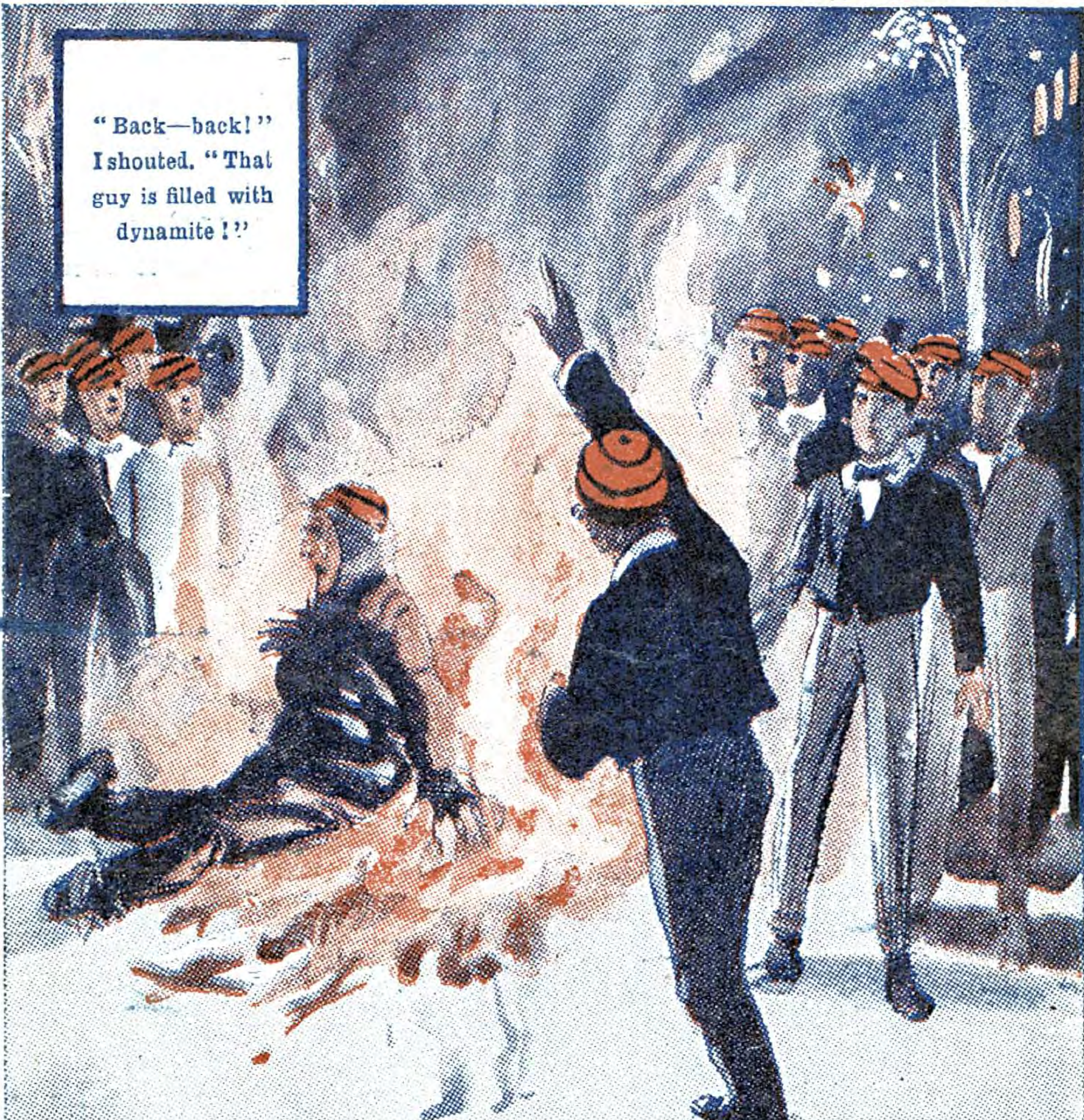


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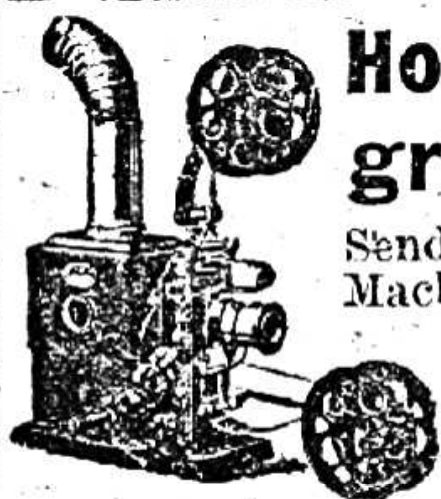
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

GETTING READY FOR SATURDAY!

SIZ-Z-Z! Bang! Kenmore, of the Sixth, leapt into the air, uttering a startled gasp. The explosion had taken place right under his feet, and the report was quite considerable; but when Kenmore looked round in the gloom of the evening, he could only see a puff of smoke and a few sparks.

From somewhere out of the dimness came a few soft chuckles.

Kenmore scowled.

"You confounded young sweeps!" he shouted furiously. "Who threw that cracker at me?"

The only reply he received was another chuckle.

Kenmore was not a popular fellow at St. Frank's, and this was by no means the first firework which had been hurled in his direction during the past day or so. And now, as he strode forward, bent on investigating, a red spark came shooting through the air towards him. It fell to the ground near by.

"Not this time!" snapped the Sixth-Former curtly.

He went to stamp upon the spark, which lay sizzling in the gravel of the Triangle; but before he could carry out his object, the spark suddenly burst into life. It was really a jumping cracker, and Kenmore knew all about it.

Bang! Siz-z-z! Bang! Siz-z-z! Bang-bang-bang!

It was a particularly good specimen, too, for it exploded with loud reports, jumping about like a live thing. Simon Kenmore found it necessary to jump, too. He leapt about here and there, roaring at the top of his voice—not that this made any difference. And wherever he jumped, the cracker seemed to follow him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was no chuckle this time, but a roar of laughter. Kenmore suddenly came to the conclusion that the whole position was undignified, so he clenched his fists, set his lips, and charged into the Ancient House.

From behind the clump of chestnut trees emerged Reginald Pitt, De Valerie, Handforth, and Church. They were all grinning hugely.

"That's the way to treat Kenmore!" grinned Pitt. "My hat! That jumper was the best we've lot off yet! What a pity the ass went in—I was just getting the next one ready!"

"But we shall have to be careful," said De Valerie. "Mr. Lee has already punished one or two chaps for letting off fireworks; but he winks his eye at a good many cases. It's the Fifth on Saturday, and so we're allowed a little bit of latitude, so to speak."

It afforded the juniors considerable pleasure to make unpopular seniors jump. Quite a number of fellows had

been victimised. Timothy Tucker, of the Remove, had been on the jump nearly all day, for the cheerful lunatic of St. Frank's was an extra-special mark for the jokers.

This sort of thing, of course, usually took place a few days before the Fifth of November. Fireworks were not officially allowed among the fellows until the actual day arrived, and then, of course, there would be quite a big display, in addition to a huge bonfire.

But the juniors generally managed to get a few loose fireworks, usually of the cracker variety, and these were let off at odd moments, when no masters or prefects happened to be near by.

Quite a big programme had been planned out for Guy Fawkes Day. As captain of the Remove, I had full charge of all the big fireworks and the general arrangements. A bonfire was to be built in the big paddock behind the Head's garden. It wasn't an ordinary bonfire, but a scientifically constructed affair, which would blaze up for two or three hours, and light up the whole countryside.

And the fireworks would be of an ambitious type. There had been large contributions among the fellows, and the whole sum lumped together enabled us to purchase a fine selection. In addition, the Directors themselves, in a fit of generosity, had promised to send out a big box of fireworks. There would, in fact, be a set display, with an official programme.

All the fellows were looking forward to this. But, at the same time, they greatly enjoyed the prospect of letting off their own private fireworks, and it was only to be expected that a few of these should be discharged a day or two in advance.

Handforth was one of the worst sinners in this respect.

He had plenty of cash, and he had laid in a good stock of jumping crackers and fireworks of a similar type. And he took a particular delight in worrying the unpopular fellows. Thus, Fullwood and Co. had received quite a lot of attention from Handy. Crackers had been flung in their study by an unseen hand, and the cads of the Remove had had a rather jumpy time.

And now Handforth and Church, still chuckling, made their way to the Ancient House doorway. It was just

tea-time, and McClure had been left in Study D, getting tea ready.

"We'll have another lark later on," said Handforth, as he and Church marched into the lobby. "My hat! I'll make some of the fellows dance—just you wait! I've got a particularly fizzy one for Christine and Co."

At that moment Church turned, for Pitt had called to him from outside—Pitt and De Valerie were not coming in just yet. When Church returned to the lobby, after having had a few words with the champion footballer of the Remove, he found that Handforth had not waited.

And as Church was turning into the Remove passage, a hand suddenly reached out and grasped his shoulder. Church was rather startled, for a second before there had been no evidence that the lobby was inhabited. Everything was very quiet, for all the fellows were at tea in their studies, barring an odd one here and there.

"What the dickens——"

"Now I've got you, you little rotter!" exclaimed a harsh voice. "Think you can play about just as you like, eh? I'm going to teach you a lesson—a lesson you won't forget in a hurry!"

Church found himself in the grasp of Kenmore, of the Sixth.

"You—you rotter!" shouted Church, struggling.

It was only too evident that the Sixth-Former had been lying in wait. He had presumably let Handforth go by—concluding that Handforth was rather too much of a handful to tackle. And so he had waited for Church.

"Lemme go!" panted Church wrathfully. "What's the idea of this? I've done nothing to you——"

"Don't try any whoppers on me!" interrupted Kenmore harshly. "You were one of the young beggars who threw those crackers at me! I heard what Handforth was saying a few minutes ago, and now you're going to pay!"

Church struggled more than ever.

"You cad!" he gasped. "Do you call this cricket, to collar me like this before I've got a chance to defend myself——"

"Never mind what I call it—I'm going to twist your giddy arm!" said Kenmore savagely. "I'm going to make you howl."

The Sixth-Former, unable to punish

all the culprits, was determined to vent his vicious spite upon Church alone. He found it a somewhat difficult task, for Church was not exactly meek.

He struggled and wrenched and gave Kenmore a lot of trouble, and the Sixth-Former fairly let himself go. Swinging the junior's arm round, he twisted it suddenly, until Church gasped with pain, and his face was screwed up with the agony of it.

"You—you bullying blackguard!" he panted. "You—— Yow—yaroooh!"

Kenmore was twisting his arm more; then suddenly it was released, and even while Church was staggering, Kenmore brought his clenched fist round with all his force, and struck the junior on the side of the head.

Church went down like a log, dazed.

"Now perhaps you'll be more careful!" said Kenmore thickly. "And if you sneak about this I'll half murder you next time!"

He strode away, leaving Church on the floor. Three minutes later Handforth and McClure, in Study D, looked up as the door opened. Church came in—but not the usual Church.

"What the dickens——"

Handforth paused, and stared.

Church fairly staggered into the study. His clothing was dusty, his collar was crumpled and torn out at one side, his hair was tousled, and his left ear was fiery red and swelling visibly. At the first glance it was quite obvious that Church had been in trouble.

"You—you silly ass!" exclaimed McClure. "Who the thunder have you been fighting? My hat! That ear of yours looks pretty puffy! Somebody managed to give you a pretty decent smosh."

Handforth carefully rolled up his sleeves.

"Who was it?" he demanded grimly. "Come on—out with his name! Of all the giddy nerve, knocking a member of Study D about like this! I'm jolly well going to smack him to smithereens!"

Edward Oswald Handforth was a peculiar mixture. He would inflict black eyes and thick ears in Study D with cheerful frequency. Church and McClure, in fact, were generally suffering from the effects of Handy's fists; but if anybody else chanced to knock them about, Handforth always sought vengeance.

He seemed to regard Church and

McClure as his own particular property. It was his privilege to batter them as he liked; but they were forbidden ground to any other fellow.

"It's—it's all right," muttered Church. "Don't be an ass, Handy—you'll only make things worse. But I'll get even with the cad one of these days. My goodness! I believe he's dislocated my shoulder!"

Handforth's face grew even more grim.

"Oh! So you've had your arm twisted, eh?" he demanded. "That's a deduction," he went on, turning to McClure. "Of course, you can't follow it, not being a detective; but I deduce these things on the instant. I'll do some more. Church's arm has been twisted—that proves that he hasn't had a scrap with a junior. What does it leave? Either a master, or a prefect, or an ordinary Sixth-Former. A master or a prefect wouldn't twist a fellow's arm; therefore, it must have been somebody else. How's that for a piece of deduction?"

"Blow your giddy deductions!" said McClure. "There's no need for those long-winded speeches now, Handy. Here you are, Church—sit down in this chair. I'll rush upstairs and get a sponge and water for that ear——"

"No, don't trouble," interrupted Church. "I'm better now—lots. And I'll buzz upstairs myself, and have a wash and put a clean collar on. That rotten cad ought to be boiled in oil!"

Handforth glared.

"Are you going to give me his name or not?" he demanded.

"Well, you might get into trouble——"

"I'll give you ten seconds—or punch your nose!" roared Handforth.

This was his usual way of obtaining information. He meant it, too; and Church, who had received enough punching for the time being, did not feel inclined to dodge into safety. There was only one alternative.

"I'll tell you, Handy; but you can't do anything," he growled. "It was Kenmore who knocked me about——"

"Kenmore?" snorted Handforth. "Well, the brute! I saw him in the lobby, but he took no notice of me. Do you mean to say he sprang on you when you came in?"

"Yes, rather; and twisted my arm, and then nearly knocked me silly," ro-

plied Church. "But you can't go for Kenmore—it couldn't be done, Handy. You'd only get a couple of black eyes!"

