fear for him. By the way, I have heard no explanation as yet regarding your presence in the Triangle long after lights-out."

Sir Montie and Tommy looked dismayed, but I grinned.

"Oh, you don't want to be bothered with that, do you, sir?" I asked.

"I shall not consider it a bother, Nipper."

"Of course, if you like to insist, I suppose I shall have to tell you," I said cheerfully. "But you're a good sort, gov'nor, and nobody could accuse you of being a spoil-sport. If you hear some rather surprising news in the morning, you won't connect it with us, will you?"

"That all depends, you young rascal."

"Well, you're rather inclined to put two and two together, gov'nor," I explained. "When you hear this news, and remember that we were discovered under sinister circumstances after lights-out, you'll guess things. But we know jolly well that you won't take any action. We trust you, sir. It ain't in you to ruin a jolly good jape."

Nelson Lee tried to look stern.

"Am I to understand, Nipper, that you have the audacity to attempt persuasion?" he demanded. "Are you actually trying to make me a party to some harum-scarum escapade? I can assure you——"

"Oh, come off it, gov'nor!" I grinned. "After all, we came forward of our own accord, didn't we?"

"I can heartily agree on that point," said Nelson Lee feelingly. "My elbows are considerably sore where you drove them into the

gravel, and I am not at all sure that I ought not to report you to the Headmaster for gross misbehavior."

"But that wouldn't be fair," I protested. "You're the second chap—"

"The second what, Nipper?"

"Chap, sir," I said coolly. "You're the second one we bowled over to-night in the fog. First it was Mr. Crowell—and then we found out that it wasn't Mr. Crowell. It was those beastly Monks—"

"Begad!" whispered Mr. Montie. "You're frightfully incautious, old boy!"

"So that's the game, is it?" said Nelson Lee. "Your deadly rivals from across the way performed that trick upon you, eh? Mr. Crowell mentioned something about it to me. And you have taken a prompt revenge. Well, well, perhaps I shall forget all about it—although I must admit you have made me curious regarding the disclosure which is to come in the morning. Off to bed with you!"

Tregellis-West and Watson breathed with relief, visions of canings vanishing before their eyes. I had never had any visions of that sort, because I knew the guv'nor wouldn't take advantage of the situation. As we moved towards the door I glanced at the broken bureau.

"Didn't they take anything else, sir?" I asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Nipper, I had no opportunity of making a careful search," said Nelson Lee, crossing to the bureau. "The locket and package were missing, and that was sufficient. I will just see—"

The guv'nor paused, catching in his breath. He stood staring down into one of the pigeon-holes with an expression of amazement upon his face. Then he turned slowly and regarded us.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed wonderingly.

"What's wrong, sir?" I asked.

"Well, upon my soul, I cannot tell you, Nipper," said the guv'nor. "But I will swear that Grell rushed through the window carrying both the locket and the package in his hand. I saw them distinctly—and my eyesight, as you are aware, is not exactly defective. I examined the bureau, too—"

"I don't know what you're getting at, sir," I interrupted.

"The thing is simply extraordinary, young 'un," said Lee. "Both the packet and the locket are here—in a different pigeon-hole, it is true—"

"Here!" I yelled.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Begad!" was Montie's mild contribution.

We all stared into the bureau. And there, sure enough, were the articles which we fondly believed Simon Grell to have taken! Jack Mason's half-locket lay upon the sealed package, and they were both in full sight in one of the pigeon-holes. The electric-light, indeed, glittered on the gold locket in such a manner that it could not possibly be ignored.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I panted. "And

we've been chasing about, falling down quarries, and I don't know what the dickens else! Oh, guv'nor!" I added reproachfully.

"Why that tone, Nipper?"

"Your eyesight ain't so good as you make out!" I explained. "You don't expect us to believe that Mr. Grell was seized with remorse, do you? You don't suppose that he came back and put the things in the bureau again?"

"That is hardly a likely supposition."

"Why, it's as clear as daylight that you surprised the rotters before they took the loot," I said. "They've been here all the time!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am not so easily mistaken, Nipper," he said. "I don't pretend to know who put these things back, or how they came back. But I will willingly swear that Simon Grell took them away with him, incredible though it may sound. The affair is astounding—I will grant that. And at the same time it is extremely gratifying. I wonder whom we have to thank for this?"

