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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE IN THE FORM-ROOM.

"**S**ILENCE!"

Mr. Crowell's eagle gaze wandered over the Remove Form-room at St. Frank's. Afternoon lessons were in progress, and the day was fine and sunny. The weather was so warm, in fact, that most of the juniors were restless; they were anxious to be out in the glorious sunshine.

"Silence!" repeated Mr. Crowell. "Handforth, you were speaking!"

Edward Oswald Handforth looked astonished.

"I, sir?" he repeated, in surprise.

"That expression does not deceive me in the least, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell tartly. "If I have to warn you again, I will give you fifty lines. I insist upon having silence during lessons."

Mr. Crowell glanced back at his book, but his attention was soon attracted once more.

"Alexis!" he rapped out. "What are you doing?"

Titus Alexis, the Greek junior in the Remove, looked up sullenly from his somewhat isolated desk in a corner of the big Form-room. There was no mistaking the hatred which smouldered in his eyes as he gazed at Mr. Crowell.

"The lock of my desk is stiff—that is all," he said sourly.

"There was no necessity for you to make that noise, Alexis," said Mr. Crowell. "You were wrenching at your desk with unnecessary violence. I am afraid you are too apt to reveal your somewhat vicious temper. And you will remember, in future, to address me with more respect."

Alexis made no reply.

"Did you hear me, boy?" demanded Mr. Crowell warmly.

"I heard you," growled the Greek junior.

"I am rapidly losing all patience with you, Alexis," said the Form-master tartly.

"Repeatedly I have told you to address me

as 'sir.' You take no notice whatever. When I am compelled to correct you again I will give you lines."

"I have done nothing!" exclaimed Alexis, his eyes flashing. "Why should I be punished? It is not the fair play! I have done nothing!"

Mr. Crowell took a deep breath, but said no more.

"The beastly cad!" murmured Handforth into McClure's ear. "I'd like to see him kicked out of the giddy school——"

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

Edward Oswald's whisper was always loud—although he was sublimely unaware of that fact—and Mr. Crowell could scarcely help hearing him. The Form-master's temper had been tried a good deal that afternoon, and he was not in the mood to overlook even a whisper. Alexis always shortened Mr. Crowell's temper.

"You were speaking again, Handforth," shouted the Form-master.

"Only—only a word, sir," said Handforth meekly.

"You will write me fifty lines, Handforth!"

"Yes, sir."

Handforth glared at the juniors near him, and then glared at Alexis.

"Rotter!" he breathed.

It was not certain whether Handforth was referring to Mr. Crowell or Alexis. Fortunately Mr. Crowell did not hear him, and everything went smoothly for some few minutes.

I regarded Titus Alexis rather curiously. He was an extraordinary junior in many ways, and I had already tasted his venom. My back was still sore from an encounter which had taken place the previous week.

Fullwood and Co., the Nuts of the Remove, had ragged me on that occasion. Having painted me up, they had left me bound and helpless—intending to get some of the fellows to release me.

But after they had left the Greek junior had appeared. Bound hand and foot, I had

been unable to touch him. And he had taken advantage of my helplessness to beat me unmercifully with a cane. He had struck me until my back was nearly raw; and it was still extremely tender.

But Titus Alexis had paid the penalty, for he had been flogged by the Headmaster before the whole school. I don't think many fellows were likely to forget that flogging.

Alexis had behaved like a wild cat. He had screamed, kicked, struggled, and clawed. And at the finish he had threatened to have a terrible revenge upon the Headmaster for what he had done.

Naturally, Dr. Stafford took no notice of that threat. At the same time I knew well enough that all the masters had been instructed to keep a particularly sharp eye on the Greek boy.

He was certainly the most vicious boy we had ever had in the Remove. And with his viciousness he possessed a vile temper which was capable of leading him almost anywhere. Many juniors, I know, were rather nervous about him. They felt that he would slash them with a knife if he became enraged.

Owing to his contemptible nature he had been "sent to Coventry" by the whole school.

Nobody would even speak to him. Fullwood and Co., young rascals though they were, would have nothing to do with Titus Alexis.

"He won't last long—that's one thing!" whispered Tommy Watson. "Alexis, I mean. He'll get the sack within a month, I'll bet!"

"Begad! Let's hope so!" breathed Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Dry up, you asses!" I warned.

Mr. Crowell was already looking round, and my chums "dried up" in time. After that the lesson proceeded peacefully for some few minutes. Then Handforth caused another diversion—and this was destined to be rather a dramatic one.

Handforth, unknown to Mr. Crowell, had occupied his time for some minutes in manufacturing a small pellet of blotting-paper, soaked in ink. Hurling ink pellets across the Form-room was a type of amusement which was frequently indulged in by the juniors. But only Handforth would have attempted such a thing when Mr. Crowell was not in the best of tempers. But Handforth was always reckless.

"I'll make the cad sit up!" he muttered.

Waiting until Mr. Crowell's back was turned, Handforth whizzed his ink-pellet across the Form-room with unerring aim. It struck Titus Alexis full upon the ear, and he looked up, his eyes glittering with fury.

At the same moment a hiss of anger left his lips.

"What was that noise?" demanded Mr. Crowell sharply. "Alexis, you were— Good gracious! What are you doing, boy?"

"I will show you!" snarled Alexis.

He picked up his ink-pot—which was filled to the brim—and left his place with a catlike movement. Two strides he took, and then his hand shot out.

Swish!

The ink left the ink-pot abruptly, and spurted with terrific force into Handforth's face. Handy gave a roar, and half jumped up. His face was almost hidden beneath the coating of splashed ink.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole Form roared.

"I will stand no nonsense!" shouted Alexis fiercely. "It is enough!"

"Groooh!" gasped Handforth. "You—you rotter—"

"Alexis!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "Come here! How dare you act in such an outrageous manner before my very eyes! Come out here!"

"I will not!" shouted Alexis. "He threw at me, and I threw at him—it is over. What is the difference? You should not interfere!"

Mr. Crowell gasped.

"I—I should not interfere!" he repeated dazedly. "Good heavens! Do you realise what you are saying, you young rascal? Come out here at once!"

"Groooh!" muttered Handforth. "Gimme a duster, somebody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" bellowed the Form-master. "If there is another sound of laughter in this room the whole Form will be detained for an hour!"

There was an intense silence.

Handforth wiped his face with McClure's handkerchief, and the streaky effect nearly caused the other fellows to roar afresh. I had great difficulty in keeping my face straight.

"Handforth!" rapped out Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Handforth.

"Go and wash yourself at once!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Handforth was only too eager to escape. He left the Form-room, and Mr. Crowell turned his attention once more to Titus Alexis. The Greek junior had returned to his seat, and was apparently reading.

"Alexis!" said Mr. Crowell, in an ominous voice.

The new boy looked up.

"Well?" he snapped.

"If you address me in that disrespectful tone, Alexis, I will punish you severely," shouted Mr. Crowell angrily. "You are utterly impossible. I have never before dealt with such a wilful, wicked boy! I order you to leave your place, and to come out here before the class."

Alexis glared.

"Why should I come?" he asked defiantly.

"Why should you?" roared Mr. Crowell.

"Because I order you to do so—that is why, you wretched fellow!"

"I have done nothing," said Alexis. "I shall not come!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "He is askin' for it—he is, really!"

"And he'll get it, too!" I muttered.

"He'll be half skinned!"

"Serve him right!" growled Watson.

Mr. Crowell took a deep breath.

"Alexis," he said deliberately, "I will give you one more chance. I have ordered you to come out here—and my orders must be obeyed. If you do not leave your seat within three seconds I will use force."

Alexis scowled, looked round him, then left his seat. He knew that Mr. Crowell was in grim earnest. He came down from his desk, and stood sullenly before the angered Form-master.

"Well?" he said fiercely—"what do you want?"

"That is not the way to address me, boy!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "I am beginning to fear that I shall never succeed in moulding you, Alexis. You are wilful and obstinate and vindictive. I intend to cane you——"

"I will not be caned!" shouted Alexis furiously.

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Crowell, reaching for his cane. "We will see about that, Alexis! A few minutes ago you committed an outrage; you hurled a pot of ink at Handforth——"

"He hit me with a pellet of blotting-paper!" shouted Alexis.

"That is no excuse!" said Mr. Crowell tartly. "Handforth was in the wrong to interfere with you, and I shall punish him when he returns. But you had absolutely no justification for hurling a pot of ink at Handforth, thereby wilfully damaging his collar and jacket and tie. Hold out your hand, Alexis!"

"I will not!" said the Greek junior defiantly.

He placed his hands behind him, and we all looked on with much interest.

"By heavens, boy, you are trying my temper severely!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "Hold out your hand!"

"I have done nothing wrong!" muttered Alexis. "I will not be punished!"

Slash!

The cane descended upon the boy's shoulders.

"Ow! Yow!" howled Alexis. "You brute! You English pig-brute!"

Mr. Crowell fairly staggered.

"Upon my soul!" he exclaimed amazedly.

But he was grim; and the next second he had grasped Alexis. The boy struggled and kicked and howled. But he was helpless in the Form-master's iron grasp. Then the cane rose and fell grimly and forcibly.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The dust rose from Alexis's clothing, and he roared and screamed and kicked. It was really the only way in which to give him a thrashing. He was absolutely unmanageable. He flouted nearly all orders.

"The howling cad!" muttered Church disgustedly.

"He ought to be sacked!" said McClure.

"Why doesn't the Head kick him out?"

"My hat! Look there!"

Alexis had suddenly commenced struggling madly. He wrenched himself away, flew

round Mr. Crowell's desk, and then rushed back to his desk, where he sat down, glowering savagely.

"I hate you all!" he panted. "Wait! My time will come!"

Mr. Crowell was breathing hard.

"I will not deal with you further now, Alexis," he exclaimed. "Your conduct is absolutely impossible, and I shall find it necessary to report you to the Headmaster. It is amazing——"

"I care not what you do!" shouted Alexis.

"Be silent! I will not allow you to say another word," thundered Mr. Crowell. "You have already set my authority at defiance, and that is a thing which no boy can do with impunity."

Alexis growled something under his breath, and the next moment Handforth appeared looking clean once more.

"Ah, Handforth, I wish to have a word with you," said Mr. Crowell grimly. "Alexis has informed me that you hurled a blotting-paper pellet at him. Is that true?"

"The beastly sneak!" said Handforth indignantly. "Yes, sir, it's quite true. I'll chuck another one at him if he gives you any more cheek! It's not right for a fellow to be disrespectful to you, sir."

Mr. Crowell smiled grimly.

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself, Handforth," he said—"and it is not at all necessary for you to take my part by the manufacture of blotting-paper pellets. You will kindly write me one hundred lines."

"Certainly, sir," said Handforth. "It's not my business to question any punishment you decide to impose, but it doesn't seem quite fair to me——"

"What did you say, Handforth?"

"Well, I was smothered with ink, sir——"

"Alexis has already been punished for that offence," said Mr. Crowell. "Go to your place, Handforth, and do not interfere with Alexis in future."

Handforth looked dismayed.

"But I want to punch his nose after lessons, sir," he protested.

"I was referring to your conduct in the Form-room, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell smoothly. "What you do in your leisure time is not my concern—although you will please understand that I do not sanction fighting in any form."

Handforth went to his place, feeling satisfied. He knew well enough that Mr. Crowell would wink at any little disturbance which occurred after this. The Form-master probably thought that a punch on Alexis's nose would do Alexis a large amount of good.

But the trouble was not quite over, even now.

Titus Alexis jumped up in his seat.

"I will not submit to Handforth's violence," he shouted. "Handforth will attack me soon—and I demand protection!"

"You will be silent, Alexis," said Mr. Crowell sternly.

"If I cannot have protection——"

"One more word from you, Alexis, and I will take you straight to the Headmaster's study," roared Mr. Crowell, his patience entirely exhausted. "You are utterly incorrigible! Be silent at once!"

"I will not—I will not!" shouted Alexis, his eyes flashing. "Do you think I care for this school? You are all English pigs! I will not consent to remain unless I am treated with respect and——"

The door opened, and Nelson Lee appeared. "Good!" I murmured.

The gov'nor was our Housemaster, and I felt sure that he would soon put the Greek junior in his place. All eyes were fixed upon him as he stood listening to the final words of Alexis's outburst.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Crowell?" he asked mildly.

"You may well ask me that, Mr. Lee!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell. "I have had terrible trouble with that boy this afternoon. I can do nothing with him—nothing at all. He will not attend to his lessons, he has insulted me repeatedly, and he positively refuses to obey all orders. The lad is beyond all control!"

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Crowell," said Nelson Lee. "I am afraid you are having a rather trying time. However, Alexis must be taught that the authority of the school must be maintained. It will be as well, perhaps, if he is taken before the Headmaster."

"Please do not give me the task of taking him," said Mr. Crowell hastily. "The lad is like a wild animal the instant you touch him."