"What?" yelled Handforth. "A couple of black eyes from Kenmore? Why, you silly fathead, I could eat him up! He's a hulking great chap, and Sixth-Former, I know; but I'm going to wipe up the floor with him, all the same."

Church looked rather alarmed.

"Yes, of course you can do it, Handy!" he gasped. "You could knock him into the middle of next week; but it's not worth it. You can't do a thing like that quietly. Before you're half whacked—I mean, before you've given Kenmore a hiding, you'll have the masters and prefects buzzing round you. And that'll mean a thousand lines, at least. It's not worth it, old son."

Handforth paused. He hadn't thought of that aspect. He never did think of the obvious. He was a fellow of the moment—he never took the trouble to gaze an inch beyond his own nose.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he admitted. "But you needn't think I'm going to let the rotter off. He's going through the mill when I get the first opportunity. I don't suppose it would be advisable to go for him in his own study."

Handforth sat down, and became thoughtful. He was trying to think of some means of getting even with Kenmore in a fitting manner. Of course, the best of all methods would be to punch Kenmore's nose—that went without saying; but drastic action of that sort, with a senior, required thinking over.

And the possibility that Handforth might not be able to inflict a thrashing never occurred to him. It was more than probable, in fact, that Handy would get far the worst of it, if it came to a real scrap, for Simon Kenmore was a big, muscular fellow, and quite a big proposition to tackle.

Church went off upstairs to change his collar and to bathe his swollen ear. When he came down, Handforth was still sitting in the chair, in exactly the same position, and McClure was at the table, partaking of tea.

"That's better," said McClure. "You look yourself now, Churchy. How's your arm?"

"Hurts a bit; but I don't suppose it'll

give me much trouble until to-morrow, and then it'll be as stiff as the dickens," said Church. "What's the matter with Handy? Doesn't he want any tea?"

"Goodness knows!" replied McClure. "I've called him about six times, but he simply ignores me. He gets like this occasionally, you know. We could insult him right and left, but he wouldn't hear us."

Church sat down to tea, but he had hardly done so before Handforth jumped abruptly to his feet, and slapped his thigh. Then he gazed at his two chums, with a triumphant expression in his eyes.

"Got it!" he exclaimed exultantly. "The very wheeze—the most ripping idea we could think of! Buck up with that tea, and finish. We've got to start on it to-night, or we sha'n't get it done."

"Start on what—the tea?" asked McClure, staring.

"No, you ass!" said Handy. "Of what importance is tea? We can do without it for once, I suppose; and then we'll rush out to the wood-shed and get straight on the job."

"Which job?" demanded Church.

"Oh, my only hat! Haven't I just been telling you?" asked Handforth impatiently. "I've never known such chaps—you always want everything explained twice! We've got to get even with Kenmore, and here's a chance of doing it. We'll make him the laughing-stock of the whole school."

"In the wood-shed?"

"No, you duffer!"

"But you just said——"

"We're going into the wood-shed to prepare things," said Handforth. "We can't burn him unless we get everything ready, I suppose?"

"Burn him?" gasped Church.

"Of course—on the bonfire!"

"Burn—burn Kenmore on the bonfire?" yelled McClure. "Why, you ass, that would kill him——"

"Who's talking about burning Kenmore?" snorted Handforth.

"Why, you are!"

"We're going to make a guy, you fathead—an extra one!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Don't you see the wheeze? We'll shove him on the fire in thing-a-me-jig——"

"In what?"

"You know what I mean—in effigy," said Handforth. "That's what they call it. We'll make a guy—one that looks exactly like Kenmore, and burn him on Guy Fawkes night. And we'll keep it secret until the last minute. My hal! He'll look a bit blue when he sees himself burning in the flames!"

Neither Church nor McClure were particularly struck by this tremendous brain wave; but they knew it was no good arguing or attempting to turn Handforth from his purpose. Edward Oswald had evidently made up his mind that a special guy was to be made—and it would be made.

And so Church and McClure thought it better not to argue the point. They could have made all sorts of objections; they could have pointed out that it was practically hopeless to make a guy that would bear any striking resemblance to Kenmore. And in spite of their doubts, they warmly approved.

"Oh, great!" said Church. "You do get some stunning wheezes, Handy! And you propose making this guy in the wood-shed?"

"Exactly."

"Of course, it'll be rather difficult to get the face right," said McClure thoughtfully. "It won't be so easy to make a guy of Kenmore. If you take somebody like the Kaiser, with an up-turned moustache, it's simple enough to guy him; but it'll be a different matter with Kenmore——"

"Leave that to me," said Handforth. "I know where I can get a mask, and we can build it in properly, and with a little grease-paint and stuff I can soon make it look exactly like Kenmore. Trust me!"

And so, shortly after tea, Handforth and Co. sallied out to the wood-shed, and there they commenced certain mysterious preparations. They little realised what the making of this guy was ultimately to lead to!

CHAPTER II.

A NEW FACE AT ST. FRANK'S!

TO-DAY?" asked Tommy Watson. "I think so, anyway," I said. "Fenton told me so half an hour ago, and he ought to know."

"Yes, rather, dear old boy," agreed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "But now

frightfully interestin', begad! A new master at St. Frank's—not in place of somebody who has left, but a new master altogether."

"Well, he's not an ordinary master," I explained. "He'll be in charge of the senior and junior laboratories—in other words, a science-master. I think he's a frightfully clever chap, and he'll probably be as dry as dust, and wear spectacles, and be absent-minded—a regular professor sort of joker, you know. His name's Mr. Hugh Trenton, with a long list of letters after it."

"Oh, well, he doesn't interest me much," said Watson. "I don't care twopence for science, and all that kind of rot. Even if he does come to-day, I don't suppose I shall trouble to have a look at him."

As a matter of fact, only a few fellows in the Remove were keen on seeing the new science-master. It was morning now—Friday morning—and the weather was crisp and fine, with every prospect of remaining so over the week-end. The barometer was high, and showed a slight tendency to rise, so everybody was in high spirits.

We had a big programme on for the morrow, for we had an important football fixture in the afternoon, and then the fireworks and bonfire in the evening. The football match was of more particular significance, because Reginald Pitt would play in his old position of outside-right—the first time he had played for the school for a good few weeks, owing to his sojourn with the Bannington professional club. Everybody was looking forward to see Pitt perform his football marvels on Little Side.

The school we were playing was Carrowfield College, and we had heard that their junior eleven was about the hottest proposition in lower school football that could be imagined.

We only played Carrowfield twice in the season—at home and away—because it was so far distant, and meant a very long journey. And we were not in the least scared by Carrowfield's record, which was certainly formidable. They had not been beaten this season. Not only this, they had never failed to win a game on their own ground or when visiting other schools. Their record was a remarkable one.

And, as I informed the members of

the Remove eleven, it was up to us to lower Carrowfield's colours. With Pitt in our eleven, it certainly seemed as though we stood some chance of doing so.

For the greater part of Friday hardly anything was talked of but football and fireworks. Many pessimistic fellows declared that it would pour with rain on the morrow; but, as I pointed out, it made no difference what they declared. We couldn't alter the weather.

Afternoon lessons were just over, and it was inclined to be misty, with more than a touch of frost. It was growing quite dusky, and the Triangle was dim. Handforth and Co. sallied out, and they happened to pass me in the lobby. There was a gleam in Handy's eye, and I easily guessed what he had in mind.

As a matter of fact, Handforth had a number of crackers in his pocket—special jumping horrors, which he intended hurling at innocent and unsuspecting fellows. This form of pastime amused Handforth hugely.

But, unfortunately, there was nobody in the Triangle at the moment, with the exception of a group of fags, who were vainly experimenting with some damp Chinese crackers, and attempting to make them go off.

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "There's nobody here."

"Some fags——" began Church.

"Do you think I'm going to waste these specials on Third Form kids?" demanded Handforth. "They cost nine-pence each, and I'm not going to—— Hallo! What have we here? By George! This looks interesting."

At that moment a stranger had entered the gateway. He was a well-dressed, tall gentleman, attired in a light overcoat and a soft felt hat. He was carrying a small handbag, and he paused just within the gateway, and looked about him.

"Looks like a commercial traveller," murmured Handforth. "Ten-to-one he's come to sell fireworks, or hair-oil, or something of that kind. A victim, my sons—absolutely asking to be japed."

McClure looked rather doubtful.

"Better be careful," he exclaimed. "There's a new science-master coming to-day, Handy, and it might be him——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "This science-master is an old fogey—a giddy professor. Show some sense, do!"

"Well, we don't want to make a bloomer!"

"Trust me, and you won't come to any harm," said Handforth. "Now, come on—we've got to do this thing properly. You chaps come along and engage the fellow in conversation. I'll do the rest. By George! We'll make him jump a couple of yards into the air!"

Church and McClure were still somewhat uncertain, but it was impossible to deny Handforth once he was fairly on the go. So they marched across to the stranger, doffed their caps, and smiled sweet smiles.

"Good-evening, sir!" said Handforth, with ultra politeness.

The stranger looked at the juniors, and nodded. He was scarcely more than thirty, good-looking features, and dark eyes that seemed to twinkle.

"Hallo! Where did you beggars blow from?" he asked genially. "Did the mist bring you out, or do you generally roam about loose?"

Handforth glared, but checked himself.

"Oh, we belong here," he replied. "Just come to have a look round, I suppose? What kind of samples are you carrying?"

"Samples?" repeated the stranger. "Oh, I see!" he added with a laugh. "By Jove! I am travelling in sweets—chocolates, and all that kind of thing. I thought perhaps some of you fellows would give me an order. Anything doing in this particular line of business?"

Handforth nodded.

"These chaps are awfully interested in sweets," he said, winking furiously at Church and McClure. "They'll be greatly interested in your samples."

Handforth made several ferocious grimaces, evidently with the intention of making his chums get into conversation with the stranger. They did so, making all sorts of absurd inquiries about toffee and caramels. In the meantime, Handforth hovered in the rear of the stranger.

Greatly to Handforth's delight, the newcomer took a cigarette out, and placed it between his lips. In a second Handforth had a box of matches ready, and he struck one. And after the cigarette had been lit, Handforth did not immediately put the match out. For some mysterious reason he held it down near

the ground, in the stranger's rear. Then Handy gave a jump.

"Come on, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "Sorry we've got to go, sir—can't bother about your samples now. Buck up, you asses!"

Church and McClure knew what had happened, and they lost no time in skipping clear. The next second there was a fierce hiss, a shower of sparks, and then a loud report. The stranger jumped into the air with a startled yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Not only Handforth and Co., but several other fellows howled with laughter—and, certainly, they had good reason to yell, for the newcomer was in an unenviable plight. A gigantic jumping cracker was securely fastened to his coat-tail, and it was leaping about, exploding like a mad thing.

"Bang-bang-bang! Siz-z-z! Bang! Bang-bang!"

As the explosions occurred, the stranger jumped, and his dancing figure in the centre of the Triangle was excruciatingly funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, old son!"

"Show us the fox-trot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Handforth. "This is rich—better than all the seniors! It'll teach these blessed merchants not to come buzzing round St. Frank's. I'll bet he'll bunk out after this."

But the stranger made no attempt to bunk out after the jumping cracker had exhausted itself. He calmly turned round, pulled the smouldering remains from the back of his coat, and then looked round. He did not fail to note the juniors who were scattered about, still roaring.

"Who is he, anyway?" asked Pitt, who had just come out.

"Oh, some chap selling sweets," replied Handforth. "I guessed he was a traveller at once, and thought it would be a good idea to jape him. Perhaps we ought to go and buy some of his giddy wares now, just to show that there's no ill-feeling."

"Good idea!"

Several of the juniors surrounded the stranger, and he regarded them suspiciously, but with no sign of anger. His

eyes certainly gleaned for a moment, but then he gave a good-natured laugh.

"Very good—very funny!" he remarked. "Ah, you're the young gentleman who engineered the thing. I should like to know your name, sonny?"

"Sonny!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think you're talking to a fag? My name's Handforth, and I belong to the Remove——"

"Ah, that's very interesting, and I shall bear the name in mind," said the other. "It has not taken me long to discover, Handforth, that you are a bit of a handful—no pun intended. I can see that I shall have many a little troublesome five minutes with you in future."

"In future!" repeated Handforth. "What are you getting at? You're not going to stay here!"

"No?" said the stranger calmly. "I was under the distinct impression that this venerable pile was to be my future abode. I'm not really a traveller in sweets—I was just pulling your leg, as it was plainly asking to be pulled."

Handforth staggered, and Church clutched at McClure.

"Not—not a traveller?" gasped Handforth. "And—and you're going to stay at St. Frank's? But—but you're not the new science-master——"

"At your service!" interrupted the other coolly. "My name is Mr. Hugh Trenton, and my introduction to St. Frank's was most entertaining and lively. Your name is Handforth? Good! I shall bear it in mind."

Handforth felt a peculiar sinking sensation under his waistcoat, and Church and McClure had turned a shade paler. Several of the other juniors began to melt away in the gloom.

The crime which Handforth had committed was an appalling one. He had actually tied a jumping cracker to the coat-tails of a master. There were redeeming features, of course, since Handy had not known that the gentleman was a master. However, the Head would hardly be likely to take this into account when the matter was reported to him.

Handforth was as red as a beetroot.

"I—I say, sir, I'm awfully sorry, you know!" he gasped. "I thought—I—I mean, I didn't think—— That is to say, I hadn't any idea that——"

"Keep your hair on!" said Mr.

Trenton calmly. "You needn't get scared, young 'un. I'm not going to eat you—and, anyhow, it was my own fault for pulling your leg. We'll let it pass. I want to be nice and chummy with all you fellows, and I believe in starting well."

"You—you mean you won't report me, sir?"

"Of course not; but you're a cheeky young beggar, all the same," said Mr. Trenton, shaking his finger at Handforth. "And what about my overcoat? It's scorched in about four places. The next time you want to be funny, try somebody else!"

