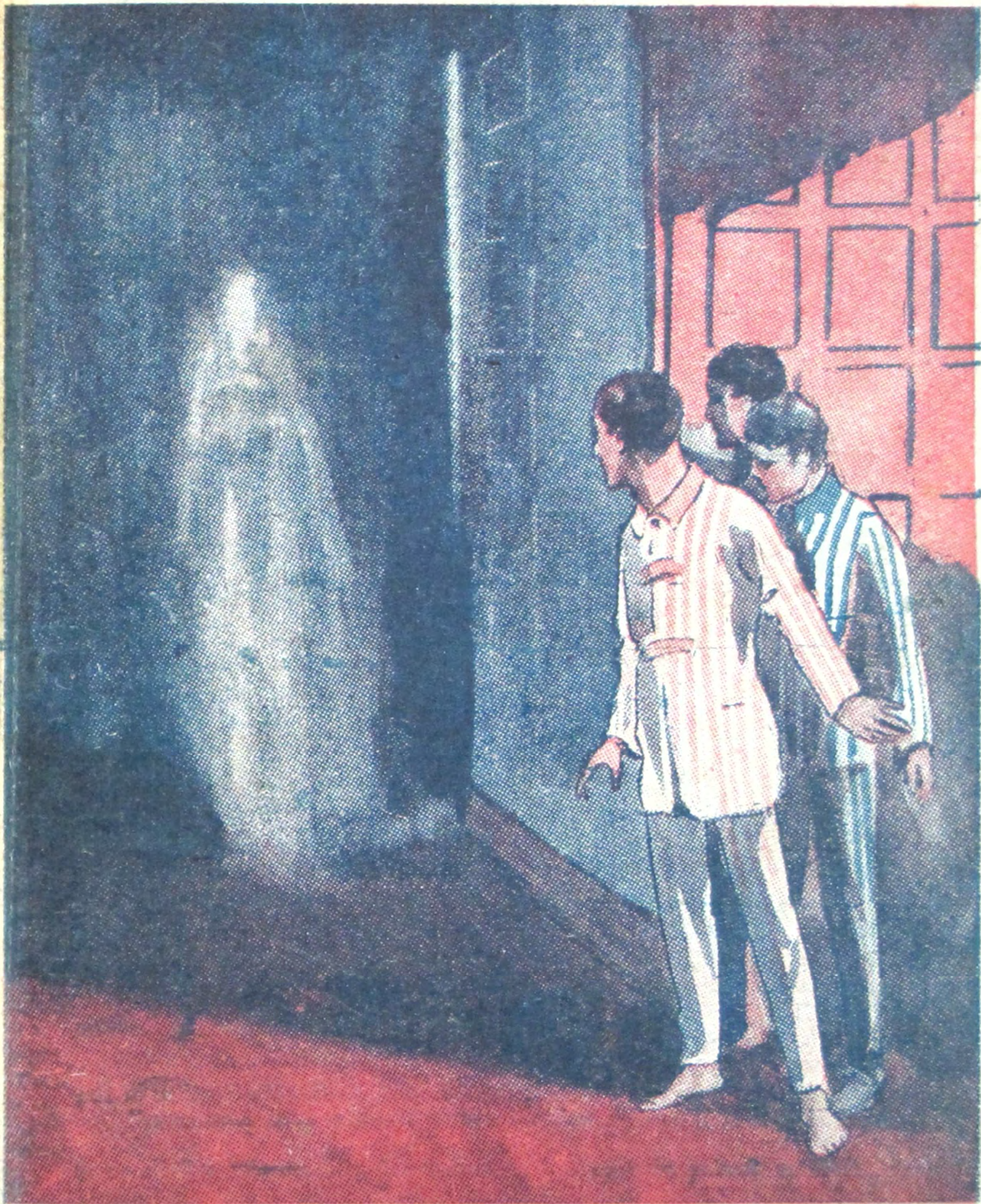


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE APPARITION.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH glared round the Remove dormitory. "Who's had my slippers?" he demanded warmly.

Nobody troubled to answer.

"Can't you hear me?" roared Handforth.

"As I was saying," remarked Pitt, "football in London is rather a temporary business. We can't do anything properly until we get back to St. Frank's. We shall have to buck up with our practice——"

"Where are my slippers?" bellowed Handforth.

"Begad! Will somebody kindly smother that frightful ass with a pillow?" asked Sir Montie Tregellis-West languidly. "It ain't reasonable to suppose that a fellow can get to sleep with a noise like a megaphone roarin' through the dormitory."

But Handforth was not to be silenced. The Remove had come up to bed ten minutes earlier, and most of the fellows were between the sheets. I was already in bed, and I grinned as I waited for things to happen. It was always somewhat amusing to see Handforth in a paddy.

We were not at St. Frank's. The school had been temporarily shifted to London while extensive building operations were being undertaken at St. Frank's. The College House had been burnt out, but was now practically rebuilt.

Meanwhile, we were making the best of things in London, and we certainly could not complain of lack of excitement. We had had a good many adventures since our arrival in London City.

"Where are my slippers?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"Oh, give him his slippers, for goodness' sake" exclaimed De Valerie. "If you can't find 'em, give him somebody else's. Do any-

thing you like to stop his blessed jaw! He's like a parrot!"

Handforth rose from his bed, looking grim. "I want to know where my slippers are," he said. "They're a brand new pair, and I left them under my bed. It's a pity a fellow can't leave slippers under his own bed! Who's boned them?"

"I expect you left them somewhere else, you ass," said McClure. "I saw a pair of slippers in the study this morning. Where's your memory?"

"I brought those slippers up here this evening—and now they've gone," said Handforth. "I don't like to make a fuss——"

"You hate the very idea of it," remarked Hart sarcastically.

"I don't like to make a fuss," repeated Handforth. "but I'm not going to rest until those slippers are found!"

"And you won't let anybody else rest, will you?" said Pitt. "If you don't dry up within two ticks, my son, we'll smother you with your own bedclothes. Can't you see that these chaps want to get to sleep?"

But Handforth was obstinate.

"When I start a thing, I always finish," he said firmly. "Some rotter has pinched my slippers, and I'm not going to bed without them!"

"My hat!" said Watson. "Do you sleep in your slippers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, I don't!" bawled Handforth.

"Then what do you want them now for?"

"I want them because they're mine—I don't believe in robbery!" said Handforth bluntly. "I wouldn't mind betting that you took 'em, McClure. I missed a necktie last week, and I found you wearing it."

McClure sat up in bed.

"I've heard about that tie every day for a week—I've had it rammed down my throat from morning till night!" he said

deliberately. "I'm fed-up with it—and I'm fed-up with you!"

"What!"

"I wouldn't touch your slippers if you begged me to accept 'em," said McClure sourly. "Go to bed, and let somebody else sleep! I reckon you ought to be gagged when you come up into the dormitory, you—you gramophone!"

Handforth laughed bitterly.

"Even my own pals turn against me!" he sneered. "All right, my son. I'll soon show you what's what! I'm blessed if I'm going to be jawed at by an ass like you, Arnold McClure."

"Here, steady!" gasped McClure. "Don't you touch me——"

"Go easy, Handy!" I grinned. "If you're not careful, you'll have a prefect along—and then you'll receive a slipper in a place where you won't like it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to wipe up the floor with this rotter!" said Handforth firmly.

He bent over McClure, and the next second there was a terrific uproar. Handforth, McClure, and a pile of bedclothes descended to the floor with a series of bumps. Legs shot out everywhere, and the noise was appalling.

"Yaroooh!" gasped McClure, fighting his way to the surface. You—you babbling lunatic! If you ain't careful you'll have the Head here—and then we shall all be gated, or something."

"Drag the ass off before he does any harm," I said briskly.

Many willing hands seized Handforth. He was yanked up, lifted into the air, and planked down upon his own bed with sufficient force to break the springs. He floundered there for a moment, and then bobbed up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"I want my slippers!" he panted fiercely. "I sha'n't rest——"

Whizz!

Somebody's pillow caught Handforth in the mouth, but he thrust it aside.

"My slippers——"

"Oh, my hat!" said Pitt wearily. "Doesn't anyone know where his beastly slippers are? We shall never get any rest until they're found. I've never heard of such a pestering bounder in all my life!"

"Slippers!" exclaimed Cornelius Trotwood, catching a word of Pitt's. "Is anybody talking about slippers?"

The juniors gasped.

"Is anybody talking about slippers!" said Pitt weakly. "Oh, my hat!"

Cornelius Trotwood—the twin brother of the redoubtable Nicodemus—was extremely deaf, and he had been dozing during Handforth's earlier remarks. The commotion had awakened him, and he blinked round amiably.

"Do you know anything about 'em?" demanded Handforth.

"Eh?"

"My slippers!" said Handforth. "Have you taken them, you duffer?"

Cornelius looked surprised.

"Why should I suffer?" he inquired mildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Suffer!" gasped Handforth. "You—you deaf idiot! I'll make you suffer in a minute if you don't wake up! If you know where my slippers are, you'd better tell me before I roll you on the floor!"

"I really must ask you to speak a little louder, my good Handforth," said the deaf junior. "What was that you were saying about the door? You can't expect me to hear if you only talk in whispers."

Handforth breathed hard.

"How dare this chap live?" he asked blankly. "It's a marvel to me he hasn't been murdered by somebody long before this! We have to stand a good deal in the Remove!"

Handforth pretended not to hear.

"I'm not going to punch you, Trotty," he said, "although I feel like it. You can't help being deaf, so I'll humour you. I always believe in kindness to fellows who ain't quite all there."

"Yes," said Cornelius. "I think it needs cutting!"

"Eh?"

"Your hair——"

"My hair!" gasped Handforth. "You—dotty ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I understood you to say something about your hair, my good Handforth," said Trotwood mildly. "But how is your hair connected with your slippers? I saw your slippers this evening. They were downstairs——"

"Ah!" said Handforth. "The truth at last!"

"Why should I speak fast?" asked Cornelius.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Your slippers were in Study B," went on Trotwood mildly. "I happened to see them when I went in there to speak to Hubbard. They were being worn——"

"What!" roared Handforth, "Hubbard was wearing my slippers!"

"No, Hubbard wasn't!" snapped the junior. "Don't jump to conclusions, you ass. Now I come to think of it, Long was wearing a pair of new slippers. He told me he'd paid five bob for 'em!"

"Go on!" said Handforth ominously.

"I didn't know they were yours," said Hubbard. "Long offered to let me have them for three-and-a-tanner——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The awful young thief!" said Handforth. "I'll skin him for this! I think his pater must have been a professional burglar, you know. He's always selling property belonging to other chaps!"

Handforth marched across to the bed occupied by Teddy Long, the sneak of the Remove. Long's tubby form was curled up, and he was breathing heavily and regularly. This was rather remarkable, for I had

noticed that Long's eyes were open a minute earlier.

"You little cad!" said Handforth, grabbing Teddy's shoulder.

Snore!

"I'm going to skin you!"

Snore!

"And you won't get out of it by pretending to be asleep, you fat little burglar!" said Handforth, pulling the clothes back with one sweep. "I'll give you one chance to confess," he added, administering a slap.

"Yaroorh!" howled Long. "I—I'm asleep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't be asleep for long!" said Handforth sourly. "What the dickens do you mean by trying to sell my new slippers?"

Long blinked at him dazedly.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he said sleepily. "Gimme my bedclothes, Handforth! 'Tain't time to get up yet!"

"What have you done with my slippers?"

"Your slippers?" said Long, puckering his eyebrows. "How the dickens should I know

"If you try this innocent stunt on me, I'll swipe you until you can't sit down," said the leader of Study D.

"I—I didn't know they were yours, Handy," said Long weakly. "I—I found 'em you know. I thought they were mine. I—I had a pair just like 'em! They're in Study B, you know. Hubbard wouldn't buy 'em, the mean beast. I—I mean——"

Long was yanked out of bed.

"I'll teach you not to touch my property," said Handforth grimly. "You'll go downstairs now, you young bounder, and you'll fetch my slippers up here. Understand? Buzz off, before I tan you!"

Teddy Long shivered.

"I—I'm not going now!" he panted.

"You are!"

"But—but it's all dark——"

"I don't care about that!"

"And I might meet a master——"

"If you meet a master, tell him the truth," said Handforth. "You won't get into a row for fetching a pair of slippers. Clear off, you shivering ass! If you don't buck up, I'll pitch you out on your neck!"

Teddy Long looked round appealingly.

"I—I say, you fellows," he pleaded. "'Tain't right to make me go down now, is it? It's all dark, and—and I don't know my way about properly—— Yaroorh! Leggo my ear, Handforth."

"You'd better cut off at once, Long," I said. "You took Handforth's slippers, and deserve a hiding for attempting to sell them. You'll be getting off lightly if you simply have to fetch them back."

Long was the most cowardly fellow in the Remove, and he shook as he edged his way towards the door.

"I—I shall complain to the Head about this!" he said falteringly. "The stairs are all black, and——"

"You rotten little funk!" said Handforth

contemptuously. "I'll give you your choice, if you're afraid of the darkness. You'll either go and fetch those slippers, or you'll take a hiding on the spot. Which is it to be?"

Teddy Long knew what Handforth's hidings were like.

"I'll—I'll go!" he said, with a gulp.

He opened the door, gazed outside for a moment, and then took the plunge. The landing was in total darkness, and somebody was unkind enough to close the dormitory door.

Teddy Long groped his way to the head of the stairs, shivering with fright. At last he reached the stairs, and he tumbled down them as hard as he could pelt. To his great joy there was a glimmer of light in the hall, and he made his way without much difficulty to Study B.

The whole house was fitted with electric light, but at this hour it was turned off at the main—so far as the studies and classrooms were concerned. By the time Long had found the slippers he was in a pitiable condition.

