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THIS
THRILLING

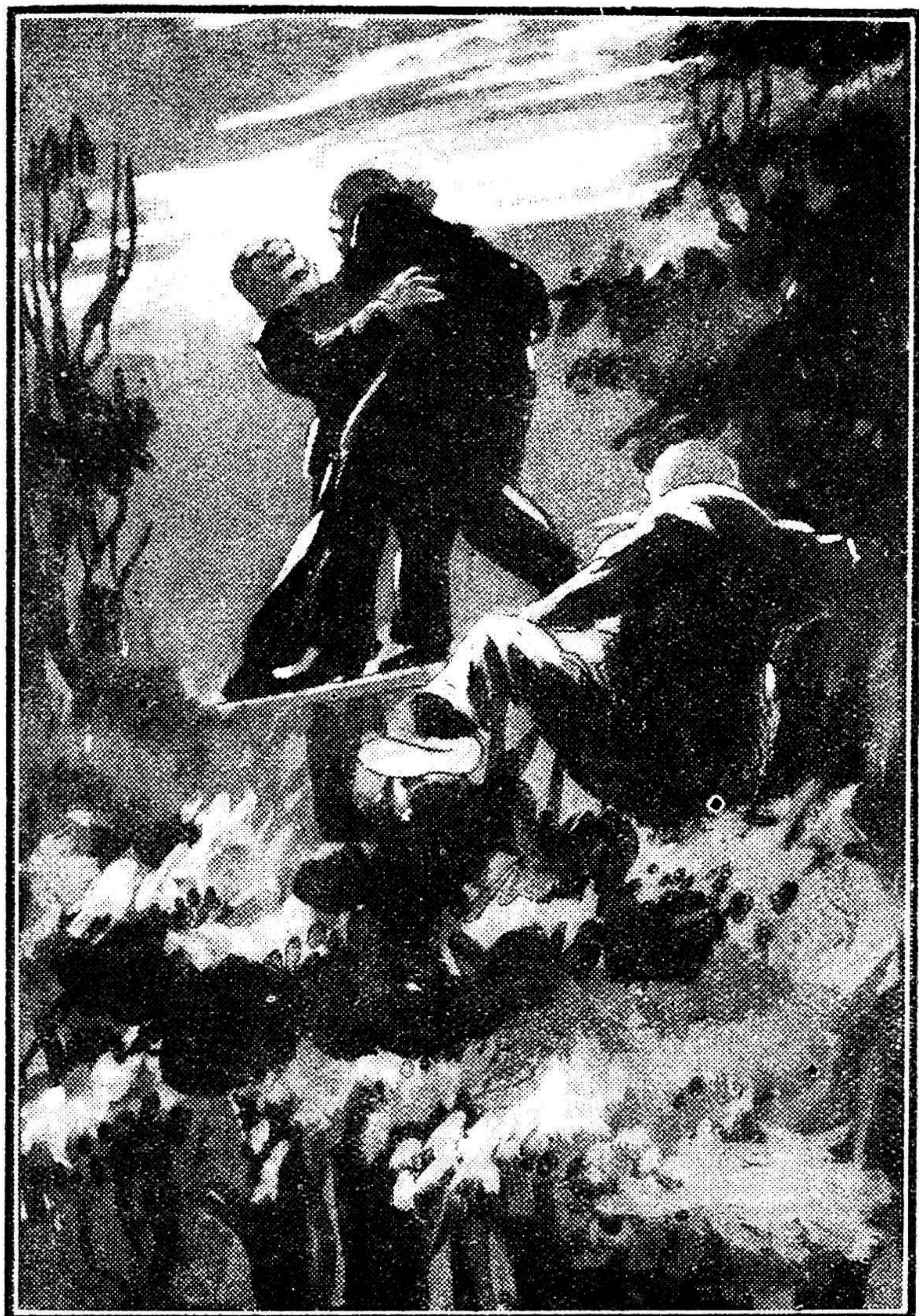
WEEK'S
LONG

COMPLETE STORY OF ST. FRANK'S:—

THE
HORROR OF BELLTON WOOD.

Introduces FU CHOW, a dangerous enemy, against
whom NELSON LEE is matching his wits.

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE, No. 27, IS THE CENTRE OF ATTRAC-
TION IN THIS BOOK!



Fu Chow uttered a snarling sound in his throat and sprang at me.

THE HORROR OF BELLTON WOOD

Fu Chow, the inhuman monster from China, who attempted last week, and nearly succeeded, in blowing up St. Frank's, because the famous Old School sheltered one, Yung Ching, from his evil clutches, is again actively at work on another scheme which forms the thrilling subject of the following story: "The Horror of Bellton Wood!" By the author of "The Yellow Grip," "Archie in Chinatown," "The Fiends of Fu-Chow," and many other fine yarns.

**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY
NIPPER.)**

CHAPTER I.

TEDDY LONG SEES THINGS!

TEDDY LONG came to an abrupt halt. There, lurking before him in the gloom were two dim figures—shadowy, indistinct and sinister. The sneak of the Remove at St. Frank's felt his heart thumping wildly, and he gazed round for some means of escape.

But he gazed in vain.

He was in the lane leading from the village to St. Frank's. On one side of him lay the undulating meadowland, but impossible to reach by reason of the thick hedge, which had no gaps in it at this point.

On the other side lay the dense mass of Bellton Wood. This, certainly, was accessible, for there were wide spaces through which one could easily pass. But it was



dusk, and Teddy Long feared the darkness as a cat fears water.

And so Teddy Long came to a halt, and contemplated making a wild rush back towards the village. He had come out after locking up—not because he wanted to do so, but he had been bribed by Grayson, of the Fifth, to fetch a parcel from the post office. That parcel contained cigarettes, and the Fifth Form bully wanted them. It was, of course, impossible to buy cigarettes openly in the village.

Before Long could make up his mind, however, the two dim figures bore down upon him. He had wild ideas of tramps and hooligans. He pictured himself lying mangled and battered in a ditch after an encounter with these footpads. Teddy Long was the biggest coward in the Ancient House, and he nearly yelped with terror.

It was very gloomy this evening. Not only was the sky overcast with the threat of thunderstorms, but the dense bulk of Bell-ton Wood made the lane much darker than the ordinary open highway.

"Collar him!" exclaimed one of the dim figures roughly.

"Yow! Help!" wailed Teddy. "Don't—don't you touch me—"

"Grab the young idjit!"

The two figures seized Long just as he was about to flee. And it was not until then that he discovered that they were not desperate footpads, as he had imagined, but two village youths who were obviously in the mood for mischief. One was the son of the local blacksmith, a hulking lout, known in Bellton as "Lumpy Bill"; and the other was Jim Potter, who worked at Holt's Farm. Both these young gentlemen seized every opportunity to "get one in" at the St. Frank's fellows. They regarded the college boys as their natural enemies.

"You—you rotters!" gasped Long, half relieved and half alarmed. "I—I thought you were tramps, or—or something! Lemme go! I'll jolly well report to the Head if you don't chuck it!"

"Stow that talk!" grinned Lumpy Bill. "My! Ain't you scared? Me an' Jim are goin' to put you through it now! We'll do it proper, too! What's the fust thing to be done, Jim?"

"Blowed if I know!" said Jim. "Ain't there a ditch we can chuck 'im into?"

Long wriggled desperately.

"You—you daren't!" he gasped.

"Don't git funky, ye little coward!" said Lumpy Bill. "The ditch is as dry as my throat arter a hard day's work! There wouldn't be no sense in chuckin' you into the ditch!"

"I know!" said Jim Potter, with a wink. "We'll take him into the middle of the wood, an' leave 'im there—"

"Don't—don't do that!" shouted Teddy wildly. "I—I'll give you anything! You—you can have what you like! Don't—don't take me into the wood?"

"Skeered?" asked Jim Potter sneeringly.

"Of course he's skeered," said Lumpy Bill, with contempt. "But 'e says 'e'll give us anything we like if we don't do it. What 'ave you got, kid?"

"Only—only my pocket-knife," said Teddy Long. "Oh! I—I remember! I lost it this morning—"

"Got any money?"

"Yes, of course!"

"How much?"

"Fourpence-ha'penny," said Teddy, hopefully. "I—I don't mind giving you threepence to let me go—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Lumpy Bill. "Frippence! Lumme! Ain't 'e generous, Jim? Frippence to let 'im go! Why, ye young idjit, ain't ye got nothing better to give us than that?"

"I can't give you what I haven't got," replied Long desperately. "You—you thieves—you ain't any better than footpads, after all!"

"Garn!" put in Jim. "Stow that talk—we ain't takin' no insults from you. We ain't takin' money, neither—no, not if you 'ad quids! We ain't thieves! But we're jolly well goin' to score off you, kid! The best thing we can do, Bill, is to take 'im into the wood—"

"No—no!" wailed Teddy Long, panting hard.

Lumpy Bill cast an uneasy glance into the wood.

"I don't reckon that idea's much good," he said doubtfully. "'Ere, I'll tell you what. We'll chuck the kid's cap into the wood—'e's bound to go arter it, 'cos 'e wouldn't dare show himself without 'is cap. It's a new one, too!"

As a matter of fact, Lumpy Bill, in spite of his size, was as much afraid of the wood as Teddy Long was. The village lout was the biggest coward in the district, and he would never dare to interfere with a St. Frank's fellow unless that fellow was about half his own size. And even under such conditions Lumpy Bill required a companion with him.

Teddy Long made a snatch at his cap, but he was too late.

Bill seized hold of it, and held it away. It was, as he had stated, practically a new one. Teddy Long would not dare to return to St. Frank's without it. The Removite gazed at the cap with wild anxiety.

"Give it to me!" he shouted. "Don't—don't you dare—"

"'Ere, look sharp!" exclaimed Jim Potter quickly. "There's somebody comin' up the lane! We don't want to be copped! Chuck that cap away, Bill! Go on—over the 'edge!"

Lumpy Bill looked round quickly, and spotted a large, heavy flint stone. He grinned, picked up the stone, and wrapped it inside the St. Frank's junior's cap. Considering Bill's reputation—he was locally

regarded as being soft—this was a pretty smart idea.

For when he hurled the cap into the wood, the stone carried it deep into the recesses. Lumpy Bill was strong, and he had a powerful throw. The stone crashed through the twigs, carrying Teddy Long's cap with it. Then, finally, there was a soft kind of thud. Teddy's cap was right in the wood.

"Now go an' git it!" said Lumpy Bill, with a loud guffaw.

Jim Potter joined in, and the two village youths ran off towards Bellton. Teddy Long remained standing in the middle of the lane—hot, indignant, furious and scared. He hoped that somebody would come along to help him.

But Jim Potter's warning had not been a true one. There was nobody coming at all. Jim had probably fancied it. And Teddy Long stood there, quite by himself. It seemed darker than ever.

"Oh, the rotters—the cads!" he muttered. "My new cap!"

For a moment he had an idea of going back to the school and saying he had lost the cap. But it was a new one, and Mr. Crowell would want to know how he had lost the cap, and all sorts of other things. Teddy daren't explain that the village boys had taken it. For inquiries would be set up, and at the first opportunity Jim Potter and Lumpy Bill would take ample and drastic revenge.

Furthermore, if Teddy failed to give any details he would be supplied with a new cap, and the cost of it would be deducted from his weekly pocket-money. This would mean that he would be without cash for two or three weeks. And the thought of being broke was an appalling one.

It seemed, therefore, that there was only one thing to be done.

He would have to fetch the cap.

It would even be impossible to ask anyone else to fetch it. It wasn't dark, and Teddy knew well enough that a fellow like Pitt or De Valerie or Bob Christine would sally into the wood without hesitation. If Long asked somebody to go and fetch his cap he would be jeered at—he would be called a frightened baby, and would never hear the last of it.

"Oh, my goodness!" he muttered. "I'll have to go and fetch it!"

And, having come to this conclusion, Long plucked up his courage. This wanted some doing, for he didn't possess any. However, he produced a kind of imitation courage, which served him all right for the moment.

He stuck his hands into his pockets, assumed an expression of bold defiance, and started whistling. The whistle was decidedly cracked and horribly out of tune, but Long didn't notice this. He sauntered towards the hedge, broke through, and penetrated into the wood, between the thick trees. He had only gone about three yards

when he suddenly ceased whistling, gave a wild gasp of dismay and fled.

Something had moved near the ground!

Teddy reached the road, casting a terrified glance behind him. And he was just in time to catch a glimpse of a healthy-looking rabbit as it scuttled into the ditch, and thence into a burrow.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Long. "I—I thought—"

He didn't know exactly what he thought, but he was more relieved than he could say. And once again he decided to brave the hidden perils of the dark wood. That cap had to be recovered.

He went through the gap again, and this time succeeded in getting twenty or thirty yards into the wood. He looked round carefully, trying to locate the cap. He knew its approximate position, and just here, anyhow, there was a bit of clearing. But he couldn't see any sign of it.

And it was much darker in the wood than he had thought it would be.

Looking back, he found that he was isolated. He was alone. He seemed to be in the very centre of the wood, and there was no sign of the lane. For a second, panic seized him once more, and he dashed back on his tracks.

At least, he thought he was doing so. Instead, he went off at a tangent, and did not run back towards the lane, but parallel with it. Indeed, after a while he bore further into the wood, crashing through the undergrowth wildly.

Then he came to a halt, panting and gasping.

The awful truth was borne upon him—he couldn't find the lane!

He had lost himself! And perhaps he would not be able to find his way out again! He had forgotten all about his cap now, and, indeed, didn't care anything about it. His one desire was to get out of the wood and to race for St. Frank's at full speed.

Anything to break this horrible spell.

He had been a fool to enter, he told himself. And he was just discovering that this part of the wood was darker than any other. It was like night in here—so black that it was almost impossible to see five yards in any direction. Long gazed round him, shivering in every limb.

"Oh, I—I know something's going to happen?" he moaned feebly.

Something did!

As he stood there he caught sight of an object which seemed to appear from nowhere. It was yellowy-white, and floating amongst the trees about five feet from the ground. It came from behind one tree, hovered a moment, and vanished behind another.

And then Teddy Long gulped.

His terror was of such an order that he could not move. He was rooted to the ground. That strange object came into

view once more—and now it was near him—only about ten or twelve feet away.

And the uncertainty of its nature had vanished. He could see clearly what it was. He stood there, transfixed as before, and it seemed to him that his heart completely stopped beating.

Certainly, the object was enough to scare anybody.

Even a strong-willed junior—a fellow with plenty of natural pluck—would have gone rather pale and shaky at the sight of this fearful, mysterious apparition. The effect on Teddy Long was stupendous.

There the thing hovered—a horrible face! It was a human face, with eyes that seemed to be luminous. They glared balefully. The mouth was thin and straight and cruel. Long couldn't see much else. He only knew that this face was there—unsupported by any body!

It seemed to be hanging in the very atmosphere. And it was not a mask. For the eyes moved—the mouth altered its shape, opened, and revealed two sets of fang-like teeth.

A wild scream came into Teddy Long's throat, but he couldn't utter it. He was struck dumb with the horror of the whole thing. And then, in a flash, the face vanished.

It didn't go behind a tree—it hardly moved. Yet, even while Long was staring with dread fascination, the face became no more. And the junior was alone. There was not another soul near by.

As the face vanished, Long gave vent to a scream. It came out—full, wild, and hoarse. And movement returned to his limbs. He twirled round, gasping and screaming still, and tore through the wood.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Oh, help!"

He didn't know which way he went—he didn't know anything. Utter and complete panic had got hold of him, and he forced his way through the bushes, past the trees, banging his arms, scratching his hands, and not caring.

And, more by luck than anything else, he suddenly found himself in the lane. He didn't know how it happened. His only knowledge was that he forced his way through a thick clump of bushes, and then he was in Bellton Lane—but at a much higher point than the spot where he had entered.

With one terrible look behind him, he raced away towards St. Frank's. He ran as he had never run before. And about two hundred yards from the school he suddenly caught sight of three figures sauntering along the dusty lane.

It wasn't so dark here, for the wood had been left behind, and the evening light was still flooding the land. And Long recognised the three figures as those of Remove juniors. They turned and stared as he approached.

"Somebody in a hurry!" remarked one of the juniors.

"Looks like it, by gad!" said another.

The trio, in fact, were Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, of Study A, in the Ancient House. They were the Knuts of the Remove—the three young rascals who considered themselves to be "goers." Incidentally, they were rotters.

"Help!" panted Long wildly. "Save me—save me!"