"You're a brick, sir!" said Handforth warmly. "I—I didn't know, and I'm awfully sorry if I've——"

"That's all right," interrupted the science-master. "Nuff said. We'll renew our acquaintance later on. At the present moment I feel infernally grimy after a long journey, and I'm frightfully peckish. So I shall have to tear myself away from your bewitching company, and hie myself to a festive board. So-long!"

And Mr. Hugh Trenton, the new science-master, waved his hand, and marched into the Ancient House, leaving Handforth and Co. staring after him. Then, when his figure vanished, they stared at one another.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Church blankly. "Science-master! Why, he's more like a giddy actor, with his free-and-easy talk. One of the best, too!"

"Rather!" said Do Valerie, strolling up. "Any other master would have scalped you, Handy, for doing that. You ought to consider yourself jolly lucky. But I must say it was funny!"

Without a doubt Mr. Trenton had created a very favourable impression. He was voted by all the juniors present to be one of the right sort, and a proper sport. Indeed, the new master was popular from the very start.

Handforth was more careful with his crackers after that, and he abandoned his original programme as soon as tea was over. He had intended using a lot more of the jumping crackers; but, under the circumstances, he thought it advisable not to do so.

And when prep. was got out of the way in Study D. Handforth and his two faithful chums strode out into the dark, cold Triangle, and found it absolutely

deserted. They were very pleased with this, for they were bent upon secret business. Silently and stealthily they made their way across to the wood-shed. All was quiet, and within a couple of minutes they had made their entry. The door was closed after them, and they stood in inky blackness.

"Got the candle?" asked Church.

"Yes," said McClure. "Strike a match, and I'll light it. We ought to get this giddy guy finished to-night, Handy—although I don't exactly see how you'll make it look like Kenmore without getting the bounder in here as a pattern."

Handforth scoffed.

"Who wants a pattern?" he asked scornfully. "Do you think I don't know what Kenmore looks like? By the time this guy is finished, you won't be able to tell which is Kenmore and which is the guy."

Church and McClure made no comment. If they spoke what was in their minds, a terrific row would result. So it was altogether better to keep their own counsel.

There was no fear of their being spotted in the wood-shed, for the only window was at the rear, and it overlooked the paddock which adjoined the Head's garden. There was about one chance in a thousand of anybody being in the paddock at this time of the evening.

So the juniors did not even think of putting up a temporary blind, such as a piece of sacking. They hauled out their guy from behind a pile of faggots, and inspected it critically. Church and McClure were not much impressed; but, judging by Handforth's expression, he was eminently satisfied.

"Ripping!" he remarked.

"Yes, that's the worst of using those old togs," said Church.

"Eh?"

"I thought you said the coat was ripping——"

"You funny fathead!" snapped Handforth. "I mean it looks good—first class! Why, it's almost human even now."

Handforth's imagination was evidently a vivid one, for the guy was scarcely similar to a human being in its present state of construction. At all events, it would be a very peculiar human being

with bunches of straw for hands and feet, and a blank space for a head.

But the heroes of Study D had come prepared. They had gloves and boots and headgear and a mask. According to Handforth, it would be an easy matter to stuff these and make the guy look like the real thing. At the present moment it looked about as much like Kenmore as a cat resembles a printing machine.

There was very little fear of an interruption. Josh Cuttle, the school-porter, was away at the time—he was taking three days off, and would not be back until Sunday morning. This was his shed, and nobody else ever came to it.

Handforth and Co. certainly worked hard. They did their very utmost to improve their handiwork. With some difficulty an ancient pair of boots were fixed on to the trouser legs, and made secure. The gloves were treated in the same way, and the fact that wisps of straw were protruding from several holes did not appear to worry Handforth in the least.

But, after all, it was the face which was really the problem. Handforth had obtained a mask, which was quite a good one of its kind; but, as Church vainly pointed out, the nose was at least three times too large, since Kenmore had a somewhat small nasal organ, and inclined to be snub. This mask had a huge hooked nose with a fiery red knob.

Handforth surveyed it critically.

"We won't start faking it up yet," he said. "What we've got to do is to fix it to the figure and make it look like a real head. When it's all secure we can get busy with the make-up, and by the time I'm done you'll think we've got Kenmore in here!"

"Oh, good!" said McClure. "Kenny ought to be pleased!"

The head of Kenmore No. 2 was manufactured out of an old piece of canvas rolled into a ball, and tied with cord. This was placed in position on the shoulders, and secured; then the mask was fitted, and a school-cap placed on the top.

The school-cap really belonged to Hubbard, of the Remove; but Hubbard didn't know anything about it. Handforth had coolly taken the cap from the cloak-room, regardless of the fact that it would probably be required. Hub-

bard, by this time, was doubtless making inquiries concerning his missing head-gear.

"There you are!" said Handforth proudly. "What do you think of that?"

"Rotten!" said Church absently-mindedly.

"What?"

"I—I mean topping!" gasped Church. "Didn't you hear me the first time. Handy? Oh, topping! Absolutely life-like!"

"Rather!" agreed McClure. "Just like Kenmore!"

Handforth glared.

"You dotty idiot!" he snapped. "I haven't started the make-up business yet! How can it look like Kenmore? His figure, perhaps; but the features need quite a lot of alteration."

Church had an intense desire to point out that the figure looked like that of a hump-back with crooked arms and odd-sized legs. As a representation of Kenmore, of the Sixth, it was a horrible libel. But Church wisely restrained himself.

Handforth proceeded with the make-up.

He had borrowed a small box of grease-paints from the props. of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society; and now he daubed the paint over the mask liberally, fondly believing that he was making the inanimate thing resemble Kenmore.

"See how it's coming along?" he asked, as he worked. "Now, what about the nose, my sons? Looks a bit like Kenmore's, eh? Now we've got to get his eyebrows. That's it—absolutely first class. The chin isn't quite the right shape, but we can't bother about that. Now just a little touch on the cheeks, and we'll soon have the giddy guy so that Kenmore won't know it from his twin brother."

Church and McClure were dumb with admiration—at least, so Handforth thought. Actually, they would not trust themselves to speak, much less to venture upon any criticism. As Church said afterwards, there wasn't any reason why they should stir up trouble for themselves.

"Nearly finished now," went on Handforth. "Blessed sticky stuff, this grease-paint! Just lend me your handkerchief, Church, to wipe my fingers —"

"Haven't you got one of your own?" growled Church.

Handforth glared.

"Do you think I'm going to use my own?" he demanded grimly. "Mine's clean, and——"

"Mine's clean, too!"

"Why, you rotter——"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated McClure suddenly. "Look! Why, what—— Quick—quick! Look at the window——"

He broke off, and dashed across the little shed to the tiny window which overlooked the deserted paddock. Handforth and Church stared at him, wondering what was the matter.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTRUDER!

McCLURE turned after a moment, and his face was flushed.

"Didn't you see it?" he asked sharply.

"See what?"

"That face——"

"Face?" said Handforth. "You ass! I didn't think you were an imaginative chap, Clurey——"

"Rats!" interrupted McClure. "There was somebody's face at the window—I saw it clearly. He was looking inside, but the instant he saw me looking at him, he vanished. I thought you chaps saw the face as well."

"We didn't see anything," said Church.

"For the simple reason that there was nothing to see," said Handforth tartly.

"You know as well as I do that the paddock is deserted——"

"Yes, but some of the fellows might have got the wheeze that we're up to something special," put in Church. "It would be a bit rotten if we were spotted. Handy. You want this guy to be a surprise, don't you?"

Handforth frowned.

"By George!" he said darkly. "I hadn't thought of that! If one of the chaps has been prowling about outside, spying on us, I'll slaughter him! But who would it be? Whose face was it, Clurey?"

"I don't know," said McClure.

"But you must have recognised——"

"There wasn't time to recognise anybody at all," put in McClure. "I just

saw the faint blur of the face—two eyes looking in at us—and then it vanished away. But, somehow, it didn't seem to be one of the fellows. I've got a kind of impression that it was a man."

"A man?" said Church, staring. "What kind of a man?"

"How should I know?"

"Do you mean one of the masters?"

"Dash it all, what's the good of questioning me like this?" asked McClure impatiently. "We're wasting time, anyhow. We ought to be outside, looking for the bounder. I can't give you any details, and I can only say that somebody was looking in. The glass is smothered with grime, and you can hardly expect me to recognise anybody through it."

Church scratched his head.

"But what's the good of going outside?" he asked. "You say the chap buzzed off, and I don't suppose he'll be waiting round the corner so that we can pounce on him. We might as well stay in here. We didn't hear a sound, and it might not have been a face at all. Perhaps a moth fluttered against the glass——"

"You—you babbling ass!" shouted McClure. "Do you think I don't know the difference between a face and a moth? And where would you get a moth from at this time of the year? Talk sense, for goodness' sake!"

"Oh, well, it's no good arguing about it," said Church. "And it won't be any good going outside, either. We can't search for footprints, or follow trails——"

"By George!" said Handforth, with a start. "Trails! Footprints! Here's a chance to get on the track, my sons. We'll go outside and investigate. We'll gather all the data at our disposal, and then form a hypothesis of the case!"

Church groaned.

"Oh, my only hat!" he murmured blankly.

"What's the matter—got a pain?" asked Handforth sharply.

"No—nunno!" stuttered Church.

But he gave McClure a glance which was full of meaning. Handforth was fairly started off now. At the slightest provocation he would get on the trail like a hungry sleuth-hound; and he generally strung out a long series of high-sounding words—borrowed, mostly, from detective stories that he had recently perused.

Handforth greatly fancied himself as an amateur detective; and now, full of vim and determination, he dashed to the door, tore it open, and went out into the night. Church and McClure followed him—not to lend him their assistance, but to look after him. For, as they realised, he wasn't quite capable of looking after himself.

In order to reach the paddock it was necessary to go right through the Head's private garden, or to skirt round it, which meant a considerable detour. There was no quick way to the rear of the shed, since there was a very high wall on either side of it. This wall, in fact, formed part of the shed itself. From the paddock side there was no sign of any shed at all—the only indication that such a place existed was that single little window in the high wall.

Handforth had no scruples about trespassing upon the Head's private garden. He jumped a hedge, ran across the flower-beds and lawns, taking no notice of his chum's frantic appeals to be careful. A moment later he was sorry that he ignored them, for he caught his foot against a piece of ornamental stonework, and fell headlong, with his face in a young rose tree.

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped. "I'm scratched—I'm torn to bits!"

"Well, you shouldn't blunder along like that," panted Church, glancing behind him. "I say, we might be spotted here, and we shall get into awful trouble if the Head finds out."

"Rats!"

Handforth got to his feet, slightly scratched, and considerably calmed down. The lights from the Ancient House windows gleamed out brightly through the trees, and one or two distant voices came across the intervening space. But there was nobody in the immediate vicinity.

Handforth went on at a more sedate pace, and within a minute or two the paddock was reached. The three juniors entered the little field, and they could distinctly see the tiny square of yellow light in the high wall. That light was caused by the candle in the wood-shed. From every part of St. Frank's it was invisible, but from the lane which skirted the paddock it could be distinctly seen.

Handforth and Co. approached the window, and then Edward Oswald commenced his investigations. Church and

McClure stood looking on derisively. Fortunately, the darkness prevented Handforth from seeing their expressions.

He examined the ground and the surrounding grass; but this, after all, was a mere pretence, for it was obviously impossible to find out any facts in the darkness, and with such material.

"H'm! Nothing much here, I'm afraid," said Handforth, at length. "I don't suppose it was one of the fellows who looked in at the window. In any case, who would take the trouble to come all the way round here? And how did anybody know we were in the wood-shed?"

"That's what I said all along," exclaimed Church. "We've simply wasted our time; and I've got half an idea that McClure imagined the whole thing. Just as if somebody would come and squint through that blessed window!"

McClure grunted.

"I don't care whether you believe it or not—I know what I saw!" he said gruffly. "The chap was there, and he was watching us; but it's ridiculous to suppose that we can find out who he was, or why he came. I vote we go indoors to Study D——"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "We've got to finish that guy!"

Church and McClure sighed, and followed their leader back to the Head's garden, and thus to the wood-shed. Everything was quiet, and, after closing the door, Handforth continued his masterly efforts with the grease-paint.

He daubed the guy's face liberally—until he was quite satisfied that it bore a close resemblance to Kenmore, of the Sixth. He was evidently very easily satisfied, for Church and McClure could not find any adequate name for the horror which Handforth had perpetrated. It was about as much like a human face as a cubist painting is like the scene it intends to convey.

Still, Handforth said that the guy looked just like Kenmore—and as Handforth had made it himself, he was better qualified to know than anybody else. And, after the precious guy had been concealed, the three juniors left the wood-shed, and returned to the Ancient House.

The scene remained dark and deserted for some little time.

But then, after about twenty minutes

had elapsed, a silent, stealthy form appeared out in the paddock. It was so stealthy, indeed, that it seemed to be a mere shadow of the night.

But it came nearer and nearer, and it was always approaching that little square of glass in the high wall—the window of the wood-shed. And soon, had anybody been watching, it would have been seen that the prowler was not a schoolboy, but a man—an elderly man with bent shoulders, and attired in weather-stained clothing. He was hatless, and considerably bedraggled and dishevelled, as though he had been spending nights out in the open.

This queer-looking creature was acting strangely, too. Arriving at the window, he flattened himself against the wall, and stood listening; then he set down on the ground a small sack. The sack contained something heavy and apparently fragile, for the man handled it gingerly.

For ten full minutes he tinkered with the window, trying to make an entrance without breaking the glass—for his cunning wits told him that inquiries would be made if one of the window-panes was found broken.

And at last he succeeded in his object.

The catch was not a particularly strong one, and it yielded to the intruder's persuasive tinkering. The window came open, and the man gave vent to a soft, low chuckle.