I was quite prepared to accept the guv'nor's word. He couldn't have made a blunder of that sort. He wasn't perfect—nobody is—but it was inconceivable that he should make such a palpable blunder. The locket and the package had been taken by Simon Grell. Some other factor—had been working unknown to us; that was the only possible explanation.

Montie and Tommy were frankly sceptical, they didn't know Nelson Lee as I knew him. And then I received a flash of light in the darkness. Looking at the bureau, I observed a thumb-mark upon the polished woodwork, which happened to be dusty. It was no ordinary thumb-mark, for there was an irregular line right across it, proving that the thumb was scarred.

And I knew the truth in a second.

Reginald Pitt had been in the guv'nor's study! Pitt's thumb had been burnt and injured in a fire at Bannington, and the scar was still prominent. Only his thumb could have made this particular mark, and it was quite fresh.

I said nothing. Indeed, I actually rubbed the impression out and looked to see if there were any others. But there were none. Pitt had evidently rested his hand upon the woodwork for a moment while he slipped the things into the pigeon-hole.

But what could this mean?

Pitt, of all fellows, had recovered the stolen property and had replaced it! Although startling, I knew that the thing was not at all impossible. Pitt was about the only fellow who had had any connection with Mr. Simon Grell. It was quite reasonable to suppose that he knew of Grell's plans, and he had acted against the man he had formerly helped.

What had brought about this change was a mystery. It was equally mysterious how Pitt had hoodwinked the astute Mr. Grell. It would be futile to make any conjectures, for we knew no facts. But Pitt had done

It, and I felt warmed towards him. I always knew that there was plenty of good in the chap, but it was slow in coming to the surface.

It was rather startling to realise that Pitt had been out of the dormitory on this particular night. Had he seen us? Had he deliberately fooled Grell, or had he accomplished his purpose by cunning methods which were peculiarly his own?

Nelson Lee transferred the locket and the package from the bureau into his neat little safe.

"I ought to have done this earlier," he declared. "But I had no idea that an attempt would be made to steal them. Now, boys, only we four knew of this affair, and I rely upon you not to chatter."

"Trust us, sir," said Montie.

"I shall do, my lad," said the gov'nor. "There is no reason why the attempted burglary should be made public property. It would only cause idle talk. Mason need know nothing of what has happened. Grell will certainly have no further opportunity of robbing this study."

"But he ought to be locked up, sir," protested Watson.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Nelson Lee. "But we should be put to no inconsiderable trouble to lock Mr. Grell up, Watson. Furthermore, the whole business would become known, and we wish to avoid that. Let it be sufficient that the property is recovered. How it came about I do not presume to know, probably I shall receive further light later on. For the present—bed!"

"Right, sir," I said promptly.

We bade the gov'nor good-night, and then went upstairs to the Remove dormitory.

"I say, old boy, Mr. Lee was mistaken—eh?" suggested Montie. "How could those things have got back—"

"I'll bet a quid the gov'nor wasn't mistaken," I interrupted. "Somebody put 'em back, Montie. We don't know all that's been happening to-night. It's jolly queer, but I'm not going to puzzle my brains."

For the present I didn't mean to voice my suspicions concerning Reginald Pitt. We entered the dormitory, and I wondered if Pitt was in bed. It was quite likely that he hadn't returned. But, of course, that's wrong. The very fact that the locket was replaced proved that Pitt had come back.

He was in bed, and I paused for a moment to have a look at him.

There seemed to be a smile on his face as he slept, and the cunning expression which was so well known in the Remove was entirely absent. Reginald Pitt was looking extremely happy in his sleep.

My chums and I got into bed, and within three minutes we were asleep too. We had had a tiring time, but everything was all right.

And I was mistaken.

Pitt was fully awake, and he had been aware of my scrutiny. He lay in bed feeling wonderfully elated and satisfied. He had defeated Simon Grell! It had been his object all along to get the stolen property and return it to Nelson Lee's bureau secretly.

Pitt's action was worthy of the highest praise. He had risked much to accomplish his purpose, and he wanted no acknowledgement. He had performed the work, and hoped that the truth would never come out.