Quivering in every limb, he made his way back to the hall, clutching the slippers fiercely. He fancied he saw grotesque shapes in every corner, and he had the strength of will to fight against the fear which was rapidly overpowering him.

He managed to get to the top of the stairs at last. He gasped with relief as he turned into the corridor. The dormitory was only a few yards now. He could see the slit of light beneath the door.

And then he stood stock still, frozen to the spot.

Right in front of him, about ten yards off, something was moving. Teddy Long gazed at it with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and with his hair bristling upon his head.

He was unable to move, and his gaze was fixed.

The something took shape, after one horrible moment. At first it had been a mere haze against the blackness. But then it changed in character. The haze disappeared—or, rather, it took on a definite shape.

Instead of a haze, Teddy Long saw an object which brought a gasp of absolute terror from his parched throat. It was a skeleton—a human skeleton—and it was moving towards him slowly and deliberately.

And then, at the last second, Long recovered the use of his limbs.

With a wild scream, more husky than loud, he fled along the corridor, Handforth's slippers dropping as he ran. He charged at the door, blundered into the dormitory, and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Great Scott!"

"What the merry dickens!"

"Shut—shut the door!" screamed Long.

"It's coming in—it's coming in!"

"You young idiot! You're scared over nothing——"

"It's coming in!" shrieked Long.

Hubbard closed the door, after a somewhat nervous glance out into the darkness. All eyes were fixed upon Teddy Long. He crouched on the floor, shivering in every limb! I jumped out of bed, for I saw that Teddy was in a really bad way—although he had probably scared himself over nothing.

"Get up, you young ass!" said Handforth. "My hat! Haven't you brought my slippers? I'll punch you——"

"Never mind your slippers now, Handy," I broke in sharply. "Long isn't fit to stand any of your nonsense. The little idiot is half crazy with fear. Pull yourself together, Long—you're safe enough here!"

"Don't let it come in!" moaned Teddy. "Oh, it was ghastly!"

I pulled him to his feet, and sat him on one of the beds. His face was ashen, and there was a wild expression in his rolling eyes. The other fellows began to see that the junior was genuinely frightened.

"Hand over some water," I said briskly.

Teddy long gulped down a glassful of water, and sat panting heavily.

"Pull yourself together, kid," I said. "You needn't be scared now. What did you see? I expect it was your fancy——"

"It wasn't—it wasn't!" gasped Long. "I—I saw a—a skeleton——"

"A which?"

"A what?"

"A skeleton!" said Teddy fearfully. "Oh, it was horrible! I—I saw it down the corridor. It was a kind of film at first—all hazy and indistinct. Then it grew into shape, and—and it was a skeleton! It came towards me with its arms outstretched, and—and there was an awful smell——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "The chap imagined it all!"

"Of course he did!" said Owen major.

And their view was shared by almost everybody in the Remove dormitory.

CHAPTER II.

THE HAUNTED CORRIDOR.

SOMEHOW, I couldn't quite believe that Teddy Long was a victim of sheer imagination. He was fanciful and nervous, but he was not quite so nervous as all that. He would see shapes and figures in the darkness—inventions of his own fear—but he could never describe them.

But this time he had described the apparition minutely.

"You'd better get into bed, my son," I said. "Go to sleep, and don't be scared any more. You're all serene here——"

"What about my slippers?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, bother your silly slippers!" I snapped. "Give 'em a rest, for goodness sake! If you want them so badly, go and fetch them!"

"Yes, I will!" said Handforth—"and I'll

give that little funk a hiding to-morrow, too!"

Teddy Long shivered afresh.

"Don't—don't let him go!" he panted. "That horrible thing will get him! Don't let him go! His slippers are at the top of the stairs, but—but that skeleton is there! Oh, keep him back!"

Handforth laughed scornfully.

"Do you think I'm afraid?" he demanded. "I'm not full of fancies, Long. I'd go through a churchyard as the clock was striking midnight—and I shouldn't care a toss. I don't believe in ghosts!"

He moved towards the door, and everybody watched him. A good many fellows, I knew, wouldn't have ventured out into the darkness just then. Long had made them feel creepy, and they were glad to be in their beds.

"He's going!" whispered Long fearfully. "Oh, he'll be killed——"

"Let him go!" I said. "You snuggle down, Teddy, and make yourself easy. I'll go with Handforth, if you like, to keep him company."

"Oh, yes—please do!" faltered Long.

"Please don't!" snapped Handforth. "Do you think I'm a kid! Keep me company, indeed! If you try to come with me, Nipper, I'll punch your nose. I'm going alone, thanks!"

I grinned.

"Just as you like," I said. "I expect you'll come back whole. And when you've got your slippers, you'd better put 'em in a glass case, and seal the case up. They'll be famous for ever, after all this fuss!"

"I haven't made any fuss!" said Handforth warmly. "If you accuse——"

"Oh, he's off again!" I groaned.

Handforth snorted, and strode to the door. A moment later he was outside, and the door was closed. Long sat in bed, watching the door with a fascinated gaze which made me feel rather uncomfortable.

Nobody spoke, except in whispers. A minute passed, and we all looked for Handforth's return. Then, suddenly, there was a scuffle outside the door. The next second the door burst open, and Handforth appeared.

His face was white, and his eyes were big and round.

"Good—good heavens!" he panted, closing the door, and leaning against it.

"What's the matter?"

"Have you seen anything, Handy?"

"Tell us, you ass!"

"Speak up!"

Handforth took a gulp of air.

"I—I saw it!" he said shakily. "Long was right! I—I beg his pardon! I saw something out there—a filmy kind of skeleton——"

"You've been dreaming," said Pitt bluntly.

"I haven't!" gasped Handforth. "I'm not the sort of chap to imagine things, am I? I scoffed at Long, because I thought he was a silly little ass—a scared baby. But there's really something out there!"

I jumped out of bed.

"Something!" I repeated. "Didn't you see it distinctly?"

"No—it was only hazy," said Handforth, sitting at the foot of his bed. "I thought it was my fancy at first, but then I saw that the blur took on a kind of shape, until it looked like a skeleton."

"That's—that's right!" faltered Long. "I—I don't want to stay in this school any more! I shall ask my people to take me home!"

"The rotten place is haunted!" said Gulliver, looking frightened. "The—the ghost may come in the dormitory next—"

"Dry up!" I said sharply. "There's no sense in scaring the nervous chaps, Gulliver. If you're afraid, keep your affairs to yourself. I'm game to go out into the corridor—to investigate. Who'll come with me?"

There was a pause before anybody answered.

"I'll come," said Watson, at last.

"Begad! An' you can reckon on me, dear old boy," said Montie.

"Good!" I said briskly.

"I'm game, too!" said Pitt. "We'll go out—"

"Thanks all the same, but I think the three of us will be sufficient, old man," I interrupted. "Too many of us might spoil things—and it needs a few strong-minded chaps left here to prevent a panic."

"I—I shouldn't mess about with it!" said Hubbard, hugging his knees in bed. The best thing we can do is to yell, and bring some masters and prefects here. "What do you say?"

"Good idea!" declared Gulliver. "Help—help—"

"Chuck a pillow at that idiot!" I rapped out.

Swish!

Somebody obliged, and Gulliver subsided.

"That's the very way to get the whole dormitory into a panic," I declared angrily. "Keep calm, for goodness sake. There's no danger, and we don't want the masters here until there's something worth bringing them for. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the ghost is really a moonbeam, shining through the branches of a tree."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "The sky's all cloudy, for one thing, and I'm not such an ass as all that! This thing I saw was at the end of the corridor, and I don't mind admitting that I bunked."

I looked round.

"Well, we mustn't bunk, that's all," I said. "We've got to find out what the thing is. Are you chaps ready?"

"Waiting for you, dear fellow," said Sir Montie.

I don't think Tommy Watson cared much for the prospect, but he was plucky enough, and was quite willing to venture out with me. Anything ghostly is always scoffed at in the daylight, but at night it seems different. One is apt to change one's view very considerably."

A fellow who laughs at ghost stories in the daytime begins to believe in ghosts at midnight, especially if he is requested to help in

searching for one. And the corridor outside the dormitory was very dark and cornery. I found that it required a bit of nerve to prepare myself—and I've always professed to scorn ghosts and ghost stories with a fine contempt.

"Come on!" I said gruffly.

"I hope you come back all right—that's all!" said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to croak, but don't blame me if you fellows go dotty; it wouldn't be a difficult job to turn you dotty, anyhow!"

Several juniors grinned, and some of the tension was relaxed.

"Are you trying to comfort us?" asked Watson bluntly.

"I'm only giving you a word of warning," said Handforth. "If you see that thing, take my advice, and bunk. Everybody knows I'm not a coward, but when it comes to ghosts, I draw the line. I've seen this thing, and I know what I'm talking about. Go easy, my sons!"

For Handforth to use that tone was significant. He was the last fellow in the world to advise a chap to bunk, and it proved that he had been really startled by what he had seen. The matter-of-fact Handforth was half ready to believe in ghosts! The apparition must have been particularly awesome.

I led the way out of the dormitory before anybody could say anything else. The electric light was burning in the apartment, although, of course, it wasn't supposed to be. Morrow of the Sixth had seen lights out half an hour earlier, and had switched off the "juice." But, although the switch was a patent one—turned only with a key—several juniors were able to work the thing easily.

"My hat! It's dark out here!" muttered Watson.

The wide corridor was pitchy black, and it was well calculated to make even a strong-willed fellow nervous and touchy. A chill draught blew along from somewhere, and we shivered.

"Keep your pecker up, my sons," I whispered. "And don't forget that there are no such things as ghosts. Either some funny ass was playing a trick on Long and Handforth, or they imagined things. It's quite possible that Christine has been up to some of his rot!"

"I—I don't believe it," said Watson. "Christine couldn't scare a chap like Handy! This is an awfully old house, you know. And I've heard that in old places of this kind there are ghosts to be seen at certain times— Oh, rot! I'm not going to believe it!" added Tommy resolutely. "Come on!"

"That's the way," I said. "How do you feel, Montie?"

"I'm all right, dear old boy," declared Montie.

We moved forward cautiously. I led the way, and my chums followed. Just near the head of the stairs the corridor took a turn, and a long section of it led away to the Third and Fifth dormitories.

I reached this turn before the others, and I felt my way round. I carried my electric

torch ready to be switched on at any moment. But it would be no good looking for a ghost with a light burning. If possible, I wanted to take the thing by surprise.

Just round the bend I paused.

A window stood a little distance ahead, on the left, but scarcely any light entered. And all was dark and still beyond. Then a sound came to my ears—a faint, dim sound. A board creaked. I set my teeth grimly, and waited. Genuine ghosts don't make boards creak!

I waited and watched, Tregellis-West and Watson remaining just in my rear. And as I stared down the passage, I fancied I saw something moving in the darkness—something lighter than the black surroundings.

It was so indistinct and hazy that for a few moments I thought I was mistaken. Then I stared harder. The haziness was fading, and the outline of a human skeleton became apparent.

And the awful thing was moving forward—towards us!

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Watson. "Can—can you see it?"

"Begad! I—I—"

"Don't jaw, you asses," I breathed. "There's nothing to be alarmed about. That thing's no ghost—it's a fake! It's either a joke of somebody's, or something deeper. But it's human enough."

Montie and Tommy were relieved. But, at the same time, they were feeling rather uncertain. Personally, I was convinced that the apparition was a rank fraud. The skeleton looked horrible enough, but the proportions were all wrong. It was my opinion that somebody was dressed in a tight-fitting suit, with the skeleton painted on his clothes. Perhaps the paint was a bit luminous, which accounted for the spectre being seen in the darkness. And the culprit only needed to wear a cloak to render himself entirely invisible. The mere opening of the cloak would exhibit the ghost at once.

"Yes, it's a fake," I repeated grimly.

And, without waiting for anything further to happen, I dashed forward, switching on my electric torch. The brilliant gleam of light revealed a black figure for a second, but then it vanished. And when I reached the spot there was nothing to be seen.

I came to a halt, puzzled and startled.

Then, without any warning, something soft seemed to envelope me. My strength ebbed away, and all I remember is sinking to the floor, dazed and dizzy, with my head whirling.

Sir Montie and Tommy did not know what was happening. They saw me dash forward, and they saw my light suddenly extinguished. But there was no assailant visible to them. They only knew that I had rushed forward, and that there was no sign of me.

"What—what's happened?" gasped Watson fearfully.

"Dear old boy, I can't tell you," said Montie, clutching at Tommy's arm. "But Nipper seemed to collapse, or somethin'. Supposin' we go forward?"

I was there all right, but not in a position

to answer. Watson and Tregellis-West went forward gingerly. They had no electric torch, and they were in total darkness. The whole experience was creepy and weird.

Their anxiety for me was greater than their fear, for they did not mind admitting afterwards that they were both in a state of blue funk as they went along that passage. Nobody really believed them, for they had proved themselves to be just the opposite.

"He seemed to vanish just about here," remarked Watson softly, as he felt his way forward. "I can't imagine—Great goodness! What—what's that?"

"What's what, dear fellow?"

"My—my foot touched something," said Watson huskily. "I—I say, Montie! We ought to have brought a light with us—"

"Begad! I've got some matches," breathed Tregellis-West.

"Oh, good!"

"Shall I strike one?"

"Yes, of course—strike half a dozen!"

Montie produced his box of matches, and within a few seconds one of them was flaring up. The weak light seemed quite brilliant to the boys after the intense darkness. They only needed one glance ahead to convince them that something bad had occurred. A black figure was lying huddled on the floor.

"Oh, goodness! It's Nipper!" muttered Watson shakily.

The figure did belong to me, as a matter of fact, but I was not able to verify the statement. The surroundings were of no interest to me whatever. I was oblivious of everything.

"What's the matter with the dear boy?" asked Montie anxiously. "Gracious! The poor chap can't be—be—"

"Dead?" muttered Watson, with a gulp.