There seemed to be something almost horrible in that sound. It was hardly the chuckle of a man in his rational senses—and, to tell the truth at once, it was not. For this elderly individual was a lunatic!

His name was Crawford Hope, and by birth and upbringing he was a gentleman. But the appalling fact remained that he was a dangerous, homicidal maniac. Only a few days earlier he had escaped from Moor Hill Asylum—the big home for mental patients on the other side of Bannington Moor.

Handforth and Co. had very good reason to remember Mr. Crawford Hope. They were, in fact, the only St. Frank's juniors who had actually become acquainted with the pitiful specimen of humanity. He had appeared rational at the time—until he presented the juniors with several articles of jewellery.

On the top of this, he had persuaded them to take him for a row on the river,

and had then deliberately upset the boat in a dangerous pool. The lunatic had been swept down on the current, clinging to the oars. He had escaped, and had not been recaptured. And Handforth and Co. only escaped with great difficulty.

Afterwards they had learned that Crawford Hope was a man whose mind had become unhinged as the result of an air raid during the big war. He had been a schoolmaster, and his particular mania took the form of a murderous hatred against all schoolboys.

As somebody ironically pointed out, it was perhaps natural that Mr. Hope should have an intense desire to murder every schoolboy he came across. He knew what schoolboys were! But, after all, the doctors had all declared that there was nothing strange in the fact that this mad schoolmaster should attempt to wreak his maniacal designs upon boys.

To some extent the affair had been hushed up, and the asylum authorities were still searching high and low for their missing patient. Several reports had come to hand that Hope had been seen in the direction of Helmford, and that he was working his way towards London. It was assumed, therefore, that the lunatic was nowhere in the vicinity of St. Frank's. The Head was greatly relieved to hear this, and he did not think it necessary to restrict the movements of the St. Frank's fellows.

But those reports were obviously false, for here was Crawford Hope now, getting into the wood-shed! And he had evidently come with a definite object in his distorted mind.

He remained within the shed for just over half an hour, and during that time he was busily occupied. He worked entirely in the darkness; but his task was of such a nature that no light was required. And when he stole out into the night once more there was not the slightest indication that any unauthorised person had been in the shed.

Crawford Hope vanished away into the gloom, and his face was expressive of hatred and malignant joy. Only the face of a lunatic could have worn such a terrible expression.

Handforth and Co., in sweet ignorance of what had happened, had pleasant thoughts of the morrow. In Study D they discussed the matter, and Hand-

forth was inclined to be quite enthusiastic.

"Yes, by George!" he said. "We'll teach Kenmore to try his bullying tricks on any of us! When he sees himself burnt in to-morrow's bonfire as a guy, he'll feel pretty mean, I should think."

Church looked thoughtful.

"I've got a suggestion to make," he said slowly. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to fasten a label on that giddy guy?"

"A label?"

"Yes; with Kenmore's name on it," said Church. "Then everybody would be able to see whom it was meant for."

"You fathead!" roared Handforth. "Can't they see without a label?"

"Well, it would be more certain——"

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "I took a lot of trouble making that guy into a second edition of Kenmore, and anybody who isn't blind will recognise it at the first look. Just you wait until to-morrow evening."

So Church and McClure decided to wait. And the next day, which was Saturday, broke fine and clear, with a trace of mist, and a decided touch of frost. It was the Fifth of November, and promised to be a still, clear day, with a bright, starlit evening in store.

All the fellows were in high spirits, for many had been anticipating rain and gales, and all kinds of other weather abominations. It was rather nice to find that the big day was as perfect as it could be.

We had a double reason for being pleased, for during the afternoon we had a most important junior fixture with Carrowfield College. Reginald Pitt would take the field in his old position at outside-right, and we were all confidently expecting a victory. For Pitt alone, according to his performances for the Bannington professionals, was capable of winning the match.

I decided to play exactly the same eleven which had taken the field for the first match of the season—that memorable match against Bannington Grammar School.

It had been a stiff and grim tussle, the Grammarians being on equal terms with us up to one minute of the whistle. Then Pitt had bewildered the visiting goalie by one of his fast, tricky shots.

In that game Reginald Pitt had

played amazingly fine football. Since then he had played in a number of exacting professional games, and had improved wonderfully. He was now faster, trickier, and his shots contained altogether more sting. So it was not without reason that we looked for big things from him.

The St. Frank's eleven was made up in the following manner: Handforth; Yorke, Burton; Church, Talmadge, Somerton; Christine, Grey, myself, Tregellis-West, Pitt. All these fellows had played, in the same positions, in that first match of the season, and Pitt was not the only one who had improved. Tregellis-West, for all his dandified ways, was one of the finest inside-rights a team could wish to have. Once on the field, he dropped his elegant manner, and became a red-hot, live wire, always ready to snap up an opportunity and send in a first-time shot for goal. As partner to Pitt, on the right wing, he couldn't be bettered.

The left-wing, although not so good, was nevertheless excellent. Bob Christine and Jack Grey understood one another thoroughly, and their combined runs down the field were always a feature of junior matches. I felt in splendid form myself, and knew that I was capable of leading the forward line in a creditable manner.

When morning lessons were over the Triangle was filled with fellows, and there was an air of subdued excitement abroad. The match during the afternoon, to be followed by the bonfire and firework display in the evening—all this tended to make the juniors light-hearted and cheery.

As the early morning had promised, the weather was splendid—cold, crisp, with welcome sunshine, and hardly a trace of wind. Pitt rubbed his hands together with satisfaction as he stood on the Ancient House steps.

"Football this afternoon," he said briskly. "Great! There's nothing I could wish for better, and I feel as fit as a fiddle. If we don't whack Carrowfield, I'll eat my best footer boots!"

"We'll do our best to lick 'em, anyway," I exclaimed. "Not your footer boots, but Carrowfield!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we mustn't think that it's going to be a walk-over," I went on. "Over-confidence is frequently the cause of

disaster on the football field. We've got to play all out from the very start, and even if we get well ahead we mustn't ease down. That's another fatal mistake."

"Well, we don't want a giddy lecture about it," said Handforth. "You can trust me to keep goal all right. It'll be a queer thing if the Carrowfield forwards got the ball anywhere near the net this afternoon."

Several remarks that I happened to hear made it quite apparent that the onlookers would not be solely juniors. A large contingent of the Fifth would be on hand, and even the Sixth would be well represented. For Reginald Pitt's fame was great, and the seniors were tremendously interested to see what he would do.

While we were still standing on the Ancient House steps, Mr. Hugh Trenton appeared. The new science-master was looking bright and cheerful. He was spruce and neat, and he gave us a genial smile as he came up.

"You'll see me round the ropes this afternoon, my lads," he exclaimed crisply. "By what I can hear, there's going to be a keen game. And our team includes a professional, doesn't it?"

"Hardly that, sir," smiled Pitt. "I've played professional football for a while, but not really seriously."

"Don't take any notice of him, sir," said Tommy Watson. "Pitt's as hot as mustard, and he could whack the first eleven into a cocked hat any day. You wait until you see him play. Do you take much interest in footer, sir?"

Mr. Trenton laughed.

"Interest!" he repeated. "My dear kid, I simply eat it! I only wish to goodness I was your age, then you'd see me in the merry old team, gallivanting about the field like a two-year-old. When it comes to football, I'm pepper!"

"Well, you're bound to see a good game this afternoon, sir," I said. "If Carrowfield are as clever as we hear, it'll be a stiff tussle. And our visitors must be clever, because they haven't lost a match yet."

"They'll lose one this afternoon all right," said Handforth.

"Of course they will," agreed Mr. Trenton. "My children, they've simply got to. It's due to me, as your science-master, that you should celebrate this

occasion by a stunning victory. This is the first match I shall see at St. Frank's, so it's got to be a bumper one."

"We'll do our best, sir, anyway," grinned Pitt.

Mr. Trenton nodded, and strolled away.

"Jolly decent chap, I must say," went on Pitt. "I was picturing the new science-master as a crusty old beast, with whiskers about a yard long. Mr. Trenton's a real good 'un."

"Yes," I said slowly, "he seems to be."

But I was not the kind of fellow to be influenced by first impressions. Before I accepted Mr. Trenton as "a real good 'un," I required to see a bit more of him. I was quite ready to admit that he was a cheerful, easy-going sort, and well calculated to be popular among the chaps.

The dinner-gong sounded shortly afterwards, and the fellows filed into the dining-hall, laughing and joking. High spirits were general to-day; and there was further excitement when strange juvenile voices were heard in the Triangle towards the end of dinner.

"Hallo! The Carrowfield crowd has turned up!" said Handforth, jumping on his chair, and staring out through the high window. "Ripping! Buck up, you chaps——"

"Handforth," snapped Mr. Crowell, "get down at once! How dare you?"

Handforth scrambled down, and finished his dinner with considerable impatience. And by the time we got outside, we found the Carrowfield eleven on the playing field, chatting in a group round the pavilion.

They were a big set of fellows, and, on the average, about a year older than the St. Frank's junior team. To judge by appearances, any outsider would certainly say that the odds were all in favour of the Remove being hopelessly beaten on their own ground.

Looking at the visitors, I could easily understand why they had won every game of the season so far. They were a much better body of fellows than the average junior school eleven. They took football seriously, and having been so successful in their opening games, they were fighting hard to maintain their unbeaten record.

The captain was a fair-haired young-

aler, tall and straight, and well proportioned. He had an air of supreme confidence while I was chatting with him—indeed, his conversation savoured somewhat of boastfulness. The other members of the team were frankly and openly amused. They regarded the game as a walk-over, and the idea of defeat never entered their heads.

"Of course, we shall do our best to win," said the fair-haired skipper. "We've whacked everybody so far, and we've whacked 'em with ease. We haven't met a team yet that could hold a candle to us. Our lowest score in any match this season is three goals. Against Westham Grammar School we found the net eight times."

"You've been doing pretty well," I remarked.

"Rather!" said the other. "And lots of the schools on our programme are stiffer than St. Frank's, I can tell you. I've heard rumours about you having a specially good chap in your team?"

"You mean Pitt?"

"Yes, played for a professional club, didn't he?" asked the Carrowfield skipper. "Of course, we're not scared about that. I'll guarantee our forwards are better than yours any day."

His tone was quite moderate compared to the other members of the eleven, who simply couldn't refrain from glorifying their previous victories. Pitt was grinning amusedly when we entered the dressing-room to prepare.

"By all we can hear," he said drily, "we're going to be wiped off the face of the earth this afternoon."

"Seems like it," I grinned. "These chaps are proper boasters, and it'll do 'em good to take some of the swank out of them. We've got to send them back to Carrowfield not merely licked, but humbled in the dust."

It can be readily imagined, therefore, that when the game started shortly afterwards, there was a great deal of interest attached to it. There had never been such a crowd to witness a junior match before.

Fully half the Fifth were in attendance; the Remove was there to a man, and a fearful amount of noise was caused by the lively crowd of fags. In the pavilion, the Sixth Form was represented by fully a dozen seniors. And Mr. Crowell was there, chatting with the new science-master.

As there was no first eleven fixture to-day, Fenton, the school captain, had kindly promised to act as referee.

The game started with a swinging rush, the Carrowfield forwards getting away with the ball, and racing down towards the home goal like a machine. It was clearly their intention to score at once, and they apparently thought that the defence would not be able to check their advance.

They thought wrong.

Yorke and Burton, our backs, were steady and absolutely reliable. The Carrowfield rush came to nothing, and the visiting forwards looked quite surprised when the ball was robbed from them and sent soaring up the field.

The leather fell just over the half-way line, within easy reach of the Carrowfield left-back. He was over-confident, and before he could touch the ball, Reginald Pitt streaked up like a flash, secured it, and was away down the touch-line.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Pitt!"

Pitt was going it well, and for the first time the Carrowfield defence seemed to realise that there was danger. Pitt went right up, and then, when within a few feet of the goal-line, he sent over a glorious dropping centre. The ball fell dead in front of Sir Montie, who didn't even wait for it to touch the ground. Tregellis-West met the leather with his foot, and sent in a red-hot shot at close range, which simply hurtled past the startled goalie and found the net. As an exhibition of snappy shooting, it was a delight to witness.

"Goal!"

"Good old Montie!"

"Oh, well played!"

Pitt grinned as we all lined up again. He was enjoying himself immensely. After the strenuous battles against professional teams, this was child's play to him. He promised himself a regular orgy of goals this afternoon.

And, sure enough, before play had been resumed for another five minutes, Pitt himself raced clean through the defence, tricking both backs and then facing the Carrowfield goalkeeper alone. The shot that Pitt sent in was a beauty—a rising one which sent the leather soaring up. The custodian leapt wildly, was too late, and the second goal was registered.

The game was, to be exact, a walk-over for us. We were all astonished, having expected a hard tussle. The very opposite was the case. We simply hemmed the Carrowfield fellows in their own half of the field, and bombarded their goal continuously. It was only on rare occasions that their forwards broke away, and even then they were never able to get within shooting distance.

Handforth had the easiest afternoon of the season, but the visiting goalie was terribly overworked. Pitt's runs were the feature of the game. Nobody could stop him. He was always marked, but the ease with which he defeated his opponents was enough to make the spectators hug themselves with joy. Pitt simply made circles round the Carrowfield defence.

From two of his centres I scored goals. And it must not be imagined that the other wing was idle. Christine and Grey were playing better than they had ever played before, and by the time half-time arrived the score was five-nil!

The change in the attitude of the Carrowfield fellows was positively comic. Never before had we seen such a set of depressed, gloomy juniors: and they took their defeat badly.

In the second half they were sulky, vindictive, and unsportsmanlike. Sir Montie was fouled in the penalty area ten minutes after the restart. Tom Burton took the kick, and slammed the leather past the goalie in his best style. After that the visitors went to pieces more completely than before. The game deteriorated into a scramble—at least, so far as the Carrowfield eleven was concerned. We positively took pity on them before the final whistle.

