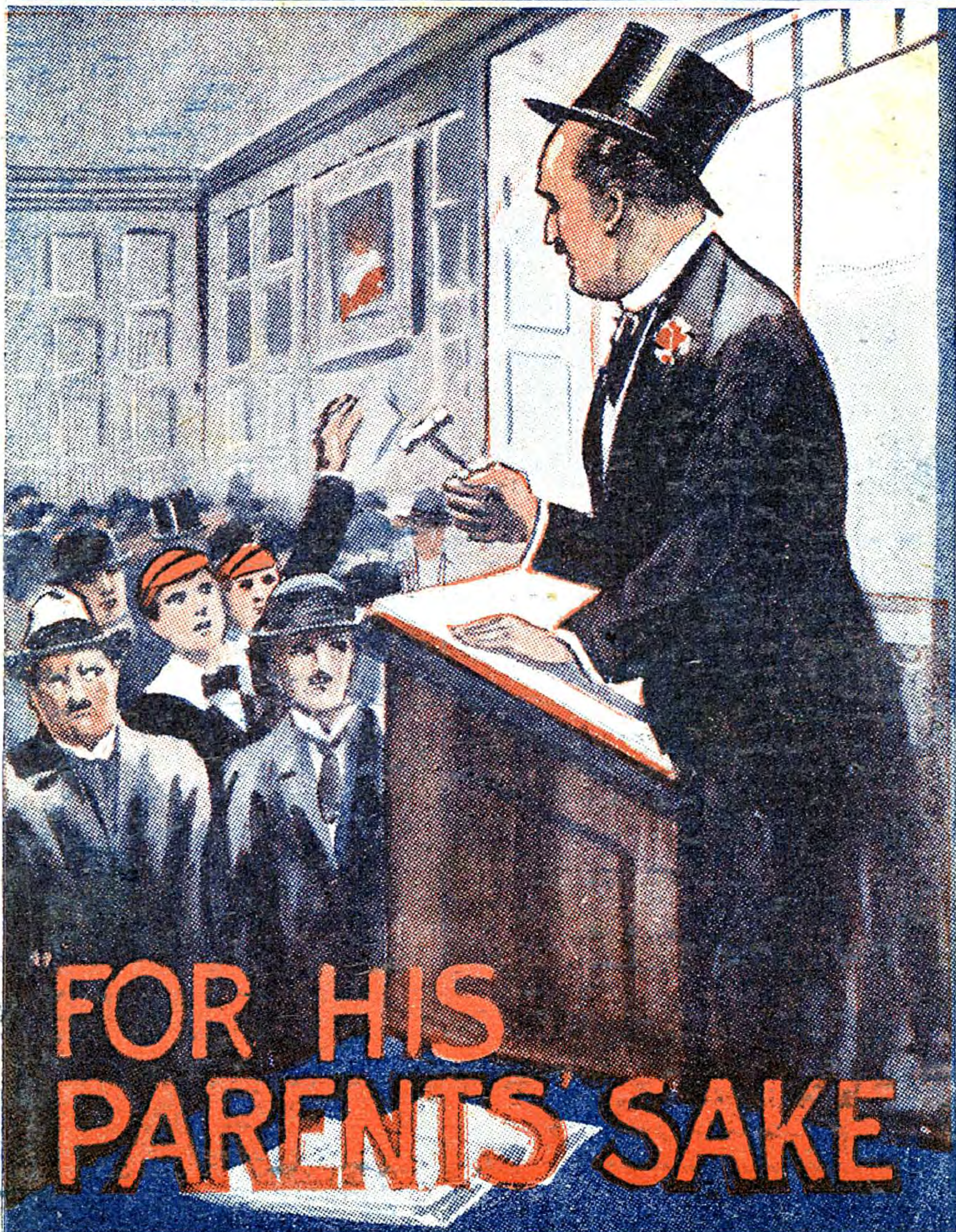


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No. 335.

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November 5, 1921.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE VISITOR FROM THE DARKNESS!

"TEN thousand pounds!"

Tom Howard whistled softly after he had uttered the words. Then he lay back in his chair, placed his feet on the fender, and puffed at his pipe.

"Ten thousand quid!" he repeated. "That's a tidy sum, Reggie, and all for getting five goals in the Porthampton match! That's what I call easy money!"

Reginald Pitt smiled.

"It was a wager," he said. "But, of course, I sha'n't allow Lord Dorrimore to pay it properly. My pater will pay it back as soon as everything is straightened out. And Dorrie only made the wager for a special purpose."

"Yes, I know that," said Howard. "Lord Dorrimore seems to be a jolly good sort."

"He's one of the best," said Pitt. "He's a brick!"

The pair were sitting in Tom Howard's cosy little front parlour in Bannington, and it was Sunday evening. Outside the weather was rather blustery, and rain was falling. It was by no means a pleasant night.

Reginald Pitt, of the Remove at St. Frank's, had been doing some very peculiar things of late—and one of them was that he had joined the Bannington

Football Club. He had played splendidly in his own position of outside-right, and had been doing wonders for the League club in its first team fixtures.

But now practically all the trouble was going over, and it seemed that there would be an end to all worry and anxiety. Before so very long Pitt would be able to go back to St. Frank's, and take up his old position in the Remove.

Jack Grey would be only too eager to welcome Pitt back in Study E, and practically every member of the Remove was anxiously awaiting the time when Pitt would return to the fold.

As for myself, I was quite keen upon getting Pitt back, for we had sadly missed his play in our football fixtures. With him in the Junior Eleven we could be almost certain of winning our games with rival schools. Without him we could do fairly well—but he was a tower of strength to any side.

And now, at last, it seemed that the troubled waters would be smoothed over.

"You've been having some rough times of late, Reggie," said Tom Howard, as he shifted into an easier position. "You've got some pluck, too!"

"It wasn't a question of pluck," said Pitt. "You know all the facts, Tom, and I simply had to do something. You know that my people were in a bad way, and I only took on this job for the Bannington Football Club because I

needed the money. You've been a real friend to me, Tom."

Tom Howard laughed.

"Nonsense!" he replied. "You bunked away from St. Frank's because of a misunderstanding, and I should have been a fine sort if I hadn't asked you to stay with me. I'm only too glad to have you here, in fact. My mother's away, and I've got the whole house to myself. I was as lonely as a hermit until you came. And I suppose you'll be clearing off soon."

"As soon as everything is all right I shall have to go back to St. Frank's, of course," said Pitt. "Strictly speaking, I ought to be there now. But Mr. Lee promised that I could stay with you until Raspe was arrested and exposed."

Tom had removed his pipe.

"What's all this about Raspe?" he asked. "I've never heard the yarn properly—and there's no reason why you shouldn't tell me now, is there? Doesn't Raspe live somewhere near Bannington, in a big house?"

Pitt nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "Simon Raspe was the man who swindled my father out of everything he possessed—even to the extent of seizing our house and home. I was away for the summer holidays, you know, and when I came back I found that this man, Raspe, was living in my parents' home—and my people were in lodgings, and nearly broke!"

"That was a stiff shot, if you like!" said Tom Howard. "And in face of all that, you kept a stiff upper lip, and did all you could. Reggie, I've got a big admiration for you."

"But my people weren't the only ones who suffered by Raspe's villainy, as you know," went on Pitt. "My father's private secretary, Stanley Lockwood, was sent to prison. Which reminds me that we haven't seen anything of him since that night we rigged him out in some of your clothes. I've been wondering if he's been recaptured."

Tom was thoughtful for a moment.

He was thinking of that night, only about a week ago, when they had encountered an escaped convict in the lane. This convict had turned out to be Stanley Lockwood, and Pitt had recognised him at once as his father's old secretary. Pitt knew that Lockwood had

been sent to prison on a trumped-up charge, and he had helped Lockwood to escape.

The unfortunate man had been provided with clothing, and he had been told that he could stay for the time being in an old bathing hut near the river. But Lockwood had failed to take advantage of this latter offer. He had gone, and neither Pitt nor Howard had seen him since.

"Yes, I can't quite make out about that chap," said Tom Howard. "It's a queer thing why he didn't stop in the little hut. He'd have been quite safe there. But we needn't talk about him, Pitt. You're going to London to-morrow, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I wish you luck," said Howard simply.

"Thanks. You know why I'm going, don't you?"

"Well, I think so," replied Howard. "This Raspe chap has put your home up for auction, hasn't he? And the sale is to take place to-morrow morning?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "So I'm going up with this ten thousand of Dorrie's, and I think I shall be able to buy everything. Won't it be glorious? Won't it be simply ripping to buy all the old home and furniture, and everything, and then give my father and mother a surprise!"

"Rather," said Tom Howard. "It'll be a fine piece of news for them when they hear that! But do you think ten thousand will be sufficient?"

"Oh, I'm sure of it," said Pitt. "You know what these sales are. It's quite likely the whole place will be knocked down for six or seven. It's terrible the low price property is fetching now-a-days."

"That's right enough," agreed Howard. "What I'm hoping for is to see the news that Raspe has been arrested. Mr. Lee is working hard on the case, isn't he?"

"Yes, and I'm certain he'll succeed," said Pitt.

His confidence was justified, for even at that moment Simon Raspe was in a cell in London—awaiting his trial. Reginald Pitt didn't know it, but Nelson Lee, with the aid of Scotland Yard, had effected Raspe's arrest on the very

afternoon of the Porthampton match at Bannington—that is, on the previous afternoon.

And, on Monday morning, Raspe would be brought before the magistrate and formally charged with conspiracy and fraud. The case against him was of the strongest possible description, and he would have no loophole for escape.

Tom Howard rose, and stretched himself.

"Well, I suppose we'd better be getting to bed," he said, with a yawn. "You've got to be up early in the morning, Reggie—you're going up to town by the first train, aren't you?"

"Yes, rather," replied Pitt. "I want to be in London by ten. This sale starts at twelve, you know, and I'd like to have a look round first. You don't know how happy I am, Tom! To think that I'm able to——"

"Hallo! What was that?" interrupted Howard.

He turned and looked sharply at the window.

"Didn't you hear something?" he asked, looking at Pitt.

"I thought I heard a slight tap," said the junior. "A twig, I suppose, or something of that kind. It's rather windy, you know, and there's some creeper——"

Tap—tap!

This time there was no mistake about it. The sound upon the window was caused by somebody using his knuckles. It was certainly not a chance scraping of a twig, or a piece of creeper.

"Who on earth can it be?" muttered Howard. "Why, it's after ten, and there's no reason why anybody should come round to the window! What's the matter with the front door?"

"I suppose we'd better open the window, and see," suggested Pitt.

Howard strode across and pulled up the blind. A pale face was pressed against the glass outside—a wan, haggard face with a stumpy growth of beard upon the chin. The man looked like a tramp at first sight. But, somehow, there was an air of refinement about him, in spite of his unkempt appearance. Tom Howard and Pitt stared.

"What in the world——"

"Why, it's Mr. Lockwood!" exclaimed Pitt quickly.

"By George, so it is!" said Howard.

He flung open the window, and the man leaned against the sill. He was soaking wet with the rain, and he seemed weak, and certainly weary. For a few moments he remained there without speaking.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lockwood?" asked Pitt sharply.

"I—I'm sorry to come and trouble you like this," exclaimed the visitor. "I didn't want to bother you again, but—but I'm just about done. I can't carry on. I—I'd like some food——"

"Great Scott! Come in!" put in Howard quickly. "Man alive, why didn't you come before? And what have you been doing all this time?"

Lockwood scrambled through the window, aided by the others. He got inside, and was led across to the easy chair. Then the window was closed, and the blind drawn. The escaped convict seemed too weak to speak much.

"Here, get this inside of you!" said Howard sharply.

He handed Lockwood a small glass of brandy, and the latter swallowed it at one gulp. It had a good effect upon him, for he brightened up at once. And he looked at his companions gratefully.

"You stay here with him, Reggie, and I'll see about some food," said Tom Howard, bustling to the door. "I'll soon have something ready. By the way, you'd better rush upstairs, and get some dry things."

"Don't—don't trouble," said Lockwood, as Howard passed out of the room. "I'm all right, Mr. Reginald. I've had some pretty hard times, and this won't do me any harm. But I'd like some food."

"Where have you been?" demanded Pitt.

"Wandering about, mostly."

"But why?"

"What else could I do?"

"You could have stayed here—we shouldn't have minded," said Pitt. "You would have been safe, and well cared for——"

"I couldn't do it, Master Reginald," interrupted Lockwood, shaking his head. "You and your friend were kind to me as it was, and I couldn't endanger you by remaining here. It wouldn't be right—it wouldn't have been playing the game."

"But you could have stopped in that bathing hut——"

"I didn't like doing that, either," interrupted Lockwood. "It belongs to Mr. Howard, and if the police had got me— Oh, well, perhaps Mr. Howard would have been in trouble. So I've been wandering about, skulking about in the daylight, and trying to get something to eat at night. It's been—awful. I think I'd rather give myself up, and finish it all."

"There's no need to do that now," said Pitt quickly. "Why, before long the whole truth will be out, and you will be a free man."

Lockwood shook his head sadly.

"I've given up hope of that," he said dully. "I don't think that'll ever happen, Master Reginald. "Raspe is too clever—he'll never allow himself to be exposed. Just give me something to eat, and then I'll go straight to the police-station."

"No fear!" said Pitt firmly.

"But—"

"We'll give you some grub, and some dry clothes and some money," went on Pitt. "Then you can clear out, and go straight to London. Why, there's hardly any fear of you being retaken now. The hue and cry is over, and you're not in any danger. I tell you that Mr. Lee will get you out of all the trouble. All you need is a little patience."

Lockwood looked at Pitt with hope in his eyes.

"Do you think this—really?" he asked.

"Of course I do."

"Then it won't be necessary for me to worry," exclaimed Lockwood, closing his eyes. "I might just as well give myself up. Don't you understand, Master Reginald? If my innocence is to be proved, I've nothing to fear. A few weeks longer in prison won't make much difference. I'd rather do it than go about in fear of every uniform I see. You—you don't know what it's like!"

Tom Howard came briskly into the room.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Why, you lazy young bounder! You haven't given Mr. Lockwood any change of clothes, or anything. This won't do! Come along—we'll soon fix you up!"

"May I have just a bite first?" asked our guest weakly.

"Of course—it's all ready."

Lockwood was led into the little kitchen at the rear. And there he

found a meal all ready for him—some cold meat, bread, and something hot to drink. He fell upon the food eagerly, and it was a pleasure to see him eating.

He looked much better after he had partaken of the meal, and he declared that he felt quite fit, and was not going to bother them any longer.

But both Pitt and Howard urged Lockwood to stay.

And then came a surprise.

Rap—rap—rap!

Three sharp knocks came heavily upon the front door, to be followed at once by a peal at the bell. Lockwood started up with a hoarse little cry. His face went even paler than it already had been.