Nelson Lee nodded grimly.

"Alexis!" he said. "You will go to the Headmaster's study immediately lessons are over."

"Why should I go?" demanded Alexis fiercely.

"Because I order you to go," replied Nelson Lee. "And you will please understand, Alexis, that if you fail to carry out my orders, you will be punished. You have only yourself to thank for your constant punishments—but you must be made to understand that Mr. Crowell's authority cannot be flouted."

Nelson Lee turned to the Form-master.

"Have patience for a little longer, Mr. Crowell," he murmured. "Dr. Stafford is making arrangements to have Alexis quietly removed from St. Frank's. It is hoped that Alexis will leave before the end of this present week."

"Splendid—splendid!" said Mr. Crowell, with great relief.

There was no further trouble with Titus Alexis that afternoon. Whether he attended in the Housemaster's study or not I do not know. It was quite certain, however, that the Greek junior was not destined to remain long in the school.

He was still dangerous, for all that—and he meant mischief.

CHAPTER II.

SOMEWHAT HIGH!

"**P**HEW!"

De Valerie sniffed rather sharply, and made a grimace. Edward Oswald Handforth had paused in the lobby, and De Valerie regarded him with interest. Handforth was carrying a parcel. "Yes," said Handforth; "I meant to give Alexis a punch on his silly nose, but there's no sense in causing another riot. The chap is like a wild animal, and there's no telling what the dickens he'll get up to."

"The best thing we can do, Handy, is to let the chap severely alone," remarked Pitt. "He's a holy terror."

"If you think I'm afraid of him——"

"My dear chap, I don't think anything of the sort," said Pitt soothingly. "That's not the point. But it only causes a commotion to punch Alexis——" Pitt paused, and glanced round him.

"What's the matter?" asked De Valerie.

"Haven't you noticed anything?" said Pitt, with a sniff.

"I've noticed something with my nose, if that's what you mean," replied De Valerie, with a suspicious glance at Handforth. "I thought the drain had gone a bit wrong, but the sniff seems to be coming from that parcel of Handy's."

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie, coming to a halt as he was strolling by. "What is the meanin' of this frightful odour, dear fellows?"

Handforth glared.

"Don't talk rot!" he snapped. "I can bring a few kippers in for tea, I suppose, without you making a lot of fuss? They smell all right if you take a good sniff. Just look at 'em!"

Handforth unwrapped the parcel, and exposed the kippers.

"I bought 'em off a chap——" he began.

"Why, what—— Come back, you idiots!"

But the crowd melted away, leaving Handforth in sole possession of the lobby. In the doorway of the Ancient House Pitt had collapsed, and De Valerie was fanning himself frantically.

"Water!" gasped Pitt faintly.

"You silly jossers!" roared Handforth wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These kippers are simply ripping," went on Handforth. "I don't like fellows getting prejudices just because a thing happens to be cheap. You come along to Study D in ten minutes' time—and then you'll come to know the truth."

"We don't want to be poisoned, thanks," said Somerton, holding his nose. "Clear off, you ass! You're making the whole place reek!"

Handforth grunted, and strode out of the lobby. In his own mind, he had one or two private doubts concerning that parcel of kippers. But he had paid solid cash for

them, and he saw no reason why they should be thrown away. And he was far too obstinate to admit that he had been swindled.

He strode into Study D, and found Church and McClure making preparations for tea. The kettle was already on the boil, and the table was set. Church was busily cutting bread-and-butter.

"Afraid we haven't got much of a tea to-night, Handy," he remarked. "Only bread-and-butter and tea—and one jam tart between the three of us. That's the worst of being hard up. When is your next remittance coming along?"

"It ought to have been here to-day," said Handforth. "But I had a tanner left, and we sha'n't be without something tasty, after all. I've got some ripping kippers here. You'd better cook 'em, Church."

Church looked up.

"Kippers!" he exclaimed. "Good! They may not be a swell dish, but I'm jolly fond of kippers. I suppose you've got two for sixpence? That'll be enough, even though it is a bit short."

Handforth rubbed his hands.

"We've got two each," he said pleasantly.

"You'll find half a dozen in this parcel."

"For sixpence?" demanded McClure.

"Rather!" said Handforth. "Big ones, too!"

Church took the parcel doubtfully.

Where the dickens did you get them?" he asked. "Mrs. Hake hasn't got a smell of one. It's ripping to have—Oh, my hat! Whew! Great goodness!"

Church dropped the parcel, and reeled back.

"Help!" he gasped, holding a handkerchief to his nose.

"What's the matter with you?" roared Handforth.

"They're bad, you ass!" said Church. "They're whiffy!"

"Rot! The chap told me they were fresh"

"I say, open the window!" said McClure hastily. "I can smell 'em over here! It's a bit thick, Handy, to bring stuff of that kind into the study! If you're not careful they'll walk out on their own!"

Church and McClure were exaggerating, of course, but it was an undoubted fact that the kippers were far from fresh. Handforth picked up the parcel, and planked it down upon the table again, exposing the kippers to view.

"Why, they're lovely!" he exclaimed. "Just look at 'em! If you can show me anything wrong, I'll admit that I've been had. But they're as fresh as daisies, and once they're cooked they won't smell at all—I mean—"

Handforth paused, turned his head, and took a long breath.

"Where's the frying-pan?" he asked thickly.

Church grabbed the frying-pan, and put it behind him.

"You're not going to put those niffy

things in this frying-pan!" he roared. "We paid three-and-sixpence for it, and I don't see why we should have it ruined while it's practically new!"

"You—you silly lunatic!" shouted Handforth. "Don't I keep telling you that these kippers are fresh? I bought them off a chap in the road—some travelling fishmonger, with a cart."

"Oh! That explains it!" said McClure. "I suppose they were the last he had?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, they were," admitted Handforth. "So he let me have them for a tanner. We can easily do with two each—"

"You silly ass!" shouted Church. "We're not going to eat those things!"

"Why not?"

"Because they'll make us ill!"

"Rot!" said Handforth.

"Ill for a week!" declared Church. "It's quite likely that we should die. Bad fish is frightful stuff to eat. Great Scott! The air in this room is getting too awful for words! The giddy things are talking, Handy."

"Be sensible, old man," put in McClure.

"We can't eat those kippers."

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"If you like to eat bread-and-butter alone you're welcome to it," he said. "I'm having kippers for tea. Gimme that frying-pan, Church!"

"Look here—"

Handforth did not argue further. He picked up the parcel of kippers, and approached Church. Church dropped the frying-pan, and fled. A moment later two of the highly-scented kippers were in the pan.

"They'll be delicious!" declared Handforth firmly.

The kippers were soon frizzling, and the air of Study D became thick with fumes. Fortunately, the window was wide open. Pitt, who was seen to be passing the window, staggered as he walked; then reeled, and fell to the ground. Several juniors found it necessary to carry him away.

Handforth watched it all without a smile—although the other fellows were roaring. Pitt's idea of a joke appealed to them—but it didn't appeal to Handy.

The kippers sizzled merrily in the pan; and certainly they had a very different odour when they were cooked. Handforth, who had half-decided to give up the feed, changed his mind again.

He sniffed the frying-pan.

"Why, they're O.K.!" he declared.

"Nothing wrong with these giddy kippers!"

He opened the door, so that the appetising smell should escape into the passage. Church and McClure were waiting there waiting until their leader was overcome. They thought that the moment had arrived.

"Hold him!" said Church huskily.

They grasped Handforth as he looked out into the passage.

"What the dickens—Leggo, you asses!" roared Handforth.

"We—we thought you were ill, Handy!" gasped Church.

"Ill!" bellowed Handforth. "I'll show you whether I'm ill, you prize duffers! Those kippers are as right as ninepence! Smell 'em! Now that they're cooked, they smell lovely!"

McClure sniffed cautiously.

"They smell better," he admitted. "But you can't eat the things, old man! You'll be taken bad—you'll have ptomaine poisoning, or something! For goodness' sake, throw the beastly stuff away!"

"Rats!" snapped Handforth.

He went back into the study, and turned the kippers over. The door of Study C was ajar, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I were at tea. The odour which stole into the study made us sit up.

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "What a frightful sniff!"

"It's those kippers of Handy's," grinned Watson. "They've been smelling the whole passage out! Shut the door, Nipper!"

I kicked the door to.

"It'll be rather a pity," I said thoughtfully.

"Eh?" said Watson. "What'll be a pity?"

"Losing Handforth."

"What the dickens——"

"I don't suppose he'll survive," I explained. "Bad fish is liable to carry people away in no time—and you know what an obstinate beggar Handforth is. He'll eat two or three of them, and succumb before bed-time!"

Sir Montie looked shocked.

"Dear fellow, you ain't serious?" he asked, adjusting his pince-nez.

I grinned, and that grin was sufficient to reassure my noble chum. Meanwhile, Handforth had transferred the two kippers from the frying-pan on to his plate. He sat down at the table, and Church and McClure watched him from the doorway—as though they thought there was a danger of something exploding.

"Don't stand there!" said Handforth briskly. "Come inside, and close the door. You've got to fry your kippers yet!"

"Oh, come off it, Handy," said Church. "You ain't really going to eat those smelly things?"

"They ain't smelly!" roared Handforth. "They were only a bit—a bit dry, or something—or perhaps they'd been lying near some fish that really was a bit squiffy. I'll admit they hummed a bit before they were cooked. But they're as sweet as a nut now."

Church and McClure entered the study.

"Well, you're welcome to eat 'em," said McClure. "Look here, old man, I'm serious now. Don't be so obstinate. You know as well as I do that it's harmful to eat anything that's on the turn——"

"Dry up!" snapped Handforth. "I bought these kippers, and I'm going to eat them. If you like to go without yours—well, it's your loss."

"I think it'll be our gain!" remarked Church.

The trio sat down to tea, and Church and McClure watched their leader with some little amount of concern as he demolished the first kipper with relish—or, at least, apparent relish.

He didn't eat quite all of it, and he pushed his plate aside.

"Had enough?" asked Church, with a grin.

"I—I think so," said Handforth carelessly. "I'm not very hungry, you know."

"I thought you wouldn't eat the two," chuckled McClure.

"I'd eat 'em if I felt like it!" said Handforth. "But I'm not a chap who believes in gorging himself. If I was hungry I'd eat three or four, rather than see 'em wasted. Pour me out a cup of tea, Churchy!"

"Yes, I expect you need it!" said Church, with a nod.

Handforth, strangely enough, continued to eat bread-and-butter—which didn't look as though he'd lost his appetite. Yet his second kipper remained untouched. By the time the meal was over everything eatable in the study had been demolished, with the exception of five kippers and one quarter.

Everything was cleared up, and then Church and McClure announced their intention of strolling out to the playing-fields.

"All right," said Handforth. "I'll come later on."

"Why don't you come now, you ass?"

"I—I want to do something in the study first," said Handforth carelessly.

His chums went off, but a few minutes later McClure returned, having forgotten to change his shoes. And McClure was somewhat astonished to find Handforth sprawling full length on the couch.

"You lazy bounder!" said McClure indignantly. "Oh, but I expect you're feeling the effects of that rotten kipper! You'd better see the doctor——"

Handforth turned over.

"Can't you leave me alone for a minute?" he demanded. "My—my head aches a bit—not because of that kipper, you duffer! Everybody's liable to suffer from a headache. I think it must have been the fumes when I was frying at tea-time."

McClure regarded his chief anxiously.

"I say, Handy, be serious," he exclaimed. "You'll be taken bad before long. The best thing you can do is to rush down to Dr. Brett——"

"Rot!" growled Handforth.

"Do you feel kind of weak in all your limbs?"

"No, I don't!"

"Do you feel pains in your tummy?"

"No, you lunatic!"

"Do you feel sick?"

"No!"

"Is your head swimming?"

"By George!" said Handforth, picking up a cushion. "Are you going to leave me alone, or do you want to be chucked out of this

study on your neck? All you can do is to bother me with idiotic questions!"

"Yes, but look here——"

Whizz!

The cushion shot through the air, caught McClure under the chin, and he toppled over backwards through the doorway, roaring.

"Hullo! What's the trouble?" I asked, as I passed along the passage.

"Handforth's ill!" gasped McClure.

I grinned.

"It doesn't seem like it," I remarked. "If he can chuck you about like that when he's ill, he must be a holy terror when he's fit! Have those kippers begun to work? I can still smell 'em!"

Handforth slammed the door of Study D. and he was not further bothered. About two hours later, when most of the fellows had come indoors, Handforth entered the junior common-room.

It was crowded, and the electric-lights were blazing.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Pitt. "Look at Handy!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Handforth was not looking himself. His eyes were heavy, and the usual ruddy glow had quite departed from his cheeks, leaving them sallow and pale. He looked really ill—and he probably felt ill.

"Poor old chap!" said Somerton feelingly.

"Eh?" exclaimed Handforth. "Who are you referring to?"