By this time we had found the net ten times, and it was quite certain that we could have scored another four or five goals if we had liked, so utterly did the defence crack up.

But we had mercy on them, and let them off further disgrace. But we sent the boastful Carrowfield crowd back to their own school licked as they had never been licked before.

The jubilation at St. Frank's was joyous, and Reginald Pitt was the hero of the hour. It was mainly owing to his astonishing powers that so many goals had been scored. His very presence in the eleven gave all the rest of us con-

fidence, and urged us on to our utmost efforts.

Just after tea, which had been a very pleasant meal, I happened to meet Morrow, of the Sixth, in the lobby. He was looking rather worried, but as he spotted me his face cleared.

"Doing anything particular just now, Nipper?" he asked.

"Well, no," I replied. "Why?"

"We sent for a case of extra rockets for the display to-night," explained Morrow. "They ought to have been down yesterday, but I've just heard over the 'phone that they arrived at Bannington this afternoon. Do you think you could run over on your bike and fetch them? You've got a decent parcel carrier, haven't you?"

I promised to go, for Morrow pointed out to me that these rockets were of a particular brand, and would be greatly missed. Morrow himself, and most of the other seniors, would be busy getting all the fireworks ready.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie elected to go with me, and within a few minutes we started out for Bannington, little realising what tremendous issues rested upon our seemingly unimportant trip!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GLORIOUS FIFTH!

"ANYBODY seen Nipper?"

Handforth asked the question as he came out of the Ancient House. It was quite gloomy now, for darkness had been descending for some time. Overhead the stars were beginning to twinkle, and the air was crisp and clear.

"Nipper?" said De Valerie. "Yes, I think he went to Bannington with Watson and Tregellis-West."

"The asses!" said Handforth. "It's nearly time to start the show, and if they're not quick they'll miss the beginning!"

"Oh, I expect they'll be back all right!" exclaimed De Valerie. "In any case, they won't miss much, because the start will only be ordinary. The main display won't take place until later on."

Morrow came out of the lobby.

"Nipper back yet?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so," said Church.

"Handy was just inquiring about him,



Siz-z-z! Bang! Simon Kenmore leapt about here and there, roaring at the top of his voice. And wherever he jumped, the cracker seemed to follow him.

but it seems that he hasn't turned up yet."

"Well, he can't be long now," said Morrow. "Ask him to come straight to me if you happen to see him first. I shall be out in the big paddock."

Handforth and Co. moved off across the dark Triangle.

"The fatheads!" growled Handforth. "If they ain't careful they'll miss the best part of the whole programme. I'm going to stick that guy of Kenmore on the bonfire as soon as it's properly burning, and before the big display starts. I want everybody to pay full attention to it."

"Well, that's all right," said Church. "Nipper and the others are bound to be back soon, and I don't see that it interests them much, anyhow. We might as well be enjoying ourselves until the fun starts. I've got a pocket full of squibs and things, and we might as well let them off."

As a matter of fact, minor explosions were occurring from all quarters, for the juniors saw no reason why they should wait until the actual darkness descended. Coloured stars were shooting into the sky, and fiery sparks could be seen on every hand.

Roman candles were being let off, and all manner of other minor fireworks. Jumping crackers and maroons were to be heard distinctly. The bangs were loud, and the noise in the Triangle was increasing, if anything. Out in the paddock the final preparations for the big show were being made.

Nelson Lee, at the moment, was chatting with the Head, in the latter's study. The schoolmaster-detective thought it would be very popular if the Head himself opened the ball by setting light to the big bonfire. The Head, however, did not seem in a mood to agree.

"No, no, Mr. Lee, there's no reason why I should bother," he said, with a touch of irritation. "After all, it is the boys who enjoy this somewhat childish exhibition, and I should be quite out of place. Let them get on with it alone—I don't want to be disturbed."

"Very well," said Nelson Lee. "But I understood from your remark you let pass last week, that you would be present. Indeed, I distinctly remember your saying that you would have great pleasure in——"

"Tut—tut!" interrupted Dr. Stafford. "What I said last week is of no concern,

Mr. Lee. Please refrain from being absurd! I tell you once and for all that I will not take part in this ridiculous affair."

Nelson Lee looked at the Head curiously.

"Very good!" he said stiffly. "I will say no more."

It was most unusual for the Head to speak to Lee as he was speaking now. As a general rule, Dr. Stafford was kindly, considerate, and quite gentle. But this evening his voice had taken on a sharp, impatient note, and Nelson Lee was at a loss to account for it. He had never before seen the Head so irritable.

He rose to his feet in order to take his departure. And at that very moment a series of loud bangs took place just outside the window, in the Triangle. The Head glared furiously at the window.

"Confound the young idiots!" he rapped out. "I won't have these noises going on outside my very study!"

"Really, Dr. Stafford, I hardly see how it can be avoided on such a night as this," said Nelson Lee gently. "It is the fifth of November, and the boys are always allowed a certain amount of licence——"

"Absurd—positively absurd!" snapped the Head. "In future I shall forbid it! I won't have these disturbances—you understand? I won't have them! Good gracious! It is getting worse and worse!"

A particularly loud bang had happened, and the Head half rose to his feet, his face expressive of fury and savage annoyance. Then, suddenly, he fell back into his chair.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee," he said huskily. "I don't quite seem to remember what I have been saying. Ah, yes—the fireworks. Of course—of course! The boys are rather noisy to-night, are they not?"

Nelson Lee again gave the Head a curious glance.

"Yes, but we always expect such a demonstration on Guy Fawkes night," he said. "I am afraid your nerves are not quite in order, Dr. Stafford. You have spoken to me rather sharply, and——"

Bang-bang-bang!

The Head leapt to his feet.

"I won't have it!" he thundered. "Do you hear me, Mr. Lee—I won't have it! Confound the young wretches

"creating all this noise, and disturbing the whole school! I shall forbid——"

"Really, Dr. Stafford, please control yourself," interrupted Lee. "I am beginning to think that you are not quite well this evening."

The Head breathed hard.

"Of course I am well!" he snapped. "Perfectly well! Please refrain from being personal, Mr. Lee. I want you to understand at once that I shall not put up with any nonsense from you, sir."

The Head glared at Nelson Lee, and Nelson Lee looked calmly at the Head.

"Come, come, you cannot be serious, Dr. Stafford," said the detective gently. "I am quite worried about you. I fear that there is some grave trouble on your mind. Otherwise you would surely not display such an unwarrantable fit of temper."

Dr. Stafford passed a hand over his brow and sat down.

"There is nothing the matter with me, Mr. Lee—nothing," he muttered. "Please do not concern yourself—and I shall be obliged if you will leave me alone."

"But I hardly like taking my departure at such a moment," said Lee. "If you are not feeling quite yourself, sir, I will immediately ring up for the doctor——"

"Nonsense—arrant nonsense!" shouted the Head harshly. "There is nothing the matter with me—nothing whatever! And please get out of this study! If there are any further disturbances out in the Triangle I shall—— Well, what the deuce do you want? Who told you to come in? Get out!"

The Head had transferred his attention from Nelson Lee to Mr. Hugh Trenton, who had just entered the doorway. The science master paused, with the door-knob still in his hand. He looked half-bewildered, as well he might, and his gaze travelled from the enraged Head to Nelson Lee.

"Were—were you addressing me, sir?" he asked mildly.

"Yes, confound you, I was!" snapped the Head. "Am I to repeat what I said, Mr. Trenton, or did you hear me clearly the first time? I didn't ask you to come here, and I don't want you! Go!"

"Well I'm hanged!" said the science master frankly. "I—I——"

"Go!" thundered the Head.

Mr. Trenton gave Leo a helpless

glance shrugged his shoulders, and then took his departure. Nelson Lee himself was now positively alarmed. The Head was acting in a most extraordinary manner. Such a fit of temper as this was unknown.

"Please calm yourself, Dr. Stafford," said Lee quietly. "I feel that——"

"Never mind what you feel!" interrupted the Head curtly. "And there is no necessity for you to tell me to be calm, Mr. Lee. I will please myself—and I have already intimated that I should be pleased by your withdrawal!"

Nelson Lee gave it up. It was evidently impossible to argue with the Head in his present state. But what had caused him to be so irritable and furious, Nelson Lee could not imagine. Only an hour earlier Dr. Stafford had been talking genially and enthusiastically about the boys and the treat that was in store for them. This sudden change was therefore all the more inexplicable.

The detective left the study at once, frowning to himself. He was inclined to be slightly annoyed, for it was not customary for him to be addressed as Dr. Stafford addressed him. However, it was obviously no time to argue, or to reason with the Head.

Leo went outside and joined the seniors in their preparations. Meanwhile, a certain number of juniors still continued to make the Triangle noisy and filled with weirdly coloured lights of every tint.

Cheap rockets were sent up, red and green fire was burnt in odd corners, and catharine wheels were laced upon window sills and other handy objects, and set hissing on their giddy journey. The fags, whose pocket money would not run to big fireworks, had to content themselves with sundry boxes of red and green matches, whilst the fag who possessed a few jumping crackers was a most important personage.

Handforth was one of the worst offenders in the noise line. He had purchased a number of abominations which rose in the air ten or twelve feet, and then exploded with a terrific bang. There was nothing pretty about them. But, as Handforth had said, he wanted something for his money. Handforth evidently considered that noise was the most important point.

And it was unfortunate, perhaps, that Handforth should choose that particular

part of the Triangle in close proximity to the Head's study. The booms were loud, and the shouts of the juniors were louder. The row in the Triangle, to be frank, was enough to annoy anybody.

And, at the same time, the big display in the paddock was about to commence. The bonfire was just being lit—by Nelson Lee himself—to the huge delight of large numbers of fellows.

And then, just as Handforth and Co. were moving out of the Triangle towards the paddock, a surprising interruption took place.

Handforth had exploded a louder one than usual, and, at the same time, the spent exterior of a threepenny rocket came down slantwise, and thudded against Dr. Stafford's study window.

"I say, be careful, you chaps!" called out McClure. "You'll be getting into trouble before long."

"Speaking to us?" asked Owen major, from across the Triangle.

"Yes, be careful with those giddy rockets——"

"Stop! I command every boy to stop!"

The juniors turned, startled. The voice was harsh and furious, and loud with strident thickness. At first the fellows hardly recognised it as the Head's voice. But there was Dr. Stafford, just outside his own door, hatless, and with his face distorted with a fury which was practically beyond control. He came rushing down the steps into the Triangle.

"Stop this at once—this very moment!" he thundered. "I will not have those noises disturbing the peace of the school! The first boy who fires another of those atrocities will be instantly expelled!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

He was staggered, and with very good reason. For the Head to speak in that way was utterly and absolutely amazing. Everybody in the Triangle stopped still, scared and alarmed. But Handforth had more reason than the others to feel perturbed, for he held a jumping cracker in his hand, and he had already lit the fuse. He was so thunderstruck, in fact, that he forgot to throw it away, and it suddenly started going off in his fingers.

Bang—bang—bang! Hisss-sizzz!

"Ow-yaroooh!" howled Handforth wildly.

He hurled the firework away, and it was disastrously unlucky that it should fall right at the Headmaster's feet. Church clung to McClure, and Handforth positively turned pale.

"Oh, my goodness!" panted Church. "That's done it!"

"What the—— Good gracious!" shouted Dr. Stafford, leaping about in alarm, as the cracker jumped. "How—how dare you—— Good Heavens!"

The cracker followed the Head about like a live thing, and he leapt aside wildly, and his raving increased to such an intensity that he was hardly recognisable. Handforth was standing stock still, too startled even to speak.

"Boy!" rapped the Head, rushing forward and seizing Handforth by the arm. "You young scoundrel! You'll pay dearly for your——"

"It—it was an accident, sir," gasped Handforth.

"Don't dare to answer me back!" roared the Head. "You will be expelled in the morning—publicly, before the whole school! Go at once to the punishment room and remain there!"

Handforth turned deathly pale.

"But—but you don't mean it, sir?" he asked faintly. "I—I only let off a firework, and—and——"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "You would bandy words with me? I will teach you to be respectful to your Headmaster!"

He raised a cane that he held in his hand, and brought it down with resounding force upon Handforth's back.

"Yaroooh!" bellowed Handforth, more surprised than hurt.

He wrenched himself away and ran helter-skelter across the Triangle. Just for a moment it seemed that the Head was about to follow; but his attention was distracted by the crackling explosion of a rocket over the paddock.

The Head gazed at it, and he uttered a furious cry.

Then he ran swiftly to his private garden, passed through it, and arrived in the paddock breathless and hot, with his grey hair waving in the cold breeze. There were scores of fellows there—seniors and juniors.

"Stop!" shouted the Head thickly.

There was a strange silence, and all eyes were turned upon Dr. Stafford.

"Cease this madness at once!" shouted the Head, his voice savage and harsh. "Do you hear me? Every boy will go into the school—not another firework shall be used. I positively forbid it!"

"Oh!"

There was a chorus of dismayed and startled exclamations.

Morrow came running up, excited.

"But—but it's all arranged, sir!" he panted. "The youngsters are looking forward to the display and the bonfire —"

"Another word, Morrow, and you'll be severely punished!" stormed the Head.

"But, sir, let me explain——"

"How dare you, Morrow?" raved the Headmaster. "How dare you? When I give an order it shall be obeyed! Am I the principal of this school, or am I not? I command every boy to—to—(Gr-r-r—gr-rh!)"

Dr. Stafford uttered an inarticulate cry in his throat, clutched at his collar, and then collapsed weakly to the ground, where he lay breathing heavily, and apparently unconscious. There was a rush, and the boys stood off in a wide circle, white-faced, scared, and terribly alarmed.

"Stand aside, boys—stand aside!" commanded Nelson Lee, hurrying through the crowd. "The Head has forbidden the firework display, but you must not take that too seriously. Wait until I give you permission to proceed!"