"The police!" he muttered hoarsely.

"Rubbish! Why should you assume that it's the police?" whispered Tom Howard. "I expect it's one of the fellows. Hearne generally knocks and rings like that. You just stay here, Mr. Lockwood, and I'll see who it is. There's no need to worry."

Pitt grasped Howard's sleeve.

"But—but supposing it is the police?" he whispered.

"I'll give a whistle," replied Tom promptly. "Then Mr. Lockwood will have a chance to slip out at the back."

Howard realised that he, himself, was in danger—for it was a serious offence to harbour an escaped convict. But Tom was confident as he went to the front door, and threw it open. He was rather startled to find the bright light of a bullseye flashed into his face.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Howard," said the voice of a constable—a man whom Tom knew. "We've got to—"

"What do you want?" asked Howard sharply.

Another figure strode forward, and it was that of Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington Police.

"We have information that a man named Lockwood is in your house at the present moment," he exclaimed. "Please take this matter calmly, Howard, and make no attempt to evade the law. Lockwood is an escaped convict, and he was seen to enter your house by means of a window. A constable was passing down the side lane at the time, and he saw Lockwood come in."

Howard tried to bluster.

"What on earth do you mean?" he

asked. "Of course you can come in—search the place, if you want to. I don't mind!"

He tried to whistle carelessly, and then led the way into the parlour. The inspector and constable followed, and gave a casual glance round. Of course, there was no sign of Lockwood.

"Would you care to go upstairs?" asked Howard.

"What about the kitchen?" asked the inspector grimly.

"Oh, just as you like."

He opened the door, and glanced quickly in. Then he caught his breath in sharply. For Lockwood was still there, and he had apparently made no attempt to get away. He was standing in full view.

"There's your man!" said the inspector.

The constable went forward, and took hold of Lockwood's arm.

"It's better," muttered the unfortunate man. "Please forgive me, Mr. Howard—you didn't know that I was wanted by the police, did you? I'm an escaped convict, and it's better that I should be retaken."

Tom Howard bit his lip. He realised at once that Lockwood was saying this so that he—Howard—should not be implicated.

The inspector looked round, and nodded. Then he went up to Lockwood with a peculiar smile on his face. He gazed searchingly into the convict's features.

"Yes, there's no mistake here," he said. "I'm sorry, Lockwood, but you must come with us to the police station."

"I'm ready," said Lockwood quietly. "I hope Mr. Howard won't get into any trouble, inspector? It wouldn't be fair —"

"You needn't worry about that," Mr. Lockwood, interrupted Mr. Jameson. "Nobody will get into any trouble, I can assure you."

The escaped convict looked at the inspector in surprise. What did he mean? He had called him "Mr. Lockwood!" Surely that was not the customary method in which a police inspector spoke to a recaptured convict?

Jameson chuckled.

"I've got some good news for you, Mr. Lockwood," he said. "It's just as well that you have been found here. I'm proud to meet you, sir, and you have

my full sympathy in all the troubles you have been through."

Lockwood stared.

"I—I don't understand!" he said.

"My dear sir, it is quite plain," smiled Inspector Jameson. "Owing to the efforts of Mr. Nelson Lee, your innocence has been established, and the prison authorities have received instructions to release you as soon as the necessary formalities have been gone through. Virtually speaking, you are a free man, even now."

Lockwood's eyes lighted up.

"Is—is this really true?" he panted eagerly.

"Every word of it."

"Oh, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Lockwood fervently.

"Free!" yelled Pitt. "Oh, ripping! I knew it was coming, Mr. Lockwood. I said you wouldn't have to wait long!"

"We both said so, Mr. Lockwood!" said Howard enthusiastically.

The inspector smiled.

"Oh, and you were supposed to know nothing about it, eh?" he exclaimed. "A bright pair, I must say! Well, never mind, you knew better than the police did. Everything will soon come right now."

And Stanley Lockwood went off with the police, supremely happy in the knowledge that at last his innocence had been established, and that soon he would be a free man, with his honour redeemed, and with his fair name cleared.

CHAPTER II.

OFF ON THE BIG ADVENTURE!

JACK GREY lay in bed, but he didn't sleep.

He was in the Remove dormitory at St. Frank's, and it was Sunday night—about the same time, in fact, that Mr. Lockwood was hearing good news at Bannington. And Jack Grey was not the only junior who was wakeful.

Lights were out in the dormitory, but most of the fellows were talking.

"Something ought to be done!" Handforth was saying. "Dash it all, it ain't right that Pitt should be away from St. Frank's like this. We want him back here, with us—and we're going to have him!"

"Rather!"

"My hat! Didn't he play a ripping game on Saturday?" grinned De Valerie. "I never saw anything like it—five goals on his own—five goals against a team like Porthampton!"

"And the others got two, making seven altogether!" said Church. "Talk about a wipe up! And we can't have Pitt with us! I think it's rotten, you know. Handy's quite right—something ought to be done."

"Can't you fellows get to sleep?" I demanded. "If you'll only have a little patience, things will come right soon enough—without any suggestions from you."

"And when do you think Pitt will be back here?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Oh, before the end of next week," I said. "Probably on Monday or Tuesday. We want him on Saturday, anyway, to play in one of our matches."

"But why isn't he here now?" asked Handforth. "That's what I can't understand. He only ran away because all you fellows made a dead set against him—because you thought he was backing horses, and gambling, and all that sort of rot! We know the truth now, and he knows that everything's all right. Why doesn't he come back?"

"There's a special reason for it, Handy," said Jack Grey. "Everybody knows that there's something more behind it. I'm not giving away any secrets by saying that. When the matter's settled up, Reggie will come back."

"Let's hope so," said Church.

"He's one of the best!"

"Rather!"

"The conversational activities are extraordinarily extreme," exclaimed a soft voice from one of the beds. "I was really under the misunderstanding that we had retired to this astounding apartment for the purpose of partaking of the excellent slumber!"

"Hallo!" said Handforth. "The tame dictionary has started!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I don't wonder at it," I put in. "Why can't you fellows get to sleep? Don't worry, Hussi, the chaps will soon be quiet."

Hussi Ranjit Lal Khan turned over in his bed. The Indian junior had been trying to get to sleep for some little time, but, considering the commotion in the

dormitory, this was quite impossible. His complaint was a reasonable one.

"Your words have enlightened me enormously, Nipper," he said. "I shall be overflowing with the magnificent gratification when complete silence is formulated. It is quite impossible to sleep while such ludicrous noisiness proceeds to aggravate the harmony of the dormitory."

"Hussi Khan says 'Shut up!' only he puts it into a volume!" chuckled De Valerie. "You chaps had better ease off."

"We're not going to shut up because Hussi Khan tells us to. Rats to him. We'll be quiet when we want to."

"Dry up, Hussi!"

"Go to sleep, if you want to!"

The Indian junior sat up.

"Is it absurdly possible for any person to sleep while this beautiful noise reigns?" he inquired. "It is not for me to command the supreme silence, but my obligation will be of the most wonderful order if you will only complicate with my nefarious suggestion and become silent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're getting mixed, Hussi!"

"My mixture is of my own making!" said the Indian boy. "At the present moment I am desirous of the sleep which brings unhealth. And I am confidently exaggerating the politeness, when I extravagantly request a silence!"

Hussi Khan could not get anybody to take any notice of him, so he lay down and tried to get to sleep, in spite of the conversation that still went on. The majority of the juniors were talking about Pitt, and wondering how they would get him back.

One by one they grew sleepy, and dropped off. And, at last, silence actually did reign in the dormitory. But Jack Grey still kept wakeful. He was thinking of his absent chum.

"I wish I could go to London to-morrow!" Jack told himself. "It would be ripping! And Pitt needs somebody, too. He's going to that sale, and he won't have a soul with him. But it's impossible for me to go!"

At last Jack fell off to sleep.

But when he awoke in the morning his thoughts were still the same. He was first to get dressed. And he got down even before the rising bell commenced to

ring—before any of the other fellows in the dormitory were awake.

As a matter of fact, Jack had an idea of shooting off to Bannington on his bicycle to have a few words with Pitt, before he left for London. Jack Grey knew he was going by a train which left at about half-past eight.

Jack had hardly got down into the lobby before he found himself face to face with Nelson Lee.

"Up so early, Grey?" said Lee. "How is this?"

"Oh, I—I couldn't sleep," said Jack lamely.

"Indeed! And why not?" asked Nelson Lee. "You are looking worried, my boy. Is there anything on your mind?"

"Not—not exactly, sir," replied Jack. "I've been thinking about Pitt. He's going to London this morning, sir, and—"

"And no doubt you would like to go with him?" smiled Nelson Lee. "That's all very well, Grey, but you have your lessons to attend to. I know that you are Pitt's particular chum. He has told you about his trip, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"The lad is very anxious about it," said Lee. "He's going to this sale, and the matter is very dear to his heart, for he wants to purchase his father's property, if it can be managed."

"Yes, I know, sir, and that's why I couldn't sleep," said Jack. "Pitt's going by the eight-thirty train from Bannington, and—and—"

"You are simply bursting with eagerness to ask me for permission to go, too?" chuckled Nelson Lee. "Is that it, Grey? Cannot you pluck up sufficient courage to ask me?"

Jack Grey's eyes gleamed.

"Rather, sir!" he replied. "But—but I didn't think it would be any good! May I go, sir?"

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"Well, as the circumstances are so exceptional, I think, perhaps, I might excuse you for to-day, Grey," he replied kindly. "It will give you a great amount of pleasure, and it will be better for Pitt to have a companion with him. Yes, you may go, but you must be back before calling over this evening."

Jack Grey fairly jumped.

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!" he exclaimed. "You're a brick, sir!"

He didn't wait any longer, but fairly rushed out of the Ancient house and tore to the bicycle shed. He had never expected this—he had never hoped for it. What a lucky thing it was that he had got up before the other fellows!

He rode to Bannington as though life depended upon it. The morning was quite fine after the rain of the previous evening, although the roads were still wet and muddy.

But Jack didn't care anything about the mud. He sped on, his only anxiety being that he might be too late—that he might arrive at the station to find that the train had already gone.

The air was brisk and clear, and so the exercise of cycling was invigorating, and Jack Grey made good speed, and arrived at Bannington Station just as the first London train was rolling in against the platform.

Jack hurled his bicycle into the cloak-room, grabbed the check, and bought his ticket. Then he pelted on to the platform.

He looked up and down anxiously.

Then he caught sight of a face at one of the windows, and he rushed up, and hurled himself into the compartment. Reginald Pitt was just sitting down and making himself comfortable. He was very surprised to see his study chum.

"Why, Jack," he exclaimed delightedly, "what on earth's the idea of this? Come to see me off, eh? Look out, the train's going——"

"And so am I!" said Jack breathlessly.

"You're coming with me?" asked Pitt, staring.

"Yes."

"But my dear chap, you'll get into a frightful row," exclaimed Reggie. "You'll be away all day, and it'll mean nothing less than a thousand lines and a gating for a month! It's not worth it, old man!"

"Yes, it is," said Jack. "Don't you want me with you?"

"You old ass, there's nothing I'd like better," said Pitt. "I should have been all alone without you. But think of the cost, Jack! You'll get into awful hot water——"

"You ass!" grinned Jack Grey. "I've got permission to come."

"What?"

"Mr. Lee gave me his sanction—and here I am," said Jack. "My hat! I

rode like the dickens from St. Frank's, and thought I should miss the train. It's a lucky thing I got up early this morning."

Pitt was overjoyed at having Jack Grey with him. Things were all working out splendidly, and the very knowledge that Lockwood's innocence had been proved told Pitt that Nelson Lee must have been doing big things.

Reginald Pitt told Jack Grey all about it, and the latter listened with great interest.

"Don't you see, everything's becoming rosy!" finished up Pitt. "Mr. Lockwood's as good as a free man, and that means that Mr. Lee has been successful. Think of it! He's been doing great things, and perhaps my pater will recover his fortune soon. If that comes on the top of buying the home back, won't it be glorious?"

"Rather!" said Jack. And it will happen, too—don't you worry, Reggie. I'd trust Mr. Lee with anything. He's a wonder!"

The journey up to London was quite a pleasant one—far more pleasant than Pitt had been expecting. Grey, of course, was in the seventh heaven. It was like a day's holiday for him, and he was delighted, in any case, to be in the company of his old chum.

All the clouds between them had passed away now, and their friendship was even more firmly established than before.

When they arrived in London they lost no time in getting on the Underground, and making for Duncan Square. For it was No. 59, Duncan Square, which was for sale. It was the house which Reginald Pitt had known since childhood—the home, which his father and mother had established over twenty years earlier.

It was—home!

And to think of it all being sold up, and taken away, was too awful for contemplation. Pitt gloated when he thought of the possibilities. While his father and mother thought that everything was going he would save the house, the furniture, and the whole property!

He would buy it and give it back to them.

When the two juniors arrived on their extraordinary mission, they found quite a crowd of people there already. And, when the position came to be reviewed, it

certainly was a strange position for the two boys to be in. Indeed, it seemed ludicrous, on the face of it.

They had come to this sale to outbid every other would-be purchaser! A junior schoolboy had come with ten thousand pounds in his pocket to purchase a house and all the property it contained! There was something rather humorous about it, but, all the same, something pitiful, too.

Would Pitt be able to realise his ideal?

Would the money be sufficient? Would he be able to buy the old home back? He did not think of anything else. He was sure he would be able to do it. He didn't think of any other possibility.

Pitt led the way into the house through the front door. He was afraid that somebody who knew him might be there. He didn't want that. If possible he would prefer to buy everything without being known. His eyes glowed as he looked round the comfortable hall, with everything in its proper place, just as it had been left when he had last been at home.

Nothing had been disturbed—not a piece of furniture or an ornament had been shifted. For this was not an auction sale where all the items were to be sold separately, for everything was placed into lots. There were no disfiguring labels upon the furniture. And it was fine to see it all just as it had been left.

The house and all it contained was to be sold in one lot—as a whole. And that's what made it so simple; that's what made it easy for Pitt to be here and to bid for it.

"Well, Jack, old son, we've arrived!" exclaimed Reggie softly. "And before we leave, everything you see is going to be mine—mine! And I'm going to hand it back to father and mother within an hour afterwards."

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CHAPTER III.

THE AUCTION SALE.

IN spite of himself, Pitt could not help feeling sad as he walked through all the rooms, that were so well known to him.

He found himself glaring almost aggressively at the other people, wandering in and out of the different apartments.

What right had they here? How dare they be in these sacred rooms, where nobody but the Pitt family had a right?

This was how Reginald Pitt felt.

And, after all, it was a perfectly natural feeling. Simon Raspe had swindled his father out of this property, and then he had got it put up for auction! It was a cruel, heartless thing to do. But now the great moment had arrived, and Pitt was thrilled as he thought of the big thing that he was about to do.