"You!" replied the duke.

"Me? Oh, don't be dotty!" snapped Handforth. "What's the matter with me?"

"You look bilious," said Pitt solemnly. "You look frightfully ill, Handy. It's my belief you've been poisoned. I've heard that ptomaine poisoning always begins by a fellow feeling bilious——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter," went on Pitt. "Handforth is showing all the symptoms. He ought to go straight to bed. I vote we carry him upstairs straight away—he's too weak to walk himself."

"You—you funny ass!" howled Handforth. "I'm all right! If you lay a finger on me, I'll punch your ugly nose!"

Pitt shook his head sadly.

"That's another sign," he said. "Shortness of temper, and a tendency to become violent. I think we'd better do something—— Look out, you ass! Yarroo!"

Handforth's fist, containing nearly all its old punch, landed in Pitt's chest, and Reginald staggered backwards into the arms of De Valerie and Jack Grey.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't seem to be very ill!" grinned De Valerie.

"The fathead!" gasped Pitt. "I was only thinking of his health——"

"I can look after my own health, thanks," said Handforth sourly. "Mind your own giddy business. I've heard enough about those kippers! They weren't exactly fresh, I'll admit; but they haven't done me any harm!"

But Handforth was absent from the supper-table that night—and that was certainly an ominous sign.

CHAPTER III.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

CLANG!

One o'clock boomed out solemnly from the great tower above the Ancient House. St. Frank's was asleep.

At that hour everybody had retired to rest. Not even a master was up and about at one o'clock in the morning. The Remove dormitory was still and dark and silent—silent, at all events, except for sundry snores.

Handforth was generally the chief offender in this respect; but to-night Handforth was not snoring. He did not appear to be sleeping peacefully at all, for he kept rolling about in bed.

"Oh!" he mumbled. "I feel awful!"

He was only half awake, but at last he sat up in bed and gazed round him into the gloom.

Handforth doubled himself up, and moaned.

"What an ass I was!" he muttered. "I ought to have taken the advice of those chaps. I—I believe I'm going to die!"

Edward Oswald, to tell the truth, had a most uncomfortable feeling in his interior. Something was decidedly wrong. His tongue felt hot and dry, and he had an awful fear that he was about to be sick.

The kipper was to blame, of course.

It hadn't been exactly bad, but its strength was such that even Handforth's constitution was not capable of digesting it without protest. In short, Handforth was a bit bilious, and the experience was new to him.

After a while he lay down again; but he couldn't rest.

It was impossible for him to obtain any sleep. He felt that he was suffocating—that he must have fresh air. And at length he tumbled out of bed and awayed over towards one of the windows.

He pushed open the sash weakly and leaned out.

The cool night air beat upon his face, and he breathed in the pure atmosphere with a sense of great relief. And undoubtedly the fresh air did him a lot of good. He remained at the window for some little time, until the dark Triangle below had become more distinct.

His eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, and where all had been black before he now saw definite objects. He could recognise the woodshed, and Warren's barrow standing near by.

He could see the fountain, with its wide pool. Everything was still and quiet, and nothing disturbed the peace of the night except the distant rumble of a goods train travelling on its journey.

The stars were shining overhead, and the air was rather cool. Handforth decided that

he had better get back to bed. He had no wish to catch a cold on the top of his other indisposition.

But, just as he was about to leave the window, his attention became fixed.

"My hat!" he muttered.

He forgot all about his illness, and he stood gazing down at something which was visible to him near the College House. A figure was moving—a human form! It lurked about for some little time, and then disappeared.

Handforth waited, his heart beating fast. Then, once again, the figure was visible. It was acting in a most suspicious fashion, for it crouched over one of the gratings which led into the College House cellars.

"By George!" murmured Handforth. "A burglar!"

There seemed no doubt upon that point. Who else, indeed, would be prowling about the school at one o'clock in the morning.

Handforth didn't exactly know what to do. He wasn't feeling up to an investigation himself—although, under ordinary circumstances, he would have delighted in such a thing.

But all he wanted to do was to get back into bed, and to lay quiet and still. He felt dizzy even as he walked across the dormitory and approached a bed. The next moment I awoke, feeling a hand on my shoulder.

I was fully awake and alert in an instant.

"Hallo!" I said. "Who's that?"

"Don't yell, you ass!" whispered Handforth. "It's me!"

"Oh! What's wrong, Handy? Feeling bad?"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"I feel all right—nearly all right, at any rate," he said. "I shall be as lively as a cricket to-morrow. I woke you up because I want you to give the giddy alarm."

"What the dickens for?" I asked.

"Just now I was at the window, and there's somebody down there near the College House—a burglar!" said Handforth. "I thought I'd better wake you up, Nipper, because you're rather keen on burglars."

I grinned.

"Try pulling somebody else's leg, old son," I said pleasantly. "You're not going to catch me like that—"

"You—you fathead!" hissed Handforth. "I'm not trying to pull your silly leg! It's the truth—I saw the chap with my own eyes!"

"I suppose it's the effect of those kippers—"

"I tell you I saw him!" roared Handforth.

"Don't wake the whole school!" I said, with a chuckle. "Where did you see this prowling, sinister figure?"

"Come to the window!"

I slipped out of bed, and I must confess that I felt very doubtful. Handforth was a famous fellow for getting wrong ideas into his head. One had to be very careful when dealing with his "discoveries."

We both looked out of the window, and Handforth pointed.

"You know those gratings which lead into the cellars of the College House?" he asked.

"Well, the burglar was prowling about one of them."

I fixed my gaze upon the wall of the College House. The gratings which Handforth referred to were well known to me. There were none connected with the Ancient House, however.

"Nobody could get into the school that way," I whispered. "Those gratings are padlocked. Besides, the cellar windows are barred—"

"I'm not saying anything about that," interrupted Handforth. "All I know is that the chap was lurking about—My hat! There he is again! Can't you see him, you silly chump?"

I stared hard.

"No need to call me names," I said calmly.

"But can't you see—"

"Of course I can see him," I murmured. "Dry up!"

The figure was dim and indistinct. It had just appeared from the clump of trees which stood near the ruins of the old monastery. The figure crossed the open space, and came to a halt near one of the iron gratings.

Then it vanished.

"What did I tell you?" breathed Handforth. "He's got in."

"It certainly looks like it," I agreed grimly. "My son, this matter needs to be investigated. It's a jolly good thing you were feeling ill—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, it's a good thing you came to the window," I explained. "We'd better make haste and slip some clothes on."

"I don't think I'll come," said Handforth. "I—I'm not feeling quite up to the mark, you know. I shall be better in bed. Take some of the other chaps with you, and collar the burglar."

"That's just what I am going to do," I said briskly.

"But don't forget that if you do collar him it'll be my giddy capture!" said Handforth. "I put you on to it, and it's only fair—"

"That you should get the glory?" I grinned. "All right. Don't you worry yourself, old man. We won't steal your honours."

I rapidly shook the shoulders of Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West. They stared at me sleepily in the gloom.

"Begad! Is that you, Nipper, old boy?" asked Montie.

"Yes," I replied. "Slip out of bed and dress yourself—"

"But it's dark, you know—it ain't time to get up yet!" protested Tregellis-West. "What's the idea of—"

"Burglars!" I whispered keenly. "Hurry up!"

"Begad!"

Sir Montie asked no further questions. And Tommy Watson quickly jumped out of bed and was soon slipping into his shirt and

trousers. Within three minutes we were ready, and Handforth was back in bed.

He sat up as we were about to depart.

"I've a good mind to come, after all," he said doubtfully.

"You stay where you are, old son," I exclaimed. "You wouldn't be any good to us, even if you did come. You're not feeling fit, Handy, and we couldn't accept the responsibility of allowing you out in the chill night air."

"You silly ass!" growled Handforth.

We passed out of the dormitory, and very soon afterwards we were stealing down the stairs into the hall. We made our exit by the most convenient way—via the window of Study C.

Once out in the Triangle I cautioned my chums to refrain from talking, and to follow behind me in single file. They raised no objections, and we proceeded along the wall of the Ancient House in deep shadow.

The College House loomed up in front of us. I called a halt, and for some few moments we remained quite still, watching and waiting. But nothing happened. The school grounds were still and quiet.

"You fellows stay here for a tick," I breathed.

"But what—"

Without giving them a chance to question me I slipped away into the gloom, and made a detour. Finally I arrived against the wall of the College House, and edged my way along until I came to the first of the cellar gratings.

It was quite firmly fixed.

But when I arrived at the next grating I found a different state of affairs. The thing was open, and a yawning black hole lay before me. So Handforth had not been wrong, and neither had I.

Somebody was attempting to burgle the College House!

I was almost certain that the fellow, whoever he was, was lurking inside the cellars at that moment. So, without loss of time, I crept back to my chums and informed them of what I had seen.

"The time to act is now!" I concluded. "What we've got to do is to nip into that cellar and capture the rotter—"

"Hold on!" breathed Watson suddenly. "Look there!"

He pointed.

Sir Montie and I saw a dim figure moving towards the College House—towards the open grating. My surmise, then, had been wrong. The burglar was not within the cellar—unless there were two of them.

We watched this fellow with interest. He was not very big, and he was attired in an overcoat. He seemed to be carrying something heavy—something which resembled a square tin.

"I wonder what his game can be?" I breathed.

"Let's go and pounce upon him," suggested Watson.

"Good!"

I was in full agreement with the sugges-

tion, and we all started forward at the same time. But the figure disappeared into the cellar, and when we arrived all was quiet and dark.

"We'll wait!" I whispered. "We'll collar him as he comes out with his giddy booty!"

"Begad! That's the idea," said Sir Montie. "Although, if it comes to that, dear fellows, I don't think the frightful rotter will find much booty to carry away."

"I suppose he's a beastly old tramp," murmured Watson.

We waited, grim and silent.

We were inclined to be somewhat impatient after five minutes had elapsed. Watson suggested that we should enter the cellar and Montie seconded the proposal. But I was against it.

"He'd probably slip away if we did that," I said. "He's bound to come out by this exit, sooner or later, and so we shall nab him."

"Oh, all right."

"We're entirely in your hands, dear fellow."

And so we waited for a further period. And then we heard a sound just below us. Two seconds later somebody appeared in the opening, and scrambled up to the ground level.

"On him!" I said sharply.

We all sprang at the same moment, and the stranger was overwhelmed.

He collapsed to the ground, and we simply piled all over him. He scarcely made any attempt to struggle.

"Now, you rotter," I exclaimed, "let's see who you are!"

At the same moment I flashed out my electric torch—fully upon our prisoner's features.

"Great Scott!" gasped Watson.

"This—this is simply amazin'!" declared Sir Montie.

For our prisoner was Titus Alexis, of the Remove!

— —

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR.

THE Greek junior's face was very pale.

"Let me go!" he muttered savagely. "You have no right to keep me in this way! Let me go! Do you hear me?"

"We can hear you all right," I replied. "But you've got to tell us what particular game you're playing, my son. What's the idea of prowling about in the middle of the night?"

Alexis breathed hard.

"I was restless—I could not sleep," he exclaimed. "It is nothing; you need not be frightened."

"We're not frightened, you Greek idiot!" growled Watson.

"What were you doing in the College House cellar?" I demanded. "Out with it, Alexis! Speak up before we give you a licking!"

The Greek junior glared at me balefully.

"It is not your business!" he snarled.

"I think it is," I replied. "You have no right here in the middle of the night. We thought you were a burglar. What possible business can you have in the cellars of the College House?"

Alexis laughed harshly.

"Bah! You are making the fuss over nothing!" he snapped. "I was walking for exercise—nothing more. This grating was open, and I was curious. That is all. Some of the boys left it open, I imagine."

"You were carrying something not long ago," put in Watson.

"I was carrying a canful of water," said Alexis. "But why should I explain to you? Let me go! It is no concern of yours; and if you inform the masters about this I shall have a terrible revenge——"

"Oh, dry up!" I said contemptuously. "You're always talking about revenge. We shan't tell any of the masters—you needn't be afraid. But if you're spotted out here you'll be dropped on pretty heavily—that's all. I'm quite certain I'm not interested in your silly movements!"

I rose to my feet.

"Let's get back to bed, my sons," I added.

Watson and Tregellis-West followed me. I was not at all keen to investigate the matter any further. Titus Alexis did not interest me in the slightest degree. He was an eccentric youth, and there was no explaining his conduct.

But Tommy and Sir Montie were not quite satisfied.

"I wonder what the cad was up to?" said Watson, as we re-entered the Remove dormitory. "It strikes me as being queer—jolly queer!"

"Dear fellow, you are quite right," said Montie, shaking his head. "I cannot possibly think of anythin' which will form an explanation. Alexis was up to something very shady——"

"Oh, never mind him," I interrupted. "He can't do much harm, anyhow. Perhaps some of the College House fellows have incurred his enmity. I'll give Christine the tip to-morrow—to look out for trouble."