"Really, old fellow, you are perfectly ridiculous!" protested Montie. "There's no question of Nipper bein'—begad! I've burnt my fingers now!"

He dropped the match-end, and struck another light. Watson grabbed hold of me, and pulled me over. My face was pale, I believe, and I looked rather awful in that flickering light.

"He must have fainted," said Tommy. "And can't you smell anything, Montie? There's a kind of nasty smell in the air—it's making me feel quite dizzy!"

Sir Montie nodded.

"The best thing we can do, old fellow, is to rush away to Mr. Lee's bedroom," he said. "This affair is too much for us to handle, an' we'd better let Mr. Lee know at once. Come on!"

Tommy Watson nodded.

"Yes, you're right!" he said. "We'll fetch Mr. Lee."

They hurried from the spot, excited and anxious. Now that I had fallen out of the affair, so to speak, my chums were like lost sheep. They had been ready to follow my lead, but were not ready to act on their own initiative. And the events of the last five minutes had been so extraordinary that they

badly wanted advice and support. They would get both from Nelson Lee.

It didn't take them long to reach the Housemaster's door. Everything was still and quiet, and there was apparently no sign of the ghost returning. Watson rapped upon the panels of the door so sharply that he hurt his knuckles. But he didn't care about this.

"Hullo!" came Lee's voice. "Who is that?"

"Me, sir—Watson!"

"Watson!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "What on earth are you doing out of your bed at this time of night? Wait one moment."

The door opened, and allowed a welcome flood of electric light to stream into the passage. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West stood there, blinking at Nelson Lee.

"Tregellis-West, too!" exclaimed Lee grimly. "What on earth is the meaning of this? Why are you not in your dormitory?"

"It's—it's Nipper, sir," said Watson.

"He's unconscious!"

Nelson Lee stared.

"Nipper unconscious—he has fainted?" he repeated. "What nonsense is this you are talking? Upon my soul! You are both as pale as death, and you, Watson, seem to be positively shivering. What has happened?"

"It—it was the ghost, sir——"

"The ghost?"

"Yes, sir—the apparition," said Watson.

"The skeleton——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lee smoothly. "There is evidently something wrong. I never suspected that you would talk of ghosts. Come inside, and tell me exactly what has happened."

"Yes, sir!"

And the two juniors entered the Housemaster's bedroom, and the door was closed. Nelson Lee regarded Montie and Tommy keenly.

"Now," he said, "let me hear the trouble."

CHAPTER III.

NELSON LEE'S PROMISE.

TOMMY WATSON clutched at Lee's arm. "But we want you to come, sir—now!" he exclaimed huskily. "Nipper is lying unconscious, and—and that awful thing might take him away, or do him an injury. You must come now, sir."

"I cannot come, Watson, until I know what is wrong," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I suspect that you are exaggerating, and that the actual facts are by no means serious. You are excited, my boy, and——"

"But it's true, sir—it's true!" persisted Watson. "Nipper is really unconscious, and I—I think he might be dead! Oh, you must come, sir!"

"Begad, yes!" said Montie. "There's no time to lose, sir!"

Nelson Lee regarded the pair keenly.

"Very well—I will come at once," he said.

"But if you have been alarming yourselves needlessly, my boys, I shall be annoyed. Lead the way, Watson."

Watson dashed to the door, and went out into the passage. Montie and Nelson Lee followed. The Housemaster detective, who knew a great deal about boys, had a pretty shrewd idea that the situation was not so acute as Watson made out. Lee believed that somebody had been joking.

But his thoughts underwent a change three minutes later. For, arriving in the long corridor, my chums were relieved to find that I was still lying there. Nelson Lee strode forward, and bent down beside me.

"Hold this, Watson," he ordered sharply.

Tommy took the electric torch which Nelson Lee handed over. The bright rays enveloped me, and perhaps the light helped to revive me. At all events, I stirred and opened my eyes.

"He's coming round, sir," said Watson.

"Oh, good!"

"Hallo! What the dickens——" I paused, and looked round me dazedly. "What's the matter here? And what's wrong with my head? It feels like a lump of lead, and it's throbbing—— Great Scott! Is that you, guv'nor?"

I was just beginning to recover in earnest.

"Yes, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I am glad to find that you are all right—although, a moment ago, you looked extremely pale. I shall be very pleased to hear what has happened to bring about this state of affairs."

The guv'nor produced his brandy flask, and compelled me to gulp down one or two mouthfuls. I didn't like doing it, but the spirit acted wonderfully, and my strength returned by leaps and bounds.

"My hat! I'm jolly glad to see that you're getting better, Nipper," said Watson with untold relief. "I—I thought you were dead for a minute."

"It takes more than a ghost to kill me," I said grimly.

Nelson Lee stowed his flask away.

"What is all this talk about ghosts?" he demanded. "I insist upon a full explanation at once, boys. It may interest you to know, Nipper, that you were bowled over by a drug. Don't you know how the drug was administered?"

"No, sir, I don't," I replied. "And what was it—chloroform?"

"No, not chloroform," replied Lee. "I can't give it a name at the moment. It is some Eastern drug, and it is highly dangerous unless used with extreme caution. You are lucky to have escaped so lightly, Nipper—and the very presence of the drug proves that there is something grim and sinister about this affair."

"That's what I think, sir," I said. "We were out looking for a ghost, sir, and I saw the thing down this corridor. It looked like a skeleton, but I am sure it was only a fake——"

"One moment," interrupted Lee. "Why were you looking for a ghost?"

"Because some of the other fellows saw it, sir," I explained. "The dormitory is awake now, and some of the fellows are scared out of their wits. Long saw the thing first, and he was nearly crazy with fear."

"Why was Long out of the dormitory?"

"That's hardly sticking to the point, guv'nor," I protested. "Long only went downstairs to fetch something. And on his way back he saw an awful-looking skeleton moving towards him. When he came into the dormitory he was as white as a sheet, and nearly off his head."

"Long is a nervous boy," said Lee. "He imagines things—"

"That's what Handforth said, sir," put in Watson. "And Handforth went out, as bold as brass, scoffing all the time. But after five minutes he was back, almost as badly scared as Long had been. He saw the thing, too."

"So you three came out to investigate—is that it?"

"Yes, that's right, guv'nor," I replied. "I caught sight of the ghost down this corridor. I was sure it was a fake, and I thought perhaps some silly ass belonging to the College House was responsible. So I charged at the thing, and it seemed to vanish into thin air. Anyhow, it faded away."

"Into a recess, probably," said Lee grimly. "And what then?"

"I don't remember much more, sir," I replied. "I felt myself become weak, and before I could yell I simply collapsed."

"H'm!" murmured Lee. "I should say that the mysterious marauder—probably a thief—sprayed you with this drug, and you consequently collapsed to the floor. But the whole matter must be thoroughly investigated."

"I can't imagine why anybody should dress up as a ghost," I went on. "It seems such an idiotic thing—"

I broke off, for at that moment we all became aware of footfalls, and as we watched, the figure of Mr. Suncliffe hove into view. The Third Form master was attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, and he carried a lighted candle in his hand. His hair was looking like a mop, and he presented a somewhat untidy appearance altogether.

He stared down the passage at us.

"Really, how fortunate!" he exclaimed. "I was just about to arouse you, Mr. Lee. Is anything the matter here?"

"These boys have been seeing ghosts—that is all," smiled the guv'nor.

Mr. Suncliffe started.

"Ghosts!" he ejaculated. "Dear me! Upon my word!"

"Why, have you seen it, sir?" I asked.

"No, Nipper, I have not," said Mr. Suncliffe sourly. "I do not believe in ghosts, and what has come over the school is beyond

my comprehension. It is utter nonsense and rubbish!"

"But why were you coming to me, Mr. Suncliffe?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why was I coming?" repeated the Third Form master. "I want you to come to my dormitory, Mr. Lee. The Third Form is awake, and some of the boys are in a highly nervous condition. They are only youngsters, and it seems that they are thoroughly frightened."

"But, why, sir?" I asked.

"Because the boys have been kept awake by rappings on the walls," said Mr. Suncliffe grimly. "These rappings have continued, at intervals, ever since the lights were put out. I was called into the dormitory, and I must confess that the whole thing is very mysterious. The taps are most distinct, but it is impossible to locate them. The juniors also declare that they heard the sound of fiendish laughter—but that, I am certain, was pure imagination."

"My hat!" muttered Watson. "The whole school is haunted!"

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"Haunted by spirits of a very human type," he remarked. "These manifestations are occurring simultaneously, it seems, and the only object of the perpetrators can be to get the boys into a panic."

"But why?" asked Mr. Suncliffe.

"I'm not quite sure—although I have a suspicion," said Nelson Lee. "I will come with you to the Third Form dormitory, Mr. Suncliffe, after I have paid a brief visit to the Remove. There are some boys there, I believe, who need calming."

Nelson Lee led the way to the Remove dormitory. I was only too glad to get back into bed. We found that half the Remove had dropped off to sleep, and the others were much calmer now. A few words from Nelson Lee put matters right, and everybody was soon at his ease.

Then Nelson Lee departed with the Third Form master, and I fell straight off to sleep. I didn't waken until the rising bell clanged out—and I left my bed feeling almost as fresh as ever.

"Well?" I said yawning. "What about the ghosts?"

Handforth sniffed as he looked out of the sunny window.

"We were asses last night!" he declared. "Ghosts? What rot!"

"Yes, it's easy to say that when the sun's shining," remarked Pitt, grinning. "But it's a different story at night, when everything is still and dark. You weren't so contemptuous of ghosts last night, Handy."

"I suppose it does make a difference," admitted Handforth. "But I've been thinking over things, and it's my belief that some silly ass was playing a trick on us last night."

"Bob Christine, perhaps?" suggested McClure.

I shook my head.

"The Monks had nothing to do with it," I said. "Most of you fellows were asleep when Watson and Tregellis-West and I came back. Mr. Lee was with us, and I can tell you that something queer had been going on."

"Yes, rather," said Watson. "Why, Nipper was unconscious for ten minutes. He encountered the ghost out in the corridor, and we found him lying senseless on the floor."

"Unconscious?" asked Handforth.

"Didn't I say he was senseless?" said Tommy.

"Yes, but he's always senseless——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was bowled right out," I said grinning. "My head still aches a bit——"

"Fainted through fright, I suppose?" asked Fullwood, with a sneer.

"No, that's more in your line," I retorted. "Some kind of drug was sprayed over my face, and it's as clear as daylight that the ghost wasn't a ghost at all, but a fraud. Somebody was trying to get up a panic. The kids in the Third didn't escape, either."

"Why, did they see the ghost?" asked Pitt.

"They appear to have had a variation of the manifestations in their dormitory," I said. "They had spirit rappings—or something that was supposed to be spirit rappings. Perhaps somebody wants to clear us out of the school."

There was a good deal of discussion on the subject, and when the Remove went downstairs, they heard all about the Third's experiences. Owen minor was relating everything to an interested group of Removites in the hall.

"You chaps can talk about your ghosts all you like," he said. "But we had a rotten experience in our dormy. Not five minutes after the lights had been put out, something started tapping on the wall."

"Some ass playing a joke, I expect," said Owen major.

His minor glared.

"I knew you'd say that!" he snapped. "As a matter of fact, we did think some funny idiot was having a lark. But after a while we knew that there was no joke about it. The rappings came from all sides. Jolly mysterious, it was!"

"And what about that fiendish laughter we heard?" asked Heath.

"And those hollow cackles?" said Lemon. Owen minor shook his head.

"I didn't hear any laughter, and I didn't hear any cackling—I believe it was one of the kids snivelling," he said.

"Rot!" snapped Heath. "I heard it as plain as anything."

"Well, it's pretty rotten," said Owen.

"I'm blessed if I shall want to sleep in the Third dormitory again, if that sort of thing goes on. Half the chaps will be afraid to go to bed to-night!"

Owen minor was quite correct in this

statement. And the same applied to the Remove. All the juniors professed to be contemptuous of ghosts and ghostly phenomena, but I was positive that when bed-time came there would be a marked reluctance on the part of the more nervous fellows to retire.

Nelson Lee, too, was of this opinion. He was greatly concerned over the whole matter, and he was summoned to Dr. Stafford's study during morning lessons. He found the Head looking worried.

"I am very glad that you are here, Mr. Lee," said Dr. Stafford. "What does this all mean? I am referring, of course, to the strange happenings which took place last night. Can you suggest any explanation?"

"I hardly know at the moment," said Nelson Lee. "But it seems that some evilly inclined person is making an attempt to frighten the boys——"

"You are of the opinion, then, that the ghost was the result of human agency?" asked the Head.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"My dear sir, there are no such things as ghosts," he said. "This affair was engineered by something very human—and there can be little doubt that the object is to get up a scare—a panic."

"But why? For what earthly reason?"

"Probably to get us all out of the school as quickly as possible."

"Well, that effort will be achieved unless something is done," declared the Head. "I shall not be able to keep the boys here if we experience any more nights such as last night. The juniors, in particular, will be in a very nervous state when they go to bed to-night. And if any ghostly effect is produced there will probably be a panic. By the end of the week the whole school will be disbanded."

"I am glad that you realise the seriousness of the situation, Dr. Stafford," said Nelson Lee. "I quite agree with you. Something must be done—to-night—to put an end to this situation."

The Head tapped his desk agitatedly.

"Do you know, Mr. Lee, that I have received no fewer than fifteen applications from the boys this morning?" he said. "They want to be sent home—they are afraid to remain in the school. You may be sure that those boys will write home, and anxious parents will communicate with me—or call upon me. I am really in a great state of worry. Even the Fifth Form was not exempted from a visitation last night. Several seniors have declared that their sleep was disturbed by uncanny sounds during the small hours. What is to be done?"