"Thank goodness nothing has been touched!" he said. "It's all the same—every blessed article! Oh, Jack! If I haven't got enough money. I don't know what I shall do! If somebody else buys it——"

"Don't you worry—that won't happen," said Jack Grey. "It's all serene, old man."

"I do hope it is!"

"It must be. Everything's gone all right so far that there'll be no hitch now," declared Grey confidently. "You mustn't get the wind up, Reggie, old son. When is the sale supposed to start?"

"About twelve o'clock."

"Oh, we've got heaps of time to go about, having a look round. There's all sorts of things you can show me."

They did go round, from room to room, taking no notice of the other people who were flocking in and out. In spite of himself, Pitt could not help feeling somewhat bitter. It was a shame that anything like this should occur—a wicked shame! For people to be walking about the house, inspecting every article of furniture, criticising it, struck Pitt as something almost beyond endurance. But there was nothing he could do to stop it.

And, anyhow, it couldn't last for long.

As soon as the property was sold it would belong to the one who bought it, and then every stranger would have to go. Pitt could not help having day-dreams. He pictured to himself what would happen after everything became his. He would go to his parents in their lodgings. He would tell what had happened, and then invite them to come home! It would be too wonderful for words. The junior glowed with pleasure as he thought of it.

And then he saw that there were signs of activity.

The auctioneer and his clerk had arrived, and they were making all due

preparations for the commencement of the sale. It was not reckoned that it would be a long procedure. As there was only this one lot to be disposed of, it would naturally be quite brief.

The auction itself was to take place in the big dining-room of the house, and here the people began to congregate—for it was now twelve o'clock already. Most of them were prosperous looking, and there were quite a number of ladies. In addition, Pitt had no difficulty in recognising that some of them were people who wanted the property to dispose of—dealers, and so forth.

"Not long to wait now, Reggie," whispered Jack.

"No, we shall soon know our fate."

"Got your money all right?"

"Rather!"

The two juniors were well in front of the crowd, and, in fact, right under the auctioneer's seat, for this was raised above the floor upon a big table.

And now practically everything was ready.

People crowded in at the last moment, and the room was nearly full up. The auctioneer, a small, alert-looking old gentleman, gazed over the throng.

"Are we ready, ladies and gentlemen?" he asked genially. "Yes, I think we are."

He tidied a few papers on his table, and then looked up again.

"We ought to get over this little business quite quickly," he said. "I have another sale to attend by one o'clock, anyhow, so there is no time to waste. And there is no necessity for me to go into any long speeches regarding this property. I'm taking it for granted that you have all had a good look round, and seen what you are bidding for."

He paused, and adjusted his pince-nez.

"The property is a desirable one in every way," he went on. "The furniture, alone is worth many thousands of pounds, and I trust that you will bid in accordance with the value of the property. Now what shall we say to start with? Will somebody please name a starting figure?"

Nobody spoke, and the auctioneer smiled.

"Rather shy, eh?" he said. "Well, what shall we say? Perhaps I had better start it myself. We will begin with ten thousand pounds, eh?"

Pitt gasped, and clutched at Jack's arm.

"Ten thousand pounds!" he muttered huskily.

"Hush——"

"But—but he's starting it at ten thousand pounds!" whispered Pitt.

"Why, it'll go up into the twenties——"

"Don't be an ass!" hissed Jack. "Nobody's bid that sum! It's only the auctioneer's spoof! They always do that!"

But Pitt was very anxious.

"I'm afraid you are very slow!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "Is ten thousand too high to start with? Perhaps we had better lower to eight——"

"I'll make a bid!" said one of the would-be buyers. "Two thousand pounds!"

The auctioneer looked shocked.

"Oh, come, come!" he protested. "That won't do! Two thousand pounds! Perfectly ridiculous! A most desirable property of this kind, including every article of furniture and every household utensil! Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, supposing we get seriously to work?"

"Two five!" said somebody else.

"Two thousand five hundred said the auctioneer. "Surely——"

"Three thousand!"

"Three five!"

"Four thousand!"

"Four five!"

"Ah, that's better!" said the auctioneer, as there was a pause. "Four thousand five hundred. We're getting along. I think yours is the bid, sir? Is there any advance on four thousand five hundred——"

"Five thousand!" said the man who had opened the bidding.

"Five thousand two hundred!"

"Oh, come," protested the auctioneer. "I really can't accept bids of two hundred pounds. Five hundred is surely the smallest advance. Who will bid five thousand five hundred?"

Somebody did so, and again there was a pause.

"Go on!" whispered Jack Grey.

"Not yet," muttered Pitt. "I sha'n't bid until everybody looks like being finished. It's no good bidding now."

"Five thousand five hundred!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "I am waiting, ladies and gentlemen!"

"Five seven-fifty," called somebody.

The auctioneer sighed.

"Oh, well, I suppose I must submit to it," he said. "But you must really recognise it is ridiculous. Five seven-fifty. Any advance on five seven-fifty? Take your time, ladies and gentlemen. Remember what you are bidding for. You have all seen the property, and you all know that it is worth at least four or five times the amount that has been offered——"

"Six thousand!" came a bid.

"Six two-fifty!"

"Six five!"

"Six seven-fifty!"

"Seven thousand!"

Again there was a pause, after this little run, and Pitt was beginning to feel rather anxious. Seven thousand already! Surely the bidding would not go on very much longer.

And it certainly did seem that a limit had been reached, for everybody was silent when the auctioneer appealed for further bids. The old gentleman looked round through his pince-nez, with a grave concern.

"Oh, but this is impossible!" he exclaimed. "Seven thousand! Seven thousand pounds for this entire property! Surely you cannot allow such an absurd bid to stand, ladies and gentlemen? I am waiting for someone to offer a really reasonable price. Is there any advance on seven thousand?"

"Go it!" muttered Jack.

The auctioneer already had his hammer up—not that he had the least intention of bringing it down. It was just one of the little tricks of his profession to precipitate bidders into naming higher figures.

"Seven thousand two hundred and fifty pounds!" exclaimed Pitt huskily.

The auctioneer nearly dropped his pince-nez.

Then he adjusted them, and stared down at the two juniors, who were quite close to him. He regarded them as though they were a pair of specimen lizards, or something of that kind.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "How did you children get in here? You ought not to have been allowed——"

"I've made a bid!" interrupted Pitt grimly.

"Good gracious!"

"Seven thousand two hundred and fifty pounds!" repeated Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

An audible titter of amusement ran through the room, and everybody was smiling. The auctioneer, however, frowned.

"My boys, we cannot have the proceedings interrupted by these absurd jokes!" he exclaimed severely. "I must request you to leave at once. Either that, or you must be silent."

Pitt glared.

"I'll say it for a third time!" he exclaimed firmly. "Seven thousand two hundred and fifty pounds!"

There was another titter, and the auctioneer grew red.

"How dare you?" he demanded angrily.

"I've got just as much right to bid as anybody else!" shouted Pitt. "Can't you take it?"

"Good heavens!" shouted the auctioneer. "Are you seriously suggesting that you are making this bid in real earnest, my boy?"

"Yes, I am!"

"It is quite absurd!" said the old gentleman. "I cannot allow—"

"You needn't be afraid, I've got the money!" exclaimed Pitt. "I wouldn't be bidding if I hadn't!"

"You have the money—seven thousand pounds?" asked the auctioneer incredulously. "This is most extraordinary. I have received large bids from strange people in my time, but this is really something quite novel."

Reginald Pitt was very self-conscious; all eyes were upon him, and this is just what he had been afraid of. He pulled the bundle of notes out of his pocket, and waved them at the auctioneer.

"It's real!" he said sarcastically.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "I really believe it is! You must not be offended my boy. You must not be angry because of my incredulity. But this is the first time in my whole career that I have received so large a bid from a person of your tender years. Will you kindly tell me your name?"

"Is that necessary?" asked Pitt. "You haven't asked the name of any of the other bidders."

"Under the circumstances, perhaps I'm justified in asking for your name," said the old gentleman. "You see, my boy, I only wish to be satisfied that your bid is really serious, and not merely an ill-timed joke. I cannot continue with

this sale if I am to be subjected to practical joking."

"I tell you it's a serious bid," exclaimed Pitt exasperated.

"And your name?"

"I don't want to give it!" growled the junior.

"In that case, I must refuse to accept your bid until I am perfectly satisfied as to your credentials," said the auctioneer. "Upon my soul! This is the most peculiar state of affairs!"

He was, perhaps, somewhat justified in taking up this attitude. Pitt was a schoolboy—obviously—and for him to make a bid of over seven thousand pounds undoubtedly seemed like a joke.

"Tell him your name!" muttered Jack Grey. "What does it matter? You've got nothing to be ashamed of, Reggie. Everything's straight and above board. It can't possibly do any harm."

Pitt nodded.

"I'll give you my name," he said to the auctioneer. "It's Pitt."

"Eh? Dear me! Pitt?"

"Yes—Reginald Pitt!"

"Why, surely that is the name of the— One moment, my boy," said the auctioneer. "What is your address?"

"This is!" said Pitt promptly.

"This?"

"Yes, this very house!"

"Oh, I—I understand!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "Dear me! So you are the son of the gentleman who lived in this property for so many years? Ah, I am beginning to grasp the situation. I am very sorry, Master Pitt, that I should have doubted you. But you must let me point out that you cannot call this house your address under the present circumstances. But perhaps you are anticipating?"

"Why not get on with the sale?" suggested Pitt sarcastically.

"Quite so—quite so!" said the auctioneer. "Well, ladies and gentlemen. I have been offered seven thousand two hundred and fifty pounds. Is there any advance on that sum?"

"Seven five!" said a fat man with a large gold watch and chain.

Pitt glared at him.

"Seven seven-fifty!" he exclaimed.

"Eight thousand!" said the fat man.

"Eight two-fifty!" retorted Pitt.

"Eight five!" offered somebody else from another quarter of the room.

"Eight seven-fifty!" shouted the fat man.

"Nine thousand!" roared Pitt.

"Dear me! This is getting quite exciting!" said the auctioneer. "Nine thousand bid from Master Pitt. Come, ladies and gentlemen, we are not going to let the bidding cease at this figure? I am waiting!"

He waited two or three minutes, and there was quite a lot of talking meanwhile. But there was a pause in the bidding.

Pitt was quivering with excitement. He only had another thousand left, and if there was another spurt he would be left out of it completely. He had a wild hope that the property would be knocked down to him for nine thousand. Surely the bidding had reached the high water mark?

But his wild hope did not materialise.

The fat, prosperous-looking man, had evidently set his heart upon the property. He was not a dealer, but evidently a wealthy man in search of a good home. He had certainly found one here.

"Nine thousand one hundred!" he exclaimed.

"One hundred!" repeated the auctioneer. "Dear me! This is quite distressing! Surely we have not descended to such small advances?"

"Nine thousand five hundred!" said Pitt grimly.

The fat man puffed out his cheeks.

"Nine seven fifty!" he exclaimed, with determination.

Pitt clenched his fists.

"Ten thousand!" he exclaimed desperately.

A murmur went round the room, and there was a short silence after it. Pitt had reached his last figure, and he could not make another bid. Would it stand? Would the fat man go beyond the ten thousand mark?

A thrill of joy ran through Pitt as he saw that his opponent in the bidding had half turned away, with a disgusted look on his fat face. Everybody else, of course, had long since dropped out. It had resolved itself into the battle between Pitt and the stout gentleman.

"Is there any advance upon ten thousand pounds?" asked the auctioneer. "Come, sir, it is against you! Surely you will make another bid on this fine property? Come, it is your last chance!"

Pitt glared at the auctioneer as though he'd like to eat him. Everything depended upon this minute.

The fat man made no offer.

"It is your last chance, sir!" repeated the auctioneer. "Ten thousand pounds has been offered! Ten thousand pounds! I shall be compelled to knock the property down at this figure. One—two——"

He paused there, and Pitt's heart was in his mouth.

The hammer was raised, and just falling.

"Ten thousand two-fifty!" shouted the fat man quickly.

Reginald Pitt's head swam. He sprung up with a hoarse cry, and all the colour fled from his face.

"What!" he gasped. "Oh—oh——"

"Don't, Reggie!" muttered Jack miserably.

The auctioneer sat overhead, beaming pleasantly. To Pitt he looked like some mis-shapen ogre in a nightmare. Pitt had an almost uncontrollable desire to go for the auctioneer baldheaded.

"Ten thousand two fifty!" he exclaimed genially. "Come, Master Pitt, you are going to make another offer, I hope?"

"I—I can't," muttered Pitt hoarsely.

His shoulders drooped, and he looked unutterably miserable.

"Come on, Jack!" he muttered faintly.

"Ten thousand two fifty!" said the auctioneer, his voice sounding faint and far away to the junior. "Is there any advance——"

Pitt didn't hear any more. There was a drumming in his ears, and he caught a glimpse of the fat man grinning at him with gloating triumph. All the other people were staring from every side. Pitt pushed his way through the crowd madly.

"Ten two-fifty!" droned the auctioneer. "Going—going——"

Pitt didn't want to hear any more. Indeed, he couldn't have heard any more if he'd wanted to. For he and his chum were outside in the open air now, and Pitt led the way into the garden. He wanted to get away from it all. His head was throbbing, and his heart was as heavy as lead within him. A great lump was almost choking him, so that he could not speak.

Jack Grey led him gently to a garden seat, which was placed conveniently in a little alcove of evergreens. The sun was shining warmly and it was very pleasant

out here, in the exquisitely kept garden.

"Cheer up, old man!" muttered Jack. "Oh, it was cruel—rottenly cruel! What did that chap want to bid like that for? It was only to do you in the eye! I don't believe he wants the place at all!"

"Oh, Jack!" whispered Pitt huskily.

At that moment he was almost on the point of sobbing. He felt so unutterably sad that the tears welled into his eyes unbidden. After all these hopes—after all the glorious things he had expected.

And now those hopes were dashed to the ground.

The worst had happened—and all because of that one man. The property had been Pitt's—he had expected the hammer to fall every moment. And then that fat, gloating bounder had raised the bid!

Jack Grey was highly indignant.

"It was the auctioneer's fault!" he said simply. "He hung up indefinitely, and he ought to have knocked it down to you long before. Oh, it was a shame—a beastly shame!"

Pitt grasped his chum's arm.

"Don't—don't blame the auctioneer," he muttered. "He was only doing what was right, Jack. It's his job to get as much money as he can. How was he to know that ten thousand was my limit?"

"I suppose you're right," said Jack Grey miserably. "Oh, Reggie, I can't believe it! After all your hopes—and—and everything! It can't really be true—I—I don't know what to say, old man."

Pitt gave a bitter laugh.