"But he said he was carrying a can of water," argued Watson. "What the dickens could he be doing with a can of water in the cellar?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," I said. "As soon as I found that Alexis was the night-bird I lost all interest in the matter. Rats to the chap! I shall be glad when he's sacked."

We all got back to bed, and Sir Montie and Tommy were soon fast asleep. I was asleep, too, but I awoke shortly afterwards, and found that Alexis was getting back into bed.

In the morning he was up before everyone else—as usual. The Greek junior was certainly not lazy in that respect; he was always an early riser. But we all had an idea that his object in getting dressed before the

rising-bell was to avoid contact with us as much as possible.

Handforth was much better.

In fact, the sturdy leader of Study D was practically himself again. He had slept off the effects of the kipper, and if any evidence was wanted regarding his condition, he very soon supplied it.

Hubbard and Merrell unwisely chipped Handforth concerning that kipper. They regretted doing so shortly afterwards. For Handforth landed out with all his old force, and the two juniors knew it.

"I'm fed-up with the subject!" snorted Handforth. "If there's any reference to it again, I'll punch the culprit until he's black and blue! I wasn't quite myself last night, I'll admit, and I was a bit restless——"

Handforth paused, and looked over in my direction.

"By the way," he added, "what about that burglar?"

"Burglar!" said several juniors.

"Oh, nothing!" I replied carelessly. "There wasn't a burglar, Handy. We made a bloomer. I'll tell you about it later."

"But I don't see——"

Handforth was interrupted, however, and the subject was not brought up again until I came across him in the Triangle, just before breakfast.

"There was no need to let everybody know," I said. "That chap we saw last night, Handy, was Alexis."

"Don't talk rubbish," said Handforth bluntly.

"He was Alexis, I tell you," I said. "We sprang upon him, and collared him properly. But, of course, we let him go again."

"What was he doing?" asked Handforth.

"I don't know—and I'm quite certain I don't care."

Handforth looked doubtful.

"I'll bet the rotter was up to some mischief," he declared. "He's not connected with the College House, in any case, and I don't see what game he was playing. Didn't you find out?"

"No," I replied. "Alexis might have been doing all sorts of things—but the most likely explanation is that he was just prowling about for the mere curiosity of it. He's just that kind of mysterious beggar. Anyhow, it's not our business to keep our eyes on Alexis. Confound the chap!"

If he had not been so cordially detested by everybody, Alexis's movements would have proved of some interest to us. But he was so universally disliked that we didn't care a jot for him. We didn't even want to question him on the subject of the night's escapade.

By dinner-time I had forgotten practically all about it. For one thing, Alexis was behaving very strangely. He had always been eccentric in his manner, but on that day he was particularly so.

In the Form-room Mr. Crowell had been able to do nothing with him. He had given

vague answers to the Form-master's questions—proving that he was not even attempting to attend to the lesson.

And Mr. Crowell, who was thoroughly tired of Alexis, did not pay much attention to him. The Greek junior was allowed to go his own sweet way. He would soon be removed from St. Frank's, so what was the good of bothering about him?

"There's something rummy about Alexis to-day," remarked Pitt, as he met me in the passage before dinner. "Haven't you noticed it?"

"Yes," I replied. "He looks a bit wilder than usual."

Pitt nodded.

"The expression in his eyes makes me think that he'd be better off in a giddy lunatic asylum," he remarked. "I believe the chap is half-dotty. Nipper. Haven't you noticed the way he goes about, muttering to himself?"

"No, I haven't seen that," I said.

"It's a fresh development," went on Pitt. "Not five minutes ago Alexis was out in the Triangle—and he was jawing to himself in Greek—jawing, and waving his arms about."

"He's a queer merchant," I commented.

"Some of the fags are absolutely afraid of him," put in Grey, who had joined us. "They bunk when Alexis goes near them."

"Well, we shall soon be rid of him—that's one thing," I said. "By the end of next week he'll be quietly removed from this noble seat of learning. Plenty of Greeks are all right—splendid fellows, in fact—but we don't want any specimens of this kind at St. Frank's."

The others heartily agreed with me. At dinner-time Alexis sat in his place like a mummy. He spoke to nobody, and looked straight before him. His face was set and expressionless, and he only played about with his food, eating less than a quarter of what was served.

He was the first out after grace had been said, and when I emerged into the Triangle with my chums we found Alexis marching about beneath the Elms. His actions were so quaint that we could not avoid watching him.

"He's off his rocker," said Watson.

"Well, he certainly seems to be," I agreed.

Titus Alexis was gesticulating with his arms, and every now and again he would break into a gleeful chuckle. But there was no humour in that chuckle. It struck me as being the laugh of a demented being.

Just before afternoon lessons commenced, I happened to run into Nelson Lee. And I mentioned the subject to him.

"What about Alexis?" I asked. "Haven't you noticed him, sir?"

"Alexis seems to be attracting general notice, young 'un," said the guv'nor.

"I believe he's mad, sir—"

"No, not that, Nipper," interrupted Lee. "The lad is quite out of his element at St. Frank's. He loathes everybody here, and his

misery is playing upon his mind to such an extent that he hardly knows what he is doing."

"But he's an awful young scamp, sir," I remarked.

"He is, Nipper," agreed Nelson Lee. "I really think that Master Alexis is the worst junior we have ever had at the school. He is a coward, and his revengeful nature is something which we cannot fathom."

"I hope he'll soon be going, guv'nor," I remarked.

"You need not be concerned on that point, my lad," said Nelson Lee. "Alexis will be taken from St. Frank's not later than to-morrow, or the next day."

"Good!"

"His parents have been communicated with, and they have been informed that it is not possible to keep the boy at the school," said Nelson Lee. "So you will not be worried with your queer form-fellow much longer. But I should advise you to say as little as possible to the other boys, Nipper. We don't want any talk to be going on. Alexis will be taken away quietly."

I promised not to speak to the others, and when I went into afternoon lessons I was feeling much more cheerful. Somehow, the very presence of Alexis about the place seemed to make things uncomfortable.

Several times during lessons he talked to himself—in a quiet murmur at first. But later on he talked quite loudly. Mr. Crowell took no notice to begin with, but it was impossible to ignore it altogether.

"Alexis!" he exclaimed, at last. "You must be quiet!"

The Greek boy scowled.

"I was doing no harm," he said sullenly.

"Perhaps not, Alexis, but it is liable to disturb the other boys if you talk to yourself," said Mr. Crowell. "If you cannot remain quiet I shall be compelled to punish you."

Alexis' eyes blazed.

"It is always that—always punishment!" he shouted violently. "You are brutes in this school! Everything I do is punished! I must not talk—I must not answer! I am hit with the stick repeatedly!"

Everybody looked up at that outburst.

"You have only yourself to blame for your treatment, Alexis," said Mr. Crowell sternly. "If you behaved as the other boys behave, you would not be punished. There are many juniors in this room who have not received a caning or a line since the commencement of the term. That is because they have been well-behaved. If you would only follow their example, you would not be punished."

"I do not believe it!" snapped Alexis. "You punish me because I am not English—that is all! I am tired of everything! I hate all!"

"You must be silent!" shouted Mr. Crowell angrily. "Upon my soul! Any other boy would be publicly flogged for giving voice to the words you have uttered, Alexis. Be

alent. before you get yourself into further trouble!"

Alexis muttered something to himself, and subsided.

"The cad!" murmured Watson.

There was no further outburst that afternoon, but Alexis took no notice whatever of Mr. Crowell's order. He talked to himself repeatedly, and when the form was dismissed he went off alone.

"The fellow is absolutely off his rocker!" declared Handforth. "And, in my opinion, something ought to be done!"

"You can't interfere with him, Handy," I said. "You know what will happen if you do. He'll scream and kick, and make a terrific noise. The game isn't worth the candle. Give it up, old man."

Handforth smiled at me pityingly.

"I'm not thinking of doing anything to the cad himself," he explained. "I'm not quite such a duffer as that, I should hope. My idea is to get up a protest—a sort of general voice—to the Head—"

"My advice is to do nothing," I interrupted. "Alexis won't be here for long, and you'll be only wasting your time if you go to the Head."

"Well, we can try it, anyhow," said Handforth obstinately. "I'm fed-up to the neck with the chap—he gives me the giddy creeps! I shall begin to think that St. Frank's is a lunatic asylum!"

"Some people think that already," I grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With Study D as the padded cell, be-
gad!" chuckled Sir Montie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think that's funny, I don't!" sneered Handforth. "The only lunatic in the Remove is Alexis. Who'll come with me to the Head? Speak up, you bounders! Who'll join me in this idea?"

"I'll back you up, if you like," said Pitt.

"Well, that's four of us—"

"Four!" said De Valerie. "How do you make that out? You don't count Pitt as three, do you?"

"What about Church and McClure?" said Handforth. "They're with me—they've jolly well got to be! If they don't back me up, I won't speak to 'em again!"

De Valerie turned.

"Now's your chance, Church," he said. "If you refuse to back Handy up, you'll be relieved of his jaw for all time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church smiled weakly.

"Oh, it's no good," he said. "We've got to back the silly ass up—it's a lot less trouble in the long run. Besides, I'm keen upon this thing—it's a jolly good idea. A protest ought to be made."

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll get the chap kicked out!"

"Good!"

Quite a number of juniors were in agreement with the project, and Handforth was rather surprised to find that he had quite a

large following. It was not often that his suggestions were so readily adopted.

Twelve or fourteen fellows backed him up, and then they marched straight to Dr. Stafford's study. They all knew that they would probably be sent off with fleas in their ears, but there was safety in numbers. The Head could not punish them very severely.

Handforth marshalled the crowd into some sort of shape outside the Head's study. Then he tapped loudly upon the door.

"Come in!"

"Now then—all follow me," whispered Handforth.

He opened the door, and the party marched into the Head's study in a body. By the time they were all in, the room was practically filled. The Head, who was seated at his desk, looked up in astonishment.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Good gracious! What is the meaning of this—this invasion?"

"We have come here to protest, sir!" said Handforth firmly.

Dr. Stafford laid down his pen.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "That is very interesting, Handforth. You will kindly explain further."

There was something in the Head's tone which took some of the confidence out of the mighty Edward Oswald himself.

"Well, the fact is, sir, we wish to object—Or, I should say, we would like to protest," said Handforth, turning red. "What we want to do is to demand—At least, we would like you to agree—In other words, the object of this party is to protest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors had great difficulty in restraining their laughter. Handforth's explanation was amazingly lucid.

"What on earth are you talking about, Handforth?" demanded the Head severely.

"You tell me that you wish to protest, you go into a long rigmarole, and you arrive at exactly the same point—without explaining in the least. De Valerie, you had better be the spokesman of this party."

"But, look here, sir," began Handforth.

"I can speak all right! It's about that cad—that chap Alexis!"

The Head stroked his chin.

"Go on!" he said.

"We don't like him in the Remove, sir," went on Handforth boldly. "We all believe he's a bit dotty, and he gets on our nerves."

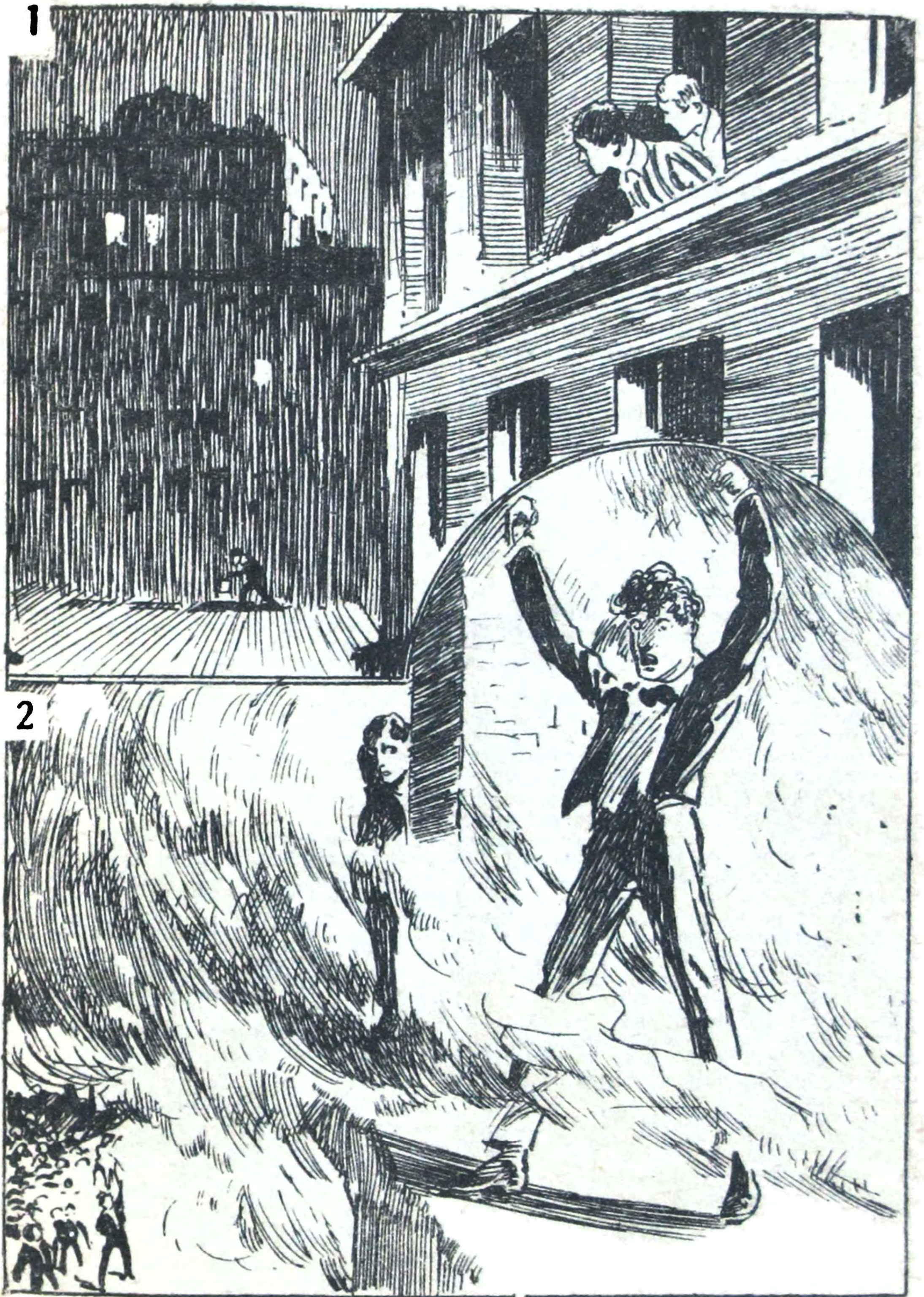
"That's right, sir," said De Valerie.