Considering that Pitt had previously plotted with Captain Jim to obtain the locket and the package, it was altogether astounding that he should now act in this way. It was proof of one thing. Reginald Pitt was beginning to realise that the straight path was far better than the crooked one.

He had felt satisfied occasionally after performing some ill-natured action, but his satisfaction had been superficial—he had told himself that he was satisfied, and believed it.

But now he couldn't sleep because of the real joy which filled his whole being. He was feeling happier than he had ever felt before. He had not dreamed it possible that he could obtain such complete satisfaction out of a really decent action.

It was a lesson to him.

He felt that he was more worthy of Jack Mason's friendship. He reviewed his former habits, and was absolutely disgusted with many of the things which he had performed without a thought. He now saw them in their true light, and he felt how much better it was to feel pleased with himself because he had done something which was honestly praiseworthy.

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Christine and Co., on the following morning, were allowed to know, absolutely and positively, that their discomfort of the night before had been caused by an enemy patrol. When they realised that the incident had been in the nature of a reprisal, they could do nothing but hide their diminished heads.

Their jape had been quite good, but they were forced to acknowledge that our counter-offensive—offensive in more senses than one—had completely taken the wind out of their sails.

When the Head arrived on the scene—as we had supposed he would—there was practically no odour left. And Mr. Stockdale's anxiety to have the drains seen to subsided. Sundry indications, too, led the College House master to come to the conclusion that the awful effluvium had found its source in the Ancient House laboratory.

No inquiries were made, but Nelson Lee gave a very significant look when I passed him that morning, and there the matter ended.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

OUR POPULAR SCHOOL SERIAL

The Chums of Littleminster School.

A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**The First Chapters.**BASIL HOOD** is a new boy at Littleminster School.

On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. The next day the match between the eleven and the sixteen takes place. Challis plays a splendid innings, but Ponsonby foolishly gets in the way of a hard drive, and is laid out. He is taken to bed, and a lot of the boys turn against Challis. When Ponsonby recovers he asks Challis to be his friend. Basil sags for Challis, and one afternoon as he is carrying the tea-things down the passage someone trips him up. Ponsonby comes to his help and finds a piece of thin cord on the floor. (Now read on.)

PONSONBY FINDS THE MISSING COIN.

PONSONBY picked the cord up, and found it was tied to the handle of a door opposite. With brows knitted he opened the door and peeped into the study beyond.

"Hi, anyone there?" he asked.

Nobody replied, and he saw that the room was unoccupied.

Quietly removing the cord, he turned to Basil.

"Are you sure this cord was tied to the handle of Myers's door, young 'un?" he asked.

"Yes."

"H'm! How did it get loose?"

"Myers cut it with his knife. I saw him do it as I was lying on the floor."

"Bah! Another lie! He's always telling whoppers!" sneered Myers.

"Is he? Then how do you account for this?"

Ponsonby laid his hand upon the circle of cord, still knotted, which was fastened to the handle of Myers's door.

Myers changed colour.

"I don't know anything about it," he blustered. "I never put it there. I expect some of the other chaps did it for a lark. And if the young fool had kept his eyes open he wouldn't have made such a blundering mess of things."

Ponsonby's lips tightened.

"You say you saw Myers cut the cord, youngster?" he cried.

"Yes," returned Basil, still hardly able to speak. "I lay for a moment dazed, and then, hearing someone moving, I turned my head and saw Myers standing at the door, grinning at me. He thought I didn't see him. He took out his penknife and severed the cord, then went back into his room and closed the door. When I went into his room to ask him what he meant by it he was sitting at his table and pretending to write."

"H'm! And it was when you told him what you thought of him, kid, that he set on you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Myers, what have you to say to this?"

"Say!" said the big boy defiantly. "Why, it's all a pack of lies! You can't believe his word against mine. I don't know anything about it, I tell you. If I'd done it I'd own up. And it's not very friendly of you to take his part, Ponsonby."

"I've taken his part because I believe he's told the truth. Galloway, Richards, and Mordant occupy the room over there. None of them has a grudge against the kid. I don't believe they set the cord up there. Whoever did it must have known that I sent the youngster to my room to borrow some things for the tea-fight in Challis's room, and have purposely laid in wait for him on his return. Myers, I believe you're the man."