A moment later Lee was bending over the Head. In the gloom it was difficult to make an examination, but the detective, who had an excellent knowledge of medical science, was able to define the complaint.

"Quick, Morrow! Help me to carry him indoors!" he said softly.

"Is—is he dying, sir?" asked Morrow, in a scared voice.

"Dying—no!" retorted Lee. "A seizure, Morrow—in other words, a mild fit. Nothing serious at all. No doubt the Head will be himself within a few hours. Come, help me to carry him."

Many other Sixth-Formers volunteered, and the Head was soon carried through his garden and into his own study, the crowd of subdued juniors following. They formed in a great throng in the Triangle—silent, anxious, and filled with alarm.

Within the Head's study, Dr. Stafford was lying on the couch, and Lee had administered a stiff dose of brandy. The effect was almost immediate, for the Head opened his eyes, coughed once or twice, and then tried to raise himself.

"Dear me!" he murmured huskily. "What—what has happened, Mr. Lee? I—I seem to remember—— Good gracious!"

He fell back, apparently startled by a realisation of the truth. And there was a strange look in his eyes, although now the Head spoke in his ordinary quiet voice, and his face was no longer distorted.

"You will soon be all right, sir," said Nelson Lee softly. "I rather think you were greatly worried over something —"

"No, no!" interrupted Dr. Stafford. "Not at all, Mr. Lee. I remember everything, and, Heaven forgive me, I made a terrible exhibition of myself by giving way to an uncontrollable outburst of temper. I am appalled. I cannot possibly understand what came over me. Please tell the boys that they can proceed with their enjoyment at once, and any punishments that I may have inflicted are automatically cancelled."

The Head's voice was rather weak, and that strange fit of savage temper had passed. Nelson Lee was greatly puzzled. The Head had not been suffering from any form of delusion, for he knew exactly what his recent actions had been like. The only possible explanation was that he had rather overworked himself of late, and had given way to the outburst of irritable temper.

Lee soon went out into the Triangle, and hearty cheers rang out when he announced that the Head was rapidly recovering, and that the Guy Fawkes programme was to be proceeded with, exactly as arranged.

"Yes, but how do I stand?" asked Handforth blankly. "I've been sacked, sir."

"You will be relieved to hear, Handforth, that Dr. Stafford has cancelled any punishment he may have inflicted. Now, boys, you can go right ahead and enjoy yourselves to your hearts' content."

"Hurrah!"

"We hope Dr. Stafford will soon be himself, sir!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hurrah!"

And the juniors dismissed the matter forthwith, telling themselves that the Head had made an ass of himself for once, but probably wouldn't do it again. And the festivities were continued.

But what was the real meaning of Dr. Malcolm Stafford's extraordinary lapse? And was it likely that he would have a return of the unaccountable fit of savage temper?

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING REVELATION!

"**B**UCK up, Montie!" I said briskly. "Put some speed on!"

"Dear old fellow, I'm peddalin' with frightful energy already!" gasped Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad! If we keep on at this rate we shall set up a new cyclin' record—we shall, really!"

"The pace is pretty hot, anyway!" panted Tommy Watson.

"It jolly well needs to be!" I said. "Owing to these blessed rockets, we shall miss the beginning of the fun—not that it matters very much. There won't be anything particular doing until nine o'clock."

My chums and I were speeding home from Bannington in the darkness of the evening. It was cold and clear, with a decided touch of frost. A slight breeze had sprung up, but all the stars were twinkling, and we could not have wished for better weather.

We were now just about half-way between Bannington and Bellton, and riding hard, for we had been delayed in the town, on account of those rockets which Morrow had asked us to fetch. In fact, we had been led quite a dance, and our tempers were only just getting back to their normal state.

And it certainly had been enough to make us irritable when we discovered that the parcel was not at the railway station. Morrow had distinctly told us that it was, and that it was urgently required. This, of course, was obvious, since the rockets would be of little use after the Fifth had passed.

We had come especially for those rockets, and our disgust can be imagined when we learned, upon inquiry at the parcels office, that they had been placed

on board the town delivery van, owing to a blunder by the clerk.

Not to be defeated, we went in chase of the van. We heard news of it at various places, but we always seemed to be a bit too late. And at last we caught it up just as it was on its way back to the station. Having run our quarry to earth, we triumphantly collected the parcel, and set off home.

It was bigger than I had expected, being, in fact, a carefully packed wooden box. It was very fortunate that I had an extra big carrier on my machine. Even so, we were compelled to purchase a ball of thick string in order to make our package secure; and I found that it came fairly easily, and was no trouble.

"Blessed nuisance—that's what it is," I said, as we continued on our way. "These railway companies ought to be boiled! The way they mess people about is shocking. This parcel ought to have been delivered yesterday."

"And now we shall be late!" growled Watson. "I say, what's the first item on the programme?"

"They're going to light the bonfire to begin with—"

"Oh, rats! We shall miss that, then."

"It's nothing much—we shall only miss the beginning," I said. "That bonfire won't be blazing up properly until half an hour after it's alight. Besides, they may be a bit late. Let's hope so."

We kept up the speed, except where the ground was rising. But even on the short hills we went at a good pace; and certainly we were never expecting the adventure which was destined to befall us.

We were only a comparatively short distance from Bellton—indeed, we could see the twinkling lights of the village just down in the hollow, for we were at the top of a gradual hill.

"Yes, there you are—look!" said Watson. "They've started!"

He pointed over in the direction of St. Frank's, which, direct across country, was only about a mile away. We could see the cluster of lights which marked the school buildings. And small rockets were going up, and a bright yellow glare denoted the fact that the bonfire had already been set alight.

We were rather breathless and hot after the pull up the hill, and now we looked forward to the easier task of

speeding down the slope, which would lead us almost directly into the village.

And then at that moment a change came about in our position.

The dark figure of a man detached itself from the hedge about a hundred yards in advance. He came right out, striking a match as he did so. The next second a fuse started spluttering.

"Hold still!" I grinned. "There's some joker with a big cracker, or something."

"Silly ass!" growled Watson. "Just as we are in a hurry, too!"

The figure flung out his arm, and hurled the hissing object; but it had only just left his hand, and was about twelve feet from him, when there was a blinding, dazzling flash.

Boom!

The explosion was shattering—certainly not the report of an ordinary firework. It was a devastating roar, and at the same second a mighty gust of air hit us fairly and squarely, and we were all flung to the ground.

I picked myself up, somewhat dazed, with my head singing and buzzing. Coloured lights of all descriptions seemed to flash before my gaze; but this, as I knew, was a result of the blinding glare of the explosion.

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie, sitting up. "Dear old boys, what a truly frightful report! Surely that could not have been a firework?"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Watson. "Where are we? I—I can't see properly! I've got a yard of skin off my shin, and——"

"Never mind your shin. After all, we're practically unhurt," I interrupted. "That wasn't a firework, my sons—it was more like a charge of dynamite. And it's a ten-to-one chance if the chap who threw it is alive."

"What?" panted Watson, startled.

I said no more, but whipped out my electric torch, and switched it on. Then I hurried forward along the road. About sixty yards away a figure was lying prostrate. I felt slightly sick when I thought of what would have happened to us if we had been much nearer, for all the force of the explosion had seemed to come in our direction.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie hurried after me, leaving our bicycles mixed up in a heap on the road. It was fortunate that I had a torch, for before

reaching that prostrate figure we came to a great crater in the road—a hole six or seven feet across by two feet deep.

This in itself spoke volumes, and proved the truth of my statement. Nothing less than dynamite could have blown that hole in the ground. I imagined that the man who had flung the bomb—for it could have been nothing else—had let it slip as it left his hand. It fell, exploding.

I had a queer feeling as I approached closer to the figure. I nerved myself, for I felt almost certain that we should find only a mangled heap of remains. But I was wrong. The man in the road was hardly scratched, although his coat was torn and tattered in several places.

He lay there, groaning.

"Well, I'm hanged!" I exclaimed.

"I thought he would have been killed outright! Quick! Lend a hand. Help me prop him up, Montie. Tommy, you fetch some water—you'll find plenty in the ditch on the left-hand side. Buck up!"

Sir Montie and I seized the stranger, and I made a pillow for his head upon my knee. Montie held the electric torch. I could see now that my first impression was slightly wrong. There was an ugly, livid bruise upon the man's forehead, obviously caused by a flying fragment of stone from the road.

He opened his eyes, blinked round, and sighed.

"Got that water, Tommy?" I shouted. "Hurry up!"

Watson came rushing up with his cap filled to the brim with water. I dashed some into the stranger's face, and then commenced bathing his forehead with a soaked handkerchief. And during these operations we were able to take stock of the man.

He was elderly, clean-shaven, and with grey hair. He looked quite a gentleman, but his clothing was mud-stained and altogether dishevelled. It seemed as though he had been out in all weathers, night and day, for the better part of a week.

"Who the dickens can he be?" asked Watson. "And what was the idea of chucking that thing at us——"

"I've got him—I know who he is!" I interrupted. "Can't you recognise him from the description that was circulated?"

"The description, dear old boy?"

"Yes, of course, Montie! This man is Crawford Hope," I replied. "He's the lunatic who escaped from Moor Hill Asylum. Some of the reports said that he was miles away from this district, but those reports were evidently wrong."

"Good heavens!" said Tommy Watson. "You're right, Nipper—there's no other explanation. And he tried to murder us!"

"And nearly succeeded in killing himself!" I said grimly. "How on earth he managed to get hold of that explosive is more than I can imagine. Thank goodness we were a good way off!"

"And thank goodness he dropped the bomb!" said Watson fervently. "Why, if he'd flung it truly we should all have been blown to atoms!"

"Hush!" I whispered. "I think he's coming round."

"Hold him tight!" gasped Watson. "He might be dangerous——"

"Rot! He's as helpless as a baby now," I said.

I was by no means certain that Crawford Hope was whole. I had made no examination, and I thought it quite likely that an arm or a leg might be broken. But at the moment we confined our attention to his face.

And the lunatic opened his eyes and stared at us dazedly.

"Dear me!" he muttered weakly. "What—what is the meaning—— I can't seem to remember clearly. Let me see—let me see! Why, yes, of course! Great Heaven above! Are you hurt, boys? Are you injured?"

"No, we're all right," I said. "How do you feel now?"

I was surprised at the rational tone in Mr. Hope's voice.

"I?" he said. "Does it matter how I feel? I was mad—yes, I must have been out of my mind. Good gracious me! Yes—yes, that is the truth, of course! Perhaps I am insane now—I do not seem to know!"

"That's all right," I said gently. "There's no need for you to worry yourself, Mr. Hope. I think you are Mr. Crawford Hope?"

"Yes, that is my name," said the man, with greater strength in his voice. "Wait, boys—wait! I am beginning to remember everything—I know the truth. I was in that big asylum, was I not? I escaped; I have been roaming about the country. Heaven above, what ghastly nights I have spent!"

"You tried to kill us!" put in Watson bluntly.

The old gentleman looked startled.

"Yes, the dynamite!" he muttered. "In my madness I attempted to kill any boys that I could see. I heard your voices, and so I threw my bomb. Heaven be praised, my reason has been restored to me!"

And this, I believed, was the real truth.

"I want you to see if you can stand up," I said. "Do you think any bones are broken? We'll take you down into the village——"

"I'm not hurt much—very little indeed," interrupted the other. "The force of the explosion was downwards, and by a miracle I escaped grave injury. But—but tell me, is there a bonfire being burnt to-night? A guy—an effigy——"

"Why, yes," I said; "it's the Fifth of November!"

"Great heavens!" gasped Crawford Hope. "In my insane mania I prepared a trap to kill scores of boys. Perhaps it will be too late, even now, to avert the disaster; but you may be able to do something. You must try!"

For a moment we thought that he was raving again.

"You don't believe me—you think I am still out of my mind?" he asked huskily. "But you must believe me, boys—you must! I have recovered myself, I am normal again, but my mind remains clear. I can remember all that I did while under the influence of the mania."

"But what did you do?" I asked.

"Near your school—for I imagine that you belong to the big school near the village—there is a shed, with one window let into a high wall," said Crawford Hope tensely. "Do you know it?"

"Why, yes, it's the wood-shed, in the Triangle," I said. "The window looks out upon the paddock."

"Yes—yes, that is the one," said Hope. "Last night I prowled near it, and I saw three boys preparing a guy. They were the three boys I encountered once before, and whom I tried to drown in the river. Yes, I remember—I distinctly remember!"

"You mean Handforth and Co.?" broke in Watson.

"Handforth—yes, that is one of the names," said the man, who was now obviously as rational as we were ourselves. "They were making this effigy,

presumably to burn in the fire to-night."

"That's not at all improbable," I agreed. "Handforth is just the kind of fellow to make a guy of his own. But does this really matter now? Wouldn't it be better if we moved you to the village——"

"Wait—wait!" interrupted Crawford Hope. "You don't understand. And I must be sharp—I must tell you in a few words," he added, fighting for breath. "I am feeling weak again—the knowledge of my insane crime has unnerved me. For two nights I was upon the moor—and during the daytime, too. In one quarry, miles from here, they were making preparations for blasting the rock; and, while the men were absent, I took a box of dynamite—I made off with it."

"Oh!" I said. "You used some of that just now!"

"Yes, yes; but only a little—a tiny portion I had left," said the old man faintly. "The rest I used in that guy——"

"In the guy?" I shouted, my heart leaping.

"Yes—I am telling you!" went on Hope feverishly. "After those three boys had gone, I got into that shed. Without leaving a trace, I opened the guy, and inserted the bulk of the dynamite in the midst of the straw; then I closed it up again. Oh, Heaven! I can remember how I gloated—how I thought of the terrible explosion which would occur when that effigy was placed on the fire. It would blow up, and every living thing within the radius of fifty yards would be killed outright!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Watson, white as a sheet.