"And we'd like to know if there's any chance of Alexis being sent away. We hope you won't be offended, sir, because we don't mean to be impertinent."

"Rather not, sir."

Dr. Stafford nodded.

"I am not cross with you, boys," he said quietly. "I quite realise that you have excellent reasons to make this protest. Alexis is a very curious boy, and he is certainly not a nice companion for you to have. I have received full reports of his conduct, and



1. From the dormitory window we could see a figure moving across the open space.

2. Nelson Lee attempts to save the Greek boy from self-destruction.

you may rest assured that the present situation will not last for long."

"Oh, good!"

"Alexis will not be with you much longer," said the Head. "If you will go away now, and make yourselves easy, you may rely upon Alexis leaving St. Frank's within a week from to-day. He is not fitted to be a pupil in this school—and, while not being expelled, he will be sent back to his parents. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're a brick, sir."

The juniors crowded out of the Head's study, feeling very satisfied. The Head had not wished to explain matters to the boys—but, under the circumstances, he had felt bound to do so, for there was a real cause for protest.

And during the remainder of that evening Alexis was tolerated quite contentedly. And he certainly needed a good deal of toleration. For he was more wild than ever in his conduct.

Realising that Alexis was not wanted in the Remove, the Head had caused him to be placed in a bedroom by himself. That night, therefore, the Greek junior did not go to sleep in the Remove dormitory.

"By George!" said Handforth. "The air seems a lot fresher in here without that dotty ass! Thank goodness, he's going!"

And Handforth's view was shared by everybody.

All the juniors went to sleep peacefully. I was one of the first to drop off, and for some reason I awoke just as the clock was striking two. Why I should awaken at that unearthly hour was rather mysterious.

I lay in bed fully awake, and with my eyes open. Everything was quiet and still, and I snuggled over in order to go to sleep again. But, somehow, my attention was attracted by something on the ceiling of the dormitory.

It seemed to me that there was a light playing somewhere. There was a kind of flicker visible on the ceiling—very faint, but quite apparent. I lay in bed, wondering for a few minutes.

There was no moon, and I could not imagine what the source of that mysterious flicker could be. It died down for a second or two, and then increased until it was a distinct glow.

I sat up in bed, quite puzzled.

"There must be some explanation!" I told myself. "Perhaps there's a haystack on fire somewhere, or——"

My thoughts came to a standstill as the whole dormitory was illuminated by a sudden burst of fire. And, at the same moment, the faint sound of a crackling roar came to my ears.

My heart beat fast as I jumped out of bed.

For the conviction was upon me that the fire was not far distant!

CHAPTER V.

FIRE!

FLICKER-FLICKER!

The light in the dormitory increased, and it was a ruddy, lurid glow. I crossed quickly to the window—and then I knew the actual truth. There was no longer any doubt in my mind.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed huskily.

I stared across the Triangle with wide open, fixed eyes.

Huge tongues of flame were shooting up from the cellars of the College House! From every grating they were licking their way up round the brick walls, leaping higher and higher.

The flames were actually reaching the lower windows, and even as I watched I saw the glass shatter and crack. Curtains caught fire, and there was a fresh uproar of flame.

And yet everything was still!

No lights were showing in the upper windows, and it was quite obvious to me that the inmates of the College House were unaware of the truth. The school slept, unconscious of the disaster.

Fire!

The very knowledge of it staggered me. It was no isolated blaze, either. To judge by the size of the flames, the whole basement of the College House was already a roaring, flaming mass.

I thought rapidly. My first instinct was to shout an alarm at the top of my voice. But I checked this impulse. To awaken the juniors in that fashion would probably cause a panic—although, of course, there was not the slightest danger in the Ancient House. Even if the College House was burnt to the ground, the fire could not spread across the Triangle.

I came to a decision within ten seconds.

Without troubling to dress myself I rushed to the door, passed out into the corridor, and ran along at full pelt until I arrived at Nelson Lee's bedroom. I didn't even knock, but charged right in, switching on the electric light as I did so.

The guv'nor sat up in bed instantly.

"Nipper!" he exclaimed. "What is the meaning——"

"The College House is on fire, sir!" I panted hoarsely.

"What?"

"The flames are shooting out tremendously!" I went on. "There's not a light showing in the upper windows, and I don't believe the alarm has been given. I thought I'd better come straight to you, sir."

Nelson Lee leapt out of bed, ran to the window, and pushed up the sash. He gazed out for only a second, and then turned, his face pale and set.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed tensely. "You are right, young 'un! The lower part of the College House is a raging furnace! Go back to the dormitory and wait until Mr. Crowell arrives. Don't wake anybody."

"What are you going to do, sir?" I gasped.

"I'm going over to the College House at once—"

"But I want to come with you!" I said. "The fellows are all asleep here, and there's no danger. And I might be of use over there."

"All right—come!" snapped Lee.

He threw a dressing-gown over himself, and I grabbed one of his ordinary jackets. Then we dashed out. The gov'nor paused for a few seconds at Mr. Crowell's bedroom, to awaken him.

Then we hastened downstairs, and went out into the Triangle.

The whole expanse of the school grounds was brilliantly illuminated by the glare which came from the College House. There was no doubt about the fierceness of the outbreak. As I looked at the leaping flames, I told myself that the whole of the College House was doomed.

We rushed to the side-door—the main entrance was already burning, for the flames had spread with appalling rapidity. And even now they were roaring with a ferocity which I failed to understand. It was as though the cellars were filled with goods of a highly inflammable nature.

The side door was locked, and the gov'nor could not move it, so, without compunction, he smashed a window with one blow of his elbow. A minute later we were in the house, fighting our way through masses of choking smoke.

We reached one of the rear passages, found the stairs somehow, and rushed up to the first landing. The smoke here was not quite so thick, but it was increasing with every moment that passed.

As we moved forward the electric light blazed out, and a figure, clad in pyjamas, came looming out of the smoke. It was Mr. Stockdale, the Housemaster of the College House.

"Mr. Lee!" he panted, as he recognised us. "Do—do you know what this means? I only awakened a few moments ago—"

"You must get the boys out as quickly as possible, Stockdale," said Nelson Lee rapidly. "The lower part of the building is burning like a bonfire. Our first care must be to see that everybody is saved."

"Good heavens!" panted Mr. Stockdale, horrified.

After that there was tremendous excitement and commotion. Each dormitory was informed of its peril. Prefects were aroused, and they took charge of the juniors. The seniors were left to look after themselves.

And there really was danger.

The fire was spreading so rapidly that the main staircase was already cut right off. And every passage and corridor was filled with choking, blinding smoke. I was forgotten in the general excitement.

I found myself in the Remove dormitory, where the fellows were being marshalled into orderly columns by two prefects.

"There's no danger if you keep your heads," shouted Reynolds, of the Sixth.

"All right," yelled Christine. "We're cool enough!"

"Let's get outside!"

"Don't jaw!"

The juniors knew their fire-drill perfectly, and there was not even a sign of panic. In the most orderly fashion the long lines of boys filed out through the smoke-choked passages.

The Third had been rescued first; then came the Remove, and the Fifth. And when they arrived outside, in the Triangle, each Form was collected together by its particular master, and the roll was taken.

By the time the College House had been cleared the whole school knew of the fire, and there was not a single person sleeping. The Ancient House fellows were not allowed out of the House, for they were quite safe. And if they ran out, there would be nothing but confusion.

Every window in the Ancient House was packed with excited, flushed faces. It was a sight which I should not forget in a hurry, for, of course, I was below, with all the College House crowd.

Every fellow answered to his name. There was not one absentee, and Mr. Stockdale was greatly relieved. His whole household had been rescued from the burning building.

But, had there been any confusion, terrible consequences might have resulted. For, in that choking atmosphere, it would have been easy to lose count of many fellows. And the junior studies were well alight, and flames were roaring from the windows. The hall was a furnace.

There were no class-rooms in the College House; the lower floor consisted of studies and recreation-rooms, while the upper floors were dormitories and bed-rooms. And the whole lot seemed to be doomed.

The school fire-brigade—made up mostly of seniors—was already hard at work. Hoses were playing, and the streams of water hissed upon the blazing mass. But the fire had obtained a tremendous hold.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Bob Christine, as he watched the scene. "Isn't it awful! Look at our studies, you chaps! The whole building is doomed!"

"It's horrible!" panted Yorke.

"How did it happen?" asked somebody.

"Goodness knows!" said Christine. "I was asleep when the alarm came. It seems that the cellars caught fire first. Thank goodness, everybody was rescued in time. Just look at the flames!"

The juniors were awed and scared.

"What shall we do after this?" asked Talmadge huskily. "They can't save the dormitories—it's impossible! We sha'n't have any place to sleep, or—or anything! It's terrible!"

"Don't bother about that now," said Christine. "They might get the fire under control yet, if the Bannington people hurry up. The Fire Brigade ought to be here already!"

Meanwhile, excited comments were being passed by the Ancient House crowd.

"It's doomed," said Handforth, who occupied a prominent position in one of the Remove dormitory windows. "No doubt

about that, my sons. The College House will be a heap of ruins in the morning."

"Oh, rot!"

"They'll get the better of the fire!"

"Don't you believe it," said Pitt. "Those flames are too powerful. If we were in London it would be different. Dozens of engines would pump water on to the fire; but here it's hopeless. Our own pumping-engine is like a toy, and the Bannington outfit isn't much better!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "You're right, old boy!"

They watched, fascinated.

The flames were leaping higher and higher. The figures of the fellows with the hoses looked like demons in a pantomime, with the lurid glare as a background. And the crackle and roar of the flames filled the air with sound. The heat came over the triangle in choking waves, and the sparks flew into the sky in myriads. It was an impressive, appalling sight.

Crowds of people were collecting outside in the road. Practically every inhabitant of the village had been aroused. Farm people for miles around were hurrying to the scene, anxious to help.

It was a case of all hands to the pumps; but everybody had the conviction that the College House was doomed.

As to how the fire originated, this was not considered at the moment. But later, when the fellows had got over their first excitement, the question arose. Christine and Co. were particularly puzzled.

"It's astounding," said Bob Christine. "I can't imagine how the dear old place got alight. It seemed to start in the cellars—but what was there in the cellars to catch fire?"

"Nobody seems to know," remarked Clapson. "It's a mystery."

I was near the spot, and I heard what was being said. Fortunately the night was very mild, and nobody was likely to come to any harm, for the majority of the fellows were in their night attire.

"The fire certainly started in the cellars," I said. "I was the first to spot it, and the flames were leaping out of the cellar-gratings. Was there a lot of paraffin oil there—or petrol?"

"Not that I know of," replied Christine.

"Well, the truth will come out, I suppose," I said. "Anyhow, it seems that you fellows are going to lose your happy home."

"And our belongings, too," growled Yorke. "What about our clobber?"

"Yes, it's rough luck," I said sympathetically. "But these things can't be helped; fires are terrible, and you ought to consider yourselves lucky to have escaped without injury."

"We do," said Christine. "Thank goodness—My hat! Look at that!"