"Don't say anything!" he exclaimed, staring before him, and clenching his fists. "What's the good? Oh, I was a fool! It was just like my conceit to think that I should buy the property, and—and go and tell mother and father! Oh, Jack, I was looking forward to it so much! I—I was expecting to go to—to my people and—and—"

His voice broke off, and he couldn't say any more.

And Jack Grey, with a big lump in his throat, couldn't say anything, either. He just sat there, silently sharing Reginald Pitt's agony of mind. They had hoped for so much—and they had got nothing.

Suddenly Jack Grey started. He could see a part of the front path from where they were sitting. And he had just noticed the big fat man go striding down

towards the gate. He went as though he were furiously angry about something, and he snorted audibly.

"There he goes, Reggie!" whispered Jack. "The fat bounder! But he wasn't looking particularly pleased with himself—"

"What do I care about him?" muttered Pitt. "It's over now—I'm awake! I've been dreaming all the other time! We'd better be going, Jack—we haven't got any right here. And—and it's my—my dad's place—all of it! It's not right that I should be turned out like this—"

"Hallo—hallo!" exclaimed a cheerful voice. "Why, by gad! So here you are! What on earth are you lookin' so down about, young man?"

Pitt gave a jump, and looked up.

Lord Dorrimore was standing beside him, looking calm and cool, and very cheerful. Both Pitt and Grey stared at Dorrie with wonder and hope. They had not expected to see him at all.

"Oh, Dorrie, it's all over!" said Pitt huskily. "You've come too late!"

"Nonsense!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I've been here for twenty minutes, an' your nice little plan has come off, Reggie."

"But—but I lost—"

"You didn't!"

"I—I didn't?" said Pitt incredulously.

"Of course not!" grinned Dorrie. "Here's another five hundred—no, don't shake your silly young head! Take it as a loan. Surely you'll oblige me by accepting five hundred quid as a loan? Don't insult me by refusing."

"But—but I don't understand, Dorrie!" gasped Pitt.

"If you hadn't run out in such a hurry, you would understand all right," exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, grinning. "By the Lord Harry! It was worth quids to see that fat chap with the ship's cable across his waistcoat!"

"Why, what—what happened, sir?" asked Jack Grey eagerly.

"Nothin'—exceptin' that he thought he'd won," grinned Dorrie. "Then, just as the hammer was fallin', I warbled out ten thousand five hundred. By gad! You ought to have seen fatty's face! It was better than any cartoon that was ever drawn!"

"What did he do, sir?"

"He simply cursed under his breath, turned round, an' walked out," replied Dorrie. "That's all, my son. The property was knocked down to you, Pitt."

"To me!"

"Of course—I gave your name," said his lordship cheerfully. "The best thing you can do is to hurry in with the money and pay it over to the clerk. I told him I'd send you in at once."

Pitt leapt to his feet, and dashed off, his face was alight with eager joy. Once again Dorrie had come to the rescue, and had saved everything!

Dear old Dorrie.

CHAPTER IV.

A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE!

TEN minutes later, the money had been paid over and everything was settled. Pitt had the receipt in his possession, and the property was his. He felt proud and joyful as he went back to the spot where Jack Grey and Lord Dorrimore were waiting. He went straight to Dorrie.

"I don't know how to thank you, sir," he said, with shining eyes.

"Nothin' would suit me better," smiled his lordship. "I don't want to be thanked, an' the fact that you don't know how to do it is all to the good. Strictly speakin', I've done nothin'."

"You've done everything!" declared Pitt.

"That's all you know," grinned Dorrie. "Why, young 'un, this property wasn't Raspe's to sell, an' in any case there would have been all sorts of litigation about it afterwards—an' I expect it would have got back to your pater's hands all right. Still, this is savin' a lot of trouble. With regard to the money that's been paid for it, that goes to Raspe—an' in the natural order of events, it'll be transferred from Raspe to your pater, because it's really his. So we get back to the same old place! Queer how these things work, ain't it?"

"I don't take any notice of all that, Dorrie!" said Pitt joyfully. "Solicitors will bother with that, and do all the business. All I know is that the property is absolutely mine, and I can do just what I hoped for—I can go to my father and mother and tell them the wonderful news!"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"That's just what I wanted," he said simply.

In his heart, Dorrie was as generous as any man could possibly be. He knew

right enough that this property of Mr. Pitt's had not been in any real danger. He knew that Mr. Pitt would have regained it in the natural order of events.

But Dorrie had worked it this way because he knew it would give Reggie Pitt an unlimited amount of joy and pleasure—because it would seem so much nicer to his parents to get their old home back in this fashion. Dorrie had been only too delighted to engineer the little affair.

And, as he looked at Pitt he had all the reward he needed. For the junior was glowing with happiness—such happiness as one only sees two or three times in a lifetime.

"Everythin's all serene," said Dorrie cheerfully. "Now, Reggie, my son, you know what you've got to do, don't you? There's a taxi outside in the road, an' you've got to buzz straight off to your people, an' take them the glad tidin's."

"Yes, rather!" said Pitt, with shining eyes. "And Jack's coming, too—"

"Jack isn't!" interrupted Dorrie calmly. "There won't be any outsiders in this little family slice of joy. You're going alone, old man—it'll be altogether better."

Jack realised that Dorrie was right.

"Of course it will, Reggie," he said, pressing his chum's arm. "You go ahead—we can easily arrange to meet later."

Pitt suddenly gave a little jump.

"Yes, that's it!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Come back here!"

"Here?"

"Yes—to tea!" said Reggie. "You'll find father and mother here, then—we shall be home! You've got to come round—and you, too, Dorrie! Please say you will!"

Lord Dorrimore patted Pitt on the back.

"Of course we will, young 'un," he said gently. "That's just what I want—to see you an' your people comfortably back in your home. All the troubles are over, an' everythin' in the garden's lovely!"

"Oh, isn't it grand!" exclaimed Pitt. "We can go back to St. Frank's later on, Jack. I'm ever so glad you came."

His joy was threefold after he had taken it for granted that everything was lost. And now he rushed away from his two friends, and found the taxi waiting outside just as Dorrie had said.

He dashed into it, and gave the ad-

dress of the lodgings in Fulham where his father and mother were staying. He resolved that they should not stay there a minute longer than was necessary. This was the end of all the bad time. After this everything would be bright and happy.

Pitt arrived almost before he knew it. His thoughts were so busy that he didn't know what to say when he first got in. And the journey had seemed to take no time. He almost forgot to pay the taxi man—and certainly wouldn't have done if the man hadn't called him back.

Then he ran up the steps, and hammered upon the door. His summons was soon answered by an untidy looking maidservant.

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Pitt in?" asked the junior breathlessly.

"Why, yes, young gent, up in their rooms," said the girl. "If you'll wait —"

But Pitt didn't wait a moment. He had been here before, and he knew where the sitting-room was situated. He pelted up the stairs, and burst in like a young whirlwind. And he nearly ran full tilt into his father, who was just coming out to see what the noise on the stairs was about.

"Dad!" shouted Pitt joyfully.

He hugged his father, and then dashed across to where his mother was sitting. He wouldn't let her speak, because he kissed her so much. But, at length, his excited enthusiasm and joy calmed down somewhat.

"Why, Reggie, we didn't expect to see you to-day!" said his mother, at length. "My dear boy! I'm so pleased you have come! I've been anxious about you—playing that dreadful football——"

"Why, mum, don't you worry about that," said Pitt, with a laugh. "Football's the best game in the world!"

"Now that your excitement has died down a bit, young man, what is the object of your visit?" asked his father calmly. "Why didn't you let us know that you were coming? Why have you burst in in this fashion?"

Reggie didn't want to bring his joyful news out too soon.

"I—I wanted to see you, dad," he replied. "I wanted to see mum, too. And I wanted to know how everything's getting on!"

Mr. Pitt shook his head.

"If you came here expecting to hear good news, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, my boy," he said quietly. "I've nothing to tell you—except, indeed, everything that is sad."

"Oh, dad!" said Pitt. "What about Raspe?"

"I have heard nothing," said Mr. Pitt.

"But I know that Mr. Lee is doing big things," said Reggie quickly. "Of course, you are out of it all here, dad—it's mostly been happening down near Bannington. But you needn't worry —"

"Oh, Reggie, how can you say that?" asked his mother. "You tell us not to worry—and yet you must know that everything is terrible—terrible. I've given up all hope of Simon Raspe ever being brought to justice. And—and our home——"

"Don't dear!" put in Mr. Pitt quietly.

"But I must speak about it!" said Pitt's mother, with streaming eyes. "What good will it do to keep quiet? Reggie, darling, the worst of all has happened this morning. Our home in Duncan Square—where you were born, dear—has been sold. It is lost to us for ever!"

Pitt grinned.

"Don't you believe it, mum!" he said calmly.

"Oh, my son——"

"It isn't lost!" exclaimed Pitt, unable to keep himself in check any longer. "Look, dad—look, mother!"

He threw on the table the receipt he had received from the auctioneer. Mr. Pitt picked it up, adjusted his pince-nez, and regarded it in amazement.

"What—what is this?" he asked blankly.

"Can't you see, pater?" asked Reggie joyfully.

"It seems to be a receipt for ten thousand five hundred pounds!" said his father. "Auction sale—59, Duncan Square—house—furniture—— Why, good heavens! Am I dreaming?"

"What is it, Reginald?" asked Mrs. Pitt anxiously.

"I've bought it back, mother!" shouted Pitt. "Our old home is ours still! I went to the sale, and bought everything—but it was Lord Dorrimore who made it possible! Good old Dorrie! He's the best chap in the world!"

His parents were bewildered and posi-

tively amazed. It was some few moments before they could realise the real nature of Pitt's revelation. When they did realise it, they exhibited joy in rather peculiar ways.

Mr. Pitt sat down and looked deadly serious, and Mrs. Pitt bent forward in her chair, and sobbed as though her heart would break. Pitt looked at them in utter dismay.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed quickly. "What's the matter? What are you crying about? I—I thought I'd done something that you'd like——"

"Oh, Reggie, I—I can't tell you what is in my heart!" exclaimed his mother between her sobs. "I'm so happy I don't know what to say——"

"But you're crying!" gasped Pitt.

"Reginald, my boy, don't you know that your mother always cries when she is particularly happy?" asked Mr. Pitt drily. "It's just the natural order of things. Hang it all, I feel a bit like it myself! You're a wonderful fellow, I must say! How on earth you managed it, fairly beats me. My boy, I'm proud of you!"

"But I've done nothing, dad—really!" protested Pitt.

And then, after the first emotion was over, Pitt was sternly ordered to tell all the details—to go into all the facts. His parents were unmerciful—they made him tell everything—even about the wager which meant that he had to get five goals in the League match against Porthampton.

"This Lord Dorrimore seems to be a fine fellow," said Mr. Pitt, at length. "Of course, he made you that wager with a deliberate object, Reggie. But that doesn't matter—you won it fairly. Five goals! Gad, young man, you're certainly a fine youngster!"

"But about that money, dad!" said Reggie. "I know it was a fair wager, but I can't take it—it's too much. I want you to pay Lord Dorrimore back—or give him a present worth ten thousand."

Mr. Pitt looked rueful.

"But where in the name of wonder shall I get ten thousand from?" he asked. "My dear Reggie, you seem to forget that we haven't got anything at all——"

"Oh, I haven't forgotten that!" said Reggie cheerfully. "It's all coming back to you, dad—Mr. Lee is seeing to that. He's well on Simon Raspe's track,

and the scoundrel will soon be in the hands of the law."

"I only wish that those words were true, Reggie," said Mr. Pitt. "If they do come true, you can be quite assured that I shall repay Lord Dorrimore for his wonderful kindness. But I can't believe that all the clouds are rolling away so quickly. It seems too good after the trials and troubles——"

Tap!

There was a knock upon the door, and Mr. Pitt turned.

"Come in!" he called.

The untidy maidservant put her head round the door.

"There's a gent downstairs as wants to see you, sir," she announced.

"What is the gentleman's name?" asked Mr. Pitt.

"I think he says it was Mr. Lee——"

"Mr. Lee!" shouted Pitt, jumping up. "Show him up at once—it's Mr. Nelson Lee, dad! Oh, this means something good—I know it!"

Mr. Pitt rose to his feet, and looked rather flurried. Mrs. Pitt hastily seized her handkerchief, and dabbed her eyes, and made herself tidy. A visitor had not been expected.

And then, a moment later, Nelson Lee was ushered into the somewhat drab apartment.

"I am sorry if I am disturbing you, Mr. Pitt," said Lee apologetically. "Please forgive me, Mrs. Pitt. But I wanted to come to you at once, as I have something of importance to tell you."

"We are delighted to see you, Mr. Lee," said Reggie's father, shaking the detective's hand warmly. "I regret that you should find us in such unfortunate circumstances."

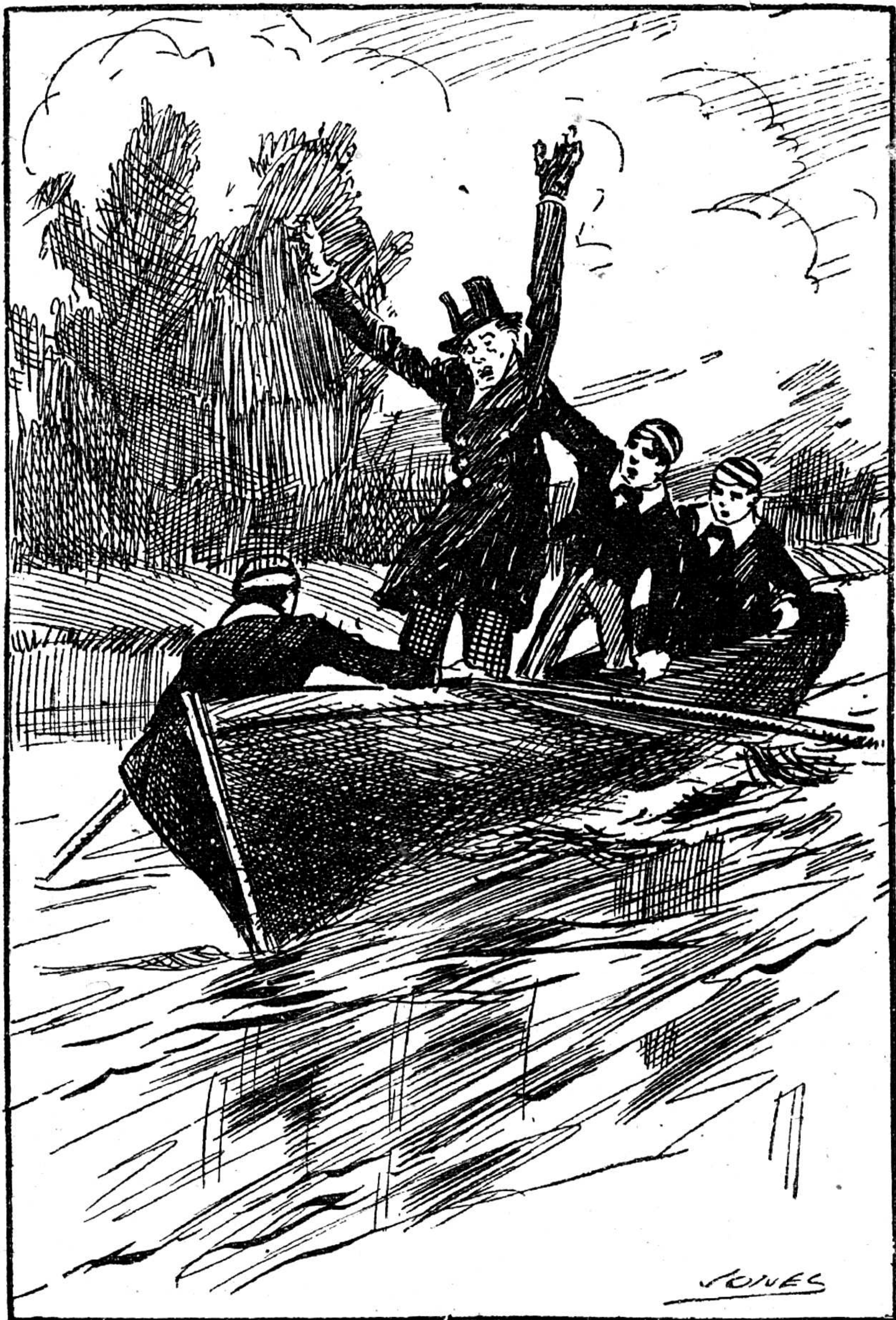
They talked for a moment or two, and Mr. Pitt explained why Reggie had come, and what had already been done. Nelson Lee smiled as he listened to the little story.