He rushed up, and fairly flung himself into the arms of Fullwood and Co. He clung to Fullwood like a leech—and Ralph Leslie uttered a yell of anger. For he was elegantly attired, as usual. And Teddy Long was dusty, untidy, and very far from being clean.

"Take your filthy paws off me, confound you!" snapped Fullwood fiercely. "You rotten young idiot! Drag him away, you chaps!"

"Save me!" moaned Long faintly.

"It's Long—I suppose he's been seein' ghosts!" said Gulliver. "My hat! He's in a shockin' state!"

"Pull him away, you fatheads!" shouted Fullwood.

Gulliver and Bell obliged.

Teddy Long was torn away by sheer force. Gulliver and Bell dragged him across the lane, and dropped him without any ceremony into the ditch. It was a deep ditch, but, fortunately, it was empty and quite dry.

Teddy Long lay there for a moment or two, babbling to himself.

"The eyes—the eyes!" he muttered. "Take 'em away! The head—the head was hovering there! All by itself! Oh, save me! I—I shall go mad! Save me, you chaps!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Bell curiously. "He's really scared, you know. A lot worse than I thought. Perhaps we'd better lug him out and find out what the trouble is. He's absolutely dotty with fright!"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Fullwood callously.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Gulliver. "We might as well hear what he's got to say. I know he's a funky little rotter, but I've never seen him quite so scared as this before. I believe he's gone off his rocker!"

Gulliver and Bell went down into the ditch, hoisted Long to his feet, and dragged him up into the long grass. And there he lay, staring round him with a wild, hunted look in his eyes.

Now and again he gazed down the lane as though expecting that hovering face to appear at any moment. He clutched at Gulliver's coat, and clung to it.

"What's the matter with you, you young fool?" demanded Fullwood.

"The face!" muttered Long, with chattering teeth. "The face!"

CHAPTER II.

A BIT OF A SENSATION!



RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD grunted.

"Leave the young idiot alone," he said. "We haven't got time to bother with him. He gets a scare over anythin'!"

"Don't leave me—oh, don't leave me!" wailed Teddy desperately. "That—that face will come again. I can see it now. It was in the wood—and it had horrible eyes, and a mouth with fearful teeth—"

"Don't be a young lunatic," said Bell. "What do you mean—a face? How could you see a face in the wood? There must have been a body with it. I expect you saw a tramp, or somebody—"

"No, no, it wasn't a tramp—it was a ghost!" exclaimed Long, clutching harder than ever. "It was just a face by itself. Without any arms or legs or body, or anything! I—I went in after my cap!"

Long was beginning to become slightly more rational. The presence of the three other juniors reassured him, and his panic was passing. But he was still pale and shaken, and he was shivering in every limb.

"Well, he's certainly seen somethin' out of the ordinary," declared Bell. "I've seen the young ass scared many a time—but never like this. How did it start, Teddy? Why did you go into the wood?"

"I—I met those two rotters," muttered Long.

"Which two rotters?"

"Lumpy Bill and Jim Potter—"

"Oh, you've been tricked, you little worm!" said Fullwood with a grin. "I expect they simply played a jape on you. One of 'em got a mask, or somethin', an' shoved some luminous paint over it—"

"Do you think I shouldn't know a mask with luminous paint on it?" demanded Long indignantly. "I wouldn't be scared by a thing like that! A mask hasn't got eyes that glow—it can't open its mouth and show its teeth. Besides, Lumpy Bill and Jim Potter weren't there!"

"But you just said they were!"

"No, I didn't!"

"Oh, leave him alone—" began Fullwood.

"It was those rotters who started it," went on Long. "They met me in the lane, and chucked my cap into the wood. Put a stone inside it so that it would go further—the cads! And I went into the wood after it. If I was scared I wouldn't do that, would I? I'm not a funk!"

"Oh, no!" said Bell. "Of course not!"

"I'm not!" declared Long hotly. "I went into the wood just the same as anybody else would have done. Then, as I happened to look round, I saw the face hovering there—"

"What do you mean?" put in Fullwood. "How long was it hovering?"

"I don't know," replied Long fearfully. "It seemed—it seemed to come from nowhere. And it moved about all by itself—without any body, or—or anything!"

"Did it make any noise?" asked Bell curiously.

"Not a sound!"

"An' the eyes were real?"

"No—they weren't like human eyes at all," replied Long, staring round him and speaking with difficulty. "They—they seemed to be a sort of green, and they flashed horribly! They weren't fakes, either—they were alive, although I don't believe they were the eyes of a man!"

"What rot!" said Gulliver. "There ain't such eyes as that!"

"I saw them—I can see 'em now," muttered Long. "And—and the mouth, you know. It—it opened, and I could see all the teeth. And yet the head didn't have any body. Oh, my goodness! I—I don't know what I shall do! I—I'm afraid to be by myself, you chaps! Don't leave me!"

Fullwood and Co. looked at the junior curiously.

And, in spite of himself, Fullwood cast an uneasy glance over his shoulder at Bellton Wood. Fullwood was not a funk in the ordinary sense, but when he came to anything touching the supernatural, he was as susceptible as Teddy Long. As for Gulliver and Bell, they had no great reputation as braves.

"I—I say!" muttered Bell. "Perhaps—perhaps there's somethin' in it, you know. Lots of people in the village say that the wood's haunted. An' I've heard it said that the ghosts are usually seen just before dark—in the half-light, you know. Perhaps Teddy saw somethin'—"

"Oh, rot!" growled Fullwood. "It was his imagination!"

"It wasn't!" persisted Long. "I—I really saw it!"

He was on his feet by this time, and he took care not to leave his three companions. They moved up towards the school, and succeeded in climbing over the wall without being spotted. Then they made their way into the Ancient House, and entered the lobby, which was brilliant with electric light. Here it was possible for Fullwood and Co. to see Teddy more distinctly.

"Great Scott!" said Fullwood. "You're in a shockin' condition!"

He was. His clothing was torn in a dozen places, and he was scratched and bleeding. His hair was tousled, and his cheeks were still unusually pale. In addition, he was smothered in dust and dirt from head to foot.

"The best thing you can do is to buzz upstairs an' clean yourself," suggested Bell. "If a prefect spots you like this there'll be terrific ructions. Well, why don't you go? Afraid to go upstairs now?"

As a matter of fact Long was nervous even here, in the full light. But he went off

after a moment's hesitation, and Fullwood and Co. made their way into the junior common-room.

This famous apartment was fairly well filled, and the juniors were standing in groups, chatting, or larking about.

"Heard the latest?" asked Gulliver.

"Lost some money on a horse?" inquired Reginald Pitt calmly.

"Oh, don't start!" said Gulliver, turning red. "I don't back horses—it's a mug's game!"

"Well, you are a mug aren't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, if you're goin' to be funny, I'll dry up," snapped Gulliver. "Teddy Long's nearly dotty with fright. He's seen a ghost in Bellton Wood—a real ghost, you know. We thought he'd gone off his rocker at first!"

"A ghost?" repeated De Valerie.

"Yes—a hovering head."

"I mean to say, somewhat extraord., and all that kind of rot," said Archie Glen-thorne, lounging forward. "Hovering heads, what? Dash it all, that requires a large amount of swallowing, old fruit! Somewhat tall, don't you know. Decidedly perpendicular, and what not!"

"Good old Archie!" grinned Pitt. "You've put it in a nutshell. A pretty large shell, but—"

"Of course, you chaps won't believe it," interrupted Bell. "But what Gulliver says is quite right. I saw Long, too. He was nearly dead with fright. He went into the wood, and saw a horrible ghost without any body—just a fearful face with a great gapin' mouth and long ears, like a demon!"

"I didn't think Long had such a long imagination," grinned De Valerie.

"It wasn't imagination—he really saw it," said Gulliver. "You wait until he comes down—he'll tell you!"

"I mean to say, the yarn, as I might put it, is somewhat fruity," observed Archie.

"What? Absolutely! Ghosts, and so forth! I don't believe in the dashed thing! A sensible chappie doesn't see ghosts, old tulip. Absolutely not!"

"Of course not!" agreed a dozen juniors.

"The very bally idea, don't you know, is prepos," exclaimed Archie. "I might even say, redic. Absolutely! A chappie doesn't see ghosts! Of course, some of the lads of the village might imagine all sorts of frightful things if they've been on the old randan. That is to say, the razzle, if you grasp the idea. Two of everything sort of stuff. You know—when a laddie gets well filled, and so forth, he sees things!"

"I hope you've never been like that, Archie," said Pitt.

"Dash it all!" protested Archie, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, dash it all! Really, old onion! Like that, what? Absolutely not! Phipps was telling me about a frightful cove he once worked for. In the dim ages of the past, of course. Well, this

frightful cove had a most deuced liking for whisky. Gallons of it, and what not! Bottles in every bally cupboard, and all that kind of rot. Well, he used to stagger home twice nightly, so to speak. See fifty different versions of everything!"

"But that's not seeing ghosts," grinned Jack Grey.

"Absolutely not," agreed Archie. "But then, don't you know, the cove trickled home one night and proceeded to have an excellent view of green snakes, and microbes, and all that sort of thing. Phipps, as it were, got the wind up. Absolutely! And the next morning he toddled off. Phipps is a decent chappie. Can't stand that sort of thing. A bit below his mark, you know. Well, they're the only kind of ghosts that Phipps knows about."

"Rats to your batman!" put in Pitt. "Teddy Long hasn't been drinking whisky, and he didn't see green snakes. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose he saw anything at all."

Just then Armstrong came in.

"I say, you chaps, heard about Long?" he asked, looking round.

"Is he dead yet?" asked Pitt. "Or only mad?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Armstrong. "But I found the young ass in the dormy just now, and he was babbling away like one o'clock. About a ghost he'd seen in Bellton Wood. A frightful face, about two yards long, with a dozen eyes that spurted liquid fire. Flames out of its mouth, and all that sort of thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at," said Armstrong. "You ought to see Long. He was quite serious about it—"

"The yarn seems to be improving with age," grinned Pitt. "Not so long ago the head only had two eyes, and we didn't hear anything about liquid fire. Are the additions yours, Armstrong?"

"Of course not!" said Armstrong. "Anyhow, Long told me something—I may have got it a bit wrong. But it's pretty certain he saw something in the wood. He couldn't imagine it. I vote we go along and investigate."

"In the wood?"

"Why not?"

"I can suggest a dozen reasons why not," said Pitt. "But one's enough—it would be a waste of time."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, I don't know," put in Griffith. "A bit of sport, you know! Things have been a bit slack, and a ghost hunt would be rather novel. What's wrong with the idea of getting up a party and going into the wood? It wouldn't take us long to find this ghost, if one really existed!"

"Rats!"

"Don't be an ass!"

"It's a jolly good idea," said Armstrong. Opinions were divided, a number of juniors

voting for the ghost hunt, and a larger number voting against it. Then, in the middle of the argument, Nicodemus Trotwood sauntered into the common room, grinning.

"What's the excitement about?" he asked. "I can tell you something to make you jaw. There are ghosts about!"

"Rats! That's stale!" said Bell. "We know all about it!"

"Oh!" said Trotwood. "I thought I was bringing some news. I've just seen Teddy Long, and he tells me that he saw something ghastly in Bellton Wood, about half-an-hour ago."

"A face with a few hundred eyes?" asked Pitt.

"No, some fearful object with four heads!" said Trotwood. "Honest Injun, you know! Four heads, with flashing eyes and yellow fangs and forked tongues! And each head had pointed ears like a demon, and horns sticking out on both sides!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good for you, Trotty!" chuckled Somerton. "It's getting better and better! I'll bet Long only saw a piece of paper hanging on to a branch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's about the size of it, Sommy," grinned Pitt. "As for getting up a search party, it would be a giddy fool's errand. At the same time, it would be rather a show up for Long if we only found a piece of paper."

"Don't be an ass!" said Armstrong. "Long may be a funk, but he wouldn't get scared like this over nothing. He's absolutely pale—he's shivering in every limb. And he's afraid of his own shadow!"

And just then Teddy Long came into the common-room. He was accompanied by Hubbard and Owen major. Long had cleaned himself, made himself look a bit more tidy. But his cheeks were still pale. The hunted expression in his eyes was as obvious as ever.

The juniors looked at him with great curiosity. There was not the slightest doubt that Teddy Long had had a very serious shock. And even the most doubting juniors could see well enough that he would not have got into this condition over a trifle. What he had seen in Bellton Wood had frightened him nearly into insanity. And it must have been something exceptionally awful.

"I mean to say, the chappie positively looks frightful!" exclaimed Archie, staring at Teddy closely. "Absolutely! Observe the drawn features, old lads! Kindly take note of the bloodshot eyes, and so forth. This is dashed rotten. The dear chappie must have seen something absolutely foul!"

"I believe you're right!" said Jack Grey.

"Dear laddie, kindly trot out the old yarn," said Archie. "That is to say, proceed to babble out the story."



There the thing hovered—a horrible face! Long couldn't see much else. He only knew that this face was there—unsupported by any body.

"I—I can't bear to talk about it," said Teddy Long weakly. "Oh, it was awful! I—I can see those eyes now! In—in the wood, you know. A face, hovering there without any support."

"Somebody says that it might have been a piece of paper," said Trotwood.

Teddy Long shook his head.

"No, it wasn't a piece of paper," he replied quietly. "I—I know I'm a bit of a nervous chap, but I'm not so bad as all that! It was a face—a terrible face! I—I can't speak about it any more. Please leave me alone!"

He sank down into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

And there was a curious little silence in the common room. The fellows had been ready to discredit the whole story, and to cast ridicule upon it—when it was told by other juniors.

But Teddy Long's attitude convinced them.

There was no mistaking the truth of what he said. He was by nature a young liar and a boaster. If he had invented this story he would have gloried in talking about it as much as possible. He would have boasted

that he was as brave as a lion, and that this thing took him by surprise.

Instead, he looked shaken to the very core. He didn't want to speak about the incident. He even admitted that he was a coward. And all this clearly pointed to the fact that he had seen something really dreadful.

Pitt became completely convinced. For Reggie Pitt was an excellent judge of character. As soon as he saw Long he knew that the yarn was not invented. There was something behind it—something serious.

"Look here, you chaps," said Reggie firmly. "We've got to inquire into this. And I think Armstrong's idea is a good one. There's something in Bellton Wood that needs examining."

"You mean we'll go ghost-hunting?" asked Jack Grey.

"Yes!"

"Good!" said Armstrong. "I'm game—and one look at Teddy Long ought to tell you that he's nearly dotty with fright. He didn't see a piece of paper, or a dead leaf. It was something really bad."

Teddy Long looked up with wild alarm in his eyes.

"Oh, don't go!" he pleaded desperately. "Don't—don't go into the wood! Oh, you mustn't! You mustn't go! It's—it's too awful!"

Pitt looked round.

"That's done it!" he said grimly. "We're going!"

The very fact that Long had asked them not to go was further proof. He was so frightened that he was scared for the safety of a search party. By this time the juniors had become thoroughly fired by the various stories that they had heard. A party was organised at once.

"I mean to say, this is absolutely the idea!" declared Archie Glenthorne. "Positively the old wheeze, laddies. Ghost hunting, what? Something out of the ord., and so forth!"

"Are you coming, Archie?"

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "Dash it all, a chappie can't back out, what? Hardly the thing to show the old white feather! I'll get Phipps to come along. Phipps is a most useful cove to have about, don't you know. He'll stagger forth and do great things. Absolutely!"

"Never mind Phipps—we don't want him!" put in Pitt. "And I should advise you not to come, Archie."

"What?" said Archie mildly. "I mean to say, eh?"

"Take my advice, and stay behind, old man."

"But, my dear old tin of fruit, it can't be done!" said Archie. "I mean to say, I'm required! On the old spot, don't you know! The chappies are looking to me to lay the old ghost—"

"If they've been saying that, they've

been pulling your leg!" interrupted Pitt. "This affair looks like being serious, and you mustn't forget that you'll get your clothing into a terrible state."

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "Really? I mean to say, what? A dreadful state?"

"Thorns and twigs," said Pitt. "The wood's full of patches of bog, too. You'll ruin your clothes, and smother yourself—"

"That, as it were, is enough!" put in Archie, holding up his hand. "Absolutely suffish? Say no more, old tulip! Cease the flow, sweet one! Archie remains at home—Archie retires from the old hunt! I mean to say, when it entails a chappie doing frightful damage to the old wardrobe department—well, absolutely nix! Archie positively retires!"