A tremendous burst of fire had suddenly roared out of an upper window, the first one to be effected. The fire had eaten its way through the flooring, and was well on its way to the roof.

"Poor old place!" said Christine. "What

a rotten shame! I never expected to see the dear old shanty go like this!"

I strolled away towards a group of Ancient House prefects, who were discussing something with considerable animation. As I came up they turned to me with flushed faces.

"Half a minute, Nipper," said Morrow. "Have you see anything of Alexis?"

"No, nothing," I replied. "I never thought of the boulder."

"He's gone!" exclaimed Fenton.

"Gone!"

"Well, he's not in his bedroom," declared Morrow. "We've searched high and low, but there's not a sign of the fellow to be seen. Mr. Lee knows about it, and he's leading another search now."

"Yes, but why should Alexis be missing?" I asked. "He belongs to our house, and there was no reason why he should be out—"

I paused, as a startling thought came to my head.

It was so startling, in fact, that I caught my breath in, and flushed with sudden excitement.

Titus Alexis was not in his bedroom! He was nowhere to be found, and nobody knew what had become of him. The obvious explanation was that the Greek junior had been aroused by the fire, and was watching it somewhere—temporarily lost in the confusion.

But it is not always advisable to regard the obvious as the actual truth. I suddenly remembered the adventure of the previous night. Alexis had been out of the dormitory at dead of night, and he had been engaged upon something of a secret nature.

He had been active in the vicinity of the College House!

That was the fact which remained fixed in my mind. The College House! Yes, and even to the cellar gratings! We had surprised Alexis in the act of carrying a square tin down into the cellar—a tin which he declared to be filled with water—

"Good heavens!" I muttered.

For the truth had suddenly dawned upon me, and I was absolutely disgusted with myself for not having thought of it earlier, before the disaster occurred. Alexis had deliberately committed this crime.

It was abruptly forced upon me that the tin he had carried was nothing more nor less than a two-gallon petrol can, and, almost certainly, it had been filled with the terribly inflammable spirit!

For all I knew he had been working on the same mission for many nights. We had only made the discovery because Handforth had happened to require fresh air in the middle of the night.

The College House had been fired deliberately!

It had been no accident, but a malicious act of revenge!

Alexis must have placed cans of petrol in various parts of the cellars, in readiness for the moment. And he had, at a given time,

poured the spirit over everything, and had then set a match to it.

What else was there to think?

He had often sworn that he would be avenged upon the Head—upon everybody in the school. And it was easy to understand, accepting this explanation as granted, how the flames had spread so rapidly.

With petrol soaking over everything in the cellars, it was only natural that they should have flared up on the instant, with practically no hope of being extinguished. It had been done purposely.

While I was still thinking, I caught sight of Nelson Lee. He had just appeared from the lobby of the Ancient House, and he was looking worried. He saw me at the same moment, and beckoned me.

"Have you seen Alexis?" he asked sharply.

"I was just going to ask you the same thing, sir," I said. "I don't know anything about him—at least, not for certain. But I suspect a lot."

"What do you mean, Nipper?" demanded the gov'nor. "Alexis is not to be found anywhere. I have searched high and low without result. If you can throw any light upon the mystery——"

"Well, for one thing, I believe that Alexis started this fire," I said.

Nelson Lee stared at me.

"What nonsense, Nipper!" he exclaimed curtly. "The very idea is out of the question!"

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," I went on. "You know as well as I do that Alexis has often sworn to have a terrible revenge. He hates everybody here, and he's capable of any violence or madness. You know that, gov'nor."

"But, my boy——"

"Listen, sir," I said grimly.

In a few words I told him of what had occurred on the previous night. He listened with set teeth and a grim expression in his eyes. When I had finished he grasped my shoulder.

"Nipper, I believe you are right," he said tensely. "It seems only too obvious that Alexis committed this foul deed. But where is he? Is it possible that the wretched youth perished in the fire of his own making?"

I started.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "I hadn't thought of that, sir. But if he really started the fire—with petrol, too—it's quite possible that he was overcome by the original outburst of flame."

"That is what I am afraid of, my boy," said Lee gravely. "Even if the lad committed this crime, it will be shocking if he has perished. I must institute another search at once."

And the gov'nor hurried away.

I should have followed him, perhaps, but at that moment the Bannington Fire Brigade arrived, and there was a tremendous outburst of cheering.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

A perfect roar came from the Ancient House, and there was fresh excitement.

Very smartly the Bannington men connected up their hoses, and before long further volumes of water were being hurled at the burning building.

But it seemed to have little effect.

The flames had obtained such a firm hold that nothing would smother them. The water only seemed to increase the fierceness of the fire. For a moment or two the flames would die down, and immense columns of steam and smoke would arise. And then, with a terrific roar, the flames would leap upwards once again.

Already they were licking the roof. The upper windows were a mass of livid fire, and the flames were spreading with tremendous rapidity. Realising that the task was a hopeless one, the firemen at once concentrated all their efforts upon pouring water on the far corner of the building, where only a few feet separated it from the Head's house.

The chief anxiety now was to prevent the fire from spreading to the rest of the school. The College House itself was doomed; there was not the slightest doubt with regard to that point.

But the rest of the school had to be safeguarded.

Fortunately, the wind, slight though it was, was blowing the flames away from the other building. There was really very little danger of the whole school becoming involved.

The College House fellows watched the destruction of their beloved pile with feelings which were incapable of being expressed. The disaster was so great that they were unable to realise its full significance at the time.

They could only stand back in groups, watching the flames with feelings of awe and fascination.

And then came a fresh excitement.

Bob Christine was the first to give the alarm. He was gazing up at the College House, his expression slightly sad.

"There goes another top window!" he exclaimed. "They'll all be alight soon. My hat! I don't believe the walls will be left standing! Look at the smoke rolling up from the roof!"

It was an impressive sight, and the fellows watched in silence.

And then Bob Christine gave a husky shout.

"Look!" he ejaculated. "Oh, I must be mistaken—— But I'm not! There's somebody up there—there's somebody on the roof!"

I rushed to Christine's side, having heard his words.

"Where?" I shouted. "Where do you mean?"

"There—look!" panted Bob. "Look!"

He pointed with a quivering finger, and a feeling of horror came over me as I saw a figure on the very roof of the burning building—a figure which clung to the main chimney stack.

"Good heavens!" I panted. "He'll be killed!"

For I knew the truth in a flash.

The figure in such a position of deadly peril was that of Titus Alexis!

CHAPTER VI.

RESCUING A RASCAL.

"O H!"

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"Where's the fire escape?"

"Save him!"

A perfect roar of shouts went up. Fellows over in the Ancient House were yelling too, for all eyes were fixed upon that figure on the burning roof.

"It's Alexis!" yelled Handforth. "Can't you see him?"

"Alexis!"

"The idiot will be burnt to death!"

Nelson Lee came running forward as the Bannington fire-escape was being rapidly hoisted into position. Up till now it had only been used as a hose carrier, but it seemed that it was to save life, after all.

"You must be careful!" exclaimed Lee sharply. "I am afraid the boy is demented, and it will be just as well to take every precaution!"

The firemen were fully warned, and when they went to the rescue, they knew that their task was likely to be a difficult one. There was danger in it, too, for the heat near the face of the building was almost overpowering. But the escape was erected at a spot where the flames had not yet reached.

The foremost fireman reached the gutter, and was about to step upon the slightly sloping roof, when he halted. Titus Alexis was standing a short distance away—a wild figure, only half clothed. He was blackened and scorched, and his hair was singed.

He truly looked insane as he stood there.

"Go back—go back!" he screamed.

"Steady, young man!" shouted the fireman. "There's no need to get excited. Come along this way——"

"I will not be saved!" shrieked the Greek junior. "I will die—here! If you move a step further I will fling myself into the flames!"

The fireman did not move.

"Try to calm yourself, my lad," he said grimly. "If you stay here another ten minutes you'll be killed. Be sensible and come down with me!"

"Go!" roared Alexis. "Go, or I will fling myself down!"

The fireman retreated, knowing well enough that the demented boy was capable of carrying out his threat.

Both the men descended to the ground, and there was a great hush when it was observed that they were alone.

"What's the matter?" I muttered. "Why

aren't they bringing Alexis down? Why haven't they got him?"

"It's amazing!" said Christine.

The firemen reached the ground, and Nelson Lee hurried up.

"The lad is mad, sir, I think!" said the first man. "He threatened to throw himself into the flames if we went near him—and it was more than I dare do to step forward."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I was afraid of something of the kind," he said grimly.

He thought for a moment or two, and then again spoke.

"You must go up the ladder once more," he said swiftly. "Make no attempt to get on to the roof, but keep the boy's attention engaged. Do you understand? If he shows any sign of jumping down, retreat."

"Very good, sir."

The fireman again commenced the ascent, and Nelson Lee hastened away. What was he going to do? Nobody seemed to notice him except me—for all eyes were fixed upon that fire-outlined figure on the roof.

Nelson Lee ran with all his speed into the headmaster's house. He hastened upstairs, mounted flight after flight until he arrived in the attic. At last he came upon a skylight, and in a moment he had pushed it open, and was on the roof. A great wave of heat surged round him.

The College House lay to the left, burning fiercely. Volumes of water were pouring on the wall next to the Head's house—and the fire, at that spot, was subdued. The two buildings were separated, near the roof by a space of about eight feet.

Nelson Lee did not hesitate.

The College House roof was flat just there, with a wide stone parapet running round the edge. Watching for a second, the schoolmaster-detective could see Titus Alexis. His back was towards Lee, and he was facing the spot where the firemen were just visible on the ladder.

There was not a second to be lost.

Nelson Lee, unseen by a soul, took a short run along the roof. Then he sprang into space as though there was no danger in the enterprise. Yet the slightest miscalculation would have meant instant death—the slightest slip would have had fatal results.

The detective landed squarely on the roof, stumbled forward, and then regained his balance.

He ran forward on the instant—for if Alexis became aware of his purpose, the lad would probably fling himself to destruction. A tremendous roar went up as Nelson Lee was seen.

As swiftly as a tiger, Nelson Lee sprang upon Alexis from behind. His arms grasped the lad, and held him firm.

"Oh! Thank goodness!" I gasped.

"He's got him!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hurrah!"

But Nelson Lee was not out of danger yet. Titus Alexis twisted like an eel, his face working with mad fury. The firemen were rushing up the ladder, in order to render assistance.

"Let me—let me go!" screamed Alexis.

"Steady, my boy!" exclaimed Nelson Lee.

"This panic will do you no good. Mind what you're doing—"

The Greek junior was almost foaming at the mouth, and he struggled insanely in Nelson Lee's grasp. For a moment the detective had all his work cut out to hold his captive secure.

And then the firemen arrived. They were about to render assistance when Alexis became as limp as a rag in Lee's arms. The sudden weight almost pulled the detective over.

The boy had fainted.

For a moment Lee suspected that he was shamming. But this was not the case. Alexis was quite unconscious. And, in that condition, he was brought safely to the ground.

The cheering which arose as Nelson Lee landed was deafening. He had undoubtedly save Alexis from certain death—and the school showed him that it fully appreciated the brave nature of his task.

"It was touch and go for a minute—but Mr. Lee has won," said Christine, taking a deep breath. "Oh, my aunt! What a night we're having!"

"It seems more like a nightmare!" said Yorke grimly.

Alexis had been saved, and there was now no danger of any human life being sacrificed. The unconscious boy was taken straight into the Ancient House, and he at once received medical attention.

Dr. Brett had been one of the first to arrive from the village, and he had been very pleased to find that his services were not required. Very many people had thought that a number of boys would perish in the flames.

But, owing to the prompt measures taken, not a boy was even so much as scorched. There were no casualties, trivial or otherwise. None, at least, until Titus Alexis was brought in.

Dr. Brett soon came to a conclusion.

"He has only swooned," he declared. "Before the morning he will be conscious again. It is my opinion that he was mad with fear and hatred. It would not be correct to say that he is mentally deranged. His madness was of a passing type, and he was quite responsible for his actions."

The Headmaster, haggard and agitated, turned to Nelson Lee.

"And do you really think, Mr. Lee, that Alexis caused the fire?" he asked.

"There can be little doubt with regard to that point," replied Lee. "When all the evidence is gathered, I think we shall

have overwhelming proof that Alexis deliberately set fire to the College House. It was a mad act of revenge."

The Head sighed deeply.

"Why did I not send him away yesterday?" he exclaimed, his voice quivering with agitation. "But I never guessed—I never dreamed that he would commit such a foul act as this! It is terrible—appalling!"

"I think we should be very grateful for the fact that all the precious lives have been saved," said Mr. Stockdale. "The building itself is really of secondary importance."

The Head nodded.

"That is true enough, Mr. Stockdale," he said. "But it is shocking to see the place being burnt down before our eyes. The damage will be extensive, for the whole of your house will be destroyed."