"It is my opinion that the whole trouble was caused by one man," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Such a thing is possible—although, from the reports we have received, one might be excused for believing that a whole army of tricksters was at work. One

man could have accomplished the various moves easily enough. First in the corridor, in the guise of a ghost. Then the rappings in the Third Form dormitory, and so on."

"But how did he cause the rappings?"

"There are several cupboards in the rear passage," said Nelson Lee. "I examined them closely early this morning. The rear walls of these cupboards is also the north wall of the Third Form dormitory. It would have been a simple matter for the marauder to move from one cupboard to another, and to rap upon the wall. The other sounds were caused in a similar way."

"And the ghost?"

"A fake," said Nelson Lee. "A ghost is the easiest thing in the world to fake—at midnight. And with a lot of boys to deal with, the task is even easier. I am glad that Nipper was awake last night. He did much to quell the fears of the Remove boys."

"But I am worrying about to-night, Mr. Lee," said the Head. "I do not know what to do. The boys will go to bed, I daresay, but they will be restless and uneasy. At the first sign of a ghostly manifestation there will be a panic——"

"I have a plan in mind," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I want you to leave this matter in my hands, Dr. Stafford. As I have told you, I have a suspicion of the truth. But to-night, with ordinary luck, I shall be certain. In any case, I promise you that the mystery will be cleared up to-night."

Dr. Stafford's relief was obvious.

"I trust you, Mr. Lee—I rely on you," he said. "What I should do without you I do not know! You have taken the responsibility off my shoulders, and I trust with all my heart that you will be successful in your efforts."

Nelson Lee left the Head shortly afterwards, and he was busy until morning lessons were over. He sallied out into the City, and when he returned shortly before dinner, there was a look of quiet satisfaction in his eyes. I met him as he was coming in through the courtyard.

"You're looking cheerful, sir," I remarked. "Have you found anything about the ghosts?"

"My dear Nipper, you need not be afraid of any ghosts to-night," smiled the gov'nor. "Everybody can go to bed in comfort and with easy minds. It is most improbable that there will be any further visitations."

"But aren't you taking any precautionary steps, sir?" I inquired.

The gov'nor shrugged his shoulders.

"What can we do?" he asked. "Where would be the sense of setting people on to watch the corridor? The most sensible thing for every boy to do is to forget last night's affair and go to sleep."

"Then nothing's going to be done at all, sir?" I asked.

"There is no sense in wasting one's time," replied Nelson Lee vaguely.

He walked off, and the other juniors who had overheard the remarks looked at one another with disappointed expressions.

"That's rotten!" remarked Owen major. "Nothing's going to be done!"

"I expect they're all afraid!" sneered Fullwood.

At the same time the majority of the fellows were disappointed to learn that Nelson Lee meant to take no action. They were assured, however, that if they went to bed quietly, everything would be all right.

Personally, I was rather puzzled. It was not like Nelson Lee to abandon a thing so tamely. And I wasn't ready to believe that he had done so. And my surmise was not wrong.

Shortly after tea that evening the gov'nor came across me alone in one of the passages.

"Oh, Nipper, I want you in my study," he said briefly.

I followed him along the corridor, and regarded him curiously when we were within the study with the door closed.

"What's the crime, sir?" I asked meekly.

"There is no crime, Nipper," smiled Lee. "I want a word with you privately. To get to the point, I shall require your assistance to-night at half-past eleven. When the other boys are asleep, slip your clothes on and peep out of the dormitory."

I was eager in a second.

"What's the game, sir?" I asked, bending forward.

"I should imagine you ought to guess what the game is."

"The ghost?"

"Of course," said Nelson Lee.

"But you told me this afternoon that no action was to be taken——"

"You will pardon me, Nipper, but I told you nothing of the sort," said the gov'nor calmly. "I did not give you a direct answer—for an excellent reason. I wanted the boys to talk; I wanted them to make it known that no precautions would be taken to-night. We, however, will be on the alert."

"Fine!" I exclaimed heartily. "And what's the programme, sir?"

"You'll find that out later—when the time comes," was Nelson Lee's reply.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTURING THE GHOST.

"GOOD!"

I sat up in bed and murmured the exclamation with great satisfaction. Eleven-thirty had just struck, and everybody in the Remove, barring myself, lay asleep. The dormitory was quiet and still. There had been no disturbances of any kind whatever.

The Remove had gone up to bed at the usual time—nine-thirty. The fellows had been

rather unsettled after the lights had been put out. Until ten o'clock not a boy thought of sleeping.

But after that, one by one they dropped off. By half-past ten everybody was asleep, except the more nervous fellows. And as nothing took place between half-past ten and eleven, they fell asleep, too.

And now everything was quiet. I was the only wakeful fellow in the dormitory. I slipped out of bed, and quickly pulled some clothes on. Then I crept across the dormitory and slipped outside. At the end of the corridor, in a little recess, I found Nelson Lee.

"That you, Nipper?" he breathed.

"Yes, sir."

"Good lad!" said the guv'nor. "Not a word. Just wait with me."

He whispered a few other things, which I received with feelings of extreme satisfaction. And after that we waited.

The minutes ticked away slowly.

The whole school was now in a state of slumber, and it was a good chance for the "ghost" to begin his operations. Of course, there was no guarantee that he would begin at all.

It was quite likely that the man would do nothing that night—that he would allow the school to settle down once more. Then, on some other night, when everybody was feeling comfortable, he would begin again.

But it was just as well to be prepared.

I was very pleased with the guv'nor for allowing me to take part in the game. We were the only two people in the whole building who knew that anything was being done to frustrate the ghost.

I was expecting midnight to chime out at any moment when I fancied I heard a slight sound down at the end of the longer corridor. I had my hand on Nelson Lee's arm, and I felt him grow rigid.

He, too, had heard the sound.

And together we waited expectantly. Another faint creak came to our ears. And then, far down the passage, we saw something dim moving. Yet everything was pitchy black in the passage. The object which moved was lighter than the darkness—a kind of dull luminosity.

And as it grew nearer we faintly saw the outline of a grotesque-looking skeleton. There was no doubt that the ghost was determined to be active. And it was quite probable that he meant to go a step further this time. His idea, perhaps, was to penetrate right into the dormitories. It was for this reason that he had come much later—exactly as Nelson Lee had anticipated.

A slight thrill passed through me, but I was not at all scared. I was convinced that the thing was human, and that took all the terror out of it. We knew that we were dealing with a spoof ghost.

The thing came onwards, slowly and silently.

At last it was within twelve feet, and was just passing a small window set in the wall. And exactly as it drew level Nelson Lee

pulled with all his force upon a rope which he held in his hand.

Swish!

There followed a clattering kind of thud, and a shrill cry of surprise and rage. Both Nelson Lee and I switched on our electric torches at the same second, and darted forward.

There, on the floor, lay the ghost—a captive.

He was struggling fiercely—struggling in the meshes of a powerful net! Escape from it was impossible, for the more he struggled the more he became entangled.

"I think we've beaten you, my friend!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

It had been the guv'nor's idea. The fixing of the net upon the ceiling had been a comparatively simple task. It had been slung aloft, and was arranged so that one tug would cause it to drop. We had simply waited until the ghost walked beneath the net, and the latter had dropped upon him. Lee had been sure that the fellow would walk along that passage.

And as our lights blazed upon him we saw that he was a Chinaman!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "A Chink!"

"Of course, Nipper," said the guv'nor. "What did you expect to see? I was convinced from the first that our Chinese friend was responsible for this little by-play. Have you forgotten the Yellow Band?"

I looked down at the captive with great interest. He was a smallish fellow, dressed in a closely-fitting black suit. Upon the surface of the material the skeleton was painted—as I had originally guessed.

A black robe over the top of this completed his attire. It was a loosely-fitting thing, and one sweep was sufficient to envelop him. This had the effect, in the darkness, of causing the apparition to vanish at a second's notice.

"I should advise you to submit quietly, my friend," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You won't do yourself any good by attempting to get away. We've caught you red-handed, and you'll have to take the consequences."

The Chinaman ceased his struggles with the net, and looked at us with his eyes glittering in the light of the electric torches.

"Me no meanee harm," he said pantingly. "Me velly sorry!"

"It's rather late to be sorry," said Lee. "You have been attempting to cause trouble in this school by means of your somewhat crude fraud—"

"Me only play lectle jokee," said the Chinaman plaintively. "No tly to do any damage. Me no thief, boss. Letee me go flee, and I come back no more. Allee same big piece sorry!"

"Get up, my friend, and we'll talk afterwards," said Lee curtly.

We helped the Chinaman out of the net. He was panting heavily, and seemed quite exhausted by his efforts. But the cunning

rascal was intent upon gaining his liberty—if such a thing was possible.

The very second he was free from the net he acted.

Although Nelson Lee was holding his arm, he wriggled round like an eel, slipped out of his cloak, and squirmed along the floor with the agility of a snake. The whole thing was unexpected.

"Now then, Nipper!" gasped the gov'nor.

I flung myself forward, and grabbed at the Chinaman's leg. To lose him in this tame way after capturing him so neatly would be galling in the extreme; and I did my utmost to prevent the rascal slipping through our fingers.

I seized his ankle, but he tore it away instantly. Nelson Lee was upon him. There was a quick tussle, and I saw the gov'nor attempting to hold the captive. But the fellow was amazingly agile, and it was almost impossible to retain a grip. And as I was rushing forward the Chinaman slipped away.

He went down the passage like a rabbit, with Nelson Lee in full pursuit. I went after him, and was quite certain that the fellow would be recaptured within a minute or two. He darted up a narrow staircase which led to the upper floor.

"Hold him, gov'nor!" I gasped.

This advice was rather unnecessary, because Nelson Lee was doing his utmost to get hold of the fugitive. The yellow man, however, was racing up the stairs with really astounding speed.

Even if we lost him, there was some satisfaction in knowing that the mystery was solved. My thoughts were curious as I rushed up the stairs. A good deal passed through my mind in those brief seconds.

I remembered a former encounter with this man and his rascally companions. There was a whole gang of them, and they were quartered far underground, in some old, disused sewers. The entrance to their lair appeared to be a manhole in the very courtyard of the school itself.

At least, this was one entrance, for I had entered by it with Sir Montie Tregellis-West; and we had only just escaped by a bare inch with Nelson Lee's timely assistance. It had been a risky experience.

I had supposed that Scotland Yard would act upon the information we had been able to supply. But the authorities had decided to hold their hand for a while—probably because they were anxious to capture the Chinamen "with the goods." There would be little use raiding the place merely to discover a common opium den.

For these yellow rascals—fiends would be a better term—were engaged in the drug traffic. They were responsible for the smuggling of considerable quantities of that deadly drug, cocaine.

I was pretty sure, in fact, that this yellow band had pretty nearly the whole cocaine trade in their hands—so far as the West End was concerned. They supplied their wares

by devious courses to certain depraved circles in Bohemia.

All this passed through my mind as I hurried up the stairs. And I wondered why the yellow brutes had played this trick upon the school. The obvious explanation was that their smuggling trade was hindered—perhaps stopped—by our presence. For years the great building had been empty, and the Chinamen had had their own way. The coming of the St. Frank's crowd had changed everything.

It would be rather rotten if we lost this fellow after we had caught him at his wretched game.

Arrived on the landing, I just caught a glimpse of Nelson Lee diving into one of the upper rooms—a topmost attic. I was in the doorway myself a moment later. The Chinaman was just in the act of scrambling through the window.

A sickly kind of feeling came over me. Did the fellow intend to throw himself down to death? And then I remembered. These rear attic windows were built actually in the roof itself.

Immediately below the window-sill the tiled roof sloped away to the gutter. But it was a very steep slope, and it seemed impossible that any human being could escape by that means.

"Come back, you fool!" exclaimed Nelson Lee hoarsely.

But the Chinaman took no notice. He scrambled out upon the roof, and at that moment I joined the gov'nor at the window.

The night was not absolutely dark, and we could see our late quarry quite distinctly. He was edging his way along the roof, sideways and upwards. His intention, it seemed, was to arrive at the apex. Once there, he could get along to the end of the building, and probably escape altogether.

And he was escaping before our eyes!

"Shall—shall we go after him, sir?" I panted.

"Good gracious, Nipper, what are you talking about?" asked Lee. "It is practically impossible to obtain a hold on this roof. Only a man with the agility of a monkey—and in a state of desperation—would dare to attempt it. I fancy——"

"Good heavens!" I whispered.

For, as we watched, the Chinaman slipped. His feet failed to retain their grip, and he slithered for a clear foot, his fingers clutching at the tiles. Then for a second he paused.

But his hold was not strong enough, and again he slid. This time he gathered such speed that there was no possible hope of checking his downward course. He slithered down the tiles with a low, pitiful scream.

For he knew that certain death awaited him.

The building was high, and the walls were absolutely sheer, and far below there was nothing but the tiled courtyard. The man would be dashed to death on the instant. And he was well aware of this.

I closed my eyes in horror, not caring to see the last of the wretched man as he went



1. With a wild scream Teddy Long fled along the corridor.

2. The gov'nor produced his brandy flask and compelled me to gulp down one or two mouthfuls.

over the edge of the roof to his doom. Then a curious, gasping cry came to my ears, and with it a metallic creak.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Look at that, Nipper!"

I looked. And I thought that I was dreaming for a moment. The Chinaman's head was still visible above the gutter! In a last despairing effort, prompted by the instinct of self-preservation, the fellow had clutched at the edge of the gutter as he fell feet foremost over the edge of the roof.

And he had gained a grip—and was hanging there, between life and death. I expected to see him relax his hold even then.

"My goodness!" I muttered. "He's saved himself from certain death, sir! But what can we do? It's impossible to rescue——"

"Helpee—helpee!" panted the Chinaman, his voice cracked and shrill with fear. "Me be velly good—me tell you evellything. Savee me! I slipped—I no hold longee! Allee samee dead!"

Nelson Lee turned to me sharply.