And the Genial Ass of the Remove trickled away and went off to his own study—to have "forty of the best" until Phipps arrived with supper. Archie had his own man, and generally partook of supper in his own quarters.

And, in the meantime, the ghost-hunting party was got together. Needless to say, no word of this was noised abroad—for masters and prefects would soon have put the lid on it.

Pitt found a dozen fellows eager and willing to accompany him. And, in the deepening dusk, the party set forth.

What grim discoveries were they to make in Bellton Wood?

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOST HUNTERS!



BOB CHRISTINE burst into Study Q like a whirlwind.

"Come on, you chaps—like greased lightning!" he said crisply.

Talmadge and Yorke looked up, rather startled. It wasn't usual for their leader to break in with such dramatic suddenness. Study Q, in the College House, was generally a quiet apartment.

"What's the idea?" asked Yorke, putting his book aside.

"The idea is a jape against those Fossils on the other side!" replied Christine firmly. "We've got a chance here, my sons—a gilt-edged opportunity. We might not get another for weeks."

"But what's the wheeze?"

"We've got to buzz into Bellton Wood, and fix up a ghost!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Talmadge and Yorke stared.

"A ghost!" repeated Christine. "Those Ancient House fatheads have got a dotty idea that there's a ghost in the wood, and they're getting up a search party to look for it. It would be a rotten shame if they didn't find a ghost, wouldn't it? Why not be obliging for once?"

Talmadge and Yorke continued staring.
 "Going dotty?" asked Yorke, at length.
 "No—of course not, you ass!"
 "How do you reckon we can supply a ghost?" inquired Yorke. "Be sensible, for goodness' sake! And, in any case, what's the joke? I'm blessed if I can see any jape in what you've said!"

Christine sighed.
 "Oh, why have I got a couple of fat-heads for study mates?" he asked. "Can't you see that this is an exceptional chance? I happened to be in the Ancient House a little while ago——"

"And you didn't get scragged?"
 "Of course not—I was there on business," said Bob Christine. "I went over about the cricket, and the chaps didn't interfere with me. Well, I happened to be near the lobby, and I overheard Pitt and some of the others talking about this ghost. Of course, I didn't listen deliberately."

"Oh, no!" said Talmadge, shocked.
 "I'll admit I didn't move away, and I kept my ears open," went on Christine. "But I wasn't listening to secrets, anyhow—and all things are fair in war. It's up to us to win this next battle against the Fossils. It seems that Teddy Long went into Bell-ton Wood this evening and saw a ghost."

"Teddy Long!" said Yorke contemptu-ously. "He'd see anything. He's got no more nerve than a kitten!"

"Well, anyhow, Pitt and De Valerie and quite a lot of the chaps have taken the thing seriously," said Christine. "There's proof of that by the fact that they're get-ting up this party. It's starting off almost at once. Now, if we're going to butt in, we shall have to do it at once."

"But what do you suggest?" asked Yorke, becoming interested.

"Oh, my hat!" said Christine. "Haven't I told you? And here you keep bothering with questions, when there isn't a minute to be lost! These Fossils are starting in two minutes, and if we don't make a move, it'll be too late."

"Oh, all right—we'll buzz!" said Tal-madge.

He and Yorke jumped up, and the three of them hurried out of Study Q, hastened along the passage, and only paused for a moment or two in the cloak room.

Bob Christine dived into this apartment, and came back with some mysterious object tucked under his jacket and forming a curious-looking bulge.

"What's that?" asked Yorke.

"The ghost!" said Christine briefly.

"The which?"

"Oh, don't ask questions, fathead!"

Yorke had to be content with this reply, and then Christine led the way out into the Triangle, and for a moment the three juniors paused and gazed across towards the Ancient House.

"They haven't started yet!" said Chris-tine. "Good! Just in time!"

As a matter of fact, Pitt and his merry men were just about to start off. But by the time they got out into the Triangle there was no sign of Bob Christine and Co. These elusive juniors had already nipped over the wall and were on their way to the wood.

The three College House juniors had the lane entirely to themselves, and it wouldn't matter much even if they did see anybody, for nobody would suspect them of being in-tent upon trickery.

"We're doing those Fossils a jolly good turn!" said Christine. "I always like obliging a chap."

"How do you make it out?" asked Tal-madge.

"Why, if they go to the wood looking for a ghost, are they likely to find one?" asked Bob. "Are they likely to find a ready-made spectre on the spot? No! Of course not!"

"The whole thing's dotty!" said Yorke.

"Of course it is," agreed Christine. "They'll never find a ghost—at least, they wouldn't have done but for me. But I believe in being kind. I've got a generous heart, and it's one of my principles to oblige people. So we're going to shove a ghost in Bell-ton Wood all ready for these fatheads when they come along."

Yorke and Talmadge grinned.
 "Good idea!" said Yorke. "But suppose they don't find it?"

"They're bound to find it!"
 "In the dark?"

"Certainly," said Christine. "Why shouldn't they find it in the dark? It'll be easy enough to see—and, anyhow, it's not absolutely dark in the wood. There's just a faint glimmer."

"But suppose they go to a part of the wood where we haven't fixed the ghost up?" asked Talmadge. "What then?"

"Oh, what's the good of trying to please a dotty lunatic like you?" said Christine gruffly. "We're going to fix the ghost up, and then we're going to lurk in the vicinity."

"Lurk?" repeated Talmadge. "I like that word—sounds mysterious!"

"We're going to lurk!" repeated Chris-tine. "And if those ghost-hunting fatheads sheer off in the wrong direction, we'll soon put 'em right. We'll attract them to the fatal spot by making a noise like a ghost."

"Who's going to make it?"
 "I am!"

"Let's hear it," said Talmadge. "I'd like to hear you make a noise like a ghost. I always thought ghosts were quiet people."

"Some of 'em make fearful noises!" said Christine wisely. "I was reading all about ghosts during the last holidays. There's the Banshee, for example——"

"The ban which?"
 "The Banshee, ass!" said Christine. "It's an Irish ghost, I believe."

"Then it's bound to make a lot of

noise," said Yorke. "But, I've heard about the Banshee, too. It gives a horrible wail, doesn't it?"

"Something like that," said Christine. "Well, you can leave it to me—I'll make these chaps come to the spot. Here we are—it's a penny to a pound that they'll dive into the wood here. This is the first gap."

The juniors had just come opposite the first large opening into the wood. There was, indeed, a little bit of a clearing beyond the hedge, and then the wood itself commenced—thick and dense, with tangled masses of undergrowth and creepers near the ground.

Now that the actual entry into the wood had to be made, Christine and Co. were not feeling quite so confident. It had seemed a great idea to provide a ghost for the Ancient House fellows.

But the wood looked very dismal and sinister.

The lane itself was gloomy enough, but in the midst of these great old trees the darkness was like something solid. Bellton Wood was of great age. Many of the trees within its depths were of huge dimensions—great, lofty giants of the forest, with branches reaching up skywards, and with the topmost leaves a tremendous distance from the ground.

Indeed, during the height of the summer, people came from all parts—char-a-banc parties were formed for the purpose—to view Bellton Wood. It was one of the beauty spots of the neighbourhood.

Experts in woodcraft would have stated that some of these great trees were many hundreds of years old, and yet the boys at St. Frank's passed the wood daily, and regarded it almost with contempt. It was nothing to them.

Christine peered through into the dim depths.

"Looks a bit dark in there!" he remarked.

"Dark!" echoed Yorke. "It's like pitch!"

"This is a good jape—I don't think!" growled Talmadge. "My hat! It's a pity you couldn't think of something better than this, Christy! Why not chuck it up? Let's go back!"

"Rather not!" said Christine warmly.

"But—but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Not afraid to go in the wood, are you?"

"Afraid!" roared Talmadge. "You—you rotter! Of course I'm not afraid! I'm game enough!"

"So am I!" declared Yorke stoutly.

Bob Christine grinned in the darkness.

"Right!" he said. "Then come along!"

They entered the wood, but even Christine himself was rather sorry that he had mooted the whole idea. He couldn't back out, of course—that was impossible. It was his suggestion, and he had to go through

with it. But he couldn't help admitting to himself that a creepy kind of sensation was unaccountably attacking his spine. And he had a most awkward inclination to keep looking over his shoulder. It didn't improve matters when he remembered that Teddy Long had nearly gone dotty because he had seen something in this very same place.

Providing a ghost for the Ancient House chaps was all very well, but even Christine hadn't realised that this was something of an ordeal. And he decided that the sooner it was over the better.

After penetrating some little way into the wood he paused.

"About far enough, I reckon!" he whispered. "What do you say?"

"Plenty far enough!" breathed Yorke.

"Rather!" agreed Talmadge.

Somehow, they couldn't help speaking in the faintest of whispers. But there was no reason why they shouldn't use their own natural tones. But it was more than they dared do. The mysterious, sinister effect of the wood caused them to drop their voices until they could hardly hear one another.

"Shall we get back to the road all right?" asked Talmadge softly.

"It ought to be easy enough," replied Christine. "We've only got to go in a direct line, we can't make a bloomer. Now, this is just the spot—there's a nice little clearing here."

They had paused in a tiny opening of the wood. It was a slight hollow, where the trees separated and left a space. And, conveniently enough, there was the stump of a sapling almost in the middle of the clear space—a stump about five feet in height.

At some time during a recent storm, a heavy branch from one of the large near-by trees had probably crashed down, for just beyond the stump there were some signs of broken twigs and dead leaves.

"Just the thing!" said Christine. "We can hang our ghost on this giddy stump, and there you are. They'll be properly spoofered as soon as they see it. All we've got to do is to crouch near by."

"Aren't we going out of the wood at once?" asked Yorke blankly.

"No, of course not."

Talmadge and Yorke had nothing to say. They were both feeling more scared than they would have cared to admit. They couldn't help it, although they were strong-minded and plucky enough.

But there seemed to be something about the wood which robbed them of their usual pluck. They couldn't understand why. They had been in Bellton Wood on other occasions, but it had never seemed so dark and mysterious as it did this evening. Perhaps it was merely imagination—the result of hearing the exaggerated yarns concerning Teddy Long's adventure.

Bob Christine produced the articles from under his jacket. They were simple. One

was a long white dust coat, which he proceeded to drape tastefully round the stump. Then he added a panama hat to the top, and foraged about until he found a long stick. This he jushed through the arms of the coat and propped to the back of the post. The object now stood there, dim and indistinct, looking very ghostly—a figure with outstretched arms, as though pointing.

"My hat!" breathed Talmadge. "It does look pretty rotten, doesn't it?"

"Awful!" said Yorke.

The three juniors were almost scared of their own fake. Yet, at such close quarters, it was robbed of its terrors. From a distance of ten or twelve yards it would look very awful. Even a light thrown upon it through the trees would give the searching juniors a big start to begin with.

Christine and Co. moved off, with the intention of retreating a little further back. They pushed their way through the nearest trees, and then found themselves in another clearing. This was larger, and near by were some gigantic trees—monarchs of the wood.

Gazing upwards, the juniors could see the evening sky. It looked almost bright in comparison to the intense gloom below. But it was only possible to obtain a glimpse of it here and there, between the foliage.

And then, suddenly, Roddy Yorke uttered a wild, startled gasp.

"Look!" he panted hoarsely. "Oh, look—look!"

There was something about his voice which caused the others to twirl round.

Then they, too, caught their breath in sharply. Not five yards away a head was hovering in mid-air—just a head by itself, exactly as Teddy Long had seen. There were the staring eyes and the thin-lipped mouth. But it was very dim and indistinct, and not at all luminous. It was just a face. Of a body there appeared to be no sign.

"My goodness!" gasped Christine. "Long—Long was right!"

"Run!" shrieked Yorke. "Run!"

They twirled round again, intending to fly for their lives. But a fresh shock awaited them.

For, instead of the open wood, they encountered five other apparitions! To their utter consternation, they found that they were surrounded by these ghastly, floating heads!

They seemed everywhere—all round.

There were at least six of them—silent, mysterious, and dreadfully awful. They were not masks, for the faces grimaced, and the eyes were living. Then, suddenly Talmadge uttered a startled scream.

"Oh—h! Something touched me!" he panted.

At the same moment all the heads vanished as though by magic. They simply disappeared into utter blackness. And, simultaneous with their disappearance the three juniors found themselves fighting.

They were fighting against something they

couldn't see. They were fighting against something Unknown. It took the strength out of them—it took the vim out of their muscles. They seemed to be battling against masses of black, enveloping folds. It was the most extraordinary sensation they had ever experienced.

There were no hands—no fists striking them. They seemed to be suffocating. And then the three juniors ceased their startled gasps and cries.

They vanished into the blackness, and all became silent.

What could be the meaning of this amazing affair?

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE WOOD.



REGINALD PITT looked round.

"The best thing we can do is to stick together!" he said briskly.

"Don't make any noise, because if we're stopped the whole thing will be squashed. Masters haven't got any sense of humour, or anything else. They wouldn't understand that we're trying to do a good service to the whole countryside—by laying a ghost!"

Jack Grey grinned.

"We haven't laid it yet," he said.

"Cave!" said De Valerie quickly. "Somebody coming up the road on a bike. My hat! I'll bet it's one of the masters!"

For a moment the juniors were in confusion. They hardly knew what to do. It was, of course, long after the time when they were allowed out of gates. And if a master saw them he would turn them all back at once.

But the bicycle was in amongst them before they could take any action.

"Hullo!" said the rider. "What's all this?"

"You ass!" exclaimed Pitt, with relief. "You gave me a scare! I thought it was Mr. Lee, or somebody. It's only Nipper, you chaps!"

He was right. The rider was me. As a matter of fact, I had been into Bannington during the evening, and had been delayed by one or two of the Grammar School fellows. I had fixed up a cricket match, and they insisted upon my staying for a bit. Consequently I had hurried home at full speed.

I jumped off my machine, and looked at the collection of fellows.

"What's the wheeze?" I asked. "Who are you going to raid? There must be a dozen of you here!"

"Chuck your bike in the ditch and join in," said Pitt. "We're going on a ghost hunt."

"What?" I said, staring.

"A ghost hunt," repeated Pitt.

And he told me all about Teddy Long. I heard the whole story, and Pitt didn't put any embellishments on to it. He gave me the yarn in its true aspect. And as I listened I became rather serious.

Did you say that this hovering face was yellow?" I asked keenly.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Pitt. "Long wasn't absolutely definite, but he made some statement to the effect that it was either yellow or white. I expect he imagined a good bit, you know."

"Yes, I expect so," I said slowly.

As a matter of fact, I was thinking deeply and rapidly.

This piece of news had come upon me suddenly, and I must confess that it was a bit of a shock.

For the first thought which struck me was that Fu Chow was at work again. Fu Chow was the leader of the fiendish Chinese who had attempted on several occasions to murder Yung Ching, the harmless little Chinese boy in the Remove. For about ten days St. Frank's had been peaceful and quiet, without any excitement, without a single sign of activity from these murderous hounds.

But, ten days earlier, Fu Chow had made a determined—and almost successful—attempt to blow up the school into a thousand fragments. This diabolical scheme had been planned by Fu Chow himself, who had been in the district. And Fu Chow was one of the most powerful criminals in the world.

His was a sinister character. He had caused tremendous trouble in China—he had brought about more murders in the East End of London than any other man. He was cunning and clever, spoke perfect English, and for some reason he was determined to kill Yung Ching.

It seemed astonishing that such a man should risk his liberty in order to come to St. Frank's for the mere purpose of killing one boy. But it was a fact, and it was none of my business to ask why.

And for days Nelson Lee and I had suffered agony as the result of that encounter with Fu Chow. For we had suffered a good deal at his hands—although, thank goodness, his evil design had been frustrated. And the school itself knew nothing of the danger which threatened it.

Nelson Lee had been on the lookout for any fresh attempt.

But, so far, Fu Chow had taken no action. I had begun to think that his failure over the explosion stunt had caused him to forsake the whole scheme. But Nelson Lee was not so sure. The gov'nor, mind you, was working hard to gather his threads together so that he could rope in the whole Chinese gang at one swoop. As he had told me it was useless taking any action until he could capture Fu Chow himself.

There had been Scotland Yard men in the district—and there were now. Although everything seemed so peaceful and quiet, a fine to-do had been stirred by these activities of Fu Chow.

Scotland Yard was just as anxious to get hold of him as was the Chinese Government. But Fu Chow was elusive.

And now I learned this incident about Teddy Long in Belton Wood.