"Hurry to the school—run as you have never run before!" panted the old man. "If you are too late, I shall take my own life as a punishment for this foul crime. But I didn't know—I was insane!"

I remembered that glare in the sky, and my heart almost stopped beating as I realised that at any moment Handforth might put his guy upon the fire. And this man was telling the truth—there was not the slightest doubt about that.

I jumped to my feet, tense and active. "You chaps wait here—keep with Mr. Hope!" I said hoarsely. "I'm going to dash for St. Frank's."

"But—but——"

"One second might mean the destruction of a hundred chaps!" I broke in. "Don't ask questions—I'm going!"

It almost seemed as though I had taken leave of my own senses. I tore down the road wildly, arrived at the heap of bicycles, and tore one out of the tangle. I didn't care whose it was, and I jumped upon it and raced past my chums without saying a word.

And I rode as I had never ridden before.

CHAPTER VI.

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH!

"HURRAH!"

A cheer rose on the night air—mainly from the fags—as the gigantic bonfire commenced to blaze up in real earnest. It had been lit shortly before, at several different points, and now the flames were leaping up in the sky.

Crowds of fellows stood round. Others were yelling and laughing in other parts of the paddock, letting off crackers and Roman candles, and all manner of other fireworks. Everybody was enjoying himself.

On such an occasion as this, the Fifth and the Sixth forgot their dignity and joined in the fun, many of them even indulging in horseplay. And Edward Oswald Handforth was much gratified when he observed that Simon Kenmore, of the Sixth, was standing comparatively near to the bonfire.

"Now's our time, my sons," said Handforth. "Buck up!"

"Time for what?" asked Church.

"Why, our guy, of course!" replied Handforth. "Kenny's near by, and we can make him the laughing-stock of the whole giddy crowd. Everybody will recognise that guy in a tick. I'd love to see the cad's face while he watches himself burning!"

"It ought to be worth quids," said McClure sarcastically. "If I was a betting chap, I'd wager ten-to-one that he doesn't recognise himself at all! I'm afraid that guy isn't quite lifelike——"

"You—you rotter!" snapped Handforth. "You know as well as I do that it's a perfect double! But, of course, I don't expect anything else from you! Everybody in the Remove is the same—you're all as jealous as you can be!"

"Ha. ha. ha!" roared Church. "Ahem! Yes, of course, Handy!" he added hastily. "Kenmore ought to go green when he sees that guy. But I don't fancy he will!"

He gave McClure an expressive glance, and a moment later the pair edged carelessly away. It was their object to mingle with the crowd, so that they would not be available when required; but, unfortunately, Handforth spotted them just before they got out of sight.

He charged up, wrathful and indignant.

"You—you backsliders!" he said warmly. "Trying to sneak off, eh? Well, you jolly well won't do it! You're coming with me, and we're going to get that guy out. Come on—no backing out of it!"

"Oh, all right!" growled Church. "Only you've got to take the blame."

"Blame? What blame?"

"For making the awful thing!"

Handforth found his voice after a moment.

"I won't slish you now—I don't want to spoil the evening's enjoyment!" he said darkly. "But it won't be a question of blame at all. All the fellows will be amazed when they see the guy. They'll be absolutely amazed!"

"Of course they will!" agreed McClure.

"They'll be so deceived that they'll think we're chucking the real Kenmore on the fire!" went on Handforth. "It'll be rather a lark if some of the chaps dash to rescue him."

Church and McClure decided to let Handforth have his delusions. After all, they couldn't do much good by persuading their leader to give the thing up. He was determined, and the best thing was to get it over as quickly as possible. So they accompanied Handforth to the wood-shed, and the precious guy was uncovered.

"My hat! It gives you a start to look at it!" said Handforth. "Just like Kenmore lying there!"

Church and McClure were silent, and their ideas concerning their leader's imagination were tremendous. And certainly Handforth must have had a really extraordinary imagination to kid himself that his handiwork resembled Kenmore.

"Come on—lend a hand!" he said briskly. "We'll carry it out as though we were dragging Kenmore himself.

The chaps will think that we're strolling along with the cad."

The dummy figure was seized, but, unfortunately, one of its legs almost parted company from the body. This defect was hastily remedied, with the sad result that the left foot was pointing in the opposite direction. But Handforth didn't notice this in the gloom, and Church and McClure saw no reason why they should point it out.

At last the guy was held, and the three juniors gingerly carried it out into the open, little realising that this innocent-looking object was, actually, a deadly bomb of the worst possible description.

It was rather a long way round to the paddock, and Church and McClure were heartily glad when they came within sight of the bonfire, for they were carrying the dummy whilst Handforth gave directions.

And when the bonfire was being approached, Church and McClure nearly dropped the guy in their valiant efforts to keep themselves from laughing, for Handforth commenced addressing the figure in a loud voice, apparently under the delusion that the onlookers would mistake it for Kenmore.

"Yes, you rotter, we're going to chuck you on to the bonfire!" said Handforth grimly. "You're a cad, Kenmore, and it's about time you were taught a lesson!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

De Valerie and Pitt and several others crowded round and yelled, and Simon Kenmore himself stood looking on, some distance away. There was a grin on his face, but certainly no sign of amazement.

"Who's it meant to be, Handy?" asked Pitt blandly.

"Nothing human, anyway!" said Owen major.

Handforth glared.

"Who's it meant to be?" he roared. "Can't you see?"

"We can see something!"

"Haven't you got any eyes?" snorted Handforth. "You must be dotly if you can't recognise who it is!"

Pitt regarded the guy critically.

"Why, yes!" he exclaimed, slapping his thigh. "Great! I didn't think you were so jolly clever, Handy! It's first class—and absolutely lifelike!"

"Lifelike!" said Grey. "Who's it meant to be?"

"Pitt can see, anyway!" snapped Handforth. "I'm glad to find he's got some sense!"

"Rather!" said Pitt, nodding. "Topping, Handy, old man! But why on earth have you made a guy of yourself?"

"My—myself?" bellowed Handforth wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Church and McClure, dropping the guy in their merriment.

"Why, of course!" said Pitt. "It's you, Handy—it's like you in every particular. Jolly clever, too! Your nose—your chin—your ears——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you funny fathead!" roared Handforth. "It's Kenmore—can't you see? It's Kenmore, of the Sixth!"

Reginald Pitt promptly fainted, and had to be led away, supported by De Valerie and Singleton, who were sobbing with mirth. And Handforth, fairly disgusted, seized the guy, and hurled it upon the bonfire.

"That's how much I think of Kenmore!" he said tartly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The dummy figure was well in flames, but it rolled down and caught upon a dark patch of the smouldering faggots. The bottoms of the legs were well alight, but it would probably be some minutes before the guy was really consumed.

And all around stood the crowds of fellows, close enough to be blown to atoms if that dynamite exploded. All innocent of their ghastly danger, the boys stood round, watching.

And, in the meantime, I was tearing into the Triangle like a madman. I was nearly exhausted, and panting like a steam engine. I had used every ounce of my strength in that ride through Bellon and up to the school.

And now, staggering from my machine, I let it crash in the Triangle, and I ran towards the paddock. And any second I expected to hear that devastating roar of the explosion—that roar which would mean scores of deaths, and the destruction of half the school!

The lurid glare from the bonfire flickered upon the walls of the Ancient House, upon the massive chimney stacks above. The fire was blazing furiously now, and yells of laughter from the paddock told how the fellows were enjoying themselves. And yet death was at their elbow!

Staggering drunkenly, for I was nearly spent, I ran into the paddock. Several Fifth-Formers caught sight of me, and they tried to grasp me. I tore through them, making straight for the bonfire.

The next second something seemed to stab right through me, for I had caught an uninterrupted glimpse of the fire. And there upon it lay the effigy—the one of Handforth's making, for this object could be none other.

It was burning fiercely!

"Back—back!" I shouted, my voice cracking with anxiety. "Stand back—all of you! That guy is filled with dynamite, and will explode at any second!" I half expected the fellows to roar with laughter at my words; but there was something in my tone, perhaps, which told them that I was not trying to be funny. And not for a second did I pause. I ran on—straight to the fire.

Even as I did so I realised that I might be going to my death. But the fellows were not moving—they were still standing round in scores. I could not run back and save my own skin, and see them blown to death. For I knew the terrible truth, and they did not.

Moreover, it was just as likely that death would come to me now, for if the explosion took place at once, I should never be able to get clear. Pitt grasped my arm as I pushed past him.

"Nipper," he panted, "what on earth——"

"Don't stop me!" I hissed fiercely.

I threw his arm aside roughly, and Pitt recoiled in amazement. The next moment I dashed right into the fire, seized the burning guy, and tore it out. And so quick was my action that I was hardly scorched.

"He's mad!"

"Hold him, somebody!"

"He'll get burnt!"

The guy, to my infinite relief, was only burning at the lower end, and at the arms. The body, so far, was only smouldering. But the whole thing was burning hot to my touch, and at any second this very heat might cause the dynamite to go off in one shattering explosion.

A crowd of fellows came rushing at me.

"Stand back, you fools!" I shouted shrilly. "Stand back! Run for your

lives! Leave me a clear path! We may all be killed within the next second!"

The fellows fell back, so amazed that they could take no action, and I dashed along with the guy in my grasp, with the smouldering rags and straw bursting into flame as the breeze fanned the embers.

I was scorched now, but I hardly knew it—I didn't care. I had one thought in mind. At the side of the paddock, and within twenty yards, there was a deep ditch, and, owing to recent rains, this ditch was full of murky water. I ran for it, stumbling, staggering, and fighting for breath.

I know that I never expected to reach the ditch.

It seemed utterly impossible to me that the dynamite failed to explode; but at last, with a whole crowd of fellows streaming behind me, I reached the water. I did not chance any half-measures. The guy was light, and would certainly not sink altogether—part of it would continue to burn on the surface.

So I flung myself clean into the ditch, carrying the dummy with me. Together we went under, and when I came up, gasping, I was surrounded by a cloud of steam. And I stood there, waist deep in the mire, holding the guy under.

"Thank Heaven!" I muttered faintly.

Then I collapsed. Everything seemed faint for the minute, and I hardly knew what happened until I found myself in front of the bonfire, surrounded by a crowd of chaps all talking at once.

The heat was welcome, and the fellows had done the best thing under the circumstances; but I felt as weak as a rat. But in my heart there was a great thankfulness that I had been in time.

"Were you mad, Nipper?" asked Morrow, bursting through the crowd. "What on earth possessed you to act in that insane fashion——"

"I'll explain," I said quietly. "In the middle of that guy there is a charge of dynamite—enough to blow half St. Frank's to powder!"

"What?"

"You're dreaming!"

Handforth was highly indignant. But then Nelson Lee arrived, and I told him of our meeting with Crawford Hope.

"My boy, you deserve the highest praise for your courageous act!" he said quietly.

In just over an hour I was feeling much better. I wouldn't hear of going to bed, although Nelson Lee at first insisted. I was suffering from several burns, but these were not so serious as the guy's first thought. And with these bandaged, and in a complete new rig-out of dry things, I felt something like myself.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee had examined the soaked guy, and, sure enough, he found within it enough dynamite to have sent half of St. Frank's crumbling to dust—enough dynamite to have killed practically every living thing in the paddock.

The fellows, of course, made a ridiculous fuss about it, and I spent a most uncomfortable time.

"We owe him our lives!" said Do Valerie quietly. "Every one of us!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Nipper!"

Of course, one of the masters and a number of servants had been dispatched post-haste to the spot where Sir Montie and Tommy Watson had been left. And my chums turned up to announce that Mr. Crawford Hope was being conveyed to Bannington, there to be installed in the hospital.

His mania had nearly brought about a double disaster. But fate is a queer thing, and the poor old chap's reason was restored to him by the very diabolical scheme which his distorted mind had formulated.

The narrowness of the escape scared a few of the fellows; but the firework display was thoroughly enjoyed, nevertheless. And that night I went to bed feeling that I had had quite enough excitement for one day.

THE END.

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Diego's Double.

"**C**HUCK-TIME" was over. The fried beef had vanished down to the last fragment, and one would have required to search the big tin pail with a microscope to find even a crumb of the biscuits it had contained ten minutes earlier. With grunts of satisfaction, the boys of Buck Adams' cow-ranche leaned back into comfortable positions to enjoy the hour or so of leisure before turning into their bunks.

When you're up at three o'clock in the morning you don't want to wait until midnight before going to bed.

Conversation, beginning with jerky exclamations, at last became more or less general. One of the name of Diego seemed to be the subject.

There was a lull, and then a hulking fellow, with an ugly face and a crop of hair that looked like a laundry-scrubber dyed orange, sat up and re-lighted his pipe.

"You all just make me plumb weary," he observed impatiently. "One'd think this yere Diego's an army corps in his one derved self by th' way some o' you fellows is barkin'!"

"What's bitin' you, Red?" inquired Tacoma Steve pleasantly.

"Why, this yere jaw 'bout Diego," was the answer. "I hear th' ravin 'of this outfit seems like as though th' hull lot'd lay down an' ask th' skunks permission for him to walk over 'em, if he was t' show his face to 'em!"

"Not so bad as that, Red," a cheerful young voice objected. "Hope not, anyway."

"You!" growled the gorgeous-headed giant contemptuously. "What's you ali got to say?"

"Why, that, as Diego isn't here, it's easy enough talking!" was the retort.

There was a laugh.

"Cheer-ho! Bully for you, Kid! Sock it in, Dick!"

Dick Dalzell, alias the Kid, Scotty, and one or two other fancy names that the boys, with whom he was a prime favourite, had

bestowed upon him, looked quietly across at the big fellow, Reddy Donovan.

Reddy was a blusterer—inclined to be a bully, on account of his huge size and enormous strength, and he liked Dick, who had no inclination to be bullied by anyone, none the less for that he was young, a Britisher, had a quick wit and a ready tongue, refused to knuckle under to him. Coming of the stock he did, knuckling under to anyone was not included in Dick's make-up.