"Rush downstairs to the lower landing," he said concisely. "In the second cupboard from the corner you will find a long coil of rope. Bring it here at once—and hurry."

"Right, sir!" I said briskly.

I went off like a streak of lightning, and simply tumbled down the stairs four at a time. A human life was to be saved—and, even if that life was worthless, it was our duty to make every attempt to save it.

I found the cupboard at once, and the coil of rope hanging up as Nelson Lee had indicated. Seizing it, I pelted upstairs at top speed, wondering if the poor brute would have enough strength to hold on to the rope even after we had cast it to him. But he had only himself to thank for his horrible position.

Meanwhile, something was occurring on the roof which I had not anticipated.

After I had gone Nelson Lee half climbed out of the window, waiting impatiently for me to return.

"Keep cool!" he said rapidly. "A rope is being fetched, and if you can hold on for two minutes you will be saved."

The Chinaman gave a pitiful cry.

"Me no hold on," he panted. "Allee samee dlop down. One minute—him no good! Me dlop one piecee now. No holdee on!"

"Have courage!" said Lee sharply. "The rope is coming——"

"Me no hold—slippee allee time," gasped the Chinaman. "I go!"

Nelson Lee took in a deep breath. To see a fellow-creature plunge to his death before his very eyes was utterly appalling. And the great detective could not do it without trying his utmost to render assistance.

"Wait!" he rapped out. "I am coming!"

He climbed out of the window, and cautiously edged his way down the roof. It was a terribly risky thing to do, and if I had been there I should have screamed to him to come back. For it seemed like certain death.

One slip, and all would be over! Both he and the Chinaman would plunge to their doom!

Nelson Lee was risking his own life in order to save that of this worthless heathen. It was a mad thing to do; but that was just like the gov'nor. He never thought of dangers. He was utterly fearless.

And he edged his way down the roof until, at last, one foot rested on the gutter. All now depended upon the strength of that fragile piece of metal. The position was enough to turn anybody faint with horror.

But Nelson Lee was absolutely cool—and that was the secret of his success. Even in a tense situation like this he kept his amazing nerve. And, reaching out a hand, he bade the Chinaman grasp it.

"Do not pull too tightly, or we shall both plunge down!" he warned. "Help will be here almost at once!"

The Chinaman said nothing. He clung to Lee's hand as a drowning man will clutch at a straw. And at that moment I rushed to the window. What I saw brought a gulping cry to my lips.

"Gov'nor—gov'nor!" I panted. "You—you——"

"It's all right, Nipper—keep your head!" said Nelson Lee, with icy calmness. "Throw the rope down cautiously so that I can grasp it. Then tie the other end to the door-knob—and hold it as well. Make haste, young 'un!"

The gov'nor's very position made me feel faint. He was lying on the roof, right at the very edge. And the Chinaman was clinging to his outstretched hand. It was amazing to me that they did not both go to their deaths as I watched. It was touch and go all the time.

In a perfect fever of anxiety and horror, I flung the rope down. Nelson Lee caught the end neatly, and I at once secured my end to a shutter-fitting just inside the window—it was better than the door-knob.

Nelson Lee wasted no time after he had got the rope. The rest was merely a matter of physical exertion. Holding on to the rope with one hand, he was secure. And it was a simple matter for him to assist the Chinaman. Four minutes later both of them were safe and sound within the attic.

The rescued man, panting heavily, flung himself at Lee's feet.

"Me vellee glateful—allee samee your servant," he muttered. "You savee my life. Me do anyting. You my master—me obey your orders. Yen Sang vellee glateful. Me no betlay you. You savee my life!"

"Yes, and you weren't worth it!" I said huskily. "You must have been mad to get on to that roof like that! Nobody else but Mr. Lee would have had the courage to go down to your assistance."

"Yen Sang, you must regard yourself as my prisoner," said Nelson Lee. "You need not pretend to be surprised when I tell you that I am fully aware of your game. Your object was to frighten the boys of this

school, so that big trouble would be caused. But you have failed, and I intend to hand you over to the police, with all the other members of your drug-smuggling band."

Yen Sang clutched at the gov'nor's feet as he grovelled.

"Me your servant!" he exclaimed. "Me no care whatee you do. My life is yours, and I glateful. Me showee you how to find others. Allee samee help to catch bad Chinamen!"

"What does he mean, sir?" I asked.

"He is apparently intending to convey the knowledge that he is willing to help us to get hold of his comrades," said Nelson Lee. "I've saved his life, and he is anxious to make amends."

"But we can't trust him, sir," I said.

"You trust me allee light—me no betlay you," said the Chinaman earnestly. "Me be dead if you no savee me. Me sollee. Do muchee for you, blave Blitisher!"

Nelson Lee looked at the Chinaman very grimly. The fellow sounded sincere enough. But was there any truth in his statement? Would he help us to round up the other members of his rascally band?

CHAPTER V.

YEN SANG'S LITTLE WAY.

NELSON LEE, I felt sure, was not likely to accept the yellow rascal's word. At the same time, there was just a chance that he was in earnest. He certainly ought to have been, considering that he owed his life to Nelson Lee's amazing act of cool bravery.

"Well, sir, what are you going to do?" I asked.

"I hardly know yet, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "In any case, there is not much to be gained by going down into the old sewers. We have been there before, and we know what they contain. What I mostly require is to discover the secret hiding-place of the drugs these Chinamen have been smuggling. Cocaine and opium, for example. I want to know where I can lay my fingers upon the hidden store."

Yen Sang's eyes gleamed.

"Trust me," he said softly. "Me showee you evellything."

"Look here, my friend," said Nelson Lee, catching the Chinaman by one arm. "I want you to be straightforward with me—if such a thing is possible. You must tell me everything you know, if you are anxious to help me."

"Me takee you down into tunnel," said Yen Sang. "Me showee you big piecee storehouse. Me vellee glateful, and no betlay you. Me betlay yellow men."

Nelson Lee considered for a moment.

"Very well," he said smoothly. "We will go with you, Yen Sang. And you must not be offended if I do not take your word. You will lead the way, and I shall follow immediately in your rear. I shall have a revolver

at full cock, and it will be pointing at your back. At the very first sign of a betrayal, I will shoot!"

"That's the way, gov'nor," I said, nodding.

But the Chinaman shook his head, and smiled.

"No playee ticks," he said. "Me vellee tluthful. Me want to get away from my fiends. No more my fiends—me glad to levenge on them. Me helpee you, boss. No talkee out of hat. Me tluthful."

"Well, you sound fairly sincere," said Nelson Lee. "Lead the way, Yen Sang—but don't forget my warning. I am taking no chances."

"But you no trust me?" asked Yen Sang.

"I will trust you when you prove that you are worthy of being trusted," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Now get a move on."

The Chinaman nodded, and passed down the attic stairs to the floor below. We went along the corridor, and then down into the hall. And we were unaware of the fact—at that time—that a dim figure crept forward out of the blackness of the corridor and leaned over the balustrade.

The figure was attired in pyjamas, and after waiting for a few moments it padded softly back down the corridor, and vanished.

Nelson Lee and I, unconscious of the fact that we had been seen, followed Yen Sang out into the dark courtyard. We found that he had made a habit of entering the school by means of a small window in the servants' quarters. The window was barred, and it had been considered impossible for any human being to get through. But Yen Sang was astonishingly slim, and extremely slippery. He had found no difficulty in negotiating the restricted passage between the bars.

Out in the courtyard there was an iron covering, which ostensibly concealed an ordinary drainpipe. The Chinaman lifted this covering, and a shallow basin was revealed. But it was only a fake.

One touch caused the basin to sink away, and a deep shaft was revealed—the shaft leading right down into the depths of the earth. There were iron supports fixed at regular intervals down the wall.

Yen Sang led the way, and the gov'nor and I followed.

I had been terribly afraid that Nelson Lee would forbid me to undertake the trip. But he had said nothing—and I naturally kept my tongue still. I was very anxious to be with him on this adventure.

We arrived at the bottom of the shaft, and found our new friend awaiting us. The Chinaman did really seem grateful, and it was his intention, it appeared, to betray his own friends as a mark of his gratitude.

"You follow me," he whispered. "We no wantee light."

"Lead the way, then," said Nelson Lee. "One moment, though. I should like to know exactly where you are leading us to?"

"Me showee you cocaine and other drugs—heap plenty of them," said Yen Sang. "Me

no take you to my friends. Me showee you drugs, then you come back. Savvy? Allee same make big laid with police. Me no wantee go plison."

"I'll see that you escape punishment if the raid is successful," said Nelson Lee. "But go ahead now—and don't talk."

We proceeded along the old sewer in the darkness. It was quite cold down there, and we walked briskly. Nelson Lee kept one hand upon Yen Sang's shoulder, so that the man would not slip away in the darkness.

And I brought up the rear. We continued in this way for several minutes. Then came a slight turn in the tunnel, and a dim glow was visible ahead. Yen Sang came to a halt, and the guv'nor and I bumped into him.

"Goe careful," whispered the Chinaman. "Store loom close here—we no wantee go to place where my friends are. Savvy? Me stop soon, and then you see. All one piece honourable."

"I hope you are," said the guv'nor.

Again we went on, and I understood what the programme was. The store-room, containing the smuggled cocaine and other drugs, was situated by itself, away from the apartments occupied by Yen Sang's yellow colleagues. The Chinaman's scheme was to show us the secret of the place, and then escort us away. He knew well enough that any trickery on his part would lead to disaster—for himself.

At last we came to a doorway set back in the tunnel. We could dimly see it in the light which was reflected from the room further along. And Yen Sang paused, and came closer.

"Be plepared to lun!" he said. "No safee. If we seen we—"

"Great Scott!" I gasped abruptly.

A pair of lean, sinewy hands had grasped my neck from the darkness behind. The next second I was pulled over backwards. Nelson Lee, before he could act in any way, was similarly attacked. And Yen Sang, with one swift movement, snatched the guv'nor's revolver out of his hand.

We had been captured!

Prepared for treachery as we had been, we had been taken by surprise. The guv'nor fought like a demon, but it was hopeless. Before we knew where we were, seven or eight of the yellow beggars were upon us.

There was a tremendous jabbering, and I noticed that Yen Sang was doing most of the talking. I bitterly realised that he was explaining to his friends how completely he had duped and deceived us.

There were many exclamations of satisfaction when he had finished. Lights were brought by others, and then the guv'nor and I were carried along the tunnel until we arrived in a square stone apartment.

The place reeked of opium, and there were several flickering lamps burning in different corners of the dungeon—for it was really little better. Nelson Lee and I, each held by four Chinamen, had no hope of getting

away. We had been disarmed, and to make any attempt to break away would be madness.

"Looks like trouble, sir!" I remarked breathlessly.

"I've been a fool, Nipper," said Nelson Lee harshly. "I ought to have had more sense than to let you come down here—"

"Oh, don't worry about me, sir."

"But I do worry about you, my lad," said the guv'nor. "I must confess that my judgment was at fault. I thought the fellow was really grateful to me, and that he meant to be true. And now we have to pay for our incautiousness. Yen Sang led me right into a trap."

"The yellow dog!" I said hotly.

Yen Sang came over towards us, leering triumphantly.

"Allee samee heap big plisoners," he said, in a gloating voice. "Me vellee pleased with you. Fallee into tlap plenty good. Now you die. No escape flom here. You dangerous—and you must die."

"You confounded rotter!" I roared. "I—I'll—"

"Don't lose your head, Nipper," advised Lee quietly.

"It makes no difference," said Yen Sang. "You no getee away flom here. Big piece triumph for me. Savvy? We fixee up your death."

He walked away, still leering, and with his glittering eyes full of hatred and contempt. The fact that Nelson Lee had saved his life weighed for nothing. He had beaten us at our own game—and he was a heathen Chinese. How can one expect such a brute to have human feelings.

In a very few moments ropes were brought, and Nelson Lee and I were bound together tightly and securely. Then we were left in the centre of the floor while the Chinamen collected in a group and talked in their native lingo. The guv'nor was listening intently.

"Can you understand, sir?" I asked.

"Very little, my boy," said Lee. "I am acquainted with Chinese, but this particular dialect is new to me, and I cannot follow what is being said. Only one or two words are familiar to me."

"Do you think they'll harm us, sir?"

"My boy, I'm afraid they will," said the guv'nor quietly.

I looked at the yellow men curiously. They were attired in all sorts of weird costumes. Some wore European dress, others were in native attire; while still others wore a mixture of the two. And all were dirty and repulsive-looking.

And after their jabbering had proceeded for a few minutes, an agreement was apparently arrived at, for there were many nods and grunts of approval. Then Yen Sang came over to us once again.

"You wishee to know how you die?" he inquired softly. "Velly well—I tell you. You go into black cavern and wait. Then a man him comes, and uses knife. You both die quick. Then you will be flung in sewer."

dlop in liver, and float away. A mystery for the police—eh? Allee same big piecee joke!"

And Yen Sang laughed to himself in a manner which made my blood run cold. I had never believed that such a heartless, ungrateful scoundrel could exist. And there was no hope for us, no chance of making our escape. We were in the hands of these Chinamen, and it was their evident intention to settle our hash without any fuss.

"Stabbed and thrown into the river!" I muttered. "Oh, guv'nor!"

"Keep your spirits up, young 'un," urged Nelson Lee. "There may still be a chance for us—one never knows."

But I knew that he was only saying that in order to comfort me. He was quite convinced in his own mind that there was no hope for us. Our position was appalling. We should be killed in cold blood by these yellow demons.

And before we could say anything further we were seized by many hands and carried out of the apartment. Along several tunnels we went until, at length, we heard the sound of running water. And then I noticed an opening in one of the walls. The sound of the running water came through this opening. I needed no telling that an active sewer lay beyond. Probably a sharp shower was pouring, and the streets were being emptied into the sewers.