What did it mean?

I was instantly struck by the significance of the affair. And I could not help thinking that Long had accidentally encountered a Chinaman—probably attired in a black dress, so that only his face showed. That would account for the hovering head appearance.

"Well?" exclaimed Pitt. "Still thinking?"

"Yes," I replied in a whisper. "Look here, Reggie. Don't go on this trip. Persuade the chaps to turn back."

"Eh?" said Pitt. "Why?"

"I don't like it—I suspect something," I said, so that only he could hear. "It looks to me like another affair of those Chinks. You know—Fu Chow."

Pitt caught his breath in sharply.

"By George!" he breathed. "What a fool!"

"Eh?"

"I mean, I'm a fool," said Pitt. "I ought to have guessed that before. You're right, Nipper!"

Without more ado, we turned to the ghost hunting party, and put it to them that the idea was silly, and it was far better to go back. But they weren't having any of it.

"Rather not," said Armstrong. "We've started out, and we're going."

"Of course!" declared Griffith. "We're going to search for that ghost."

I argued in vain—and then came to a decision.

"Oh, all right," I said at last. "Do as you please. But wait for me. I'm just popping indoors, to take a few things in, and I'll come out again. I sha'n't be long. You'll wait, won't you?"

"All right—buck up!" said Armstrong.

I drew Pitt aside.

"Keep 'em here, Reggie," I whispered. "I'm going to tell the gov'nor. If the chaps think I'm a rotter, it can't be helped. But they mustn't go to Belton Wood—they mustn't set foot into it."

Reggie nodded.

"You're quite right," he said. "Buzz in!"

It did not take me long to seize my bicycle, and enter the Triangle by means of the small private gate. I didn't trouble to go in by the ordinary method. A glance showed me that a light was in Nelson Lee's study, and the lower window was open, for the evening was very mild.

I propped my bicycle against a tree, and

then hurried to the window, pushed it open, and jerked the blind aside. Nelson Lee was sitting at his desk, and he looked round in surprise.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed. "This is about the limit, Nipper. Not content with disturbing me without warning, you must break in through the window! What do you mean by it?"

"The occasion demands it, sir!" I replied grimly. "Listen! I'm going to put it to you straight!"

As quickly as possible I told him all the facts. The gov'nor listened intently, and as he heard the facts, his brows contracted, and he bit his lip.

"H'm! Yes, it seems significant," he commented. "At the same time, you needn't become unnecessarily alarmed, Nipper."

"Don't you think my idea is right, sir?"

"It may be right, but it is just as probable that you are wrong," replied Lee. "So far as my investigations go, there is no evidence that these Chinamen have entered Bellton Wood. Detective-Inspector Meirose and his men have been keeping their eyes well open—they have paid particular attention to the wood. And their reports all agree that there has been no activity in the wood."

"But these Chinks might have slipped in during the night, sir?"

"They might, but I do not think they have," said Lee. "In fact, the Chinamen have vanished from the district completely. Not a sign of them has been seen during the last week. However, you did quite right to stop these boys going on their expedition. No good can come of such a thing."

I looked at the gov'nor straight.

"You don't believe it, do you, sir?" I asked.

"Well, I certainly think that the whole story may be an invention," replied the gov'nor. "If a junior like Pitt had come home with this account I might have credited it. But Long is well known. He is not only a coward, but I regret to say that he is addicted to falsehoods. It is more than likely that he imagined the apparition, and simply drove himself into a state of panic. At the same time, the matter warrants an immediate investigation. We can take no risks, Nipper, and it is always better to be on the safe side."

"You're coming, then, sir?"

"Yes, certainly."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet as he spoke, reached for his soft felt hat, and then he switched off the light. He accompanied me out into the Triangle, by the undignified method of vaulting through the window. But when we arrived outside the gates, there was no sign of the ghost hunting party. A solitary junior came towards us. As I suspected, he was Reginald Pitt.

"The rotters wouldn't wait," he said. "I tried to keep them, but they grew im-

patient, and went off. They've been gone about three minutes now. What are you going to do about it, sir?"

"We will follow at once, Pitt," said Nelson Lee. "I am sorry you could not keep them. I did not want this to happen."

We hurried down the lane—and, in the meantime, Armstrong had command of the party. Armstrong rather fancied himself as a leader—and he was certainly a powerful fellow, with a way of his own.

"Likely we're going to wait all night for those fatheads," he said, as they paused near the big gap. "We'll show them! Come on, my sons—follow me. It won't take us long to find this blessed ghost—if any ghost exists! Personally, I don't believe there is one."

"Looks a bit dark in there," said Griffith, peering forward.

"All right—stay behind, if you like," said Armstrong.

"You ass!" growled Griffith. "I'm game enough."

They were very unwise not to have waited, for there wasn't a single junior amongst them who had a light. They pushed their way into the wood gingerly, and with any amount of pretended enthusiasm. Being a big party they were not feeling particularly scared. For so many fellows together imbued one another with confidence.

Just as Bob Christine had expected, the ghost hunters entered the wood at the exact spot, and they marched straight towards the tiny clearing where the stump stood like a sentinel in the centre.

Armstrong, who was leading the way, was the first to catch a glimpse of the ghost.

He turned round some big trees, and then suddenly came to a halt. Something seemed to trickle down his back, and he had an uncomfortable feeling that his hair was all standing on end. For there, just visible between other trees, was a whitish object which stood silent and grim—pointing an accusing finger at him.

"My sainted aunt!" muttered Armstrong huskily.

"What's up with you, fathead?" asked De Valerie, pushing forward. "Don't stand there, blocking the way—Hullo! Oh, my hat!"

He too, saw the wraith-like form. Darkness had not yet descended completely, and there was no doubt that a certain amount of light penetrated down through the trees. But it was so subdued and dim that it seemed to make the place more mysterious and eerie than ever.

"It—it's the ghost!" exclaimed De Valerie, with a catch in his voice.

"The ghost!"

"Where?"

"Don't rot, you chaps!"

All the juniors talked, and those in the rear pushed Armstrong and De Valerie forward. They didn't feel like going forward, but there was no help for it. And almost

before they knew it, they found themselves in the tiny clearing.

Some of the other fellows—the less daring members—had come to a halt at the rear, not daring to go further. But Armstrong was pushed practically into the arms of the awful looking apparition.

"It's—it's—" he began. "Great Scott!" he added, in a shout. "It's only an old dust coat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled De Valerie.

They were so relieved that they laughed tremendously. And Armstrong tore away the dust coat and the panama hat, revealing the stump.

"There you are—I knew it!" he said triumphantly. "A giddy fake! Look at it! And Teddy Long was scared of this!"

"And so were we," said De Valerie. "No good getting out of it, my son. It was enough to scare anybody at first sight. But who the dickens could have faked up this thing?"

He stared at the "ghost" curiously, for Armstrong had only disarranged the coat a bit, and had replaced the hat. Then De Valerie became thoughtful, and shook his head. By this time the other juniors had collected round, and were all looking on.

"There's something wrong here," said De Valerie, after a bit.

"Something wrong?"

"Yes, Long saw a face hovering in the air," said De Valerie. "Even a young ass like Long couldn't mistake this for a face with staring eyes. And look here—it seems to me that the thing was faked up only a little while ago. I believe it was fixed up only a few minutes before we arrived."

"What do you mean?"

Before De Valerie could reply crashing sounds came from behind, and three figures appeared. They belonged to Nelson Lee, Pitt, and myself. The juniors recognised the gov'nor with some dismay.

"All right, boys—I sha'n't scold you new!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "What is this you have discovered?"

"The ghost, sir!"

"Is that the ghost that Long saw?" I asked, pushing forward. "But he couldn't mistake this for a hovering face!"

"That's what I said, put in De Valerie.

I produced my electric torch, and flashed it on. Then I cast the light round the clearing, and almost the first object I saw was a pocket knife. I picked it up at once. One blade was open, and it was bright and clean. This made it quite clear that the knife had only been lying there for a very short time. Christine, to tell the truth, had dropped it after preparing that cross piece for the ghost's arms, and had not noticed his loss.

"Why, that knife belongs to Bob Christine!" said Pitt, looking at it. "I've borrowed it two or three times."

"Christine!" echoed De Valerie. "Hallo

—hallo! I'm beginning to see things There's some sort of a jape here!"

"What do you mean, De Valerie?" asked Nelson Lee sharply.

"Why, sir, I happened to see Christine, Yorke, and Talmadge hurrying off towards the playing fields just before we started out," said De Valerie. "I didn't think anything about it at the time—except that it was queer they should be going to Little Side when it was nearly dark. But they must have been coming here—by a roundabout route."

"You're right!" declared Pitt. "Christine was in the lobby this evening. I saw him as he was going out. He overheard what we were going to do, and planned with his chums to come here and fake up this ghost. That's about the truth of it!"

"Well, fancy being spoofed like that!" said Armstrong indignantly.

"But you don't understand—it doesn't clear up the mystery," went on Pitt. "We've still got to find out what scared Teddy Long. It wasn't this thing, because its only been fixed up during the last half-hour. And where are Christine and Co. now? Probably hovering about somewhere. Christine—I say, Christy! It's all up—show yourself, you ass!"

But no answer came to Pitt's loud shout.

I pushed my way past the trees, and went into the larger clearing just beyond. Nelson Lee was with me, and a few of the other juniors followed. And we could not fail to observe that something of a most curious nature had recently taken place on this spot.

"There's been a fight here, gov'nor," I said, in a low voice.

"I had already noted that, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I am anxious—I fear that those three College House boys have met with foul play. It was most unwise of them to come into the wood. I cannot help feeling that there is some horror here that we do not know about!"

The gov'nor's words made me vaguely uneasy. Staring at the ground, which was clearly illuminated by the light from my torch, I could see that the undergrowth was trampled about in every direction. And on one or two leaves which lay crushed there were a couple of spots of blood. I didn't say anything about this discovery to the fellows, but I pointed out the spots to Nelson Lee. A mere scratch, of course, would have caused blood—and scratches could easily have been obtained among all these torn twigs.

But there could be no doubt whatever that a terrific battle had taken place.

And why?

Obviously, because Christine and Co. had butted in. If these Chinese were in the wood, they would not hesitate to attack the juniors if they thought it was safe to do so. And Christine and Co. were all by themselves. Had they come to any real harm? Had they been killed?

The thought was not an absurd one. Fu Chow had been willing enough to kill everybody in the whole school. Then what would be care about killing three boys in the depths of this wood? Nelson Lee thought the same as I did, and he turned sharply.

"Every boy here will return to the school at once!" he exclaimed grimly—his voice unusually harsh by reason of his anxiety. "Nipper, you will see that all these juniors go straight indoors—"

"Oh—ohhh!"

From the outskirts of the crowd there came a loud gasping cry which died away into a smothered moan. Instantly, there was confusion. The juniors dashed about among the trees, trying to discover what was wrong.

"Where's Jack," demanded Pitt suddenly. "Where's Jack Grey?"

And a search failed to bring Jack Grey to light. In some extraordinary manner he had been spirited away—under our very eyes—within our very hearing!

The horror of this affair was getting worse and worse!

CHAPTER V.

THE DROPPING CLOUD!



NELSON LEE came to a halt, his fists clenched.

For five minutes he had searched, but Jack Grey had vanished as mysteriously as though he had been swallowed by the very ground itself. He had not left a trace behind him.

Griffith and Owen major had been nearest to Jack at the moment he cried out. They had, in fact, been only a yard or two distant, and separated by a few trees. But although they had twirled round on the instant, they had seen nothing. They had only heard a muffled gurgle, and then silence. Arriving on the spot a few seconds after that sound they had seen nothing.

It was so mysterious that the juniors were thoroughly scared. They could not help feeling that there was something more here than they could possibly understand. And Teddy Long had probably been right in everything he said.

There was no explanation of Jack's disappearance. And Nelson Lee did not intend any of the other boys to share the missing one's fate.

"Every boy here will collect together, and form up in such a way that one is touching the other," he ordered. "It will be far better if you all hold hands. In that way you will form an unbroken chain. If anything happens to any one of you it will at once be obvious to your neighbours."

"That's a jolly good idea, sir," said De Valerie.

The chain was at once formed.

And, certainly, in this way, there was no fear that another junior would disappear as Jack Grey had disappeared. The most anxious fellow of the lot was Reginald Pitt. He was almost off his head with worry.

For Grey was his own particular chum. Pitt and Grey shared Study E, and they were inseparable friends. And Reggie hardly knew what to do.

"You're not going away, are you, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"I must, Pitt," replied Lee. "The first thing to be done is to see all you boys safely back in the school. I will return at once and do everything I can to effect Grey's release. For I have no doubt that he has been captured by some cunning rascals who were lurking near by. Some tramps, perhaps. I do not fear that Grey has come to any real harm."

Probably Nelson Lee did not actually mean those words, but he was to be excused for saying them. The fellows were alarmed already, and he wanted to calm them. And so, without any delay a move was at once made.

We all marched out of Belton Wood by the most direct method. And, as soon as we found ourselves in the lane, we hurried up to the school.

It was now nearly bedtime, and the news soon spread that Jack Grey had disappeared, and that Nelson Lee was about to go in search of him. The gov'nor went straight to his own study, after informing me that I was to bring Pitt.

Pitt and I arrived a few minutes later.

"Look here, Pitt, you know quite a deal about all this Chinese business," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Yes, sir," said Pitt.

"I can therefore safely trust you to keep this matter quiet," went on Lee. "I intend to look for Grey at once—and Nipper will come with me."

"Can't I come, sir?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"I want you to perform a more important duty, Pitt," replied Lee. "I want you to sleep in my bedroom with Yung Ching. You must know that the main object of these Chinamen is to kill Ching. We must therefore take very good care that he is not left unguarded. So long as somebody is on the alert the enemy will not dare to take any action."

"Won't it be too risky to leave Pitt alone with Ching?" I asked.

"I can take care of myself!" said Reggie.

"I think so, too," said Nelson Lee. "And if I had any doubt that Pitt was in danger, I would not ask you to undertake this task. You will sleep with Ching, Pitt, and—"

"I don't think I shall sleep, sir," interrupted Pitt. "I'll keep awake, on the alert."

"That is all the better," said Nelson Lee. "And at the least sign of any trouble, shout for help. Do not attempt to fight any

(Continued on page 25.)

Brief Notes about Our Footballers

Being a short account of the careers of the famous footballers whose photographs we are presenting to readers with this number. Specially written for "The Nelson Lee Library" by "Rover."

J. CHIPPERFIELD.

M. McPHAIL.

J. CHIPPERFIELD proved one of the sensations of the last season. At the beginning of it he was transferred from Tottenham to the County of Nottingham, and straightway transformed himself into one of the biggest and best goal scorers in the Second Division. What the 'Spurs are thinking about him now I cannot say, but I have been told that, in view of his performances with the northern club, they are regretting that they ever let him go.

Without Chipperfield, it is fairly safe to say that the County would not have travelled as far as they did in the Cup competition, for Chipperfield, in the first four rounds, scored more goals than any other man in the team.

He was born at Luton, and was assisting the team of that town when war broke out and football was suspended. During the war he assisted the Arsenal in London Combination matches, and it was here that he attracted the notice of the 'Spurs. On the return of peace the Tottenham people successfully negotiated for his transfer with Luton, and Chipperfield, when placed in the team, showed such promise that the management had good reason to feel satisfied with their bargain. Ill luck dogged his footsteps, however, for not long afterwards he met with a serious injury which laid him on his back for a considerable period, and also lost him his place in the team to Dimmock. As there was not room for both him and Dimmock when he recovered, he decided, at the beginning of last season, to throw his lot in with the County. He did, with what results we all know. Height, 5 ft. 8½ ins.; weight, 10 st. 12 lb.

MCPHAIL is not overburdened with international honours, but he is worth his place in a Scottish side any day, as the best judges of football north of the border will tell you.

He was born at Barrhead, and has been with the "Killies" for several seasons, showing a marked improvement in style and form with each successive period, till now he must be placed in the front rank of Scottish wing experts. He is a splendid winger, full of subtle tricks, with a great turn of speed and a control over the ball that is little short of wonderful. Is an opportunist also, for despite his position he has quite a fair number of goals to his credit, as is proved by his record for the past three seasons.

The great feature of McPhail's play is his ability to keep the ball on the carpet and his coolness in tackling. He never seems to get worried or flurried and has a knack of stealing the ball at unexpected moments that is both worrying and irritating to opposing forwards.