"It gives me great pleasure to hear this," he said. "You have already received some good news, Mr. Pitt. You do not know what happiness it gives me to say that I have brought even better news."

"What did I say!" shouted Reggie joyfully.

"I don't quite understand!" said his father quietly.

"Well, it would be unwise for me to beat about the bush," said Nelson Lee.



"I hate and detest all boys!" shouted the madman. "And now I have a chance of sending three of you to the bottom of the river!"

"I will tell you my information in a few words. Simon Raspe has been arrested, and he was brought before the Magistrate this morning——"

"Good gracious!" shouted Mr. Pitt, jumping up.

"I have succeeded in supplying the police with at least double the evidence that they require," smiled Nelson Lee. "Raspe's confederate, Stretton, is also under arrest, and has been similarly charged. I am authorised, further, to inform you that it will only be a matter of a week or two at the utmost before your financial affairs are completely adjusted. Every farthing of the money that Raspe swindled you out of, Mr. Pitt, will be restored."

Reggie's father sat almost stunned. And, this time, Mrs. Pitt did not cry. The shock of the joy was too much for that. She sat there, looking straight before her, and all the lines of worry seemed to vanish from her face as though by magic. All this had come so suddenly—so unexpectedly.

Just in the brief space of one hour all the black clouds had rolled away.

"Mr. Lee, for me to attempt to thank you would be quite futile," said Mr. Pitt quietly. "I realise that you have done all this for us, and if you can suggest any way in which I can repay you——"

"It is enough repayment for me to know that the ends of justice have been served," interrupted Nelson Lee simply. "I did not regard this as an ordinary professional case, Mr. Pitt. The few investigations I conducted were accomplished during my ordinary life at St. Frank's. I am only too delighted to have been of some slight service."

Reggie's father really tried to express his gratitude in words, but failed. It couldn't be done. He was like a new man. He had never known such joy as this.

And, presently, Nelson Lee took his departure, having delivered his glad tidings. And he had imparted one further item of news which had filled his listeners with joy. For he had told them that Stanley Lockwood would be a free man on the morrow.

"Isn't it glorious, dad?" asked Pitt. "Isn't it simply gorgeous, mum? Everything has happened all at once—and I knew it would, too! I felt it all the time! But we've got to thank Mr. Lee——"

"And we've got to thank you, my boy," said his father quietly. "Heaven only knows how much we've got to thank you!"

And, a few hours later, Pitt experienced the proudest moment of his life. For he went with his parents back into their old home. It was a glorious moment. It was theirs—every stick and stone of it! No outsider had the slightest right to be within these four walls.

After all the worries and troubles, Simon Raspe's villainy was exposed, and justice had been done. The old home was intact—just as it always had been. And Reggie and his mother and father had walked into it, and the old life was resumed just where it had been left off.

What had happened during the last few weeks would be but a memory now—a bitter memory, but with a tinge of joy, too. For that time of stress had proved Reginald Pitt's worth—it had proved him to be what he was—as true as a die!

CHAPTER. V.

BACK TO THE FOLD

"**H**ERE they are!"
 "Give him a cheer!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Pitt—Pitt!"

It was midday on Tuesday, and Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey were just coming up the lane to St. Frank's. At the gateway a big crowd of fellows had gathered, and they roared with enthusiastic vigour as they welcomed Reginald Pitt back to St. Frank's. It was a wonderful moment for the returning junior.

As arranged, Jack Grey and Lord Dorrimore had called upon Mr. and Mrs. Pitt on the afternoon of the previous day. And they had found everything happy and joyful. And Jack had received permission from Nelson Lee to remain overnight, so that he could come back to St. Frank's with Reggie in the morning.

And now Pitt and Grey had arrived. Reginald Pitt was given a great ovation. For he had really come back. There was no question about it this time. He had come back to St. Frank's for good—to take his old place in the Reserve.

And many rumours of the true state of affairs got about. The newspapers

that morning, for example, had printed a paragraph concerning the appearance of Raspe and Stretton before the magistrate. And there had been a reference to Mr. Pitt's retrieved fortune.

So St. Frank's knew quite a lot about the real facts. And most of the fellows could put two and two together—they could understand why Pitt had played League football, and why he had run away from the school. But that was all over now, and the junior was back.

"We're jolly pleased to have you again, old son!" said Handforth. "And don't forget, you've got to play like the dickens for the junior eleven."

"I'll do my best, anyway," said Pitt.

"Rather!"

"Good old Reggie!"

"Play up, Abdullah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the way, what about the Bannington Club?" asked Tommy Watson. "You can't play for them any more now, Pitt. I don't suppose the Head would allow it, even if you wanted to."

Pitt shook his head.

"No, I've been compelled to resign," he said. "I shall miss Tom Howard, and some of the others—but still, I can go and see them when I want to. And, in future, I shall devote all my half-holidays to playing football for St. Frank's. My duty lies to the school—now!"

"Good old Pitt!"

I was more pleased than anybody else to see him back, for I knew what a great difference his presence would make in the Junior Eleven. Of course, I knew all the facts about Simon Raspe, for Nelson Lee had told me everything before going up to London.

And I was highly pleased to know that the whole unfortunate business was at an end, and that Pitt's people were restored to their old home. From now onwards, everything would go on smoothly at St. Frank's.

It was just upon dinner time, and Pitt and Grey came into the dining hall with all the other juniors, and Pitt found himself regarded with great interest by everybody. Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, was particularly pleased.

"I am gratified to see you back in your old place, Pitt," he exclaimed. "I must say that I've missed you, and I am quite certain that the other boys have missed you, too."

"Rather, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"Thank you, sir," said Pitt.

"And now I hope we sha'n't have any more unfortunate affairs of this kind," went on Mr. Crowell. "I am afraid you will be rather backward in your work, Pitt, for you have missed lessons for a good many days. However, that is a matter that can easily be adjusted."

"I hope so, sir," said Reggie.

Dinner went off well, with everybody feeling in good spirits. And, after the meal, we found that two visitors were waiting to have an interview with Reginald Pitt. And these visitors turned out to be Mr. Page, the manager of the Bannington Football Club, and Fred Hearne, the captain of the team.

Pitt took them at once to Study E, and Jack Grey was with them. Outside, in the passage, quite a crowd of inquisitive juniors had gathered.

Mr. Page was looking rather serious.

"Well, Pitt, we are very delighted and pleased to hear that your affairs have become straightened, and that everything is all right," he said. "At the same time, from a selfish point of view, we cannot help being rather sorry."

"We're cut up, in fact," said Fred Hearne.

"Mr. Lee has informed me that you will be unable to play any further for the club," went on Mr. Page. "It will not be a calamity, but it is certainly a blow. You have played splendidly for us, Pitt, and I am very sorry that we shall not be able to have your services again."

"I'm sorry too, sir," said Pitt.

"However, we shall continue to be excellent friends, I hope."

"Rather, sir," said Pitt promptly.

"And we would feel very honoured if you attended a little dinner we are giving to-night," went on the manager. "It is, in fact, a kind of farewell dinner to you, my lad. I feel that we must do something to show our real appreciation. I hope you will be able to come, and I hope you will enjoy yourself."

"It's very kind of you, sir," said Reginald Pitt. "And I'll gladly accept, I hope I shall be able to get permission—"

"That has already been obtained," interrupted Mr. Page. "I rang up your Headmaster before coming, and he gave me full sanction to invite you and several

friends, if you choose to bring them. I needn't say that I shall be only too glad to welcome any of your friends. Pitt."

"Thank you, sir," said the junior. "It's jolly good of you, and I'm feeling a bit rotten, because I sha'n't be able to play for the club any more."

"Well, we mustn't grumble at these things," said Mr. Page, smiling. "We have been doing very well, and I hope we shall continue to do well. Young Howard has been showing splendid form recently, and in future he will take your place as outside right. The Junior Eleven at this school is lucky to have you among its number."

"I should think it is, sir," put in Jack Grey.

"How many fellows can I bring to this dinner?" asked Pitt.

"Oh, three or four—just as many as you wish," replied the manager. "It will be held in the big club room at the football ground at seven o'clock exactly. You boys will have permission to remain out until eleven. The Headmaster insists that you should be in by that hour, however."

"Oh, that'll give us heaps of time, sir," said Pitt. "I know who I'll bring, if you don't mind—four other fellows. Jack Grey here. Nipper, Watson, and Tregellis-West. Will that be all right, sir?"

"Splendid!" said Mr. Page. "There's just one other little thing I wanted to say, Pitt. The directors have decided to present you with a little souvenir of your spell with the club. And at this dinner you will be presented with an engraved gold watch, and I hope it will be acceptable."

"I don't deserve it!" protested Pitt. "I was paid——"

"Tut—tut!" smiled the manager. "We needn't say any more, my boy. The Bannington Club is losing a valuable player, and the St. Frank's Junior Eleven is gaining one. We cannot both have you—and, after all, your duty lies with the school."

Mr. Page and Hearne soon took their departure, and Pitt turned to Jack with gleaming eyes.

"I say, that's rather decent, isn't it?" he asked. "Guest of honour at a swell dinner, and a giddy gold watch!"

"Well, you deserve it," said Jack. "You don't seem to realise that you've been a jolly valuable member of the Ban-

nington team. They owe their position at the head of the table to your ripping play."

Pitt laughed, and went out of the study. He came next door but one, Study C, where Sir Montie and Tommy Watson and I were having a little chat before going into afternoon lessons. Pitt greeted us cheerfully.

"I've got an invitation for you chaps," he said. "How would you like to come to a nice little dinner at the Bannington Football Club ground to-night?"

"Don't spoof, you ass!" grinned Tommy Watson.

"I'm not spoofing—it's true!"

And Pitt proceeded to explain. And we, for our part, were very pleased to accept the invitation, and we said so promptly. This was very nice, and it would be a splendid farewell to the professional club.

We dismissed the matter from our minds during afternoon lessons. But we talked about it a lot at teatime, and refrained from eating with our usual gusto—so as to leave plenty of room for the dinner, as Tommy Watson explained.

Tea in Study E was a happy meal. Jack Grey and Reginald Pitt were together again, fast chums. And they were not likely to fall out again in a hurry. This lesson had been one which Grey would not forget quickly. He certainly would not be at cross purposes with Reggie Pitt a second time.

All the other juniors, of course, were green with envy about our trip to Bannington. Many were the remarks which were passed. Handforth heatedly declared that it was a nerve, and he demanded to know why he wasn't invited.

"Favouritism—that's what it is!" he snorted. "Nothing but rank favouritism. Why should Nipper and Watson and Tregellis-West go to this dinner? And if they can go, why can't we?"

"My dear chap," said Church patiently. "We haven't been invited."

"Why haven't we been invited?"

"Dash it all, it's no good asking riddles," said Church. "It was up to Pitt to choose whom he would take with him—and he couldn't take the whole giddy Remove, could he? Do be reasonable, Handy. I've never known such a chap for getting jealous——"

"Jealous!" roared Handforth. "Who's jealous?"

"Oh, don't flare up for nothing!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves.

"A statement has been made, and I mean to thrash it out!" he said grimly. "What I want to know is this—am I jealous, or am I not?"

"Of course not!" said Church, with an air of mild astonishment. "Jealous? What rot! Just as if you could be envious of anybody else, Handy! Why, everybody knows that you're always content with your lot!"

Handforth rolled his sleeves down looking suspicious.

"Content with my lot!" he scoffed. "My hat! I've got a fat lot haven't I? Two fatheaded chums who share about one grain of sense between 'em, and who can't do anything else but argue and criticise from morning till night. That's my lot!"

Both Church and McClure felt inclined to point out what their lot was—but as this would have involved many painful truths, they thought it advisable to remain silent. They were not hankering after black eyes or thick ears—and the truth, stated boldly to Handforth, would certainly have caused such dire injuries.

"Well, all this doesn't alter what I first said," went on Edward Oswald. "I think it's a cheek for Pitt to miss us out——"

"But you're not jealous, are you?" asked McClure.

"Of course not, you dolly fathead!"

"Then why growl at Pitt for inviting the others and leaving you out?"

Handforth glared.

"What's the good of talking sense to you chaps?" he demanded. "All you can do is to jaw and jaw about things you don't understand. I'm fed-up, and I'm going out for a walk along the towing path!"

"Good luck!" said Church. "We hope you'll enjoy the scenery!"

"Hear, hear," added McClure.

"Eh?" said Handforth, staring. "What do you mean? If I go for a walk, you'll go, too! You don't think I'm going alone, I suppose?"

"Yes, but we've got our prep. to do——"

"Plenty of time later on!"

"And you'd enjoy a solitary walk much better," said Church persuasively.

"Clurey and I can only jaw about things we don't understand—and you've admitted that you're fed-up with that. We should only be in the way!"

"If you think you're going to get out of it like that, you've made a bloomer," said Handforth darkly. "We're going for a walk—all of us—and we're going to start now. Come on. There's still plenty of daylight."