Both Nelson Lee and I were set down on the floor near the hole in the wall. Our bonds were tightened up, and then we were left to ourselves. Total darkness surrounded us, and our captors vanished into the blackness.

"What's the meaning of this, sir?" I asked huskily.

"I presume it is the Chinese method of mild torture," said Nelson Lee. "We are to be left by ourselves for a time. And then, when we least expect it, the executioner will come along with his knife. I am afraid, Nipper, that we are in a hopeless position."

"It's not like you to chuck up the sponge, sir," I said. "We're alone now—can't we do something? Can't we make an attempt to get free—"

"My boy, such an attempt would be doomed to failure," said the guv'nor. "These ropes were not fastened by a novice. The knots are absolutely tight, and the more we struggle the tighter they will become. I always know when there is a chance of getting free. But here there is none."

"And—and do you really think we shall be stabbed?" I asked huskily.

"These yellow men have nothing to lose and everything to gain by getting rid of us, once and for all," said the guv'nor. "My dear lad, you must not allow any false hopes to find a place in your breast. We are at the mercy of these fiends, and I fear that nothing can be done."

"What ghastly luck, sir," I muttered.

"Luck!" Lee retorted bitterly. "We are faced with death solely because of my fool-

ishness. I was idiot enough to trust Yen Sang. I prided myself that I knew something about human nature—but I was wrong. This man has betrayed us, even after we saved his life. You and I, Nipper, cannot understand such treachery."

"I—I don't think those brutes are human at all!" I said. "And the way Yen Sang leered at us made my blood boil. Yet it seemed such a safe proposition to start with. We weren't going near the actual danger zone—"

I broke off with a slight gasp, for a sudden beam of light had sprung out of the darkness. I knew at once that it was caused by an electric torch, and my heart jumped.

But then I realised that the torch was my own, or the guv'nor's. The executioner had come to carry out his work. There was no need for any information to be given on this point.

For a yellow hand, with a knife in its grasp, was visible on the outskirts of the light. I gazed at that glittering blade with a kind of fascination, and the knowledge that we could do nothing in our defence galled me to the utmost.

A soft, thin chuckle sounded.

"Plepare to have the knife," came the voice of Yen Sang.

As he spoke he turned the light round, and revealed his own grinning, evil features. He was alone with us, and I told myself that our last five minutes on earth had come.

"Do your worst, you yellow rat!" I snapped fiercely. "If you think we're going to beg for mercy, you've made a mistake! We're not afraid of you!"

Yen Sang placed the torch on the floor, so that the light played upon us, and then stepped closer, his knife ready in his hand. Nothing in the world could save us; rescue from an outside source was impossible.

"You makee one big bloomer mistake," exclaimed Yen Sang, in a soft, purring voice. "Me vellee solly—"

"Stop that kind of talk!" snapped Nelson Lee. "You treacherous—"

"Letee me explain. Me no tlaitor," interrupted Yen Sang. "Chinamen comee unexpectedly in passage. Me surprised. No meant it to be likee that. Me solly if you catchee flight!"

"What are you getting at?" demanded Lee curtly. "You have come here to carry out the orders of your gang—so what is the object of delaying?"

"Me ordered to knifce you," explained Yen Sang. "Me comee here to kill you one piece quick. Then you go in sewer, Savvy? You floats down into liver. Me came on this work for special leason. Me no play any tlicks."

"What do you mean?" I asked, a faint hope in my breast.

"All bluff—spoofee, as you call him," said the Chinaman. "Me velly fiendly. You save my life—me glateful. Me doee much for you. When we caught by yellow men me forced to aglee. They killee me one time

mighty quick if I tell them truth. So me turn against you—but only bluffee."

Nelson Lee caught his breath in.

"He means, Nipper, that his friends surrounded us without his knowledge," said the gov'nor. "He was compelled to agree with them, or his own life would have been taken. His only course was to pretend that he had trapped us. And now he has come to carry out the orders of the band."

"No, no," said Yen Sang. "Me only pretend to. You escape—I cutee your lopea, and you go flee through sewer. Savvy? All velly simple. You come back with plenty big police. I lettee you in. Big laid, and soon allee over."

"Your English is not perfect, Yen Sang, but you manage to make yourself understood," said Nelson Lee. "So you are faithful, after all? I thought my original opinion of you could not be wrong."

The Chinaman grinned.

"Me your servant," he said. "Evelytthing I can do not enough. I never lepay you for savee my life. You can swim? Good! You soon get into liver, and then allee plenty good. Heap big police——"

"But how shall we get in?" asked Lee keenly. "In the school courtyard?"

Yen Sang shook his head.

"Me know better way," he said. "I give you dillections."

He proceeded to give his "dillections." There was another way into the secret tunnels, it seemed, from the other side. But this was not much used, because it was capable of being observed.

It was the best way for a police force to enter, however, and Yen Sang gave us full instructions. He further informed us that he would have the door unfastened, ready for us to enter.

It seemed almost too good to be true.

The Chinaman had not turned upon us, and escape was within sight.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER INVESTIGATOR.

MEANWHILE, somebody was stirring in the sleeping school.

Edward Oswald Handforth, to tell the truth, was not slumbering like the rest. For some reason which he could not fathom he had awakened. He didn't know what the hour was.

The Remove was asleep.

Not a fellow stirred in his bed. Handforth lay for some minutes, thinking about the ghost. It didn't seem so absurd now. He half-expected to see something materialise out of the surrounding darkness.

Then he became aware of some curious sounds. They seemed to come from outside, and he sat up. His curiosity aroused, he slipped out of bed, and went to the half-open window.

"By George!" he muttered. "There's somebody on the giddy roof!"

The sounds seemed to indicate that Handforth was correct. The scrambling of boots upon tiles came to his ears, and he listened in astonishment. Of course, Handy was listening to Nelson Lee and Yen Sang, as they clung for life upon the roof.

Then another sound caught Handforth's ear.

Somebody was moving in the corridor! Perhaps I hadn't been careful enough in getting that rope from the cupboard. But, filled with anxiety as I was, I didn't care particularly.

Handforth remained in the dormitory for five minutes or more. He was undecided. He was wondering whether he should awaken any of the other fellows. Then at last he decided to venture out.

So, as quietly as possible—and astonishingly quietly for Handforth—he made his way to the door, and opened it. Out in the corridor he came to an abrupt halt. The soft sound of footfalls fell upon his ears. Somebody was descending the stairs from the attic!

And there was more than one pair of feet, too. Handforth squeezed himself into a recess, and waited. He wasn't thinking of the ghost now. He knew that these noises were not supernatural.

Then he saw three figures in the gloom. The first was strange-looking in the extreme, and a few seconds passed before Handforth guessed that he was a Chinaman. He saw Nelson Lee, and he saw me. We all trooped down the stairs, and Handforth watched us go.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he muttered, in amazement.

He leaned over the balustrade, and saw us vanish into the darkness. Then he softly padded back to the Remove dormitory, his mind made up. Handforth was a fellow of action, and he meant to act now.

"Nipper, Mr. Lee, and a giddy Chinaman!" he muttered. "What the dickens is the idea? I'll bet a quid that they've been searching for that ghost! But a Chinaman! My only hat!"

Handforth's eyes gleamed as he remembered something about a gang of yellow crooks who were located somewhere in the vicinity. Many juniors had heard about the Chinese drug-smugglers, but they hadn't paid much attention.

"I'll bet any odd thing that Mr. Lee and Nipper are out on detective work!" Handforth told himself. "And they didn't ask me to join in! Great pip! I'm not going to sit still and do nothing! Study D ain't going to be out of this!"

He felt rather indignant.

"Nipper's a rotter!" he declared. "He ought to have roused me when he got up! I'll punch his nose in the morning!"

Feeling that a little punching would relieve his feelings, he proceeded to jab Church and McClure rather forcibly in the ribs, as they lay peacefully sleeping. The two juniors grunted, rolled over, and awoke.

"Hullo!" murmured Church. "What the — 'Tain't time to get up——"

"Yes it is," said Handforth. "Out of bed, you boulder!"

Church blinked.

"Is—is that you, Handy?" he asked dreamily.

"Did you think I was a ghost?" demanded Handforth.

"A—a ghost!" Church started, and sat up abruptly. "I—I say, you—you haven't seen anything, have you?"

McClure was awake now, and sitting up, too.

"What's the matter, Handy?" he asked nervously.

"The matter? Nothing!" said Handforth. "I was out in the corridor a minute ago, and I saw three figures——"

"Three figures!" muttered Church.

"One belonged to a Chinaman——"

"A—a Chinaman!"

"Yes, a Chinaman, you parrot!" snapped Handforth. "The second figure belonged to Nelson Lee, and the third chap was Nipper!"

"But—but what about the ghost——"

"You've got ghosts on the brain!" interrupted Handforth. "I tell you I saw Nelson Lee and Nipper with a Chinaman, not three minutes ago, out in the corridor. They all went downstairs!"

Church and McClure gazed at their leader suspiciously.

"You've been dreaming," said Church at last.

"Of course you have," added McClure.

"You—you disbelieving asses!" hissed Handforth. "I tell you I saw them! Ain't that enough for you? I'm not blind, I suppose? Before I saw them I heard some rummy sounds from the roof——"

"Oh, you've had a nightmare, Handy," said McClure. "If you think we're going to believe that rot—well, you can think it! I'm going back to sleep, and you can finish your giddy nightmare alone!"

"Same here!" said Church.

They both snuggled down into the bedclothes. Handforth gazed at them, bubbling with indignant surprise. Then he delivered two punches, one after the other.

Church and McClure sat up, gasping.

"You—you silly lunatic!" gasped Church.

"You burbling duffer!" ejaculated McClure.

"Are you going to get up, or not? I'll give you just ten seconds to decide," said Handforth grimly. "Do you think I'm going to be scoffed at like that? Study D is going to take a hand in this game—and don't forget it!"

"But—but it's between one and two o'clock——"

"Ten seconds!" said Handforth. "One—two—three—four—five——"

"You ass! They ain't half-seconds!" gasped McClure, pushing the bedclothes back. "You'll have the whole dormitory awake——"

"Ten!" said Handforth. "Time's up. Will you get out quietly or shall I roll you on the floor?"

His two faithful chums slipped hastily out of bed.

"That's better," said Handy, nodding. "Now get dressed."

"Anything for a quiet life," exclaimed Church, giving the other junior a quick nudge. "After all, we might as well be in this adventure, Handy. There's nothing like a bit of sport at night."

"Good!" said Handforth. "Glad you've got some sense, after all. We're going out into the courtyard. I believe they went that way, anyhow. There's no telling what the game is—and we're going to be in it."

"Rather!" said Church heartily. "Of course we shall be in it—even if we spoil the whole show, Handy."

"Eh?"

"Oh, well, you can't expect Clurey and me to equal your smartness at detective work," went on Church. "We're duffers at it, compared to you. We're honoured at being allowed to come, and we shall be jolly pleased to give you a hand."

"Yes, rather!" said McClure untruthfully.

"But," continued Church—"but——"

"But what, you ass?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, I hope we shall prove ourselves to be worthy of you, old man," said Church, pulling on his socks. "By yourself you can be trusted to investigate a mystery in an amazing style. I hope we shan't spoil everything for you. We're only a couple of mere novices, and we shall probably make bloomers, and that'll mess things up properly. Still, we're anxious to go with you."

Handforth nodded slowly. He was sublimely unconscious of the fact that Church was pulling his leg as hard as it could be pulled. Handforth was surprisingly obtuse over such matters—although sharp enough generally.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said thoughtfully. "You are a couple of blundering asses, I know——"

"What?" gasped McClure. "Why, you're twice as——"

"Twice as smart as we are," said Church hastily, covering McClure's thoughtless utterance. "Blundering asses sounds rather severe, Handy, but I suppose we deserve it. You're as keen as mustard, of course. Blunders are unknown to you. If you went on this mission alone you'd cover yourself with glory—you'd make your name famous as an investigator. But if we go with you, we might ruin the whole game, and that would be a pity. Still, we're game—eh, Clurey? We'll do our level best, and trust to luck!"

"Yes, of course," said McClure, catching on to the wheeze. "There's no false pride about us—we know our shortcomings. And detective-work is about the last thing we can do well. It's different with you, Handy. You've always been smart at investigating——"

"Look here," said Handforth abruptly. "You can get back to bed, you two!"

"Eh?"

"I'm not going to have you muck the whole investigation up——"

"Oh, Handy?" protested Church. "You asked us to come! We all want to be in this, you know! Please let us come——"

"Get back to bed!" said Handy tartly. "I don't want a couple of rank duffers with me! You'd be more trouble than you're worth. I don't know why I bothered about you in the first place! I might have been on the track by this time!"

"Oh, well, if you insist——"

Church pulled off his socks and got back into bed. McClure followed his example, and the two juniors grinned joyfully into the pillows. They had spoofed their redoubtable leader beautifully.

And Handforth, feeling that he had had a narrow escape from being encumbered by two worthless lieutenants, took his departure from the dormitory with as little delay as possible.

He was feeling decidedly pleased with himself. He had never known that Church and McClure had such a high opinion of his detective abilities. Handy himself had never had any doubt on that point, but it was gratifying to learn that Church and McClure were of the same opinion.

If Handforth had only known what their true ideas were, he would have been in great danger of going off into a fit. But Handy was mercifully ignorant of the dreadful truth.

He didn't exactly know what he was going to do. But the first move was to get downstairs and into the courtyard.

"I'm positive they went out there," he told himself. "It'll be a good test for me. I ought to be able to track them with comparative ease. And then it won't take me long to find out what the idea is."

He reached the courtyard without mishap, which, in itself, was rather lucky. For Handforth was about the clumsiest fellow in the Remove, and the very idea of him attempting detective-work was enough to make a cat grin.

It was all the funnier because Handforth took himself seriously. He arrived in the courtyard, and looked round with exaggerated cautiousness. And luck was with him almost at once. Unfortunately, it was not the right brand of luck.