He has one distinction only, a distinction he earned after the conclusion of the war, but one which he hopes to add to before many seasons have expired. That is a "Victory" international cap which he gained by playing for Scotland against the chosen of Ireland. His form, on that occasion, caused him to be spoken of as a coming man, and as he has not deteriorated since, we may hope to see his ambitions realised next season.

He has been a consistent servant of the Kilmarnock side since he joined the team, rarely being absent from the first string, except on occasions of injury or indisposition. Height, 5 ft. 9 ins.; weight, 11 st. 9 lb.

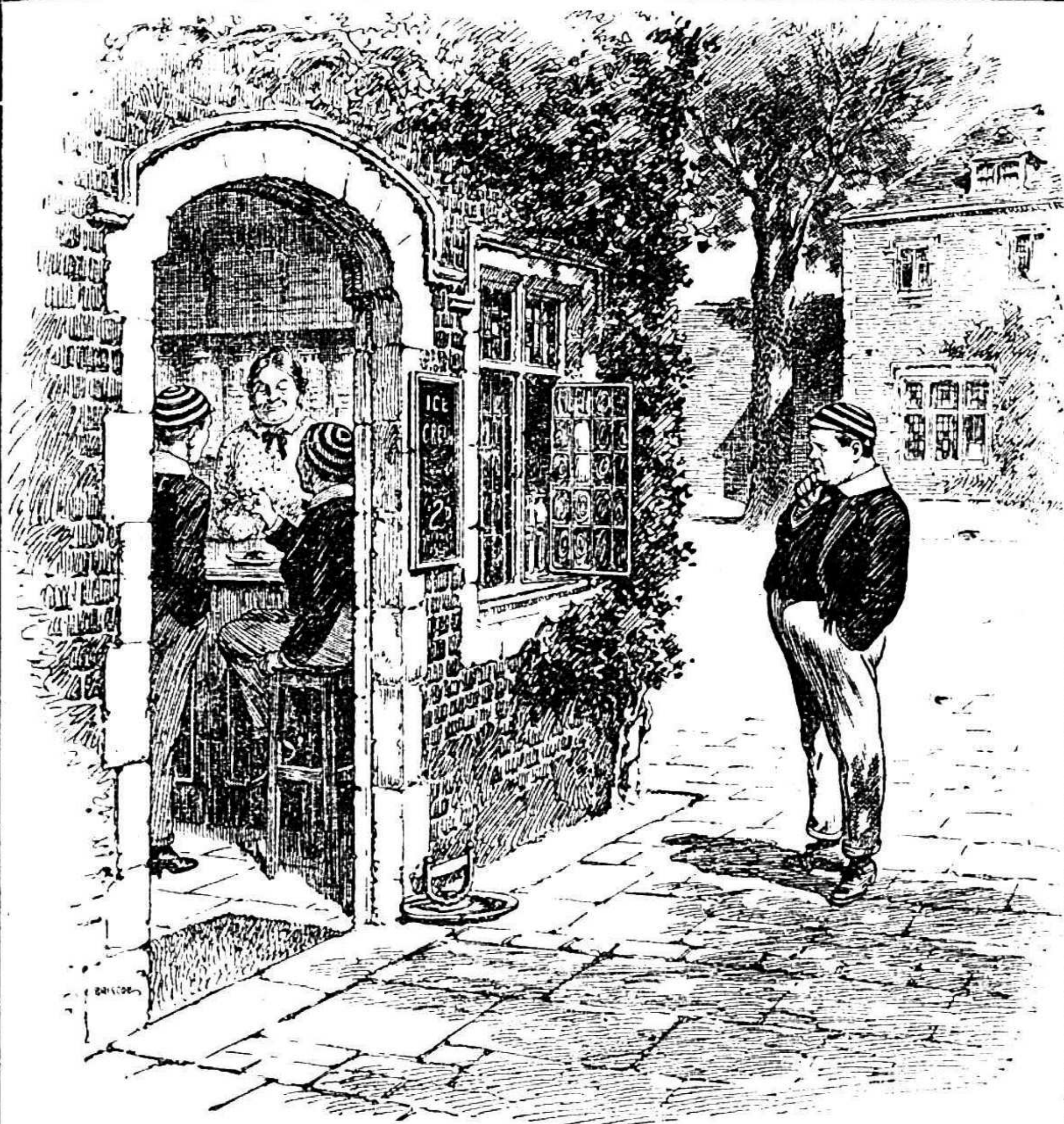
Important Announcement Next Week!

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 27.

THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

May 27.
1922.



THE TUCKSHOP
(ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE)



MY brother Montagu has up an gone an dun the most rediclus thing—bot a baby! He pade £10 for it, half enuff to buy me a pony, such a goos, an only a girl.

He says if he bot a boy it mite turn out like little Georgie some of these days, which is vary true—one bad boy in a famly is enuff to kepe it bissy.

But lately I have ben a xlent child. I have only ben late to skool unce since Monday, this is Wensday, witch is doing pretty well.

I have only put a tode in the techer's desk unce this week; it hopped out an made her gump as if as she was a tode herself.

I only put burrs in Katy's hair twice; they had to cut some of it oph to get them out. She ot not to be so vane of her hair—little girls are very apt to be vane, I am told.

Unkel Samson was going to live at the hotel, but I improved so much, he has konkluded to remane with us for the present.

I kepe him posted in what our fokes say, in a low voise, witch they do not wish him to here. He gives me a penny a day.

He is offul curius about what peple say. I cannot plese him better than to tell him

oil the names they call him, old skin-flint, old money-bags, old skrue, old liveforever, an such.

He says I'm a smart young fellow of my age, an he will not forget to remember me. He stil wurries a good dele over his eyes, cause Sue's glases don't fit him.

But to return to the baby, as the papers say. I have seen it—such a site! Why didn't they pik out I that could crepe an had hair on its head, an could play marbels with its little unkel?

This one is a perfeck idiut I should gudge, besides being a *Injian*—why did they not at leste buy a white child that would be respeckabel when it grows up?

I ast my sister "wot tribe does it belong two?" She said she "guessed the Kickapoos." Such a disgrace to the Hacketts. I suppose they got it because it was chepe, or the last of the lot.

Lil hugs an kisses it like it was the swetest thing in babies. She is mad at me because I stuck a pin in it to see was it an *Injian*-rubber baby.

I guess she will be a prise-fiter when she grows up—she struck out an hit me strait in the eye this morning like she had taken lessons; I was very mutch cirprised the way she did it.

Lil is visiting at home now gust to sho oph that yung one, so I stay out doors a good dele; I do not like to hear it cry, an it is getting on towrd the 4 of July, an we boys have lots of fun in advance with fire-crackers an uther things of a similar nachur.

My 2 married brothers, the telgraf oprater, an Unkel Samson kepe me in pokkit money, so I have more crackers than the uther boys, witch makes them very kind an' obliging to little Georgie.



I have only put a tode in techer's desk unce this week.

There is an old canon on the green in front of the town Hall; it is to be fired oph 100 times the morning of the fourth.

But Charlie an' I an' some more boys have got a lot of powder, an' we're going to do somethin funny, like the circus man did, soon—I guess tomoro.

It is a depe secret, but I will tell the, my diry. The circus feller fired a man rite out the canon's mouth. Our cannon is not big enuff to fire a man out, but it will fit a baby gust as snug, if the baby is small.

So we are going to borro Lil's, it is vary small. But we must not let her kno, she is that careful of it as if it was an eg.

We are to watch round after dark when she get's it to slepe and gose down to sit in the parlor, then I am to stele up stairs, rap it in its blanket and bring it down, then we will cut an' run.

The canon is alreddy loded with lots of powder an' about 20 bulits we made by melting up some led pipe we took out our cistern, golly bulits big as hikry nuts.

I hope it will not hurt the baby much—I do not think it will—the man that was fired oph was not hurt a partickle. Jimmy Brown is going to borro his granma's fether bed for it to be shot into.

After the baby is shot out of the canon I'm going to run home with it, an then we're going to have a bonfire of tar barels witch is splendid fun.

I wish pepel would tend to their own affairs an let little boys have some fun once in a wile. Our plan was a perfeck suckces as far as getting the baby out of the house an getting it nicely fixed in the canon.

All was reddy to appli the match, I was gust about to give the word to tuch her oph when we herd such a friteful screming you would a thought some buddy hed got their fingirs smashed, an' Montagu's voice shouting "Georgie, Georgie, hold on!" and there was papa an' mamma an' Sue an' Lil an' the doctor an' Montague an' Betty an' the cook a running for deer life, an' Montague snached the baby out the canon an Lil fell down an' fanted ded away an' Sue went into hesteriks—such a time about a little rat of a thing that was not worth buying in the furst place! besides, we had not the slitest intenshun of hurting it—we had the fether bed fixed all rite.

It semes Betty had been mean enuff to look in the, my diry, to see what I wrote las night, an' when she read it she run to see was the baby gone, an' when she found it mising she roused the hull house.

Such a fuss about nothing. I do not think as much of Betty as I did. She had

no rite to look at what I rote, tho Lil says she blesses her for doing it, els what would have become of her preshus, pre-shus baby.

The 4 of July promises to be a bizzy day in our visinity. The town counsel fires canon, rings bells, an' sets oph £100 wurth of fireworks

in the evening—rokkits, roming candels, cathrin wheels, triangels.

There are to be 2 picnics in the day time, ours an the collurd fokses, an' tho military are to march at ten, an' then a womans rites convenshun, an' sevrал other things going oph like the corks of soda water bottles.

I xpect to have a glorious time. From five o'clock urly til midnite I shall be as bizzy as a bee having a golly time.

I have given papa a sollum promis that I will not play with powder—will not go within 10 feet of boys who have toy canons—will not fire a pistol—and he has bot me some nice fireworks, to say nothing of about 2 bushel of fire crakers.

I can put as many as I ples in a barl an set em oph all at a time. I am sory I cannot have any powder, but papa says he does not wish his only sun to lose his fingers or isite, witch will not be ptesant, that's a fak.

I am not to throe any crakers at little girls, a notty thing to do, for their dress mite get on fire an burn them up. I can go with them to the picnic, but I am dredfully undesided wot to do about it.

I prefer to see the military parade an' hero the band, but Sue an' our cook are making an' offul lot of good things for the picnic.

When I think of the drums an' of marching along behind em, I think I will goin the parade—when I smell the plum cake an' the spring chicken roasting, an' the boiled ham and gelly, I make up my mind to go to the picnic.

I think congres ought to pass an ack making the 4 of July a week long, and then I could go to both. However, we get a good deel of fun in advance. All kinds of shows seem to be perambulansing around the country at this season.

Little Johnny is out agane, but his mother will not alow him to play with me,



Our plan was a perfeck suckces.

witch is a grate trial to Johnny. I am sorry for him.

About the shows, last week there was another konjuror; papa would not let me go to see him. He said such things were as eaching as the mesles.

Tomoro, witch is the day before the Fourth, at 3 o'clock xactly, there is to be a balloon assenshun from the publick square. A man is going up in it—it will be very intresting.

Our techer says it will frustrate the laws of gravity, how a thing that is liter than air won't stay down less you hold on to it.

Gas is liter than air, so the man will fill it with gas, clime in, cut the rope, and away he will sore tord the sky like enny-thing, hire and hire—Oh, it must be lovely! I would give my new gackknife to be abel to ride in a balloon. If he will take me with him I am bound to go.

Hooraw! I am going. I gust lade down my pen and treked it down to the hotel, purtending I went to call on my sister Sue, but I kontrived to see the Profesur who owns the balloon, an' he said if my parents would give their consent he would be happy to take me up with him.

Oh, wont that be bul—golly? I hope my parents will not be so crewel as to refuse. It will be a novvel xperance witch few boys of my age have had.

Imadgin how funny the world would look when I get up so high the pepel are no bigger than flys! I gess I will not ask my parents for fere they will say no. I will gust go an take the chances.

It is made of silk, an cost sevrul thousand dollars. They are going to send up a lot of paper ones the night of the Forth, but they are not to be compared with this.



I was gust about to tuch her oph when we herd such a friteful screming.

I kno I shall dreme of falling out of it to-night, my mind is so full of it. It would be offul fun to get ahead of the profesur an' go up in it alone. I could go where I plezed, perfeckly independent—the furst little boy of my age that ever made the assent alone.

Praps I mght go as far as Chica-

go, lite there, an' be sent home by xpress. I have al- was wanted to see Chicago. Or if I staid up till the earth turned over I might each a glimse of China witch is on the other side.

I would like to throw out a sand-bag an' astonish a Selestial who was not doing anything but flying a kite when it made him gump 20 feet an' lose the string of his kite.

I must have a long talk with the profesur to-morro morn- ing so as to lurn how to run the thing.

I got over in their yard when Johnny's mother was down town an' hunted an' hunted till I found the glasses out of unkel's specks, so I took him some iwater in a vial an told him to rub the iwater on at night.

So the next morning I had his specks fixed up all rite with the old glases; he could see as good as ever, an' he thot it was the iwater, an' give me a gold dollar he was so plezed.

And now, my diry, let me lock the in my desk so that prying Betty will not find out about the balloon and nip it in the bud.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—We feel quite certain that such persons as have read little Georgie's diary, will feel some regret—in spite of his having been so bad a boy—in learning that his plan of getting away alone in the balloon was only too successful. Whether he cut the rope which held it, or whether it came unfastened by accident, no one can say, but as the balloon was nearly filled, and the professor about to cut off the supply of gas and go into the car where Georgie was already proudly seated, the huge silken monster gave a sudden leap, and before the dangling rope could be caught it arose beyond reach, and the vast multitude, with one groan of horror, beheld the poor little fellow waving his handkerchief as he was carried up, up with frightful rapidity.

More than a week has passed since that hour, bringing no tidings of the youthful aeronaut, and hope has gradually expired in every breast.



I kontrived to see the Profesur who owns the balloon.

THE DAMSEL AND THE BICYCLE

By WALTER CHURCH.

NIPPER has asked me to write this bit for the Magazine, and so I'm going to have a shot at it. I don't know whether it'll pass, but that won't be my fault. Anyhow, the thing actually happened—and that's what makes it worth telling.

Last Wednesday it was a half-holiday (tell us something we don't know.—Ed.), and Handforth suggested that we should go out for a bicycle ride. Neither McClure nor I thought much of the scheme, and we said so.

But after that we managed to get away. Handy's idea was to go through Bannington and then bear round through Caistowe and back home. But we hadn't got far on the Bannington Road before we spotted a jolly pretty girl sitting on the top of a gate. She was sketching or something, and near by there was a lady's bicycle, upside down, with the front tube out, and quite flat.

The girl was a regular stunner—as pretty as you like, all dressed in some fluffy kind of stuff that looked ripping. Handforth shoved his brakes on at once, jumped off, and raised his cap.

"In trouble, miss?" he asked. "I'll lend a hand, you like."

The girl looked up, and smiled.

"Oh, thanks awfully!" she said. "You mean the bicycle?"

"Of course," said Handforth. "Punctured, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think so," said the girl demurely. "A nasty cut in the tube, and there's no repair outfit on the machine."

"So you squatted down on that gate and waited until somebody came along?" asked Handy. "Right! Come on, you chaps—we'll soon repair this!"

Well, McClure and I repaired the furniture. Of course, Handy made out that he repaired it, but all he did was to stand by and make himself agreeable to the pretty girl. We had to do all the work—but this didn't surprise us, because we had expected it from the start.

Handforth simply stood there, trying to be funny, and making an ass of himself. We didn't mind, because the girl seemed to be a sport. She winked at us once or twice, as much as to say that she knew all about it. And Handy went on quite innocently—thinking that the fair damsel was impressed.

"Well, there you are—it's done!" I said

at last. "A jolly good repair, too. There's no fear of it going down."

"Good," said Handforth. "We've done eh?"

"Yes, WE have!" I said sarcastically.

"It's awfully kind of you, and I'm sure it was very sporting!" said the girl.

"You've made a ripping job of it."

"Oh, rather," said Handforth. "When I do anything, I do it properly, you know. Are you coming towards Bannington, miss?"

"Well, no," said the girl. "I wasn't thinking of going that way."

"I'd like you to come for a ride with us," went on Handforth, turning a bit red. "Then we shall be on hand if you have another puncture."

The girl smiled sweetly.

"I'd love to come for a ride," she said. "It would be delightful. And I think you are three very nice boys. The owner of that bike ought to be quite grateful to you, for doing her such a good turn."

Handforth stared, looking rather dazed.