And, although Church and McClure had no inclination whatever to exercise their legs, they accompanied Handforth out through the playing-fields and towards the towing path. They weren't afraid of their mighty leader, but experience had taught them that much trouble would be saved by falling in with his suggestion.

They could, of course, have jibbed, but this would have resulted in a fearful row, an exchange of blows, and an uncomfortable time generally for the remainder of the evening. Church and McClure had learned to humour their chief.

They fully understood his feelings. In blunt language, Handforth was somewhat sulky—and green with jealousy, in spite of his denials. He would dearly have loved to attend that dinner party, and because he hadn't been invited, he expressed his feelings in this manner. It was one of his commonest faults.

And so, while we were busy at our prep. in Study C, hurrying in order to get done so that we could start off in good time, Handforth and Co. mooched by the Banks of the River Stowe.

They were not exactly a happy trio.

Church and McClure, who hadn't wanted to come at all, were decidedly glum, and Handforth only uttered caustic remarks about the river, the meadows, and the general surroundings.

Church and McClure suffered this without comment. According to previous experiences, this mood would last for about half-an-hour, and then vanish. Handforth was generally pretty quick in getting out of his "funny" moods..

"Well, anyway, it's a jolly good thing to have Reggie Pitt back again," said Church, trying to liven up the conversation. "We shall be able to see some ripping footer now, and Pitt will be a tower of strength to the Eleven. He's a jolly fine chap, and the best footballer——"

"Rats!" grunted Handforth.

"What?"

"Jolly fine chap, is he?" snapped Handforth. "Do you call it being jolly fine to miss out the most important fel-

low in the Remove from this dinner invitation?"

"But he hasn't!" said McClure. "Nipper's going!"

Handforth came to a halt.

"Nipper!" he repeated grimly. "Who's talking about Nipper?"

"You were," said Church. "You said something about the most important chap——"

"But I was talking about myself, you lunatic!" roared Handforth.

"Oh, sorry!"

"Just because Nipper's the captain of the Remove you think he's the most important chap in the Form," continued Handforth tartly. "But that's sheer rubbish. Everybody understands that I am the actual leader of the Remove. Nipper's only the figure-head."

"I saw a book in a Bannington shop yesterday," said McClure thoughtfully.

"I think I'll buy it and make you a present of it, Handy."

"Book!" said Handforth staring.

"What are you getting at?"

"It's called 'Hints on Modesty'—— Yow! Yaroooh!"

McClure, who was unable to finish his sentence, gave vent to a wild howl. For Handforth had brought his famous fist round with unexpected swiftness. McClure rolled over in the grass, somewhat dazed.

"That's what you get for insulting me!" roared Handforth. "By George! 'Hints on Modesty'! Why, for two pins I'd pick you up and chuck you in the giddy river!"

"Here you are!" snorted McClure, plucking two pins out of his coat lapel.

"Do it—if you can!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves.

"All right, you asked for it—and you'll get it!" he said grimly.

McClure stood ready, and Church waited near by in order to lend a hand when necessary. And then a gentle, high-pitched voice sounded.

"Now, what's all this—what's all this?" it exclaimed. "A storm in a teacup, eh? Dear me! This won't do—this won't do! Let me see if I can make peace between you!"

Handforth and Co. turned round, rather astonished, for they had not heard the approach of any stranger. The evening was drawing in, and the light was not particularly good, but it was quite strong enough for them to see who this newcomer was.

Undoubtedly, he was a stranger in the neighbourhood—a small, bent-shouldered old gentleman with white-grey hair and a wrinkled, clean-shaven face. He wore big spectacles, and there was an air of benevolence about him which was quite attractive.

He was attired in a somewhat old-fashioned frockcoat and striped trousers. He wore spats, and his linen was spotlessly clean. In many respects, indeed, the stranger was dapper. And he stood near by, beaming upon the juniors.

"You mustn't quarrel, my lads—you mustn't quarrel!" he exclaimed gently. "That sort of thing does no good. Let me urge you to be more sensible, and to refrain from these hasty little scenes. Why not kiss and be friends?"

"I don't want to be rude, sir, but wouldn't it be better if you minded your own giddy business?" said Handforth gruffly. "I'm going to give McClure a jolly good hiding——"

"Are you?" said McClure. "I'd like to see you do it!"

"Now, now, now!" interrupted the benevolent old gentleman. "This is only making matters worse—far worse! I can't allow it—I won't stand here and see any fighting. Dear me, no! If you strike one another I shall consider it my immediate duty to cane you severely."

"Cane us?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Yes, sir, cane you!" retorted the stranger, his benevolent tone becoming severe and schoolmasterly. "Don't dare to answer me back! And let me tell you this—you have already displayed such impertinence that you will write me one hundred lines. Do you understand?"

Handforth and Co. stared.

"Write you one hundred lines!" repeated Handforth. "Well, I'm jiggered! Who do you think you are?"

"There is no question about that!" replied the old gentleman. "My name is Hope—Mr. Crawford Hope—and it is your duty to obey my orders. And I insist that you cease this quarrelling at once!"

Handforth and Co. ceased it, not because they were ordered to do so by Mr. Crawford Hope, but by mutual consent. They were so astonished that they forgot all about their squabble.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Hope but we don't happen to know you," exclaimed Handforth. "I'm afraid I can't do any lines."

"No, no, of course not!" interrupted Mr. Hope. "Just a little pleasantry of mine, by boy—nothing else. I am delighted to become acquainted with you—charmed and delighted. I trust that you are really delighted to see me?"

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth sarcastically.

"You bet!" added Church. "Before you came, sir, we were feeling as glum as anything. Just having a look round the district, I suppose? Or perhaps you're going on a visit to St. Frank's?"

Mr. Hope looked strangely at Church.

"St. Frank's?" he repeated softly.

"St. Frank's—Ah, yes, of course—the big college? St. Frank's College? Dear me, how stupid! Of course—of course! You boys belong to St. Frank's, no doubt! Excellent—excellent!"

Mr. Crawford rubbed his hands together, and beamed amiably.

"Queer old bird!" muttered McClure wonderingly.

"Shouldn't be surprised if he's the new master at the River House School," murmured Church. "I was talking to Brewster on Wednesday, and he mentioned that there was a new master coming. I expect this is the new prize packet himself."

"The juniors were quite pleased at the interruption, for Mr. Hope had saved quite a lot of trouble. Even Handforth hadn't really wanted to knook McClure about, and his only object in starting the strife had been to relieve the monotony.

Mr. Crawford Hope was a far better diversion.

"Boys, I am honoured to meet you," said the old gentleman. "Perhaps you would not take it as an affront if I suggested walking with you? Yes? Splendid—quite splendid! Thank you!"

Handforth and Co. hadn't agreed at all, but Mr. Hope was evidently satisfied that they required his company. For he commenced strolling along the towing path with the juniors.

He was, undoubtedly, a queer old fellow, and Handforth and Co. were more surprised than ever shortly afterwards. From behind his spectacles, Mr. Hope glanced from one to the other of the boys—and in that glance there was something strange and peculiar, and not altogether likeable.

But he kept up a running conversation, and the tone of it was genial and benevolent. And he rubbed his hands together constantly, and seemed wonder-

fully delighted to be in the juniors' company.

"I never hoped for such an excellent meeting as this," he exclaimed. "I am gratified—so highly gratified that I do not quite know how to express my warmth. Ah, let me see—let me see! My boy, what is your name?"

"Handforth, sir."

"Indeed—indeed!" said Mr. Hope. "Handforth, eh? A splendid name—not to say an honourable name. Well, Handforth, I wish you to do me the honour of accepting this little token as an appreciation of my friendship."

Mr. Hope removed his gold watch from his pocket, and presented it to the amazed Handforth. It was an excellent watch, as the juniors could see at a glance.

"You're joking, sir," said Handforth blankly.

"Joking—not at all!" declared Mr. Hope. "How dare you doubt my word! Take it, my boy—take it! Good—good!"

Handforth had taken it, since he could do nothing else. The old gentleman had thrust the watch into his hand, and if the junior had not seized it, the watch would have fallen to the ground.

"And your name?" proceeded Mr. Hope, turning to Church.

"My name's Church, sir."

"Church? Dear me!" said Mr. Hope. "How remarkable! How peculiar! Well, Church, you must accept this—yes, yes, you must! Ah, good! It gives me the greatest delight and pleasure to make you happy!"

He had torn the massive gold chain from his waistcoat, and it was thrust into Church's hand. And before the junior could even commence any protestation, the old gentleman had turned to McClure.

"And now, what shall I bestow upon you, my boy?" he asked, beaming. "But one moment—just one moment! What is your name?"

"McClure, sir."

"Indeed! I am delighted to become acquainted with you, McClure," exclaimed Mr. Hope. "Doubtless a Scottish boy, eh? Wonderful—wonderful! Now let me see—. Yes, yes! You must accept this!"

He took from one of his fingers a really beautiful diamond ring, and the astounded McClure found it in his palm almost before he could recover from his astonishment. The three juniors, in

fact, could make nothing of this stranger.

"I say, sir, we can't accept these, you know!" said Handforth, after a moment. "It wouldn't be right—we shouldn't feel comfortable. They're worth quids and quids, and——"

"Tut—tut—tut!" interrupted Mr. Crawford Hope impatiently. "Keep them—keep them! I insist! I am rich—money is nothing to me. If you do not accept these presents I shall be extremely annoyed. And now I should like you to do me just a little favour in return. You will do so. Good—good!"

"I thought there was a catch in it!" whispered Church.

But he was wrong.

"What do you want us to do, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Yonder, I perceive a small boat," said Mr. Hope, pointing. "It would give me much pleasure to be rowed upon the river for a brief spell. You will do as I ask? Come, boys, all is quiet, and the river is calm."

"Why, certainly, sir," said Handforth promptly.

This was a modest enough proposal, and the juniors soon reached the boat—which one of the other fellows had carelessly left tucked away in the reeds. Mr. Hope climbed in and took his seat at the stern. Handforth and Co. followed him, and Edward Oswald seized the oars.

As a matter of fact, he was very glad of the opportunity to reveal his wonderful rowing prowess. Actually, of course, this didn't exist—but Handforth thought it did. He considered himself to be a marvellous chap on the river. He was regarded by everybody else as a blundering ass.

"We'll just take you down to the bridge and back," said Handforth. "Now then, Church, give us a shove off. And don't sway on one side like that, you fathhead! How can we keep a level keel, if you keep dodging about?"

Handforth quite overlooked the fact that he was sitting well over to starboard, with the result that the boat was tipping over in that direction. But, as it was useless to point this out to Handy, Church shoved off, and then adjusted himself in such a manner that a level keel was obtained.

Handforth commenced to row in his usually masterly fashion, causing showers of spray to dash up, and getting his oars clogged in the reeds at almost every stroke.

"The water, I presume, is quite shallow?" inquired Mr. Hope.

"No fear!" replied Handforth.

"No, no? Indeed, that is quite interesting!" said the stranger. "Then, if it is not shallow, I presume that it must be fairly deep?"

"Just about here it's ten or twelve feet deep," explained Church. "But in the broad parts just ahead—against that bend, sir—there's a terrifically deep pool, and it's jolly dangerous, too, because there are some strong undercurrents."

"Ah, most interesting!" said Mr. Crawford Hope, in a voice which was queerly subdued, and with his eyes glittering in a strange manner.

The boat went on smoothly until it arrived at the bend. It was in mid-stream, and gliding along well. Then, abruptly, Mr. Crawford Hope jumped to his feet, causing the little craft to sway about alarmingly.

"Steady!" gasped Handforth. "What the dickens——"

The words seemed to freeze on his lips. For, glancing up, he beheld the old gentleman. An extraordinary change had come about in Mr. Crawford Hope. The benevolent look had vanished. And, in its place, had come an expression of hatred and diabolical ferocity, which was awful to behold. The man stood there, with a light of demoniacal joy in his eyes.

And Handforth and Co., at that second, knew the truth.

They were in the company of—a dangerous maniac.

CHAPTER VI.

A STARTLING ADVENTURE!

MR. CRAWFORD HOPE uttered a wild, terrible laugh.

"Fools—weak little fools!" he shouted, his face distorted and livid. "You fell into my trap—and now you will go to your deaths. Yes—to your deaths! I had worked for this—planned for it! And you will now suffer as I always intended. Boys—boys! I hate and detest all boys! And now I have a chance of sending three of you to the bottom of the river. It is a good spot—an excellent place! The water is deep, and the current is treacherous."

Handforth suddenly came to his wits.

"The chap's mad—clean off his chump!" he gasped. "Quick—grab him! If we're upset here, we shall have

"an awful job! We shall never get ashore—"

"No, you will never get ashore!" screamed the madman.

As he spoke, he leaned over, grasped the side of the boat, and heaved with all his might. In all probability he would never have been able to upset the craft alone. But fortune favoured him. For that sudden lurch sent Handforth staggering sideways. And Handforth unconsciously completed the operation which Mr. Hopo had commenced. The boat tipped over until the water poured over the side in one swift volume. Then, with a lurch, it completely overturned.

"Oh—oh—"

Handforth and Church and McClure were thrown into the water, and they gasped with alarm and with the chill of the river. For, at this time of the year, the water was like ice.

Mr. Hopo had carried out his threat.

And now the madman, by some chance, had seized hold of two of the oars. Clinging to these, he was being swept down the river, on the current. He was in no immediate danger of drowning, for the oars were sufficiently buoyant to bear his weight.

Handforth and Co. were not so fortunate. They took no heed of the crazy stranger who had caused this disaster. They had quite enough to think about otherwise. The current was indeed treacherous, and it was flowing fairly strongly, with a dangerous undertow which seemed to drag any swimmer down.

Fortunately, all the juniors could swim fairly well. Church and McClure were better than their leader, but Handforth was never ready to admit this. And it was characteristic of him to speak as he did in that moment.

"You all right, you chaps?" he gasped with chattering teeth. "Church! Clurey! If you want a hand I'll see what I can do—"

"We're all right!" said Church huskily. "Strike out for the bank, Handy—this side! It's nearer. Oh, my goodness!"

"Where's the boat?" panted McClure. "If we could only grab hold of that—"

"No—no!" said Church. "It's gone—and we can't do better than swim ashore at once. Buck up, Handy—don't give in!"

"Give in!" snorted Handforth faintly. "Why, you—you rotter—"

His jaws, numbed with cold, refused to move and finish the rest of his sentence. And Handforth struggled on doggedly—realising in his own heart that it was going to be a grim tussle. And he had no extra strength to place at the disposal of his chums, for all his chivalrous offer.

Indeed, Church and McClure had all their work cut out to reach the river bank. There was nobody near at hand to come to the rescue. The three juniors had to rely solely upon themselves. Church was the first ashore. He reached the bank, hauled himself up with feeble strength, and flopped down on the grass, exhausted. That battle with the current had been a terrible one.