"I tell you I'm not! Say that again, and I'll—"

Myers advanced threateningly, but hesitated as he saw the resolute gleam in Ponsonby's eyes.

"Oh, I'm not fit to fight," said the invalid. "But I don't mind, if you've got the pluck to stand up against me."

Myers turned away, his face as black as thunder.

"I'll wait till you're fit and well again," he growled. "But I sha'n't forget this in a

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

hurry. Don't you come trying to make up to me, Ponsonby, for I won't have it. This means an end to our friendship!"

"An end to it!" smiled Ponsonby. "I should rather think it did! I thought you were a decent chap, and not an out-and-out cad, Myers! I intend that Grainger and the others shall know of this, and if you attempt to injure young Hood, I'll go even further, and have you up before the Head."

So saying, he left the room, and, setting his arm about Basil's shoulder, told him not to worry.

"It wasn't your fault, old man," said he. "How were you to guess that that brute would do such a dirty trick as that? Now help me to pick up the pieces."

Myers slammed the door, and while he returned to his lessons consumed with impotent rage, smarting from the bruises Basil had administered, the fag and Ponsonby, going down upon hands and knees, swept the pieces of broken crockery together.

Some of the smaller fragments of china had scattered far and wide along the passage, while the contents of the sugar basin had rolled all over the floor.

Working with a will, they piled the litter upon the tray, when of a sudden Ponsonby, who had gone to pick up some bits that had rolled some distance and lay against the wooden skirting that ran along each side of the passage, as he stooped uttered a cry of surprise.

Something that lay there glittering had caught his eye. He tried to pull it out with his little finger, but failing, took out his pocket-knife and carefully drew the shining object into the light of day.

"Hello!" said he. "That's rum! It's a coin. I wonder how it got there?"

Basil ran forward, with an excited ery.

"A coin!" he cried. "Let me look at it. Why, that's mine, Ponsonby!"

His voice trembled with excitement and his eyes flashed as he stretched out his eager fingers to grasp the coin.

Ponsonby drew his hand back and examined the coin critically.

"Wait a moment, young 'un!" said he. "Yours, is it? That's odd. I never knew you owned such a thing. It looks to me very like that one that Myers used to wear on his watch-chain."

"It is—it is! That is to say"—and Basil faltered hesitatingly,—"I—er—found it on the river bank, and—and—the other day when I was out of my dormitory someone went to my cubicle and stole it. Give it me, Ponsonby."

The Fifth-Former looked hard at Basil.

"First," said he, "pick up the rest of the rubbish—and come along to my study. I'd like to have a talk with you."

Basil obeyed.

"Now," said Ponsonby, a minute or so later, when they stood face to face in his room, "there's something behind this business of the coin. What is it?"

"I can't tell you. But give it me. And

you really think it is the one that Myers used to wear?"

"I'm certain of it. I'd swear to it anywhere."

Basil, biting his lip, stirred uneasily. Ponsonby, looking fixedly at him, dropped his hands on the boy's shoulders.

"Don't be afraid to speak," said he, encouragingly. "I'll treat what you tell me with the strictest confidence. Only I want to know where we stand, that's all. Seems to me that there was more than ordinary malice in what Myers did this afternoon."

"It's nothing, Ponsonby. Only—you know all about the accident down on the river, don't you? Well, I don't believe it was an accident. That punt never got adrift of its own accord, Ponsonby. As things turned out it didn't matter much, thanks to good old Challis. But he might have been drowned, you know, and so might I, because I can hardly swim a stroke. If we'd gone over the weir—"

Ponsonby shuddered. Well he knew the Awle! During the many terms he had spent at Littleminster he had seen the river in all its moods, and he knew that when the current flowed swiftly, as it did after very heavy rain, that there would be hardly a dog's chance for anybody who might have the ill luck to be swept over the weir.

"Here, what are you driving at?" he asked, after a pause. "Do you mean that you believe the punt was cut adrift?"

"Yes."

"H'm! And what has that got to do with the coin?"

"Only this," said Basil uneasily, his cheeks as red as a peony. "That I often went down to where the punt was moored to have a look round. You see, when the accident happened, I could have sworn I saw someone lurking about among the shrubs and willows. After the way Challis tied the punt up the rope could never have got loose by itself. I went back to see if I could find some clue, and—well, one afternoon I found that coin lying in the grass. It had been there days, and was quite dull from exposure."