"But—but it's your bike," he exclaimed.

"Mine?" laughed the girl. "Oh, no! Of course it isn't. Whatever made you think that? I happened to be here, and the old lady asked

me to keep my eye on it while she went into the village for a repair man."

Handforth staggered.

"What!" he yelled. "Not your bike! And—and I've repaired it for somebody else? But—but I—I thought—"

"That's what I thought you thought," interrupted the damsel sweetly. "And you seemed so anxious to make the repair, that I didn't like to stop you. Oh, splendid! Here comes the owner. She'll be ever so delighted."

We turned round, and stared down the road. The boy from the bicycle shop in the village was coming along, and with him was an old girl of about sixty, with a face that closely resembled a door-knocker.

"Oh, my goodness," gasped Handforth, faintly.

He dived for his bike, grabbed it, and fled. We fled with him—and I caught just a glimpse of the sweet young thing on the gate nearly falling off, and peals of silvery laughter came after us.

Handforth says he'll make full inquiries before he repairs another puncture. But I don't see why he should say that—he didn't even repair this one!



"In trouble, miss?" he asked. "I'll lend a hand, if you like."

Third Instalment.**Thrilling New Serial.****THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SQUASHED NOSE***The Amazing and Staggering Adventures of the World's greatest Criminal Detective and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.*By **EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.****TRACKETT GRIM versus PROFESSOR FULLER CRIME—MASTER MISCREANT****SYNOPSIS.**

Trackett Grim's tussle against the Brotherhood of the Squashed Nose has been successful, and the famous detective has met with many thrilling adventures trying to unmask Professor Fuller Crime, the greatest criminal on earth. Trackett Grim has succeeded in locating the headquarters of the Brotherhood. This grim fortress lies far underground, and is reached by means of tunnels from the sea. The detective is just about to enter the mysterious secret chamber.

(Now read on).

Experts in Villainy!

SUCH strange things had happened during the last few hours that Trackett Grim was not even surprised as he saw the huge door open in the rock. And, through the opening, lay the secret chamber.

"The great moment has arrived!" muttered Trackett Grim, his whole being throbbing with intense emotion and victory. "Ha, Professor Crime, look out!"

So saying, he strode forward into the mystic chamber.

Crash!

Almost as he passed the threshold, the stone door thudded to, imprisoning him here with the other members of the gang. And Trackett Grim was astounded to find that he was not in a rock cavern as he had supposed, but in a gloriously appointed apartment. The floor was richly carpeted, and the apartment was circular. In the centre stood a round mahogany table with a polished top. And seated in leather-covered chairs were the world's greatest scoundrels.

The wickedest man of all was Professor Fuller Crime, and the others were mere forgers, murderers, blackmailers, thieves and other dirty dogs of a similar type. In fact, even Trackett Grim, accustomed to associating with criminals as he was, almost started back. These men were the scum of the earth—no better than mud from a ditch-bottom.

In two strides he crossed the polished floor and reached the table.

"Well, comrades?" he asked briskly. "What's the next job?"

"Ah, No. 69,521, so you are here!" said Professor Fuller Crime. "I knew you at once! Good! What report have you brought? We have been eagerly awaiting your arrival! Your visit, no doubt, concerns the London and Tooting Bank?"

"Absolutely!" said Trackett Grim. "Right, boss!"

He was rather amazed that Professor Crime should have recognised him, and stated his number. Yet, so amazing was this master crook, that he knew every member of the Brotherhood by sight, and could name his number.

For a second, Trackett Grim was non-plussed. He was supposed to bring a report! Swiftly, he fumbled in his pockets—which were, of course, the pockets of the man he had changed clothes with. And he suddenly felt a thick envelope. He pulled it out with a flourish.

"Splendid!" said Professor Crime, after he had opened the dispatch. "Comrades, we have here a chance of lifting fifteen million pounds sterling! This gold is being taken to the London and Tooting Bank to-night, and will be delivered in a hand-cart! This is

being done to avoid suspicion. We have merely to seize this handcart, and the gold is ours!"

Exposed!

Exclamations of satisfaction came from all round the table. Trackett Grim inwardly gloated. He was learning the Brotherhood's secrets! If he could only frustrate this great robbery he would gain a terrific victory.

And then, just at the moment of victory—came defeat!

Professor Fuller Crime fastened his steely eyes upon Trackett Grim.

"No. 69,521, you will be sent on a special mission to Tooting!" he said.

"It will be your duty to seize the handcart, and remove the gold. Go at once and disguise yourself as a police-constable!"

"Right, Chief!" said Trackett Grim briskly. "Where shall I go to?"

Professor Fuller Crime stared.

"You babbling fathead!" he roared.

"Go to the Disguise Department!"

Trackett Grim looked round, but he could see no sign of any door. It was, therefore, impossible for him to make any move.

"The — the disguise department?" he repeated. "Which way, boss?"

"Which way?" repeated the Chief. "Great pip! You don't know? Then you are an impostor! You are a spy!"

In a trice the room was in an uproar. Trackett Grim whipped out his revolver, and pointed it at the breast of Professor Fuller Crime.

"Now, it is my turn!" he shouted. "You are my prisoners——"

And then a staggering thing happened.

Before Trackett Grim could complete his sentence, a mass of ironwork shot down from the ceiling. It was like a square cage, composed of iron bars. It came right down over Trackett Grim, making him a prisoner!

The Chamber of Doom!

In that second Trackett Grim knew that all was up. He had not been prepared for such devices. Marvellous man though he was, it was impossible for him to know that the Brotherhood would have such mechanical methods of imprisoning a man.

"So!" shouted the Chief. "So! You came into this place as a spy—— Ah! I know you now! You are Trackett Grim!"

The famous detective staggered.

"How—how did you know?" he demanded hoarsely.

Before Trackett Grim could say anything further, the

cage contrivance whirled upwards, carrying him with it. And almost before he could take a breath, he found himself in another department.

This was composed of rock and one glance round was enough to tell him that it was the Chamber of Death.

At the Stroke of the Clock!

The man who was guarding him stood up, and pointed to a clock on the mantelpiece. It was an alarm clock, and attached to the hammer there was a fine cord. This cord led upwards to a rifle.

"When the alarm goes off, that rifle will explode!" said Trackett Grim's guardian. "You'll be shot to the heart!"

Trackett Grim recoiled in horror.

"What time is the clock set for?" he asked defiantly.

"Nine exactly!" replied the other.

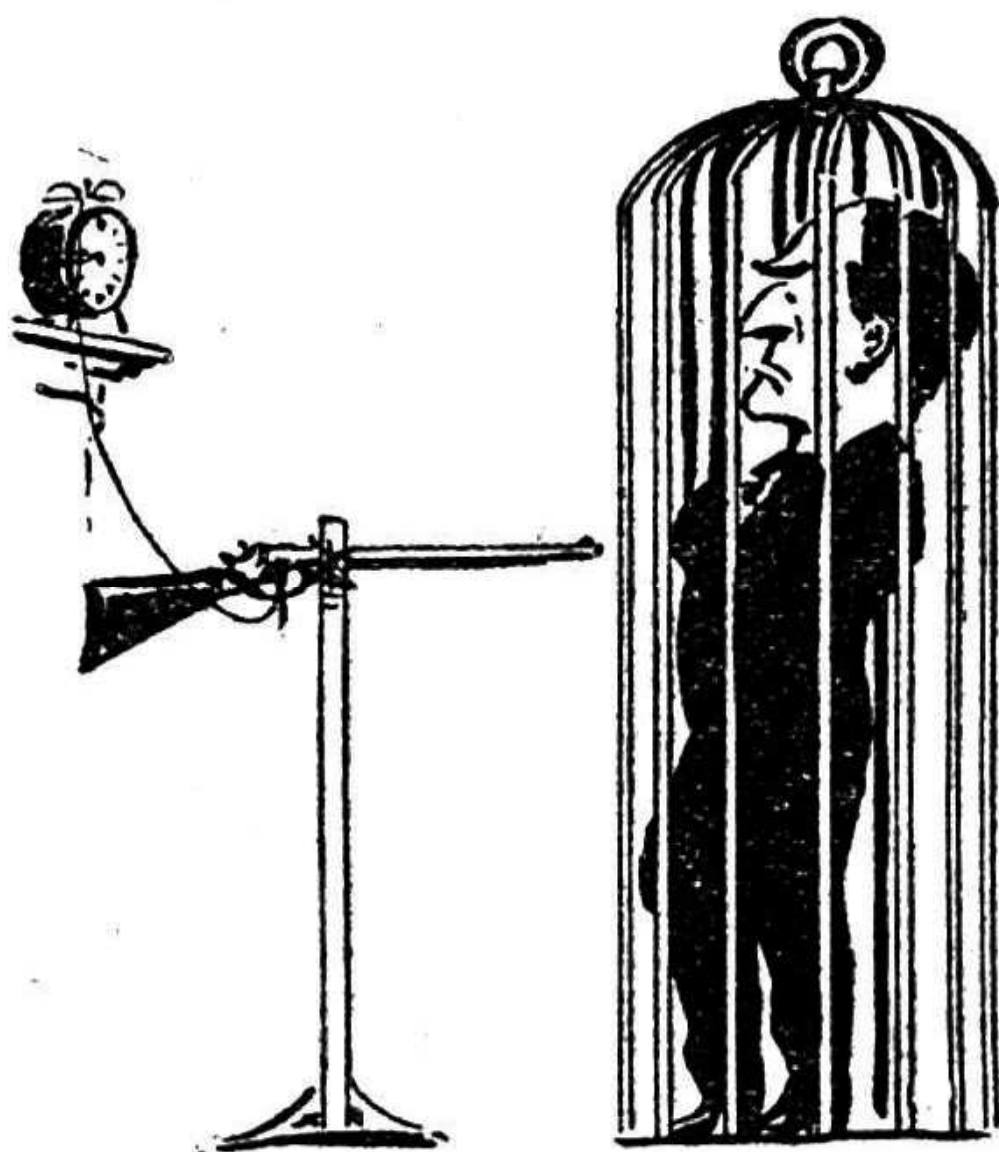
Trackett Grim gulped.

"Nine o'clock!" he cried horrified.

"You cannot mean it!"

For the hands of the clock even then, pointed to one minute to nine!

(Could a man be in a more frightful position than this? See next week's astounding instalment to discover how Trackett Grim escaped!)



The hands of the clock even then pointed to one minute to nine!

THE MICROBE FIEND.

By REGINALD PITT.

THE bounder was actually in my own study when I first realised that he was a microbe fiend. I'm talking about Timothy Tucker, who shares Study E with Jack Grey and me.

I've known all along that T.T. is a bit touched, and hardly responsible for his actions, but until Friday of last week I didn't know that he was a microbe fiend. And it's a queer thing in life that when you come across one thing for the first time, you find other examples of it immediately afterwards.

Well, we were just going to sit down to tea. It was a hot day, and we were not particularly hungry. So the tea was rather more appetising than usual. We had a ripping cheese—not too nifty—sardines, bread-and-butter, and cake. Jack and I were just starting when the Fiend arrived.

He'd been there for some time, really, but not in the form of the Microbe Fiend. He gazed at us in horror, and pointed a quivering finger to the cheese. He informed us, in thrilling tones, and with a frightful amount of unnecessary language, that the cheese was horrible.

He added that it was nothing more nor less than a crawling mass of fearful looking microbes. He advised us to take a chunk into the laboratory and shove it under the microscope. Once having done this, he declared we should always be sick at the sight of cheese in future.

Jack remarked that we'd better not try the experiment. It would be rather awkward, in passing Liptons, or the Home and Colonial Stores, to suddenly pause on the edge of the pavement and free oneself of the most recent meal. Besides that, it would be most distressing.

So both Jack and I decided that we wouldn't take the risk of looking at a piece of cheese through the microscope. We were far more ready to risk eating it—the cheese, I mean, not the microscope. (Cheap humour.)

The Microbe Fiend became more emphatic. He told us that cheese was a living mass. How could we possibly eat stuff that walked? How could we demolish millions of microbes every time we took a bite? I told him it was quite easy, and showed him exactly how it was done.

Just then Jack had finished pouring out the tea, and he proceeded to shove in a spoonful of demerara sugar. The Microbe Fiend let out a wild squeal, and grabbed the sugar basin.

In horrified accents, he explained that the sugar was even worse than the cheese. The microbes positively teemed in trillions. In fact, there was hardly any sugar at all—it was nearly all microbes.

We only got the sugar basin back by sheer force, and while we chewed up microbes—alternating the order now and again by drinking a few million—the fiend sat at the table munching bread-and-butter, and drinking tea without sugar. And then I thought I would

inform him that these microbes were jolly good pals. They were the fellows who kept the bad microbes away, and waged battle, and all that kind of thing. And I was in the middle of this learned discourse when another Microbe Fiend looked into the study.

He joined in the discussion.

And when he saw T.T. drinking tea, he recoiled. He was horrified. Milk, he declared, was not a liquid at all, but a solid mass of living matter—microbes in their worst possible form—since these microbes were of all sorts of horrible breeds.

For example, we should probably get consumption, with a touch of diphtheria on the top, and it was quite on the cards that 'flu would be closely followed by pneumonia. And all through drinking milk!

The Microbe Fiend had left me cold. And my appetite was just as healthy as ever.

I met the Microbe Fiend again in the village. I was buying some chocolates, and he told me that sweets in every form were an abomination. We walked down the village street together, and he pointed to the fishmonger's. Fish, he swore was worse than anything else, when it came to a matter of microbes. The breeze blew all sorts of dust about, and this dust was laden with countless germs.

I pointedly remarked that, according to this, it was a most unsafe proceeding to breathe. But he merely thought that I was trying to be funny, and then indicated the baker's shop with a wave of his hand.

Bread, he warned me, was shocking stuff. Wasn't it made with yeast? And wasn't yeast nothing more nor less than a solid mass of live activity? Microbes in bulk form, so to speak?

So I came to the conclusion that the best thing, under all the circumstances, was to set down the Microbe Fiend as a harmless kind of lunatic—and to go on eating microbes at the rate of seventy-five billions a day, and thrive on them to a ripe old age.



(Continued from page 15.)

Chinamen. Mind you, I do not think there will be any danger, or I would not leave you. Fu Chow's men will not act while somebody is on guard. Please go up at once, Pitt, and do not leave Yung Ching by himself."

"Right you are, sir!"

"By the way, wouldn't it be rather a decent idea to have Watson and Tregellis-West in there as well?" I asked. "They're in the know—and they've been on guard before. Three's always better than one, and, besides, they'd keep Reggie company. And they'd like it, too."

Lee considered for a moment.

"The idea is a good one, but I'm afraid the other boys would be curious and restless—"

"They're that already, sir," I said. "So it doesn't make any difference. Tommy and Montie might just as well help. They're willing enough."

"Then let it be as you say, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "Tell them at once."

We hurried off, for there was not a moment to be lost. Sir Montie and Tommy, of course, were only too glad to do something. And so, shortly afterwards, they were all comfortably settled in Nelson Lee's bedroom—where there were easy chairs for their comfort.

Yung Ching, strangely impassive in face of all these alarms, calmly proceeded to get into bed. He didn't see any reason why he should do without his night's rest. He was smiling as ever.

"Allee samee no diffience," he said blandly. "Me no makee fuss. Heap plentee sleepee. Allee samee muchee thanks for watchee. Enemies no chancee now, I thinkee. Plentee good."

"All right, Ching—you buzz off to sleep," I said. "Don't worry."

"Me notee wollee," said Ching.

And we hurried off, feeling quite certain that he was safe. It was not until Nelson Lee and I were outside that any words were spoken. And I was the first to make a remark.

"Well, guv'nor, we haven't lost much time," I said. "And we have the satisfaction of knowing that everything's all serene at the school. Chingy won't come to any harm!"

"Well, hardly, Nipper," agreed Nelson Lee. "And now we embark upon an adventure which looks like being one of the most extraordinary we have ever encountered. Quite like old times, eh?"

"Rather, sir," I agreed.

And so it was. Not often did Nelson Lee and I go out on detective work, as we were doing now. And it made me feel good. I was worried, however, regarding Jack Grey. What had happened to him was a singular mystery.

"Can you make anything of it, sir?" I asked, as we strode along.

"No, Nipper—and I don't pretend to," said Nelson Lee. "We are setting off now to investigate the whole matter, and to discover the truth. Whether we shall do so remains a question. But we shall certainly do our best."