He stood still and rigid as he saw a movement near one of the high walls. Everything was gloomy and still, but it was possible to see any object moving within ten or fifteen yards.

And it seemed to the excited Removite that something was moving out of the very ground itself. A figure appeared, and Handforth determined to examine matters at closer quarters.

"Nipper, I'll bet a quid!" he muttered.

He stole forward like a shadow—as he thought. Actually, his feet made a considerable noise on the gravel, and before he had reached the spot the figure darted upon him like a leopard.

"Here, hold on!" gasped Handforth. "What's the idea? Nipper, you ass, can't you see—— Oh, my goodness!"

For Handforth suddenly became aware of

the fact that he was seized by a Chinaman! But this man was much bigger than the Chinese whom he had seen earlier. And he was strong and powerful.

Handforth was borne to the ground, and before he knew where he was, a coarse piece of cloth was placed over his mouth, and his ankles were bound with thin cord. Then, to his consternation, he was dragged by his captor to a hole in the ground, and lowered into the depth of the earth.

His investigations had not been exactly successful!

CHAPTER VII.

THE SMUGGLERS' DOWNFALL.

YEN SANG pointed with a bony, yellow finger.

"You go thatee way," he whispered. "All stlaight and no mistake. Dlop into liver heap quick. No piecee danger. Yen Sang him know, boss. Me goee that way once. All safee."

"I hope so," I remarked, looking into the sewer rather uncertainly. "What do you think, guv'nor?"

"We must chance it," said Nelson Lee.

We were standing just against the opening in the wall which led into the active sewer. Yen Sang had removed our bonds, and now he was waiting for us to go. There was no further doubt in our minds regarding the matter. He was truly grateful for what Nelson Lee had done, and was our friend.

"Me goee back—tell plenty yarn," grinned Yen Sang. "Tell fliends me killee you and thlow you into sewer. Allee samee good joke!"

He chuckled in his own peculiar way, and a moment after Nelson Lee and I took the plunge. The guv'nor carried the electric torch, and we felt much more content with the light in our possession.

The water in the sewer was muddy, and it was swirling along about knee deep. The tunnel itself was small, and the guv'nor and I were obliged to bend low as we walked. The sewer, according to Yen Sang, went right down to the river, and emptied itself into the Thames.

It would be a fairly long run for us, and the most difficult part of the undertaking would probably be when we were near the exit. For if the tide was in and high, the exit would be under water.

This would mean a trying ordeal—a dive through water, chancing whether we got out alive. However, there was no sense in making difficulties where there might not be any, so I dismissed the subject from my mind.

And we went on slowly, but surely.

"How long do you think it'll take us, guv'nor?" I asked, after a while.

"Oh, not so very long," said Nelson Lee. "One is liable to form a wrong estimate of the distance from Holborn to the river. In a direct line it is not so far, and we are travelling in a direct line."

But we met with a stroke of luck which was quite unexpected.

Not thirty yards further on, where the water was slightly deeper, Nelson Lee came to a halt, and looked upwards. I wondered why, for there was nothing that I could see, except the roof.

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

"Nothing," said the gov'nor. "But look here, Nipper."

I went closer, and then saw that a narrow shaft led upwards. And, eight feet above our heads, in the shaft, was the first iron foot-rest! Others could be seen higher up, and all were rusty and disused.

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "Do you think we can get out this way, sir?"

"I think we should be very foolish if we did not try," replied Lee. "We may have our trouble for nothing, but it is quite likely that Yen Sang knows nothing about this shaft, and so could not tell us. It ought to lead upwards to a manhole, and that will be far better than taking a plunge into the river."

"Rather, sir," I declared. "I wasn't looking forward to a swim very much."

I was hoisted up first—for in order to reach the first support the gov'nor had to lift me on to his shoulders. I caught hold of the rusty iron, and then leaned down and assisted Nelson Lee up.

A moment later we were both climbing the shaft.

It was not so deep as we had expected, and when Lee directed his torchlight upwards, we could easily see the underside of a covering of a manhole.

"The question is, can we lift it?" I said.

A test soon settled this question. I pressed against the covering with my shoulder, and heaved with all my strength. But the thing wouldn't shift. It had probably been untouched for years, and was jammed firm.

"Let me try, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

He managed to get up beside me somehow, and it was a good thing the iron supports were strong, for they had to stand the weight of our bodies, and also the pressure which we exerted.

And our united efforts shifted the covering at last, and it went up with a sudden, jarring jerk. One moment later it was clear, and the cold night air was blowing down on our heads.

"Thank goodness!" I murmured fervently. "We've really escaped!"

I scrambled out into the open, and Nelson Lee was soon by my side. We found ourselves in a very quiet street, apparently in the heart of the City. I wasn't sure where I was—and I certainly didn't care.

We heaved the heavy covering back upon the manhole, and just as we were finished, a soft footfall sounded behind us, and the light of bull's-eye lantern illuminated our dishevelled persons.

"Now then, what's this?" demanded a gruff voice. "What's the idea of interfering with that manhole?"

"It's all right, constable," said Nelson Lee, turning round. "Nipper and I have been doing a little exploring. My name is

Nelson Lee, and as it happens I need the co-operation of the police at once."

The constable was rather inclined to think that we were pulling his leg at first. But when he was really satisfied with regard to our identity, he was only too eager and willing to help.

And, exactly fifteen minutes later, we were seated in the charge-room at a small police-station, and the station sergeant was listening to the gov'nor with great attention.

"Yes, Mr. Lee," he said at last. "I think the best thing you can do is to ring up Mr. Lennard, of the Yard. He's engaged upon this smuggling case—and as it happens he's on duty to-night."

"That's very lucky," said the gov'nor. "I thought Lennard would be in bed."

"He is in bed as a rule, at this time, sir," said the sergeant. "But there's been a murder over in Bloomsbury, I believe, and Mr. Lennard has been pretty active. He 'phoned us here twice."

Nelson Lee was soon through to Scotland Yard. And he got hold of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the Criminal Investigation Department, almost at once.

"Yes, Lennard, I want you to come over," said the gov'nor urgently, after a few preliminary remarks. "It's very important. You'll come straight away, won't you, old man?"

Lennard evidently answered "yes," for when Lee hung up the receiver a moment later, he was looking quite pleased.

Within a very short time the chief inspector arrived on the scene. He was an old friend of ours, and he greeted us cordially.

"Well, this is a nice time to find respectable people in the charge-room of a police-station," he exclaimed. "Upon my word! You seem to be in a pretty fair mess, too! When did you clean your boots last, Nipper?"

"Never mind Nipper's boots," said the gov'nor. "We want you in connection with those cocaine smugglers. I can lead you to the exact spot, and show you the hidden store of drug. But we shall want a good few men to help in the raid."

Lennard was all eagerness.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "It's really sporting of you, Lee, to do this. But I should just like to know what has happened?"

It didn't take the gov'nor long to explain.

"Phew!" said the Yard man. "You seem to have had a pretty hot time of it—a case of extremes, too. First of all excitement on the roof, and then a nice little tussle underground. You fellows can't say that you don't see life!"

"We thought we were going to see death!" I put in grimly.

"Well, that Chink ought to get a medal," declared Lennard. "He's evidently a good sort, Lee. We'd better hustle as hard as we can—before the fellow changes his mind. We don't want him to give the others a warning."

There was considerable bustle in the police-station shortly after that. Telephone messages were sent out urgently, and when Nelson Lee and I left we were accompanied by half a dozen powerful men. We picked up another dozen in the neighbourhood of Holborn, and then went on to our destination.

This was a quiet alley in a backwater. There was a manhole here, which led directly down into the Chinese stronghold. But the yellow men did not care to use it, for it was in a public thoroughfare, and their movements would probably have been spotted sooner or later.

For us it didn't matter, and we were soon descending a wide shaft. The police went first, headed by a sergeant. Then Lennard went down, and Nelson Lee and I brought up the rear.

It wasn't our job now, and we were quite willing to let the police do the fighting, if there happened to be any. The guv'nor and I were feeling rather worn out after our experiences.

There was some fighting.

We were aware of this before we reached the bottom of the shaft. When we arrived at the foot we found the constables chasing about in all directions. Several Chinamen were prisoners, and others were fleeing into the sewers. It was only a matter of time before they would all be rounded up.

Yen Sang was among the first prisoners, for he had shown no resistance. Nelson Lee assured him that he would receive no punishment; but it was necessary for him to accompany his companions to the police-station.

The raid was a complete success. Considerable quantities of cocaine were discovered, and a good many cases of opium, to say nothing of other forbidden drugs. We had to thank Yen Sang for this, for he had disclosed the hiding-place.

Nelson Lee and I were walking down one of the tunnels looking for Lennard—for it was our intention to get back to the school at once. There was no earthly reason why we should stay any longer.

And then I checked myself as I walked.

"I thought I heard somebody yelling, sir," I said.

"And I think you did hear it, too," agreed Lee. "Why, good gracious! It seems to me that I can recognise——"

He paused, and flashed the light of his

electric torch into a black cavity. It extended some distance back, and at the very rear a form was huddled up against the wall. A glance told us that the fellow was bound and helpless. His mouth was gagged, but he had been able to utter muffled cries.

Nelson Lee directed his light full upon the captive, and both he and I gave a little exclamation of surprise.

"Handforth!" I gasped.

"Without a doubt!" said the guv'nor.

We jerked off the gag, and the ropes were soon cut. Handforth struggled up rather dazedly.

"Are you hurt, my boy?" asked Lee.

"My goodness!" said Handforth. "I—I was doing some detective work," he admitted.

"Some—what?" I yelled.

"You needn't roar at me like that!" said Handforth. "I met with bad luck, that's all. I was right on the track when a confounded Chinaman collared hold of me and carried me down a shaft——"

"It seems to me, Handforth, that you were out of your dormitory when you should not have been," said Nelson Lee severely. "A Chinaman was sent to the school to see if everything was all quiet, I presume. Were you alone, Handforth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me exactly what happened."

The junior did so, and I couldn't help grinning as I watched his crestfallen face. His efforts to shine as an amateur detective had been brought to an end very ignominiously.

"Under the circumstances, Handforth, we will say no more about this affair," said Nelson Lee good-naturedly. "You had better go back to your dormitory with Nipper, and I will take no further action."

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "You're a brick, sir."

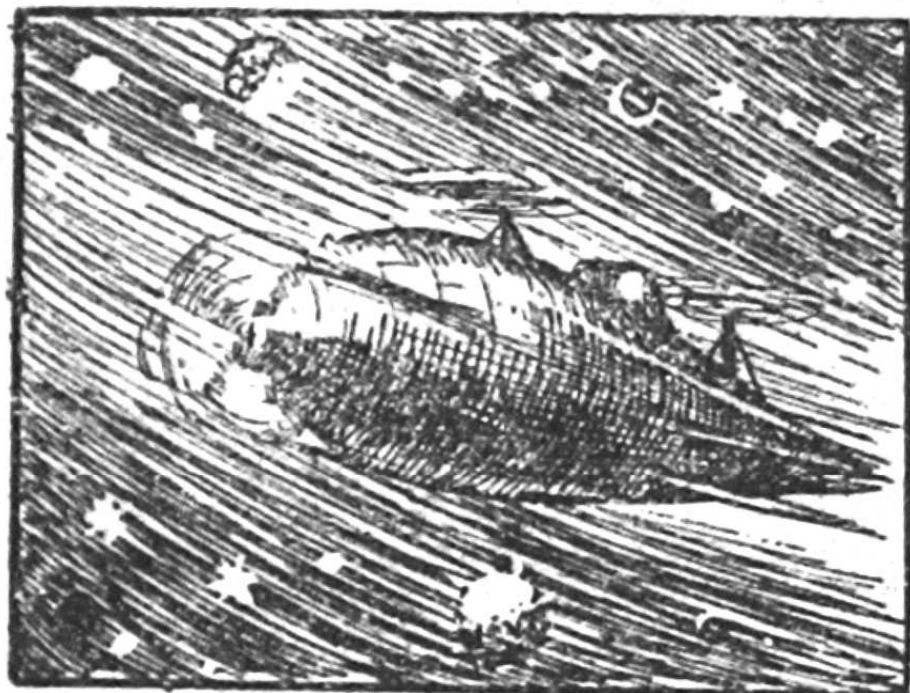
And on the morrow the whole school had nothing else to talk about except the raid upon the opium smugglers' headquarters. The papers were full of the affair, and Nelson Lee and I were mentioned largely. There was no longer any mystery concerning the haunted school.

And our stay in London was drawing to a close. St. Frank's itself was almost ready for us to return. I think most of the fellows were looking forward to the time when they would once more return to the famous old school.

THE END.

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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.

INTRODUCTION.

ROBERT GRESHAM, an inventor, is rescued from cannibals in Central Africa 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. Gresham tells his benefactors of his wonderful invention—a flying machine that will travel through space, and in recognition of their services 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 the invitation. They all return to England, where for some months the flying machine, christened the "Solar Monarch," is secretly constructed. At last everything is in readiness for starting. The adventurers are aboard, and as Gresham pulls a lever, the Solar Monarch shoots up into space, heading for the moon, which is reached in a week, the aeronef attaining a speed of 2,000 miles an hour. The surface of the moon appears destitute of life, but the explorers learn, at their peril, that the dark fissures and caves are inhabited by strange monsters. After many exciting adventures with these weird Lunar creatures, they return to the Solar Monarch and once more the trusty airship sets off for new worlds to conquer, her nose being this time directed towards Venus.

(Now read on)

Weidhoff's Comet—The Arrival on Venus—A World of Whiteness.

"I SAY, Mr. Gresham," he said, "I think something has happened to this speed-indicator. The thing's all at sea as far as I can make out. It registers that we're travelling at the crawling rate of eighty thousand miles an hour!"