Mr. Stockdale nodded gloomily.

Meanwhile the crowd was watching the final stages of the fire. The worst was over, and that end of the building which almost joined the Head's house was dark and smouldering. The fire had been quelled there. But every other portion of it was a red hot mass.

Crash!

A portion of the roof fell with a terrible noise. Great showers of sparks flew up, followed by a burst of flame which leapt a hundred feet into the sky. The glare of the fire could have been seen for many miles around.

The roof did not completely collapse. The firemen gradually became masters of the situation, and when the first faint streaks of dawn were appearing in the sky, the blaze had subsided, and the worst was over.

By that time the College House fellows had been marshalled into the Ancient House. Everything in the nature of a bed was pressed into service. Mattresses were placed in the Form rooms, all over the floors, and juniors and seniors were sleeping mixed up in confusion.

Quite an amount of stuff had been rescued from the College House before the fire had become really bad. Most of the mattresses and bedclothes had been flung out of the upper windows by prefects and masters, and the majority of these had been rescued. The fellows' clothing, too, had been salvaged.

But all the furniture, and the boys' other belongings were destroyed by the flames. Not that they cared much at that time. They were too weary and sleepy.

Several Removites belonging to the College House were in the Ancient House dormitory with the rest of us. There were a great many beds containing two juniors. But nothing particularly mattered on that eventful night.

The College House had been burnt down, and all the boys who belonged to it were left homeless. What was to happen in the

near future was something of a puzzle, and I did not worry my head about it.

I went to sleep with the rest, and dreamed about raging fires and hosts of madmen dancing in the flames.

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CHAPTER VII

THE HOMELESS MONKS.

BOB CHRISTINE gazed out of the Remove dormitory window, and shook his head sadly.

"They may build it all up again, but it won't be the same place," he said. "What a terrible shame! I feel like blubbing!"

"Yes, it does make you feel like that," muttered Yorke. "It's—it's awful, you know! The place is absolutely burnt out!"

They were gazing at the ruins of the College House.

The rising bell had not rung that morning, but all the juniors were up at the usual time. The sun was shining in through the windows from a sky of brilliant blue, and everything was warm and radiant.

But just over on the other side of the Triangle stood the smoldering ruins of what had once been a noble pile—for the College House had been a piece of wonderful architecture, picturesque, and beautiful.

Now it was merely a matter of four stark walls, with great gaping, blackened holes, where the windows had been. The interior had been burnt completely out. Within those four walls lay a great pile of smouldering wreckage.

Half the roof had collapsed, and the other half was in a precarious condition, but the old walls, built by men who knew their business, were standing as firmly and as strongly as ever.

The fire had scarcely damaged them. Blackened and scorched and scarred, they were, nevertheless, still imposing, in a forlorn kind of way. But the great interior of the building had vanished.

Studies, passages, staircases, dormitories, all were no longer in existence. And outside, in the Triangle, lay a litter of debris. The fire engines were still there, and hoses were laying all over the ground. The tired firemen were still playing streams of water upon the smouldering ruins.

"This is a fine state of affairs!" remarked Handforth, as he gazed out of a window. "What the dickens are you fellows going to do now? There ain't room for all of you in the Ancient House."

"I'm blessed if I know," said Christine gloomily.

"I expect they'll all be sent to their homes," remarked Pitt. "That's the only way out of the difficulty."

Many of the College House fellows brightened up.

"By jingo!" said Clapson. "That's not bad, you know. If we are sent home, I sha'n't be sorry about the fire."

"You ass!" said Christine warmly.

"Well, the place is insured, and we shall be given an extra holiday," said Clapson. "I don't see why we should cry, anyhow."

"What rotten luck!" remarked Owen major. "Why wasn't I a Monk? I reckon you fellows are lucky!"

"Rather!"

But the Monks, as a whole, were not very enthusiastic. They did not rely upon being sent home for a holiday. They feared that some other fate would await them.

"We sha'n't be sent home," remarked Christine. "Why, it would mean being away from school for a whole term—or longer. I can't picture the Head arranging anything like that. We shall be found accommodation in the village somewhere, and that'll be simply awful."

"I expect you're right," I agreed. "If the Ancient House had been burnt down, it would have been different. All the classrooms are here, and the library, and the lecture hall, and the dining-rooms. But the College House was only a boarding place, after all or, to be exact, a sleeping house."

The idea was general that the Monks would be accommodated in the Ancient House and in other places during the rebuilding of the College House. However, nobody knew anything for certain, and there was a good deal of confusion.

There were no lessons that morning; in fact, a whole holiday had been announced by the Head. Everything was upside down. Lessons, under the circumstances, were out of the question.

The Head was conferring with Nelson Lee and Mr. Stockdale. There was a big problem to be solved.

What was to be done? There was not room for the Monks in the Ancient House, and the whole matter was a puzzle.

After breakfast crowds of juniors went out into the Triangle, and the only interest of the day was the ruin of the once noble building. The fellows approached as near as they could—but ropes had been erected, dividing the Triangle in half. Nobody was allowed past the ropes.

"Well, the fire has made a proper mess of the place," said Handforth, who was always matter-of-fact. "I expect the builders will get busy soon, and they'll shove up a place that'll make the old College House look sick."

"It'll be a long time before we can go back," said Christine. "And then the place won't be the same."

"Of course it won't," said Handforth. "Instead of those grey stone walls, I expect you'll see red brick——"

"Rats!"

"Well, they generally use red bricks nowadays," said Handforth.

"You ass!" growled Christine. "The walls are as good as ever—they won't be touched. Even when the place is rebuilt it won't look very different on the outside, except for a new roof and doors and windows."

The walls will be just the same—and a good thing, too!"

"Red brick would look fine," argued Handforth.

But nobody would listen to him. The only fellows who would agree with him were Church and McClure, and they agreed because it was the easiest thing to do. If Handforth had suggested that the College House should be rebuilt of logs, Church and McClure would have agreed.

And while the little discussion was in progress, two huge motor-cars rolled up. They came to a halt in the Triangle, and two or three grave, elderly gentlemen climbed out and surveyed the ruins with mild horror.

These gentlemen were some of the school governors, who had been informed of the fire by telegram. After looking at the smoking debris for some little time, they all adjourned to the Head's study.

We didn't know what took place there, but when I caught a glimpse of Dr. Stafford some time later, I saw that he was looking even more haggard than ever. And then I came across Nelson Lee. The gov'nor was frowning almost angrily.

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

"A great deal is wrong, Nipper," said Lee. "Don't bother me now!"

"Yes, but I'd like to know——"

"The governors, apparently, have decided that it is their duty to hold Dr. Stafford responsible for the College House fire," said Nelson Lee curtly. "There is to be an inquiry, if you please."

"But Alexis caused the fire, sir!"

"Exactly, Nipper. And Alexis has already been removed from the school."

"He's gone?" I ejaculated.

"He was taken away early this morning—the Headmaster thought that it would be better for him to be removed," said Lee. "The proof against him, by the way, was overwhelming. But yet these old dolts—I must speak strongly—have decided to hold an inquiry."

"But what on earth for?" I asked.

"Because they consider that Dr. Stafford was in complete charge of St. Frank's," replied the gov'nor bitterly. "The governors are inclined to place the blame on the Headmaster's shoulders—they hold him responsible."

"But that's awfully unfair, sir," I protested.

"It is unfair, and unjust," declared Nelson Lee. "I intend to have quite a long conversation with two of those old gentlemen before long. But don't talk about this, Nipper. There is no need for the boys to discuss the subject yet."

"All right, sir," I said.

I was not exactly surprised to hear what the gov'nor had told me. Several of the members of the Governing Board were old fossils, who ought to have resigned years before. And just because Dr. Stafford was the Headmaster he was held responsible for the fire, and practically accused of negligence.

It was small wonder that the Head was looking haggard.

The day passed slowly for the juniors, although they quite enjoyed their freedom. Cricket was in full swing on Little Side, and the fact that the College House was burnt down did not seem to worry many fellows, after the novelty had worn off.

The only worry consisted in the problem as to how the Monks were to be accommodated. As it happened, Nelson Lee had a scheme of his own, and he was laying it before the governors.

I don't think any other man but Nelson Lee would have succeeded in convincing the old gentlemen that his scheme was sound and workable. However, after a long discussion the gov'nor won the day.

This scheme was one which was destined to give satisfaction to the whole school. We knew nothing of it that day. All was confusion. At night time temporary arrangements were made, and the Monks were once more accommodated in the lecture hall and in the Form-room.

In the morning, however, the announcement was made by Dr. Stafford himself.

The whole school was collected together in Big Hall, and everybody knew that an announcement of some kind was to be made, and it would almost certainly be in connection with the problem of housing the Monks.

The Head was looking pale and wan as he appeared upon the raised platform. There was an instant hush.

"Boys, I have something to tell you which is of great importance to you all," he said, in a quiet, penetrating voice. "What I am about to say now is only a very preliminary statement. Within two days, probably, I shall address you once more, and then I shall be able to give you fuller details. But this is a matter which affects not only the College House, but the Ancient House as well."

He paused, and the school hung upon his words.

"The governors of this school have conferred, and certain decisions have been arrived at. The College House, sadly burnt out as it is, will be rebuilt as quickly as a host of workmen can conclude the task——"

"Hurrah!"

"At the same time it has been decided that there shall be a clean sweep throughout the school," continued the Head. "For several years the necessity has been growing of remodelling certain portions of the Ancient House. And the whole school undoubtedly requires to be repainted and re-decorated. The governors consider that it is an excellent opportunity to have the work performed in a thorough manner. St. Frank's will be closed—for this term, at least."

"Oh!"

"The whole school, sir?" shouted somebody.

"Yes, the whole school!" said the Head.

"And shall we all be sent home, sir?" asked Handforth joyfully.

A smile flickered across the Head's face.

"No, Handforth, you will not be sent home," he said. "If that is what the majority of you think, I'm afraid you will be disappointed. The school buildings will be closed as I have stated, but the school itself will carry on elsewhere."

"Oh!"

"As I have already told you, I can give no details at the moment," went on the Headmaster. "I can tell you, however, that arrangements are being made to procure a large building in the very heart of London, and for the future you will continue your duties there."

"In London!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hurrah!"

It was some moments before the Head could make himself heard again. A buzz of excitement was passing through the school. I was as surprised as anybody, and just as delighted. In London! Nothing could have pleased me better in the whole world. It was a glorious piece of news.

"That is all I have to tell you to-day," consulted Dr. Stafford. "Within the course of a few days the final arrangements will have been completed, and then the school, in its entirety, will be transferred to temporary premises in London. I will give you fuller details later. You may dismiss."

The fellows crowded out of Big Hall, eagerly discussing the new situation. It had come as a complete bombshell.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "We are livin' in wonderful times, dear fellows! It will be a rippin' change to be at school in London—it will, really."

"Rather!" said Watson.

"What a fine thing the College House was burnt down!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "I don't care a snap about it now. In the heart of London! By George! There are some times ahead!"

And everybody agreed with Edward Oswald. The Monks were perfectly willing to put up with any inconvenience now. For while their House was being rebuilt, the whole school was to continue its studies in London.

There was a great deal of excitement, and much conjecture. And everybody waited, eagerly and anxiously, to hear the full details of the plan. Titus Alexis had gone, and most of the juniors remembered him in almost a friendly spirit. For he was responsible for this state of affairs.

And so the great fire at St. Frank's, instead of ending tragically, had led to something which filled both seniors and juniors with elation. There seemed to be no doubt that there were some very stirring and unusual times looming ahead!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

Towards the end of the above story it has been hinted by the Head that, as a result of the destruction of the College House by the fire, the whole school would be removed to London, where a large building was temporarily to be procured until the work of repair at St. Frank's had been effected. We shall follow next week the adventures of NELSON LEE, NIPPER, HANDFORTH, SIR MONTIE, BOB CHRISTINE, etc., at their new domicile in the Great Metropolis. The story will be entitled "St. Frank's in London."

Just a few remarks on the subject of our new serial, "In Trackless Space." In this wonderful age of flying there is no knowing to what limits the ingenuity of man and the resources of science at his command will eventually lead. The Atlantic has been flown in a matter of hours, and soon we shall hear of someone making a non-stop flight round the globe. After that the earth will seem so very small that attempts will be made to get in touch with the planets. What wonders these new worlds might reveal to the intrepid adventurer is set forth in the illuminating narrative by Robt. W. Comrade, when in next week's instalment Robt. Gresham and his party reach the moon.

THE EDITOR.

GRAND NEW SERIAL JUST STARTED.

IN TRACKLESS SPACE.

A Thrilling Account of a Wonderful Voyage to the Moon, Venus, and Mars, and of a Flying Machine known as the "Solar Monarch," the Most Marvellous Invention of the Age.

By ROBT. W. COMRADE.