"Shucks!" snorted Donovan, who was a Texan, his Irish name notwithstanding. "What's this Diego, anyway? A dirty oiler! I'd shorely twist him so's yer couldn't tell him nohow from a bit o' jerky (dried meat), if I got my hands on him!"

"He's shore a greaser, an' a little fellow at that," Burnett, the broncho-buster of the ranche admitted.

"Trouble'd be to get yore hands on him," suggested the foreman.

"He's busted an' gone through three men at once, an' all as big as Reddy," put in Cross-eyed Joe, the cook, taking his place among the disputants.

"Wouldn't go through me," Donovan was getting nettled. "This yer Diego, jus' because he pulled it off a lot o' gritters, held up some little, old, no-account pap-suckers, an' robbed a stage or two, has fair made the hull border scary. He ain't never met a man yet!"

"What's th' good o' showing fight when his hull gang's got yer covered?" inquired a cowpuncher, by the name of Williams.

"Aw, quite! I tell you all you makes me tired!" grunted the giant. "The Diego's only met suckers yet!"

"You'd be different Reddy," suggested Dick insinuatingly.

"Me!" Donovan roared liked a bull. "If you all's lookin' for a funeral, put Diego th' Greaser up agin me! My grit don't go down into my boots when I hit trouble. Didn't I lay out Sam King, th' had man of Phoenix?"

"You've certainly told us so," said Dick politely.

"An' wasn't I th' only one who'd take on that greaser what was standin' outside Silcock's saloon in Santa Anna, with a knife in his fist, an' a hankerchief in his teeth, darin' any galoot t' take th' other corner in his teeth? Didn't I carve him some?"

"We have your word for it."

"Then who'll say I'm afraid?"

"No one wants to say it."

"I guess not." And Donovan ran his fierce eyes around the circle of men. "No; you all take it from me straight, if that little ol' greaser ranges up 'longside me, his number's shorely up!"

The company had heard Reddy's boastings before. Usually they amused them, but to-night they found them tiresome. Truth to tell, they had each and all a very sound respect for Diego, the callous, smooth-voiced rascal, cattle-rustler, road-agent, and murderer, who kept the country along the Gila River in a condition of excitement that was not good for the local bill of health.

The next morning, before the others were awake, Dick Dalzell and a cowpuncher named Ben were afoot and eating breakfast. They were "wranglers" for the week—that is, it was their business to start off early to the pasture where were the horses, and drive a bunch down, from which the other boys would select their mounts for the day.

Dalzell was glad. He wanted a little private conversation with Ben, an odd, dried-up little fellow, with a great fund of humour.

"Say, Ben," he said, as they tramped together through the darkness, "you know Diego, don't you?"

Ben chuckled.

"Was interdocced five months ago," he replied. "Come in with two pals to Penzon, an' shot up th' dance hall where I was sweet-heartin' Angela, th' daughter of th' house. Pretty shot, for an oiler. Got me in th' leg."

"You remember what he was like, then?"

"Shorely I wouldn't forget him if I saw him agin. Me long-lost brother I might, not Diego."

"Little fellow, isn't he?"

"Ain't so big as Reddy. 'Bout your size, Dick. Good-lookin', if he wasn't a greaser."

"I, too, would like to know him, if I should happen on him any old time."

In picturesque language, Ben gave a minute account of the celebrated robber's personal appearance. It concluded with the information that Diego had a broad purple scar across his forehead, relic of a blow an American cowboy had once dealt him. It was in revenge for this blow, so it was said, that Diego, who boasted himself a gentleman, had taken up his present occupation.

"See that wipe once," said Ben, "an' yer shorely won't forget it. Goes hull way across his forehead, it do, an' it allus looks as though 'twere fresh."

"Much obliged, Ben."

"Yer shore welcome, Dick."

During the next few days Red Donovan's tongue worked overtime telling the rest what he'd do when he found Diego. He meant finding him, Diego having honoured the vicinity of Adams' ranche by his presence. From Fergusson's, the adjoining one westward, a boy rode in one evening to say that all the Adams' outfit had better keep their eyes skinned, as Diego had lifted a whole bunch of prime steers the day before, in broad daylight, too, and shot dead Tom Archer, the cowpuncher who'd been in charge of them.

"Your chance come, Reddy," Dick observed that night at supper-time. "Diego's camping round; but he don't know his funeral's so close at hand."

"Wait till I do see him!" growled Red.

"Eh—funeral?" asked the strange cowboy.

"It's this way," explained the foreman. "Big Donovan's swore he'll down Diego for keeps, if only someone'll show him th' greaser."

"That goes."

"It'd shore be a good thing," Fergusson's man agreed. "He's gettin' a heap too lively nowadays."

"Reckon it won't be so plumb difficult," Donovan growled indifferently. "Jest a little nerve."

"Wal, it's wuth a thousand dollars if yer do it," the cowpuncher said, greatly impressed. "I heard our boss say so last night. He'll stand for half of it."

When the boys started next morning to take up their several stations on the range, Collier, the foreman, stopped Dick.

"See here," he ordered, "you're to join Donovan this morning, Kid, you an' Ben. I've give you the range up by Hardy's Creek. The canon beyond would be a fine place from which Diego and his pals might make a break for the steers. Watch out."

"You bet," the lad answered.

And as he rode off there was a smile on his face that puzzled his two companions exceedingly. The sight of it irritated Donovan, and he said so.

"Won't bust yore head, Kid, grinnin'. I hope," he said. "Grin'll be on the other side if Diego waltzes out on yer!"

"Oh, but you're with us!" Dick replied.

Ben grinned widely.

"It's shorely a protection," he agreed.

Ordinarily the watching of the range grazing cattle was no hard work; but, with Diego being about, greater activity was demanded of the herders. Dick in particular showed himself remarkably lively. So much so as to call forth a sneer from Red.

"Kid think's he's got it all on his own shoulders!" he said derisively. "Like a bean in a frypan!"

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But Dick took it good-humouredly. He was never still, but here, there, and everywhere. His pony, Boots, had a more than good day's work to get through. Down the creek, up the creek, over the range, skirting the canon, he was taken, until even old Ben began to smile a bit.

He and Donovan were talking together when Dick came galloping suddenly from the canon. His face was flushed, his eyes jumping.

"Say!"

"Diego?" jerked out Ben.

Donovan's eyes widened.

"Yes. I guess your chance is right here, Reddy," the lad hurried out. "Signs down in the canon that the oilers are there and waiting. Go there, an' I'll bet my horse you'll see Diego himself!"

Ben muttered something to himself, felt for his revolver, and closed his jaws tightly. Oddly enough, Reddy's face seemed to grow pale.

"Come on!" snapped Ben.

"How many men's Diego got with him, Kid?" asked Reddy, and if you'd said his voice had a break in it you wouldn't have been lying.

"Oh, shucks, what's it hurt?" cried Ben.

"Not a bit, now we've Reddy here," agreed Dick. "Say, you two, come on gentle; but don't you make the canon till you hear me give the wolf howl. We don't want no traps."

"Are you game?" And Ben looked at

the lad doubtfully. "Diego'll open out if he sees you!"

And, without further argument, Dick turned Boots on his hind hoofs and loped off. In five minutes he had disappeared from sight.

"If th' Kid's not foolin', we got a plumb excitin' time before us," Ben said to his companion. "One thing, it won't be no long performance whatever way it goes!"

Red Donovan licked his lips. In spite of his bragging, he was not quite so hot to meet the robber as he would have had others believe.

Slowly they went forward, and within two hundred yards of the canon the howl of a coyote caught their ears. The dreary sound was repeated.

"We'll git," said Ben, and he drew his gun.

Donovan followed, doing the same; but his hand trembled. He didn't seem in love with the business.

They entered the canon, where a barely discernible track ran the length of it. The upper part was bare rock, with plenty of loose boulders and projecting rocks; the lower was well wooded. The light was not of the best.

"It's shorely a queer——" began Reddy.

And then from behind a rock stepped out Diego. Ben had no doubt of it. There was visible on the forehead the beginning of the red scar, the rest of which, together with

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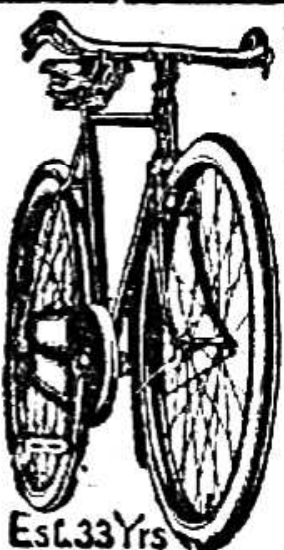
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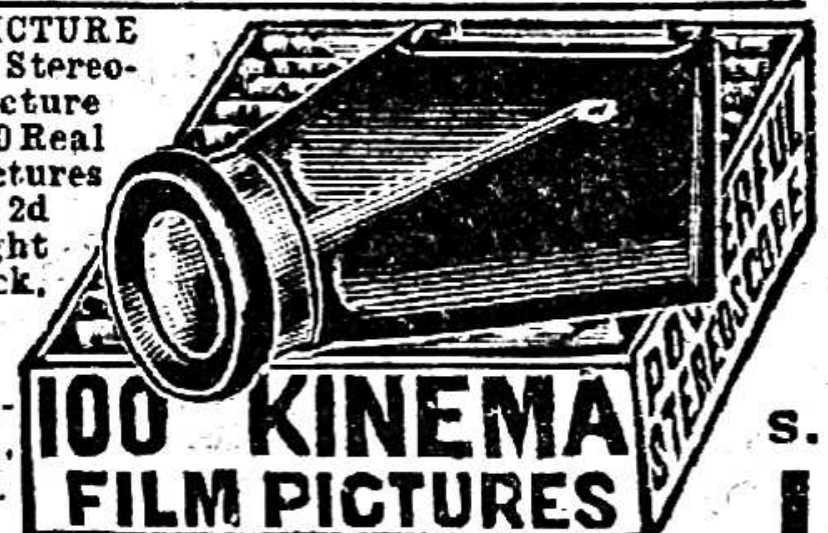
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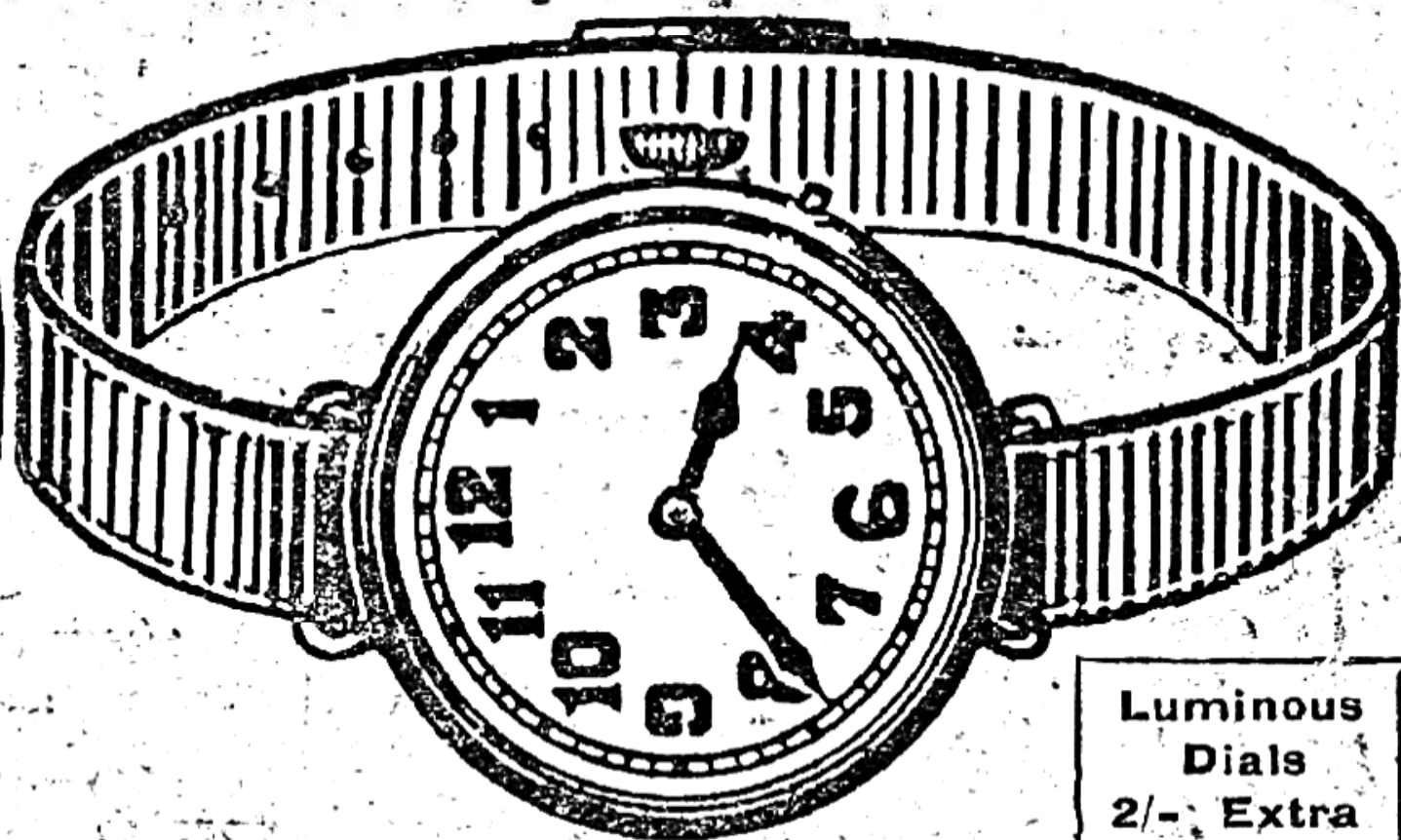
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