Gresham took four swift strides to the instrument. Then he drew his tall form up, and his neatly-pointed beard straightened.

"My dear Frank," he said affably, "you

really are far from complimentary! I thought that my indicator would not come to grief so soon as this. It is you who have made the mistake—this instrument is perfectly correct."

"I make it out," said the professor, "that we shall reach Venus, at this rate, in about a fortnight's time—considering the distance, you can't call it slow travelling, can you?"

Some two hours later, while Frank and the professor were having a hundred up—Mac doing duty as marker—Gresham entered the saloon. He had been working hard, and had, at last, discovered which comet it was they had seen. But his calculations had resulted in something else as well.

"To put the matter briefly," he said, "this comet, known as Weidhoff's, will come right across our path—or rather we shall cross its path—before many hours have passed. In fact, we are in its way at the present moment."

"But won't the thing smash the wee shippie into smithereens?" Mac ejaculated, dropping a lump of chalk into a glass of wine in his amazement.

"I don't think so," said Gresham. "But, really, Mac, I cannot say for certain. Astronomers are all at sea as regards comets. It is generally admitted that they are composed of nothing but gases and such like—I sincerely trust this is the case, or good-bye to us!"

"And how long do you think it'll be before the thing strikes us—or we strike it?" Frank inquired.

"According to my calculations," declared the inventor, "Weidhoff's comet will cross our path in exactly sixteen hours from now."

The sixteen hours which Gresham had said would elapse before Weidhoff's comet struck the Solar Monarch seemed to fly like lightning, and all the time, from the conning-tower windows, it could be seen coming ever nearer, until at last it was so close that it lost all shape, and enveloped the whole sky—an awe-inspiring mass of luminosity and dense mist.

Towards the end of the given space—when the comet had lost all its glow—all the adventurers, including Abbie, collected in the con-

ning-tower, watching the comet with wondering eyes. Not much was said, for each of them was wondering whether they would be alive in another hour's time.

"She's getting nearer," Mac said suddenly. "My word, doesna she luke a sight! Ye might imagine she was only a hundred yards awa'."

And Mac, leaving his place, went and fetched his camera. A few moments after he had taken a couple of photographs of the flying mass—for there was still more than a chance that they would emerge safely. At last the sixteen hours had elapsed, and even then the comet seemed no nearer than it had done an hour previous.

Then suddenly Abbie cried out in alarm.

"Look out dere, sah," he exclaimed, pointing in the opposite direction. "By golly, we'm run into a Lunnon fog, fo' suah!"

There was just cause for the nigger's words, for in some unaccountable fashion the Solar Monarch had suddenly become enveloped in a whitish-looking vapour, which obscured everything in the universe. And as the minutes went on this vapour increased in density until the aeronef seemed to be shut in by impenetrable walls. Unable to see, the occupants of the conning-tower could do nothing but face one another once more.

Gresham spoke first.

"My friends," he said, "I think we have every reason to congratulate ourselves; this mysterious vapour is undoubtedly the comet which we have been so much dreading. Fortunately, it has proved, as I had expected, to be composed of nothing but gases, through which we are passing at the present moment."

"Then you consider we are safe?" queried the professor. "You think the danger is past?"

"I do. We may be enveloped in the gas for over forty-eight hours; you can reckon how far we shall travel in that time! But that matters little, for no harm can come of it."

And, as it turned out, no harm did come of it, for, after the expiration of fifty-three hours, the Solar Monarch shot clear of Weidhoff's comet, and went sailing away through space as serenely as ever.

So the days went by, nothing further happening to cause them anxiety. Frank and Mac found the time hang on their hands rather heavily, but there were plenty of books, etc., to amuse themselves with, when they got tired of staring out of the windows or of playing billiards. At the end of thirteen days Venus seemed to occupy the whole of the sky in front, while behind, old Mother Earth had dwindled to such an extent that she now looked like Venus does to the inhabitants of our globe.

At the end of the fifteenth day Gresham shut off the planet's attraction, and by the morning—according to their watches—for it never got dark now—the Solar Monarch had come practically to a standstill. From that time they progressed fairly slowly, until, on

the eve of the sixteenth day, they found themselves engulfed once more in vapour; but this time it was in the clouds which surrounded the planet.

The travellers were collected in the conning-tower, eager for the first sight of Venus, and when at last the vessel burst clear of the vapour, cries of wonder and amazement broke from them all. For, although they were expecting to see something utterly unlike anything they had ever seen before, they were hardly prepared for the sight which broke into view. The clouds they had just emerged from must have been fully thirty miles from the ground—a truly surprising altitude in comparison with those on earth—and the landscape which they could observe must have been fully a thousand miles in circumference. But the surprising thing was the appearance of Venus itself. Far away they could see an ocean, but immediately in front of the Solar Monarch a vast continent stretched. And everything—land, forests, and sea—were of a creamy-white hue!

For a moment the travellers believed that the planet was covered in snow; then they saw their mistake, for a huge forest of trees could be observed; and everything had the same creamy appearance. The five men remained staring at the scene, spellbound.

"Mon, it's wonderfu'!" Mac gasped out at last, banging Frank on the shoulder. "Did ye iver see anything like it before? Luke at the watter, there——"

"By golly!" broke in Abbie. "You'm mistaken, Massa Mac. Dat dere ain't water—it's milk, fo' suah."

"It certainly looks like milk more than anything else," laughed Frank.

They got nearer and nearer, until at last, with a slight shiver, the Solar Monarch grounded, bounded back a trifle, then settled down steadily.

"Hurrah!" yelled Mac, who, when he got excited, behaved more like a boy of twelve than a young man of twenty-three. "We're on a planet at last! Mr. Gresham, allow me to congratulate you on your invention."

And in his excitement Mac grabbed Gresham by the hand and wrung it heartily. Then he performed an impromptu cake-walk in the centre of the conning-tower floor while the inventor tested the atmosphere.

"As I thought," Gresham said, a moment later, drawing his stalwart frame up to its full extent, "the air on Venus is of such density as to be quite breathable. Now, before I open the door," he added, "I wish to say a word. I think it will be advisable to affix the propeller and suspensory-screws at once. Before we even land, you understand. We know not what this world contains, and it would be foolish in the extreme to leave the Solar Monarch as she now stands—utterly helpless. You will say, I could bring the earth's attraction to bear, and so get clear of the ground. Well, so I could; but that would be a clumsy method. I thought it

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

all out before starting. Once the screws are fixed, we shall be able to sail into the clouds at a moment's notice."

The others, seeing the force of Gresham's remarks, at once acquiesced, and they set about finding the parts, etc., necessary. Gresham opened the conning-tower outer door, and immediately a wave of warm air entered the room. It was precisely similar to the air on earth, only it seemed to be a trifle damper and warmer. This, however, may have been the peculiarity of the spot where they had landed.

Very soon the tapping of hammers and the creaking of bolts and screws proclaimed the work to be progressing merrily, and presently—for the parts were all ready to bolt into place—the Solar Monarch began to change her appearance—to put on a fresh coat, as it were. From being a projectile, she now assumed the appearance of an airship. Round the conning-tower a platform had been laid down, a stout rail completely protecting it, thus forming a deck. The two huge suspensory-screws—or helicopters—were next placed in position, with four stays apiece. The blades of the screws—two—measured six feet, so that each helix was twelve feet in width. They were composed of the same metal as the ship itself—gresium.

Last of all came the propeller, under the aft-tank, and when that was completed—the large, runner-like skids protecting it from the ground—the four begrimed and perspiring toilers collected on deck, Abbie remaining in the engine-room to tend the motors—which he liked, if anything, better than cooking. A telegraph and speaking tube had been fitted up on deck, communicating below. These also opened into the conning-tower.

When all was ready, and they could hear the gentle thud-thud of the pulsating motors, Gresham telegraphed to Abbie to lift the Solar Monarch. The inventor was looking anxious and excited, for, although he had been successful with a model, this was the first time he had experimented with the real ship.

Suddenly there was a low, moaning sound, which rose to a shriek as the suspensory-screws whirled round with terrific velocity. Then, gradually, the aeronef lifted itself from the ground, rising very slowly and steadily. Gresham's face showed triumph, but he was not satisfied. In the dense atmosphere of Venus the Solar Monarch should have risen much quicker.

He shouted down the tube to Abbie, and inquired if the negro had got all speed on.

"No, sah," came the answer. "I'se only got de engines at half-speed, jest fo' to see if dis yere vessel would leabe de groun'. By golly, she'm workin' fine!"

"Then race your engines, you designing rascal!" cried Gresham joyfully. "Make them go for all they are worth!"

"Right, sah! We'll be in de clouds jest directly, fo' suah!"

Abbie advanced up, and the screws shrieked in reply. The aeronef seemed to

shoot upwards; the ground was left behind as if by magic. The inventor turned a triumphant face towards his companions, who were gazing over the deck-rail at the country beneath them. They were all hugely delighted.

"My friends, now I can truthfully say that the Solar Monarch has performed everything which I claimed for her. She has succeeded in reaching the planet Venus, and has also succeeded in flying in the atmosphere. I am justly proud of her. It now remains to discover at what speed she can fly."

He telegraphed to Abbie to ease the suspensory-screws, and a moment later the aeronef was stationary. Then the massive propeller began to revolve, causing a low, droning sound, which, as the speed advanced, rose higher and higher, until, intermixed with the noise of the upper fans, grew so deafening that the occupants of the deck could scarcely hear one another speak.

The airship shot forward, and when going full-power attained a speed of two hundred miles per hour. Gresham's was a triumph, indeed! And, as he gave the order to descend, he was feeling particularly pleased with both himself and his invention.

She alighted as gently as a feather, and then her crew sat down to a well-earned meal. They had been too intent on their work to notice their surroundings. True, it was practically impossible to escape noticing the huge size of the sun, which had been pouring down its pitiless rays on their perspiring backs the whole time, for the thick clouds had dispersed, and now there was nothing but clear sky overhead.

When the meal was over the professor proposed taking a walk in the forest. His companions eagerly consented, and, leaving Abbie in charge, they sallied forth. They found that, unlike on the moon, the force of gravity was practically the same as that on earth. The sun was high overhead, so there was no danger of being stranded in the dark. When they reached the bottom of the ladder they found themselves standing on grass; but, instead of being green, it was of a delicate cream-colour. It seemed almost a pity to walk on it, it looked so beautiful.

The Solar Monarch had descended in a small clearing, but very soon the four explorers entered the forest. Strange bushes and trees grew on all sides—trees with branches and leaves just like the trees at home, but with the difference in colour, and the fact that the leaves were some two feet broad, almost square in shape, and a quarter of an inch thick.

Suddenly there was a screeching, and a flock of birds, about the size of thrushes, flew out of a tall tree. In what little time they had to see them the travellers noticed that they were as ordinary earth-birds, but they were of a delicate pink, and they possessed no feathers—their wings were like those of a bat.

(Continued overleaf.)

"This is a rummy place, if you like," Frank commented, staring after the flock. "Fancy everything being almost white! I wonder if there are any men and women here?"

"Concerning the whiteness," said Gresham, "every astronomer on earth knows that this planet always shines with a particular brilliance. This discovery explains it. Venus reflects seventy per cent. of the light it obtains from the sun. It is scarcely surprising, considering the great reflective power this cream-coloured vegetation gives to it."

They walked onwards. All around them insects buzzed and hummed—for the heat was the heat of the tropics on earth—insects almost identical in size with those one sees in the Central African forest, but of entirely different shape and nature. Once or twice small animals scuttled across their path—too quickly for them to distinguish their form, however.

There was no wind, and under the vast foliage high above them the air was close and damp. Suddenly they came to a small clearing, and in the centre of this was a pool—a pool of milky-looking water.

"By Jove, I'm thirsty!" Frank exclaimed. "I wonder if this'll be good to drink?"

"I shouldn't advise you to try it," the professor returned. "For all we know, it may be poisonous."

"Then I don't drink this time," said Frank decidedly.

He picked up a stone, and threw it into the still and sullen pool. It fell with a dull splash, and the four adventurers recoiled, gasping.

"My hat, I shouldna like tae drink any o' that!" spluttered Mac, making a wry face. "Phew! Did ye ever smell such a fragrant scent before?"

The stench which the pond emitted was truly appalling, being strongly reminiscent of out-of-date eggs—and Venus's visitors looked at it aghast. If all the water on the planet was similar to this, there was no chance of replenishing their store. On the opposite bank a clump of tall reeds grew, and even while they looked they parted, and a head came into view. The quartet stared at it curiously, and the head stared back at them. It was a weird-looking object, pale green in colour, and of shape not unlike a toad. Two watery-looking eyes protruded from the head, and in place of nostrils curious antennae could be seen. These were waving about restlessly. As its visitors made no move, the monster evidently grew restless as well, for it opened up half its head—it could scarcely be termed a mouth, for it was of huge proportions—and revealed two sets of pitch-black teeth, while a peculiar mumbling emanated from its throat.

"When's the beastly thing going to shift?" muttered Frank. "I want to see what its body's like. Ah, thanks, old man!"

The Venus inhabitant seemed very obliging, for scarcely had Frank uttered the words than it lumbered into full view, and commenced walking round the pool towards the explorers.

"D'ye think he'll gang for us?" Mac whispered to his chum. "Mon, he's no' a sma' size, I'll have ye ken!"

The Scot was right. The toad-like creature was fully seven feet in height, and broad in proportion. It possessed four legs, similar to an earth animal, but they were of huge size, giving the body the appearance of being insignificant. And this really was the case. The head and legs—as it appeared to the travellers—were absurd in proportion to its body. No doubt the creature had something of the same idea in its own mind concerning the human beings, if the truth be known. There were three joints in each leg, and the fore were shaped precisely similar to the rear. It came onwards, still transfixing its foes with its huge, protruding eyes, and uttering strange noises.

(To be continued.)

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