Author of "The Stowaway's Quest," "Scorned by the School," etc.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

ROBERT GRESHAM, an inventor, is captured by cannibals in Central Africa. As a last hope he contrives to write a message telling of his approaching doom, which he inserts in a leathern water bottle and drops into a river. It is carried down stream for ten miles, and picked up by an exploration party consisting of **FRANK HILLSWORTH**, his chum, **MACDONALD GUTHRIE**, both sons of millionaires, their old college friend, **PROFESSOR MONTAGUE PALGRAVE**, a renowned scientist, and **ABBIE**, a burly negro. They succeed in rescuing the inventor, who has been badly tortured. During convalescence he tells them of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space. As a reward to his benefactors, he invites them, one and all, to accompany him on a voyage to the solar planets. Since none of the party have any home ties, and are ready for any adventure, they willingly accept. They all return to England, where for some months the flying machine, christened the "Solar Monarch," is secretly constructed, and, with the beginning of this new instalment, everything is in readiness for the long journey. (Now read on.)

Off to the Moon!

THE morning was a beautiful one, and the May sun shone on the Essex marshes with quite an unusual brilliance. There was not a soul near the sheds save the five adventurers. The nearest cottage lay two miles distant and quite out of sight. During the construction of the aeronef Frank and Mac and the others lived entirely among the sheds in a little bungalow, and it was Gresham's intention to depart that very night—secretly and unbeknown to anyone. It would be the right time to make his invention known to the world when they returned to earth—if they ever did so. Their first port of call—as Frank termed it—was to be the moon, and, as it would be at its full that night, there was nothing whatever to delay their departure.

The workmen had left the previous afternoon, and, being quite secluded and out of sight, the inventor had decided to run the ship out on its rollers and thoroughly examine

it by daylight. This they did, and as it stood there, glittering in the morning sunlight—for the first time revealed—a cry of admiration and wonder went up from them all, for the Solar Monarch was truly a beautiful spectacle.

Its name had been neatly engraved upon the bows, and enamelled blue, and against the gold background it stood out boldly. The massive glass dome of the conning-tower was a marvel of manufacture; the rope-ladder, with wooden steps, was hanging suspended, and the five of them all clambered up and dropped into the interior of the ship. The conning-tower was a fairly large apartment and as light as day. As it was the room in which they were destined to spend the most of their time, it had been fitted up with cushion-seats and every comfort. On a massive mahogany bench were various weird-looking instruments—compasses, barometers, and numerous other machines of Gresham's own construction. One of these was a speed indicator. From the conning-tower they went down a staircase into the saloon, round which were hung several artistic electric lamps, each containing its own battery.

After a careful examination they found everything to be in perfect order, and after due admiration the Solar Monarch was once more placed in its shed. Only until the night, however, and then it was brought forth again; but on this occasion it stood glittering and gleaming in a different light—the silvery light of the full moon—their destination!

Everything was in readiness.

Nothing had been forgotten.

The conning-tower door had been securely clamped and bolted, and the air-machine started working. The five daring adventurers were standing in the aft machine-room, with Gresham's hand resting on a certain lever. Abbie was holding a bottle of champagne and glasses. They all filled up in silence—a tense and electric silence; and Gresham held his up with a steady hand.

"To the success of the voyage!" he cried. "May we return safely after exploring the planets and the moon—commencing with our own satellite. To the success of the Solar Monarch's voyage!"

"To the success of the voyage!" the

others echoed huskily, and they all emptied their glasses.

"Ready?" queried Gresham, his voice calm and steady.

"Yes, ready and waiting," answered Frank breathlessly.

Robert Gresham pulled the lever hard over. There was a quick jerk, and the men were almost flung from their feet as the aeronef—or, rather, projectile—reared up. The next moment she had righted herself and seemed to be perfectly still. Mac let out an audible gasp.

"She's failed!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "She's no movin'; she winna gang up tae the mune!"

They glanced at one another open-eyed, and then, with one accord, turned and dashed up into the conning-tower. They pressed their faces against the glass. At first nothing could be seen, then a cry came from Abbie.

"Law sakes!" he shouted. "De earl am runnin' away! By golly, we's gwine, arter all!"

The negro was right. Facing them, and seemingly on a level—not beneath—the Essex marshes could be seen, with the sea and the winking lights of a seaport. It was for all the world as if they were gazing through the glasses of a pair of binoculars, and the lights were on the face of a huge cliff. The other side, and looking a huge size already, was the moon, and they were bounding towards it—not upwards, but as if they were on a roadway, and the satellite lay in front.

The great voyage had really commenced!

A Risky Experiment—Dashing to Destruction.

THE inventor turned away from the conning-tower windows and looked at his four companions with triumphant eyes.

"My friends," he said, the moon's brilliant rays lighting up his distinguished face, "I think you will admit that the Solar Monarch has performed what I predicted it would do?"

"Not quite, Gresham," smiled Professor Palgrave. "The voyage has but commenced; we have yet to succeed in landing on the moon's surface."

"I have not the slightest doubt that when the time comes we shall do that without endangering our vessel," remarked Gresham complacently. "One moment! I will ascertain at what speed we are travelling."

He stepped to one of the intricate pieces of machinery on the bench and bent over for a moment. Then he looked up again.

"Our rate of progress at the present moment," he announced, "is just over nine hundred and fifty miles an hour."

The others whistled.

"And shall we travel at that rate all the way?" Frank inquired, gazing at the moon, which now seemed larger than ever. Men though both he and Mac were, they would have felt lost without Gresham to ply with

questions. The inventor was a mine of information concerning astronomical matters.

"At that rate, and faster," replied Gresham. "In fact, we are gaining velocity every moment."

"Den, Massa Gresham, sah," put in Abbie, who was staring about him in awe and alarm, "how is it dat de wind don't howl roun' this heah contraption? By golly, I's feelin' good'n rum! Dere ain't no motion at all."

Gresham laughed.

"My dear Abbie," he said, "you don't seem to understand that, once we are clear of the earth's atmosphere, there is nothing whatever to howl round the ship. We cleared it in two minutes, although, through the thickness of the walls and the moderate speed at which we were travelling, it passed unnoticed. We are now rushing through space—through nothingness—and there is not a thing to impede our progress. If we were travelling in the air at this present speed the ship would become red-hot with the friction in a short time. As it is, you will find everything extremely cold—that is the reason I have lined the vessel with asbestos and felt."

Abbie shook his head dolefully.

"I's no undahstandin' fo' sech talk, sah," he muttered. "Guess I's gwine down to de galley to 'pare suppah!"

The others laughed as the huge negro disappeared down the companion.

"I think we had better follow his example, and also adjourn below," said Gresham. "From this time onward this is our house, and we must keep to the ordinary daily routine."

They descended the stairway and entered the main saloon. This was the largest apartment in the whole ship—bar the engine-room—and beautifully appointed. In the centre stood a huge dining-billiard-table. On the floor their feet sank into the depths of a magnificent pile carpet. There were easy-chairs galore, and on the sideboard, in little cases, were bottles of champagne, syphons of soda-water, glasses, and suchlike. The saloon was decorated similar to an ordinary room, and as there was no perceptible motion it was hard to believe that one was not standing in an ordinary house on mother earth.

Frank and Mac made some pretence of having a hundred up, but they were so excited that they shot at random, and paid scarcely any attention to the game. Remarkable as it may seem, the table was as level and steady as any billiard-table in existence.

Suddenly Frank asked:

"How far is it to the moon, Mr. Gresham? And how long do you think it'll take us to get there?"

"The moon, roughly speaking, is 237,000 miles from the earth," Gresham explained. "and, travelling at the rate of one thousand miles an hour, it would take us—let me see—close upon ten days to complete the journey."

(Continued on p. III of cover.)

We shall go much faster than that, though, and I have no doubt that we shall be standing on the moon's surface in less than a week from now."

"By Jove, I wonder what it'll be like there," cried Frank. "Do you think we shall be able to breathe? We don't want to get out of the ship and be suffocated up there, you know."

"Personally, I think we shall be able to breathe, although many astronomers declare the moon to be practically devoid of atmosphere. All that, however, we shall find out for ourselves in due course. At the present moment we had better think of having a little supper—the first meal on board the Solar Monarch!"

When supper had drawn to a conclusion Professor Palgrave suggested another visit to the conning-tower. It was eagerly seconded by Frank and Mac, who were the first to enter the glass-surrounded apartment.

"Great Scott," cried Mac, "there were we down there wi' the saloon shutters closed, an' the sun shining all the time. There are many things connected wi' this shippie that I no understand."

Gresham glanced at the conning-tower clock.

"It's now ten past eleven," he said, "and we have got to such a distance from the earth that the sun is visible to us. Just look at the moon—how the craters and volcanoes stand out! There," he added, turning, "is England; but it is, of course, obscured. And there, you observe, is London, where that spot of light is. Of course, everything is in darkness on earth, and that hampers our observations considerably. I am afraid we shall have to postpone them until the sun is shining on to this side of the globe."

"That is so," said the scientist, who was looking at the speed-indicator. "Um! We are now doing thirteen hundred to the hour!"

"Ah! I thought we should increase our speed as time went on," Gresham exclaimed. "But still, a thousand miles an hour is a very slow speed indeed in comparison to what we shall do later on."

"What's that?" said Mac, in surprise. "Do you mean tae say we shall go much faster than we are going at this moment?"

"We shall certainly go faster, my dear boy," returned the inventor smilingly. "When we start the more lengthy flight to Venus—the first planet we shall land on—I have no doubt that we shall attain a speed of something like sixty or seventy thousand miles an hour!"

"Phew!" whistled Mac. "I shouldna like tae fall off ganging at that rate!"

"It would undoubtedly be unpleasant," smiled the professor. "But, to change the subject, don't you think we had better be preparing for bed? It is close upon midnight, and I mean to be up on the stroke of seven."

The next morning, after spending a restless night—which is scarcely surprising considering the prevailing excitement—the first thing Frank and Mac did was to slip on

their things and make a run for the conning-tower, much as two eager boys would. They found it empty; the professor and Gresham were not yet dressed, so they had the place to themselves.

"By gosh, cast your eyes over there," cried Frank, pointing through the glass, "we must have come a decent way during the night."

He indicated the moon, which now seemed to occupy the whole of the sky in front of them. On it could be seen strange-looking craters and dark fissures.

Mac sniffed.

"That's naething," he declared. "I've seen the mune dozens of times through a telescope, and she lukes the same now. What ye want tae luke at is the earth behind ye—that ye've never seen through a glass!"

Frank wheeled round, and followed the direction of Mac's eyes. Through the transparent walls of the conning-tower the vast body of the earth was clearly visible, hanging in space, and with the sun shining full upon its face; in one or two places the surface was obscured by clouds. There were very few of these, however, which showed it must have been an extra fine morning, and for the most part the two watchers had an uninterrupted view of the globe. England was just visible, but they could plainly see the outlines of Africa, India, etc. At first sight it seemed as if they were gazing upon a model of the world, such as every school possesses. Frank and Mac looked at the magnificent and wonderful spectacle with awe-struck eyes. How many men would enjoy the privilege they were experiencing?

"Look, there lies Africa," murmured Frank. "That's where we were not so long ago. Who'd have thought that we should look upon it from the windows of a projectile in outer space? If you'd said that to me three months ago I should have thought you as mad as a hatter, or worse!"

Mac made no reply, but stood intently watching the planet, whereon, but a few short hours ago, he had stood. He was fascinated, and it was only a sudden exclamation that caused him to turn round.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Nothing's up," replied the other. "Come and have a squint over here, though. According to this speed-indicator, we're doing a cool two thousand in the hour."

"That's guid travellin'," said Mac. "At this rate we'll be on the mune in less than a week."

Some few minutes later the professor and Gresham entered the room, and were equally surprised at the speed the Solar Monarch had attained during the night. After breakfast Gresham announced his intention of trying a few experiments.

"Such as what?" inquired Frank, lighting a cigarette. "Don't, for goodness' sake, go and do us in before we have a chance of seeing the moon."

"I sha'n't do you in, as you so expressively put it," said Gresham. "But I have

(Continued on p. iv of cover.)

a mind to see what would happen if I brought the attraction of the earth to bear on the ship again."

"Why, that's very simple. We should simply start going home again."

"Ah, my dear lad, I don't mean to cut off the moon's attraction. I'll let that remain, and see which is the stronger—that or the earth's."

"Don't you think it will be rather dangerous?" suggested the professor. "I mean, don't you think that one of your tanks might be torn out bodily?"

"I think not, professor. At all events, I

mean to risk it. If you'll all remain in here I'll pop down to the aft engine-room. When you see any diminishing in the speed call out to me, and I'll come up."

With that Gresham walked out of the conning-tower and left the other three alone. The scientist was not at all sure what the result of the experiment would be. He and his two companions waited, with their eyes fixed on the speed-indicator, to see what would happen. Suddenly, and without the least warning, they were one and all flung headlong to the floor.

(To be continued.)

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