"Yes, yes. Go on," said Ponsonby.

"There isn't much more. Only, while I was looking at it, Myers sprang out of the bushes and claimed it. Said he'd just lost it, and got into no end of a rage when I wouldn't hand it back. If Grainger hadn't come along, I—I really do believe he would have thrown me into the river."

Ponsonby's face was as black as thunder.

"So Grainger knows something about this, does he?" he cried.

"Yes, a little. Only I haven't told him what I told you."

"Just as well," muttered Ponsonby. "For if you had, he'd have hauled Myers up before the Head right away. Not at all sure that I shan't, either!"

"Oh, but you've promised, Ponsonby! I wouldn't have told you had I known—"

(Continued overleaf.)

"Yes, but look here, young 'un, this is a pretty serious matter. You are implying that it was Myers who sent the punt adrift."

"And I believe it was, Ponsonby; yes, I believe it was. Only, don't you see, if we were to act too hastily, Myers might get off. We haven't any proof against him."

"We've got this coin."

"Yes, but if he says he dropped it the day I found it, what then?"

"He stole it afterwards from your cubicle, you say?"

"Yes, but if it were his, and I wouldn't hand it back, he'd have the right to take it, wouldn't he?"

Ponsonby's face fell.

"H'm! I suppose you're right there, Basil," said he. "You're pretty smart for a Junior fag, you know. It's pretty rotten, though, if Myers is the blackguard you say, and we've got to keep him here at Littleminster, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," admitted Basil. "But I'm sure things will turn out all right in the end. Perhaps proof will turn up some day, and then—"

Ponsonby's face cleared.

"Perhaps it will," he cried. "Meanwhile, I'll have a talk with Grainger. We'll arrange all the evidence in order and we'll ask old Challis what he thinks. Can I keep the coin for a bit, kid?"

"Yes, please do. Only, don't lose it," said Basil.

"Oh, I'll not lose it. I'll guard it as my life. And I mean to keep a pretty sharp eye on Myers after this. The fellow's an unutterable cad!"

So Basil was forgiven for the smash, and returned to his chums flushed and excited over the turn events had taken, much elated because he had had the better of his brush with that beast Myers, as far as the struggle had gone, and wondering in his heart of hearts whether proof of Myers's villainy would ever come to light.

The discovery of that proof was perhaps nearer to his hand than he dreamed!

JOHN CHALLIS IN A NEW LIGHT.

JOHAN CHALLIS was rapidly throwing off the mask. To the astonishment of everyone at Littleminster, particularly the Juniors, he was fast becoming one of the most popular boys in the school.

His manner, his behaviour, changed as if by magic. Wherever he appeared now, it was with head erect and shoulders squared, eyes bright, and lips curved in a smile.

Whereas he used to slink along, with his books under his arm and his head bowed, with eyes averted to avoid the sneering glances of his schoolmates, his lips set in a scowl, his clothes shabby and ill-fitting, he now walked firmly, met the looks of his companions fearlessly, and had a kindly greeting for anyone who welcomed it.

And in nothing had he changed so much as in his clothes. The old, ill-fitting suits, with trousers too short and baggy at the knees; coats sagging and short in the sleeves; waist coats shrunken and two sizes too small—had given place to some smart, well-tailored garments, which his father had sent down from home.

The change in the family fortunes was reflected in the garments Challis wore.

"Don't you worry about the expense, my dear son," Challis senior wrote. "I'll look after that part of the programme. I sent you to Littleminster because I wanted you to be educated like a gentleman. I want you to become what I should have liked to have been. There's no polish about me; but that don't matter. I know how to run a business just as I used to know how to fight a ring battle. I'm not a snob. Yet I can see that education gives a boy advantages that nothing else can. You've never had the clothes I wanted you to have, because I had to pinch and scrape to keep you at Littleminster. That's all changed. Your old father is making a fortune, and you're going to share some of the benefits. If you want anything, drop me a line and let me know. Meanwhile, I'm going to increase your pocket-money to ten shillings a week."

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY,

UNDER THE TITLE OF

"The Arabs of El Safra!"

Will deal with another adventure of NELSON LEE, NIPPER, and his Chums at St. Frank's.

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