By this time we were nearing the wood, and we entered by that same gap. Without a word we passed into the intense darkness—for by now night had fallen in real earnest, and the darkness was pitchy.

"What do you intend doing, sir?" I whispered. "I mean, what's the first move? How shall we proceed?"

"I don't quite know, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "We are groping in darkness—in more senses than one. I am convinced that this wood contains the Chinamen. And I am beginning to think that I ought not to have brought you—"

"Here, come off it, sir!"

"The dangers are great," went on Lee. "Perhaps it is wrong of me to expose you to them. However, we have faced dangers before, Nipper, and come through victorious, eh? Possibly we shall be successful again? But as to where I shall commence my investigations, I am frankly at a loss."

"Oh, there's something I forgot to ask!" I exclaimed suddenly. "What an ass!" And it's so important, too. Did you go over to the College House, sir?"

"I did."

"And what about Christine and Co.?"

"They had not returned."

"Oh!" I said quickly. "So they're missing, too?"

"Yes, they are missing," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I inquired after bedtime, and the three boys had not been seen. They are in this wood, Nipper—probably in the same place as Grey."

"Phew!" I whistled. "That's rotten, if you like! Four of the chaps collared! I can't make out why they didn't nab Teddy Long while they were about it!"

"No doubt Long took them by surprise, and they were not prepared," replied Lee. "And these Chinamen are cunning and clever. They realised that Long would go to the school and talk. They realised that others might come. And so they prepared—and with what result you know."

"A terrible result, sir," I said, keeping close to the guv'nor, instinctively. "I—I can't help thinking that all those four chaps might be dead. Honestly, guv'nor, don't you think so, too?"

"It is possible," replied Lee gravely.

"That means that you think they are," I said, breathing hard. "Oh, these demons! These horrible devils! They're not fit to live, guv'nor, and if they'd blow up the school, they'd kill these four."

"But I do not think they have, Nipper," said Lee, softly. "I cannot help thinking that Fu Chow had a certain object in getting hold of these boys. What his object

is we shall possibly learn later on. For the present we are groping."

Lee came to a halt.

"Well, sir, what's to be done?" I asked.

"Take this—and use it without compunction, if necessary," said Nelson Lee, pushing a small revolver in my hand. "In self defence, Nipper, you will be perfectly justified in shooting."

"But what about you, sir?"

"I have another," said the gov'nor. "Now, I think we had better separate for a short time, and work our way round in a half circle. You go to the left, Nipper, and I will go to the right. You are sufficiently clever in woodcraft not to lose your way. We will meet later and compare notes."

"Right, sir," I said briskly.

I knew well enough that Nelson Lee was simply trying this as a preliminary move. He did not hope to gain much by it. But we had come here to search for Jack Grey and Christine and Co., and we had to do something.

At one time I had believed that Lee would bring a whole search party on the job—half the men of the village, for example. But he realised that the search was far more likely to be effective if it were conducted by we two alone. Furthermore, it completely avoided unwelcome publicity.

I suspected that he already had given instructions to Melrose. The Scotland Yard men were no doubt hovering somewhere on the outskirts of the wood—perhaps waiting for a signal, and on the alert to act.

I pushed my way forward through the wood and I realised, suddenly, that I was almost on the same spot where Jack Grey had disappeared. I paused for a moment, looking about me, and listening. The silence of the wood was intense for scarcely any wind blew to-night. I could not even hear the movements of Nelson Lee, although he was so close to me.

And then, as I stood there, I thought I did hear something.

It sounded like a rustling and rushing not far above my head. I looked up, instinctively. Then I stared, a feeling of horror taking possession of me. Although the darkness was thick, it was not absolute. Overhead the stars were gleaming here and there, for the clouds had cleared away—and, indeed, a moon was shining somewhere. And the faint reflection came down through the trees. But there seemed to be a patch of blacker darkness just above me—hovering there like some ominous cloud.

It was so extraordinary that I could only stare. The cloud grew larger, billowing out—and then, abruptly, it seemed to descend in a kind of swoop. Almost before I knew it I was fighting madly in the folds of something thick and clinging. For one horrified second I thought some ghastly nightmare-like creature had got me in its wings. But this was palpably absurd. And

after that I was too confused to have any coherent thoughts at all.

I found myself lifted from the ground.

And I was still fighting desperately. But my strength was ebbing, and everything seemed to be going round. Shooting lights appeared in front of my eyes. My struggles became more feeble.

And then complete blankness descended upon me.

I did not know it, of course, but Nelson Lee was very near by, and he actually saw the whole incident. He watched from between the trees—and he knew exactly what took place. And a feeling of great triumph surged through him. For he could tell that there was nothing supernatural about this—only something cunning and clever and ingenious.

For he saw a great black canopy descend—let down from a huge overhanging branch high above. It descended upon me, and as it did so the folds automatically closed, and caught me up.

It appeared to be a kind of contrivance made of black cloth on a wire frame. The releasing of a spring, no doubt, caused the contraption to envelop its victim. And there was not the shadow of a doubt that this was the explanation of Jack Grey's strange disappearance.

Nelson Lee was more grim than ever.

He looked about him, selected a big tree, ten yards distant—and commenced climbing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YELLOW FIENDS!



I FELT quite comfortable.

My wits returned to me slowly and dreamily.

At first I lay quite still, believing that I was in bed in the Remove dormitory, and I smiled to myself as I

remembered the ridiculous dream I had just had.

It was palpably absurd. Of course the whole thing was a dream—Jack Grey's disappearance, the vanishing of Christine and Co., and that fight of mine with a black cloud.

I tried to think what I had eaten for supper to cause such a nightmare. But then, all at once, I caught sight of a star almost overhead. There weren't any holes in the ceiling of the Remove dormitory, and, moreover, this star seemed to be moving. That was strange.

After a while, however, I came to the conclusion that the star was still, and I was moving. The whole ground was rocking—swaying gently to and fro, and for a second I half believed that I was in a boat.

I sat up, and looked about me. Then I caught my breath in. The moon was shining, and I could see tree tops on every side.

And the place where I lay was a cunningly constructed platform, with shelters on three sides—all made from thick branches with plenty of foliage.

And then I jumped to the truth—the amazing truth.

I was at the very top of one of the highest trees in Belton Wood!

This accounted for the swaying, for the lightest of light breezes had sprung up, and was causing the high branches to move slightly. The platform itself was really the floor of this lofty hut. There was no exit at the back, and just in front of me squatted two figures.

They were Chinamen.

I did not give them any hint that I had recovered, and I was rather surprised, indeed, that I had recovered at all. I knew that I had been drugged. And I could only conclude that that folding blanket affair had been soaked with drug—so that when it enveloped me I was soon overcome. I had then been drawn up into the tree—and here I was.

I felt shaky, and even now, as I realised the truth, the whole business had an air of unreality about it which I could not shake off.

This lofty retreat was so cunningly concealed that it was utterly impossible to see it from the ground. Even in the full light of day, with the sun blazing, no indication of the hut in the tree tops could be seen. And now I was beginning to understand the position more and more.

So this was why Fu Chow and his men had not been seen!

This was why no sight of them had been observed during the past week. They had retreated into the treetops, and lay low—although that sounds a rather contradictory expression. For, as a matter of fact, they had lain high! And they had been quite safe.

Nobody had dreamed of looking into the very treetops for them. Even Nelson Lee had not suspected such a device. Probably they had only ventured down at night—and then in black robes. With their heads uncovered it seemed that the heads were hovering alone. This was the effect that Christine and Co. had seen when they were surrounded. No doubt they had been captured because they might have discovered something, and thus wrecked Fu Chow's latest plan.

And what was that plan?

I looked round eagerly, but could see no sign of the College House juniors. They were certainly not in this platform hut with me. This caused me great uneasiness, for if they were not here, where could they be? Were they prisoners at all? Were they—something worse?

It was quite useless for me to ask such questions of myself, for there was no chance of my answering them.

I was still wondering what could be done,

and if there was any chance by which I could gain my liberty, when I thought I heard a faint noise in my rear. I took it, at first, to be the creak of one of the tree branches, possibly caused by a faint breath of wind.

But, turning, I detected the signs of a dim form, lying in such deep shadow that I had missed seeing it at first. Bending closer, I now made out a human figure. I touched it gently.

"Who's this?" I breathed.

The figure stirred slightly.

"What's the matter?" it asked dully.

"I—I feel queer!"

"Jack!" I muttered, under my breath.

I recognised the voice at once. The figure was that of Jack Grey. He was recovering from the effects of the drug, and there was no doubt that he had had a stronger dose than I had experienced. For he had had his dose long before me, and yet he was only just recovering.

I wondered why the two Chinamen in front of me did not stir. But they seemed utterly impassive, and did not seem to care whether I stirred or not. They sat there without speaking, and almost without moving.

The moon was up, but it had been concealed by some passing clouds. But now, quite unexpectedly, the clouds passed away, and the moonlight flooded down in soft, silvery rays. The leaves of the trees near me glistened and took on a fairy-like aspect. The scene, judging it as a scene, was one of extreme beauty. But the presence of these murderous Chinamen converted it into one of sinister horror and dread.

And then, the moonlight permitting me to see, I noticed for the first time that another giant of the wood towered up close by. And I could just detect that there was a second platform built there, also with a cunningly contrived covering of branches and twigs and ferns. It was so far distant that to jump across was impossible.

I had no doubt that Christine and Yorke and Talmadge were prisoners in this second bower. Right up here, far from the ground, in the very tops of the trees, what chance was there of escape? What chance was there of any rescue party discovering us and coming to our aid?

I knew that it would be possible for me to leap suddenly upon the backs of these two Chinamen. It was quite likely, indeed, that I could jump down into the tree itself—and thus swarm, limb by limb, to the ground.

But of what use would such a move be? I could not possibly escape.

Before I touched the ground, I should be recaptured, only to be brought back—and possibly killed on the spot. It was far better, I judged, to remain exactly where I was, and to see how things progressed. And I must admit that I was curious. Finding myself safe and uninjured, I became

interested in the whole game. I was still trying to find out what this game would be.

And then, before it was possible for me to make any move, I saw the two Chinamen get to their feet, and stand at attention. A moment later a head came up over the edge of the platform.

It seemed to me that there was a roughly constructed ladder immediately below, for the figure which stepped on to the uneven, swaying floor was that of a wizened old Chinaman, his face rendered almost death-like by the white moonlight. I did not doubt that this man was Fu Chow.

Nelson Lee had described him to me, but this was the first time I had ever seen him. He was small, comparatively, but there was something about him which told of power.

His eyes, half closed, were nevertheless, sinister. They seemed to gleam and glow with a mysterious fire. Whether it was the moonlight, or not, I could not tell, but it struck me that Fu Chow's eyes looked greenish, like those of a cat.

He came to the platform, looked round, and then uttered some words in Chinese. The two men brushed past me without ceremony—I might not have existed—and they seized hold of Jack Grey.

I don't mind admitting that I did everything I could to trick the beggars. The very instant I spotted Fu Chow I lay back, and remained, to all appearances, still deeply under the influence of the drug.

Whether the Chinamen thought I was

shamming or not, I don't know, and it is of little consequence now. But I do know that they took no notice of me, and gave all their attention to Jack Grey.

He was brought out and placed near the front of the platform.

And I lay there, in such a position that I could hear what was going on, and see, too. And yet, all the time, I appeared to be inanimate and indifferent to my surroundings.

Jack Grey was propped up, shaken and patted. But he remained dull and listless. The two Chinamen stepped aside as Fu Chow squatted down, tailor-fashion, in front of the junior.

Fu Chow took from a pocket a tiny metal box. Opening this, he took a pinch of powder and held his fingers under Grey's nose.

"Sniff--sniff hard!" he said in a low voice.

Jack obeyed, and took a big sniff.

Then he sneezed twice, coughed, and gave a series of gasps. But the effect was quite wonderful. If he had taken a sniff of smelling salts it could not have been more effective. He became bright and alert, and looked round wonderingly. He was totally different in the space of ten seconds.

I did not doubt that Fu Chow had given him a touch of something which removed the effects of the drug, and not only restored the junior's brain to its normal activity, but made it even more acute than

(Continued on next page.)

Ex-Crown Prince's Memoirs.

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(Continued from page 28.)

usual. And Jack suddenly awoke to the strange nature of his position.

"What's happened?" he asked. "Why, what—what—Who are you?" he added, staring at Fu Chow. "What am I doing here?"

"No matter," said Fu Chow softly. "You will listen to me—you will obey me. You will do precisely what I tell you. Look into my eyes—straight, straight into my eyes!"

I watched, half fascinated.

Athough Jack was a fellow of pretty strong will, he did not seem to be able to withstand the order. He looked directly into Fu Chow's eyes—and those eyes were now wide open, like orbs of green fire. There was something horrible about them—something which made me shudder.

But Jack Grey stared steadfastly into their depths, and I was almost certain that he was unconscious of his own actions. And, in the moonlight, I could see a subtle change. His face lost its normal expression. It became relaxed. He looked like one asleep, and yet he was awake.

"So, so!" came Fu Chow's voice, purring like that of a tiger. "So! That is well, my boy—that is good! You can understand what I say? You can hear me?"

"I can hear you," said Jack Grey dully.

"You will do whatever I order you?" asked Fu Chow.

"Yes, I will do whatever you order."

"Good," murmured Fu Chow. "See, I am placing something in your hand. It is a knife—a sharp knife. Place it carefully in your pocket."

Grey took the knife, and put it in his breast pocket.

"Now, you will accompany one of my slaves to the ground," said Fu Chow. "You will then go to St. Frank's, you will get into the building, and you will go to the bedroom where Yung Ching, the Chinese boy, is lying. You will strike your knife into Yung Ching's breast. You will kill him!"

Jack Grey made no reply—he sat still and silent.

"Do you understand?" asked Fu Chow softly.

"I understand."

"What will you do?"

"I will go to the ground with your slave," replied Jack Grey monotonously. "I will then go to St. Frank's, make my way in-doors, and enter Yung Ching's bedroom. I will drive my knife into Yung Ching's breast, and kill him."

"That is correct," said Fu Chow. "Having performed that service, your duty will be finished, and you may do as you please. But remember—my orders must be obeyed. You must go to St. Frank's, you must enter the school, you must enter Yung Ching's bedroom, and you must drive your knife into Yung Ching's heart!"

These words were repeated deliberately, and in such a tone that my blood seemed to run cold. And the very horror of the whole thing gripped me. I felt helpless—and yet I wanted to do something.

For one foolish moment I thought of springing out and toppling Fu Chow over the edge of the platform.

But I knew that this thing could not have been done. For the other Chinamen were near by, and would have averted the disaster to their Chief. And I should probably have received a dagger in my heart—or, at the best, I should have been instantly rendered helpless. And Jack Grey would have been sent on his mission just the same. From every point of view my best policy was to remain quiet.

But this awful business struck a chill to my very marrow.

So this was the scheme—this was why Jack Grey had been kidnapped!

So that he could be placed under Fu Chow's diabolical influence and ordered to murder the innocent Chinese boy at the school! I half believed Grey was under the influence of hypnotism—but yet it didn't seem the same. It wasn't ordinary hypnotism.

Fu Chow had exerted all his stupendous will, and it was so great that his victim could do nothing—he was held powerless in that tremendous mental grip. He would obey the orders to the letter.

To say that I was aghast would be putting it mildly.

CHAPTER VII.

NELSON LEE TO THE RESCUE!



TO me it seemed that I was utterly alone in the midst of the enemy.

I couldn't have imagined what Nelson Lee was doing, or whether he would make any attempt to rescue me. And yet, if I had only known it, he was a great deal closer than I could have ever guessed.

The great detective, in fact, was actually looking on the very platform where I lay—and from that statement it can easily be deducted that the gov'nor was not on the ground.

He had selected a certain tree, with the intention of climbing to the very top. At that period—when he commenced climbing—he only had a vague suspicion of the real truth. He did not know that Fu Chow was so near by. He chiefly wanted to find out what had become of me—he wanted to see where I had gone after being whirled up aloft within the folds of that black contrivance.

And so, patiently, and without undue haste, he climbed foot by foot. It was a ticklish business. In the first place, it was

absolutely necessary to avoid making any noise. For to do so would be to betray his presence—and everything now depended upon swiftness of action. And he could not hope to act swiftly unless he took the enemy by surprise. And so, for the time being he did not try to hurry. Speed would be required later—at the very moment of action.

It was a difficult climb, for the tree was smooth in many parts, and more than once Nelson Lee thought that he would be compelled to drop to the ground and commence operations all over again on some other tree.