"Quick—lend a hand!" gasped McClure weakly.

He had reached the bank, too, but had not sufficient strength to haul himself up. Church assisted him, and the pair were soon side by side in the damp grass. Handforth was still six or seven feet away, but swimming towards safety.

His face was pale, his teeth were clenched. He knew that he was practically done, and it seemed to him that fifty yards separated him from the bank. But he would never appeal to his chums for help—never.

His efforts grew more feeble, and he made practically no headway. Indeed, the current caught him, and slowly but surely commenced to sweep him back.

"Good heavens!" gasped Church, in alarm.

Without hesitating a second, he leapt in, although he was chattering with cold and feeling as weak as a baby. Handforth was going—Handforth was being swept back into the strong current.

"Grab hold of me, Handy" panted Church desperately.

Handforth had sense enough to know that he was beaten, and now that help had come his pride did not prevent him from accepting it. Obstinate as he was, and reluctant to admit defeat, he could do nothing else now but accept his chum's aid.

He seized Church, and, together, they gradually made their way to the bank. It was a slow business, and it seemed that they would never reach safety. Handforth was not absolutely spent, and he was doing all he could. How on earth the pair actually managed to get to the

bank will always remain a bit of a mystery. Sheer pluck and determination, however, defeated that cruel and relentless current.

McClure had had sense enough to keep on the move, and now he was partially warmed up, and his strength was returning. He helped his chums out of the water, and breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief when they were both ashore. He knew, better than the other, perhaps, what a dreadfully narrow escape from death they had had.

"Oh, my hat!" moaned Handforth feebly. "What a rotten business! Fancy me petering out! Thanks, Churchy—you're a brick! You saved my giddy life, and I don't know what to say—"

"Oh, dry up!" muttered Church huskily.

"Dry up! Yes, that's what we need to do," put in McClure. "Come on, you chaps! If we stop here for another minute we shall catch pneumonia, or influenza, or something. Buck up and get a move on! Even if we can't run straight, we've got to rush to the school at full speed."

They pulled themselves together, somehow, and started out. Running was not an easy task in their exhausted condition. But they found, rather to their surprise, that they grew stronger instead of weaker. As their blood commenced to circulate in its normal way, the dreadful numbness disappeared and their limbs gained in strength.

But by the time they had reached the Triangle they were nearly done, and were staggering along in a drunken kind of way. But they were all three glowing with warmth, and providing they tore their wet things off at once, it was pretty safe to predict that they would come to no harm—they would probably not even catch a cold.

Just against the Ancient House steps they ran full tilt into De Valerie, Farman, Owen major, and one or two others. These juniors stared in amazement as the wild and bedraggled figures came into view.

"Great Scott! What's this?"

"Who on earth—"

"Handforth, and Church and McClure!" shouted Hubbard. "My only hat! What have the silly asses been up to—"

"There's been an accident!"

Handforth and Co. came up, breathing hard, and reeling as they ran.

"What's happened?" asked De Valerie sharply.

"A spill—river—boat overturned," gasped Church. "Quick—let's get inside! We're nearly done!"

De Valerie and all the other juniors took it upon themselves to assist. Handforth and Co. were seized and half carried, half dragged upstairs to one of the bathrooms. And there De Valerie insisted upon the three juniors plunging forthwith into a hot bath.

The water was prepared in next to no time, and half an hour later the heroes of Study D were feeling something like their usual selves. They had not dressed again, although they had expressed a desire to do so. In spite of their wishes, however, they had been rushed straight into the dormitory.

Here some of the fellows had taken the sheets from the beds of the three patients, and extra blankets had been piled on.

Handforth and Co. were now snugly between these blankets—warm, cosy, and glowing. There was certainly very little fear of their coming to any harm. But they were all rather weak and aching after their strenuous exertions.

"Now, you bounders, you've got to tell us how it happened!" said De Valerie. "What on earth made you go on the river in the first place? And how did you manage to tip the boat up?"

"Oh, I suppose they were rotting about!" said Owen major.

"You jolly well suppose wrong!" declared Handforth. "We met a benovolent old chap who gave us his gold watch and chain and a diamond ring, and then asked us to take him for a row on the river. But when we got to that deep part, close against the bend, he suddenly stood up and turned into a raving maniac. Then he tipped the boat up and we fell into the river—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The listening juniors roared.

"Don't you believe it?" demanded Handforth wrathfully.

"Well, hardly!" grinned De Valerie.

"I should try a better one than that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy's right—it's really true," said Church. "I know it sounds tall, but it actually happened. This chap called himself Crawford Hope, and he seemed all right at first, anyhow, he wasn't

dangerous. But when he was in the boat he looked absolutely horrible. I—I can see his face now!"

"Well, it's a pity you can't invent a better yarn," said Singleton. "If this chap gave you his watch and chain and all the rest of it, where are they?"

"Yes, that's a poser."

"Oh, is it?" snapped Handforth. "Just feel in our pockets."

The pockets of the wet clothes were examined, and, sure enough, the gold watch and chain and diamond ring came to light. The Removites were compelled to credit the story now.

And while they were still expressing their amazement, Morrow of the Sixth appeared, accompanied by Mr. Crowell, and the Headmaster.

Dr. Stafford was looking very serious. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "Then it is true, Mr. Crowell! Boys—boys! Tell me what has happened—I must know at once!"

It seemed that Morrow had come across a group of juniors in the upper corridor and he had heard all about it from them—although the prefect had not been able to discover how the juniors had obtained their wetting.

Handforth and Co. told their story—in all its details.

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Crowell, with just a touch of suspicion in his voice. "Indeed, it seems quite incredible!"

"Don't you believe it, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Well, my boy, it certainly sounds somewhat peculiar—"

"You are quite right, Mr. Crowell—quite right," said the Head. "At the same time, I do not doubt what the boys have told us. And, of course, I absolve them from all blame in the matter. Indeed, I must commend them highly for their pluck in getting out of such a terrible predicament in safety."

"I was just about done, sir," said Handforth. "I should have been drowned if Church hadn't lugged me out—"

"Oh, rot!" growled Church uncomfortably.

"Don't you take any notice of him, sir—it's the truth," persisted Handforth. "I'm a ripping swimmer, of course, and under ordinary circumstances, I dare say I could have whacked these asses hollow. I—I mean—"

"I quite understand, Handforth, and

it is characteristic of you to give credit to your chums," said the Head. "You have all behaved splendidly."

"My feet seemed to be clogged, somehow," said Handforth. "I couldn't swim properly, and I believe I must have had some reeds caught on my boots—"

"I don't think!" murmured Owen major.

"Well, boys, you had better remain in bed now," went on the Head. "I will make inquiries concerning this mysterious stranger. It is quite likely that he was drowned—although I hope such a tragedy has not occurred. All you other juniors must leave the dormitory at once."

Dr. Stafford, having satisfied himself that the patients were in no need of a doctor, bustled out of the dormitory with Mr. Crowell. The Head went straight to his study and rang up the Bannington Police Station.

He was soon speaking with Inspector Jameson.

"Crawford Hope?" repeated the inspector, as he heard the news. "Why, yes—yes!"

"You know something about him?" "Most certainly I do," said the inspector. "I received a report from Moor Hill Asylum this morning to the effect that a dangerous lunatic had escaped. It is this man Hope, and I am very glad of your information."

Inquiries by the police and Asylum officials proved that Crawford Hope, the lunatic, had escaped from the river. But where he had vanished to was a mystery. He was certainly not recaptured.

And now that Reginald Pitt was back in the fold we anticipated that everything would go easily and smoothly in future. And now active preparations were being made for the Fifth of November programme of fireworks.

But we little realised what fresh excitements and perils were to surround us so very soon!

THE END.

— NEXT WEEK —

THE "FIFTH" AT ST. FRANK'S!

A thrilling story of the burning of a
guy, and what came of it.

The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued).

The Prisoner in the Monks' Punishment Cell.

TRY to sleep, Miss Charteris," he said soothingly, covering her with the American's coat. "You are perfectly safe now, and I want to save this torch in case of emergency."

Once or twice he felt himself dozing, and pinched himself to keep awake. And the long night passed, without a sound in that ancient attic in the north-west wing.

When Evelyn Ingleby-Charteris opened her eyes it was to find the grey dawn stealing in through the dormer windows, and Nipper standing beside her chair.

"Do you see that?" said the boy, pointing upwards to the sloping roof, where a patch of light showed a square of glass set high above them and covered with cobwebs. "I want you to help me to pile some of these things into a heap. If I can only reach that skylight, the rest will be easy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Knock-Out Blow!

IT had been close upon eleven o'clock when the little Belgian community smirked and smiled itself out of the Manor House, with noisy expressions of thanks for Mr. Chard's hospitality, which sounded quite genuine in its broken English.

"Why are you and Madame so grave?" said Monica, when they had gone. "We have had a simply ripping evening!"

"Don't be slangy, Monica," said her mother. "And go to bed now. Look at the time!"

As the girls went out at one door "Mr. Chiffey" entered by another.

"Well, have you found anything?" said the Rev. Octavius.

"Only that, as Adolfe Malines is at Bow Street at the present moment, it must have been his twin brother who was here to-night," said Nelson Lee. "Is it not a marvellous thing that those thorough-paced scoundrels can be such wonderful musicians? Now all hangs on the news Nipper brings. It

it calls for immediate action, I will wake you at once. I am going to sit up to let him in."

Nelson Lee never closed an eye that night, and, still wearing his make-up that had deceived Mr. Chard's guests, morning found him pacing the marble floor of the hall, trying vainly to resist the feeling that something was wrong.

Nipper had not returned, and, though he knew the boy to be almost as clever and resourceful as himself, there were endless possibilities in that mysterious hostel, and he was very uneasy.

He changed Boyle's dress-coat for a loose jacket, and, since the duties attached to his new character did not commence until after breakfast, he posted himself at the window from which Nipper had watched the hostel garden, and was greatly relieved to see a curl of smoke rise from the chimney above the old abbey gatehouse.

Very different had been the overnight attitude of the four rogues, and the moment big Trochon had closed and bolted their front door Madame had screamed with laughter, in which the three men joined in three different keys.

"You see," said Trochon, "it was all right. You had your doubts, but I said 'Poof!' These English are fools of the first water—one can do anything with them!"

"It would seem so," said Professor Felix, assuming his black skull-cap, and feeling more comfortable in consequence. "There is only one thing about it. I do not see any signs of Monsieur Chard leaving the house, when he has gone to the trouble of engaging a new butler."

"If you are going to suggest that I give them another fright to-night, then I say no!" laughed Adolfe Malines' double. "Taking it altogether, it was a great strain, and I am much too tired."

"You shall snore in peace, Henri!" gurgled Trochon. "To-morrow you and I will establish communication with poor Vilotte. By the way, Marie, have you fed the prisoners?"

"They have had all they will get to-night!" said Madame, rather tartly. "Sleep well! I am going to bed."

"I suppose the American is still at

work," said the professor, when Madame Trochon had lit her candle and disappeared. "You might go down and see if he wants any assistance, Jules."

"Willingly," replied the giant, who was feeling very merry, thanks to Mr. Chard's burgundy and the liberal chase of cognac which he had taken as a nightcap.

"Hola!" they heard him say, as he went into the laboratory. "Why has the idiot closed the trapdoor? It was not necessary."

The two men left alone in the living-room smoked and talked, until, after an absence of some ten minutes, Trochon came back, with a prodigious sneer on his lips.

"He has finished," he said, "and he has gone. Moreover, he has taken Adolfe's last die with him and all the notes he printed."

"Why so?" said Professor Felix suspiciously.

Big Trochon shrugged his shoulders.

"Ma foi, there is no accounting for the actions of that man. He is cool to the verge of folly, and yet he can get the wind up in a moment. He fastened the door of the dark room down there, but never took the trouble to switch off the light. All the lamps were burning. I suppose he preferred the Maison Charteris to our monastic quarters. Shall we turn in? I have locked everything up."

The light of three candles wavered on the stone wall as the three men mounted to their sleeping-rooms, and silence fell over the ancient gatehouse.

There was nothing to show what the morning would bring. Only Professor Felix turned uneasily in his bed, finding sleep very difficult to catch, for a wonder.

He was up betimes, for they were all early risers, and Nelson Lee, from his window, saw the old man taking his usual constitutional round the garden. He saw him also meet the boy who delivered telegrams, and start visibly as he read the message.

"Now, then, what's happened?" murmured the watcher. "And why isn't Nipper back?"

Professor Felix walked to the gatehouse with a perceptible quickening of his dignified stride, and, disappearing under the archway, burst like a bombshell upon the others, who had just seated themselves round the breakfast-table.

"It is all over!" he cried hoarsely, brandishing the telegram. "This is from Verodini—Adolfe Malines was arrested last night, at the request of Nelson Lee."

Madame dropped the coffee-pot, with a piercing scream, and Adolfe Malines' twin brother grew ghastly white. Trochon was the only one who kept his head, and, leaning forward, shook his wife violently by the shoulders.

"Stop that, Marie!" he thundered. "Charteris must be told at once. There was some reason for the American's disappearance, then!"

Madame Trochon rose to the occasion and to her feet at the same time, running to a

side-table, on which were paper and envelopes.

"What shall I say?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Tell him of this thing," replied her husband, "and ask what we must do. It will not be safe to trust the post-office. Withers must take it on his auto-cycle. Here, you are forgetting your basket. And do not hurry while they can see you from the Manor House. They are watching us, you may be sure!"

Madame took the basket he held out, and walked calmly into the sunshine, with the letter, bareheaded, as usual, without the slightest visible sign of haste.

Nelson Lee saw her go, and knew where she was going, but he never moved from his position until the woman returned. And a few minutes later the landlord of the Red Lion had scorched along the high road, leaving a blue cloud of oily vapour behind him.

"Will you relieve me here, Mr. Chard?" he said very quietly. "I'm going to take a short stroll up the Peterborough road."

The headmaster looked sharply at him, and Lee nodded.

"Yes, things are moving at last, and we must keep pace with the movement," was all Lee said, as he lit a cigarette and sauntered leisurely along the King's highway.

A quarter of a mile farther on the Red Bridge crossed a little stream that flowed placidly among the mellowing rushes, to lose itself in the marsh, and as Mr. Withers, the innkeeper, returned, in an incredibly short space of time, from the cathedral city, Mr. Chard's new butler stepped into the road and opened both arms.

"Well, what do you want?" cried the landlord, slowing down and balancing himself on one foot.

"The answer to that letter you took to Mr. Ingleby-Charteris," was the startling reply. "You don't recognise me, Withers, but I am Nelson Lee, the detective, whom you have already met as 'Mr. Herbert Drake,' the games-master at the Manor House."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Withers. "Is something up?"

"Very much up, as I'll tell you when you get down," said Lee. "Give me that letter quickly." And the innkeeper produced it from his pocket. "You were going to the hostel, weren't you?"

"I was."

"Right-oh! I only want you to mark time for five minutes."

And, stepping down the bank, Lee laid the envelope on the surface of the water and held it there, taking care that no drop fell upon the direction, while Withers, propping his machine against the bridge, watched him with bated breath.

The moistened flap of the envelope soon yielded to a deft touch with the blade of a penknife, and Nelson Lee read these words:

"With you in an hour. Shall leave car at

mouth of Hoggett's Lane. Don't stir till I come. I have something to do in the vault before we start. Tell Clitters to collect all the swag."

Lee's eyes gleamed with a sudden intelligence as he replaced the hasty scrawl and drew a wad of thick white blotting-paper from his pocket.

When he had rejoined the astonished man and closed the envelope with great care, he placed it between the leaves of the blotting-paper until all the moisture had been extracted, and returned it to Withers.

"Deliver this as though nothing had happened," he said quickly. "And, after you have told Major Rogerson that I want him at the Manor House, tell Mr. Miles to drive like lightning to the chief-constable at Godmanchester, and hand him this message."

While he was speaking he scribbled some lines on a leaf of his notebook, his eyes still gleaming, but his face set hard and stern.

"What was the exact time when Mr. Charteris gave you his reply?"

"Striking nine, sir," said the innkeeper.

"Five and twenty past now," murmured Nelson Lee. "By gad, it's cutting it pretty close, but we'll have 'em!"

He ran until almost within sight of the hostel, and then fell into a leisurely stride which did not quicken until he was within six yards of the fine doorway of Mar. Manor House.

There he drew back a step, lifting his hands to shield his face, for on to the broad stone steps a tile had fallen, breaking into fifty flying fragments, and his eyes went upwards.

It did not need the waving arm to tell him what had happened, for there was Nipper on the edge of the roof, beckoning with all his might.

"I'm going to keep my word," said Lee, almost colliding with Mr. Chard and Major Rogerson, who had seen him coming and swung the door wide. "Where is Hartop?"

"With Seymour," said the major. "That's why I'm here so early."

"Then I shall want all three of you!"

And he raced like one possessed up the staircase, the pair following him.

They overtook him at the foot of the ladder leading on to the roof, as Lee lifted the trapdoor and Nipper slipped through the opening.

For a breathless moment the pair stood there, while the boy poured out the story of what he had found, and when the great detective came down again his face was scarlet with suppressed excitement.

"Quick, Nipper!" he cried. "Tell Dr. Hartop and Mr. Chard to come up here. Three revolvers from my bag, one of them for the doctor! I have my own Browning. Now, Mr. Chard, the key of the attic where the furniture is stored, and I think we can promise Major Rogerson the surprise of his life."

As they reached the door in the lonely

wing Nipper arrived with the doctor and the weapons, and they went in.

The major knew nothing, and had almost given up hope of doing more than bringing Ingleby-Charteris to justice, until the eyes in the white face met his own, and a low sweet voice called to him by name.

"Little girl, little girl!" he cried, taking her in his arms, and if the listeners had needed anything to steel their hearts for the task that lay before them they had surely found it in the broken sob of thankfulness that burst from the strong man's throat.

Nipper had led the way to the chest, which he unlocked and opened, and Nelson Lee was peering into the black depths below.

"Rogerson," he said, with a glance at his wristlet watch, "if you want to get it back on that scoundrel, there's no time to waste. If you are coming with us, Mrs. Chard will look after your fiancée."

And the major leapt like a panther across the floor, slipping Lee's revolver into his pocket as he did so.

The ex-champion middleweight boxer of the Royal Artillery needed nothing but his hands, and as he lowered himself on to the ladder he lifted up a fervent prayer that they might not be too late. The law could take its course after he had done with the spoiler of his happiness!

The inner vault was in darkness when they reached the underground floor, but Nipper, who was leading, had marked the position of the switchboard, and in an instant the whole place became light as day.

Their eyes turned instinctively to So. Clitters' prison-house, but, the bolt being shot, Nelson Lee passed on tiptoe into the middle vault.

Boyle, seeing them suddenly appear, clanked his chain as he sat upright.

"Hush! It's all right, Boyle!" whispered Lee. "How long is it since any of them have been down here?"

"Not since early morning, sir," replied the butler, recognising the voice of the popular games-master, in spite of his make-up and the fact that he was wearing clothes of his own.

"Then we are beforehand!" said the great detective, in a tone of triumph. "Show Major Rogerson Miss Charteris's cell, Nipper. Quick! Behind the pillars! I hear footsteps running!"

Meanwhile, into the hostel, where three men and a woman waited in sickening suspense, there had come a figure in a motor-coat and goggles, which could not hide the purple lividness of his face. And the stockbroker was panting for breath.

"The road's clear," he said, as they crowded round him, "and when we make a start nothing can stop us! Where's Clitters?"

"He went last night."

"The fool!" exclaimed Ingleby-Charteris, with an oath. "They'll have him as sure

as eggs. I suppose Vilotte is still in the Manor House. His number's up. Now listen to what I say, and the slightest deviation from my instructions may upset everything. It's thirteen minutes to ten now. At five minutes to, pass through the fields, keeping well in the hedge bottom. Get into my car, and muffle yourselves up in the wraps you'll find there. We shall run straight for Hull and cross over to Holland in the first case. Don't venture on to the road on any account, and don't start for eight minutes."

"But what are you going to do?" said Trochon, in a husky whisper.

"Something that I ought to have done before!" said Ingleby-Charteris, in a hard voice, drawing out a heavy revolver. "Felix, have you any powerful corrosive among your drugs, some acid that will eat through flesh and bone, and eat quickly?"

The old man's eyebrows lifted, understanding, and he went into the laboratory, the man on whom all their hopes depended following him without a word.

"This is what you want," said Felix, taking down a Winchester quart bottle. "But don't get any on your hands, I warn you."

Ingleby-Charteris grunted something in his throat, and disappeared through the trap-door.

Once, as he reached the cell, he seemed to hesitate, but it was only for a moment. He had nerved himself for the foul thing he was about to do, and, placing the bottle of acid on the floor, he called out:

"Evelyn, your troubles are over. I am going to set you free. Major Rogerson is waiting for you upstairs."

"You liar!" came a voice that boomed through the vaulted chamber, and, with a yell of terror, the would-be murderer reeled against the stone wall as the major's right took him straight between the eyes.

"I've waited a long time for this moment!" laughed the gunner-major, as the revolver dropped from the scoundrel's hand.

And then those watching figures appeared, each from his hiding-place, and when at last Dr. Hartop stepped forward and touched the major, as Charteris lay under the wall, the ex-champion middleweight let his own arms fall with a happy smile.

"Yes, I know, doc.," he said. "His face won't be in his favour at the assizes, but that five minutes was worth a lifetime to me!"

Half a dozen times Nelson Lee had had his eye on the watch, and, with a wave of his hand, ran through the arch by which the now insensible millionaire had made his appearance, the others following.

"Come!" said Jules Trochon. "It is five minutes to ten. Marie, I will carry your bag."

And they left the hostel which had sheltered them too long.

"Mon Dieu!" screamed Henri Malines. "We are trapped!"

Roddy Miles' car, full of uniformed constables, had just turned in at the gate, and an escort of police on motor-bikes went whizzing past along the high road.

"Back into the house!" thundered Trochon, scarcely giving the others time to re-enter before he slammed the door and pushed the bolts well home. "We are not taken yet!"

"I'm not so sure about that! Put up your hands, all of you!" rang out a stern voice from the door of the laboratory. "Clitters and Charteris are down below, where we can find them when we want them. Scotland Yard is looking after your friend Adolfe, and Vilotte we've had for days."

Four glittering barrels covered the gang, and, as Madame Trochon fell in a dead faint, the three men raised their arms, while Nipper let in the county police.

"Wait a moment," said the great detective. "The man I have most longed to lay my hands on has still to be secured, and I want to surprise him."

He took down a monk's robe that hung behind the door, and, putting it on, said:

"Now, colonel, this way, please!"

Outside the door of that inner dark room in that coiners' subterranean den a circle of expectant men waited while Lee slid back the steel bolt.

As he allowed the reinforced door to slowly open an angry howl greeted their ears and a furious man emerged.

"You blamed fool! Why didn't you tell me this thing closed automatically?" roared Sol Clitters.

And then, as Lee threw back the cowl and covered him, the American counterfeit king grew motionless as one of the stone pillars that surrounded them.

"Gee-whizz!" he said slowly. "So you're not dead after all! I suppose this means a lifer for the lot of us?"

And it did!

The school had yelled itself hoarse, carrying the great detective and his great assistant round and round the playing-fields shoulder-high, and Seymour, all trace of the brain trouble leaving him under Dr. Hartop's skill, opened his eyes, to see their beloved games master sitting by his bedside, with Gurling and Tulk, stuffing their handkerchiefs into their mouths.

"Mr. Drake!" exclaimed the invalid. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

And then his mind went back to the thing that had filled it not many days before, and he turned to his companions, saying:

"Has Nelson Lee written?"

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"No, you little ass! He's been here all the time!" shouted Gurling. "Here he is, and this is Nipper!"—and "Barton" crept out from under the bed.

Seymour's hand crept over the coverlet to Lee's own when he had heard of the wonderful capture.

"Will you tell me, sir"—with wide eyes full of inquiry—"why didn't you bring a bloodhound? He would have tracked the ghost."

"Yes, old fellow," said Nelson Lee, with a smile, "but he would have given us away at the same time, unless we could have disguised the bloodhound as a fox terrier—and that would have been even beyond me. And now I've promised to take all the boys down through the bottomless chest on a tour of exploration, and when you are strong again, I'm sure Mr. Chard will take you. I don't think any of us are likely to forget the mysteries of Marsh Manor—what?"

THE END.

WELCOME NEWS TO ALL MY READERS.

Last week I referred to a pleasant surprise I have in store for you. In fact, it will be a budget of surprises. The NOVEMBER 26 issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" will be the most important number of our little paper since it first made its appearance. Collectors and others PLEASE NOTE THE DATE and order from your newsagent in advance, so as to make sure that you will secure a copy. Three weeks from now many more pages will be added to "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," and NO. 1 of "NIPPER'S MAGAZINE" will make its debut as a free supplement. Of course, "Nipper's Magazine" will be edited by the Leader of the Remove and contributed to by members of the Remove. In addition, there will be GIVEN AWAY the first of a series of splendid photographic plates of famous footballers.

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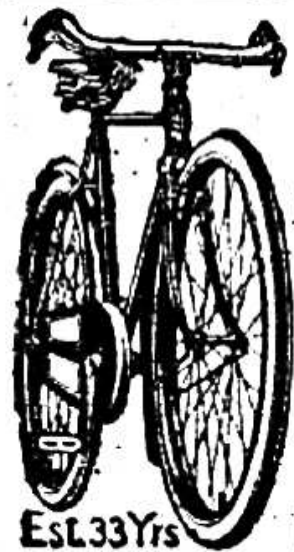
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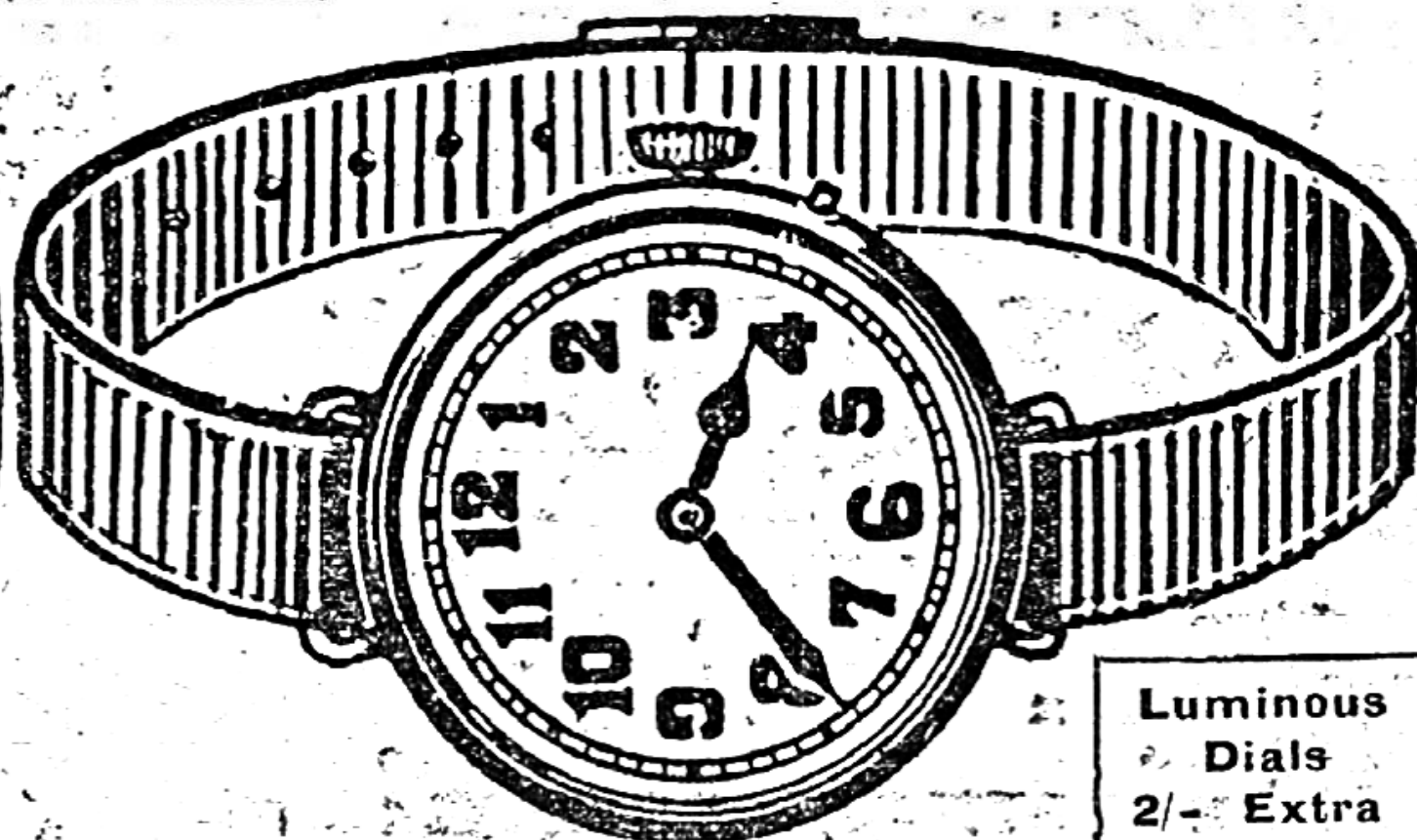
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