But, by persistent effort, he won.

And, going higher and higher, he at length emerged right out beyond the other trees. He got into a lofty perch where he could practically overlook the greater part of Bellton Wood.

Not that he wanted to do this.

His chief concern was for the trees in the immediate vicinity.

And, parting the foliage just where he crouched, he peered cautiously through. There was nothing suspicious on this side. He seemed to be gazing upon a sea of green, undulating in great billows. The light of the moon lay upon everything. He was gazing upon Bellton Wood from the top—for his tree was higher than most others.

The scene was a most delightful one.

But Nelson Lee had no eye for delights just now. He changed his position, and peered out into the opposite direction. And this time a glitter came into his eyes, and his jaws set more squarely. At the same time, he could not prevent an expression of momentary amazement appearing on his face.

He had hardly expected to see such a scene as this.

Within thirty feet of him another gigantic tree raised its head over the majority of other trees. And there, looking like a floating raft upon this sea of green, was Fu Chow's secret retreat.

Nelson Lee was looking right into it. In the moonlight everything was very indistinct—except the general outline—but he could distinguish the figures of the Chinamen and Jack Grey. He could also see a dim figure within—this latter being myself. If I had only known that the gov'nor was watching me then!"

He took from his pocket a tiny pair of binoculars. He adjusted them and gazed. Through these he could see with much greater distinctness. And almost by accident he found himself looking at the

wrong tree. Here there was another raft upon this green sea.

It was also provided with a canopy. And within lay some figures—and a Chinaman squatted on guard near the edge of the slightly-swaying platform.

"Oh, so this is how we stand!" murmured Lee. "Dear me! What a truly extraordinary state of affairs!"

And, looking at it coldly, one could not help being struck by the singular circumstances. Here, in this quiet wood in the Sussex countryside, these Chinamen were lurking like vultures in their nests. Un-suspected—unseen—they waited there, ready to pounce on their prey at the right moment.

I was so interested by everything—and so appalled—that the bizarre nature of the whole situation did not fully come home to me. But I realised it afterwards, when the immediate danger was over.

Nelson Lee transferred his attention to the first tree—where Fu Chow was giving his final instructions to Jack Grey. And as Lee watched, Grey got to his feet, and deliberately commenced to descend. From Nelson Lee's position he could see a rudely-constructed ladder, which led down from this lofty perch to the more easily-negotiated branches.

And Jack Grey descended, accompanied by one of the Chinamen.

They vanished into the blackness—like a couple of divers descending into the depths of the sea. The whole effect was most peculiar and unreal, and this was heightened by the moonlight.

Nelson Lee did not wait long.

He instinctively knew that Jack Grey had been sent upon some hypnotic mission. Grey's very actions—his calm, submissive obedience—told that he was under the influence of Fu Chow.

And Lee did not doubt that this mission was a deadly one.

At first he thought about silently creeping down and going in pursuit of the junior. But, before doing so, he wanted to make sure of Fu Chow. And so, as he crouched there, he uncoiled from his body a long thin rope of great strength.

Then, emerging into the open, so that he had free play with his arms, he swung the rope round and round his head.

Whizzz!

It shot through the air, coiled neatly over Fu Chow's head and shoulders, and was instantly drawn tight.

The Chinese scoundrel gave one loud cry of fear. The next second his companion flashed a knife through the air. Before Nelson Lee could even pull the rope taut, it was severed.

But the die was cast now—the thing had to go on.

As quick as lightning Lee pulled the rope in and made another noose. Again he swung it. This time the end, accurately

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thrown, coiled itself cunningly about the stump of a branch. It became tight. Nelson Lee's skill with the rope was well known.

Again the Chinaman next to Fu Chow flashed his knife—but this time he was not allowed to use it.

For I took a hand in the game. At the critical moment I dashed out and delivered a thudding punch between the Chink's shoulders. He spun round, and his knife went flying through the air, to fall to the ground.

Fu Chow uttered a snarling sound in his throat and sprang at me.

"No, you don't!" I shouted. "You cur—you demon! You may have got the better

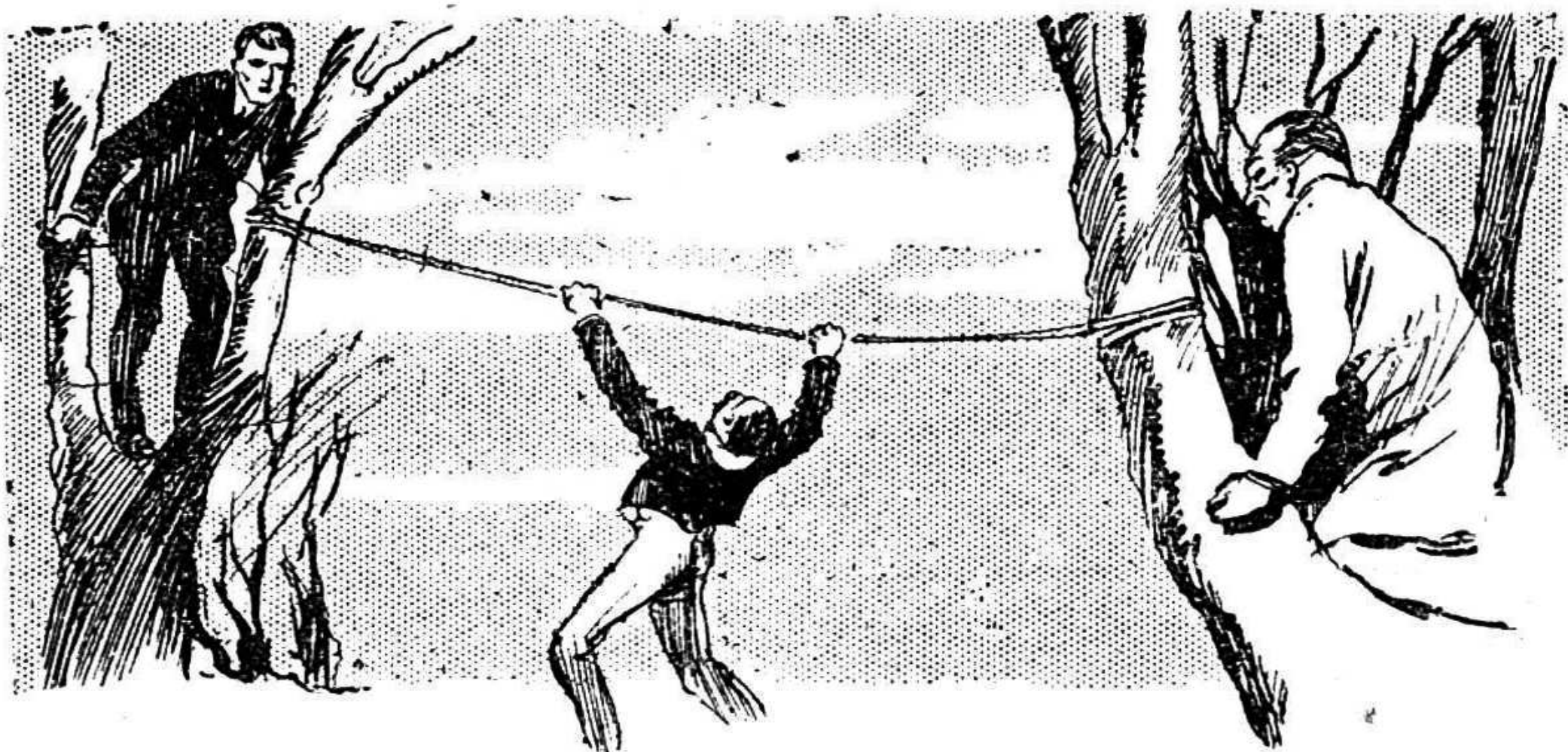
In fact, he was scared out of his wits, and could do nothing but beat a retreat.

The other Chinaman sprang at me like a tiger.

But I didn't care. I was ready for anything. My blood was up, and I simply sailed in with a feeling of sheer, unadulterated pleasure. The fellow's knife was gone, and so I had nothing to fear in that direction.

But he obviously thought that his superior size and strength would terrify me, and that I should easily succumb. I didn't. I met his rush with a straight left which took him fairly in the ribs.

Then, as he was brought up short, grunting, my right swung round, caught him



I grasped the rope and commenced swarming across. It was a perilous trip, for right below me there yawned a great void.

of Grey, but I'm going to give you something to go on with! Take that—and see how you like it!"

Crash!

I can't describe what delirious joy came to me as my fist smashed with terrific force into Fu Chow's face. My knuckles were numbed by the force of the blow, but I didn't care a rap.

The fact that I had delivered such a blow was joy in itself. I hoped that Fu Chow would stagger back and topple over the edge of the platform to his fate. But he uttered a grunting gasp, staggered to the edge, and just seized one of the overhead branches and saved himself.

The next second he was swinging down the ladder like a monkey—but not before I had seen that his nose was bleeding and that his face was damaged. For all his demoniacal cunning he was floored when he met an old-fashioned British punch. It was something he had never experienced before.

under the jaw, and for a moment I thought my arm was broken. It was numbed from the wrist to the shoulder.

But the effect on the Chinaman was tremendous.

He was lifted clean off his feet, he gave one wild squeal of terror, clutched at the edge of the platform—and toppled over. I stood there, panting hard, listening to his body crashing down from branch to branch.

And I don't mind confessing that the very sound gave me delight. At the same time, I realised that it probably meant the saving of his life. To have fallen direct would have meant instant death. But his descent was being checked all along. He would no doubt be bruised and battered by the time he reached the ground, and possibly a bone or two would be broken—but I had no doubt that his injuries would be the opposite to fatal.

But I didn't care—I jumped to the edge of the platform and waved.

"Guv'nor!" I shouted.

"Well done, Nipper!" called Nelson Lee.

"Splendid, my boy. But it's a pity we didn't get hold of Fu Chow."

"Grey!" I shouted. "He's gone to St. Frank's to kill Ching, sir! And I believe Christine and Co. are in that other tree——"

"Never mind Christine and his companions now," said Nelson Lee. "The most important thing of all is to stop Grey. I think these boys here will be safe—for Fu Chow's men are fleeing."

Without more ado, I grasped the rope, after making sure that the end was secure. Then, with a warning to the guv'nor, I commenced swarming across. He had already made his end tight. It was a perilous trip, for right below me there yawned a great void.

One false move and I should have been dashed to death. But I completed the trip without trouble, and at last stood by Nelson Lee's side. In the meantime, he had blown several shrill blasts upon a police whistle. And another thrill of joy went through me. At last we were defeating these foul Chinamen in a fair fight.

I did not doubt that Lee was calling the Scotland Yard men. They were posted out at different points, and would all come in answer to that call. But, for the moment,

we had something of far greater importance to attend to.

"Tell me, Nipper—what about Grey?" asked Lee tensely, as he gripped me.

"He's been hypnotised by Fu Chow!" I panted. "Chow gave him a knife, and told him to kill Chingy! And Grey's gone to do it!"

"He must be stopped," said Lee grimly. "And there is not a moment to lose!"

"Can we do it, sir?" I gasped. "Can we do it?"

"I don't know, my boy—but we will try," replied Nelson Lee. "Grey has a good start, but he will not unduly hurry himself, and we shall race with all our speed. There is a distinct chance that we shall be in time."

"But the chap's are on guard, sir—they wouldn't let Grey kill——"

"Don't you realise, Nipper, that they will have no suspicions?" asked Lee tensely. "If a Chinaman came in to commit this crime they would spring on him at once. But Grey—never! They will be pleased to see him, and he can perform his deadly work at any moment—when least suspected. That is why we must get to the school without any loss of time."

I was aghast once more, for this aspect had not occurred to me. And to think of

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 32.)

Jack Grey—one of the kindest of fellows—being forced to do this foul crime, made my blood surge within me. It was almost too appalling to think of.

Should we be able to avert the tragedy?

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK GREY'S DEADLY MISSION!



JACK GREY walked swiftly and deliberately up Bell-ton Lane towards the school.

A minute earlier he had been left by one of Fu Chow's trusted henchmen.

And Jack had only one thought in his mind—and that was to fulfil the mission which had been entrusted to him.

But, strictly speaking, it was not his own mind. That was subdued, and rendered almost dormant. Instead, he was possessed of Fu Chow's mind. In some sinister, mystic way, this amazing Chinaman had effected the change. Jack Grey was no longer himself. He was simply an instrument—a walking weapon belonging to Fu Chow.

The very idea seemed mad—incredible. And yet it was true—for Grey was even now on his deadly mission.

He reached the school wall, and then paused for a moment, as though at a loss. But he climbed over at length, and dropped into the Triangle. Mechanically he made his way across to the Ancient House—towards the windows of the junior studies. And he saw that several figures were emerging from one of these windows.

This didn't seem to surprise him. Indeed, he took no interest in their movements at all. And he walked straight on.

There were three figures at first, and then two more. And they stood grouped about the window, watching. The figures were those of Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, De Valerie, Somerton, and Dick Goodwin.

The latter three had not been able to sleep, owing to the uncertainties of the evening and the mystery connected with Bell-ton Wood. And, being adventurous spirits, they had got dressed—with the idea of going out to investigate. Tommy Watson, going into the dormitory to fetch something, had encountered them.

And so Tommy and Montie had decided to join the little party—leaving Pitt on guard over Yung Ching. Pitt was not alone, either, for the genial Archie was also awake, and had sauntered along from his own bedroom to keep Pitt company for a time.

The five juniors stared at the figure coming across the Triangle.

"Hold still!" whispered De Valerie. "I don't know who it is, but—"

"Great Scott!" whispered Watson. "It's Grey—Jack Grey!"

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montie. "So it is! Dear fellow, you're right!"

All the juniors hurried forward and surrounded Jack.

"You boulder!" exclaimed De Valerie. "Where have you been to? How did you get collared in the wood? Why didn't you come back sooner?"

Jack Grey made no reply.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Somerton curiously.

"I must go indoors!" said Grey dully. "I must go indoors!"

"By gum!" exclaimed Goodwin. "The lad's strange!"

And he certainly was. The juniors could not make it out, and they looked at Jack very straight. Watson took him by the shoulder and shook him.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked bluntly.

"You must not hinder me," said Jack Grey. "I must go indoors. Please do not try to stop me. Thank you—I want to pass!"

This dull, listless mode of speech was so unlike the real Jack, that the fellows stared at him in amazement. They could see that he really was Jack Grey. But he was not himself.

"Hold on!" said De Valerie. "Before you pass, my son, we want to ask a few questions. Why didn't you come before? And what's wrong with you? What's the idea of talking like a giddy parrot? Don't you know that we've been worried about you?"

"I must go indoors!" said Jack Grey listlessly.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Tommy Watson. "What's wrong with him?"

"Dear boy, I cannot imagine!" murmured Sir Montie. "The dear fellow is not a bit like himself—he isn't, really. Jack—I say, Jack! Pray cease to be so frightfully peculiar!"

Jack Grey did not even answer. He pushed on, and walked through the open window into the juniors' study. And the fellows did not stop him, for they could see that it was quite useless to question him any further.

"Better go in after him," said Watson.

"I don't see why we should!" exclaimed De Valerie. "I vote we go straight on to the wood, and see what's going on. It's ten to one that Jack will go straight to bed."

"But why did he speak so queerly?"

"I've got it!" said Watson. "He's still under the influence of some kind of drug, and doesn't exactly know where he is. He won't be right until he's had a sleep. Well, thank goodness he got back safe and sound."

And the juniors, without thinking much more, proceeded on their way across the Triangle towards the school wall. Little did

they realise what a frightful mission Jack Grey was on!

And, in the meantime, Reginald Pitt was chatting with Archie Glenthorne in Nelson Lee's bedroom. Yung Ching was lying fast asleep in his bed—serenely indifferent to all the commotion that was going on—the commotion that was being caused solely on his account.

"I wish I knew what has happened to Jack," said Pitt anxiously. "If I hadn't given my word to Mr. Lee, I'd be out with those other chaps. But I can't leave—I've got to look after Ching. It's awful, Archie."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Not only awful, dear old lad, but decidedly beyond the limit. In other words, dashed poisonous!"

"It's jolly decent of you to come in here and keep me company——"

"I mean to say, don't mench!" interrupted Archie. "Pray don't be so ridic., darling! Only too jolly pleased to be of assis.! Absolutely! And if there's any foul work to be done, rely on me! Absolutely!"

"Foul work?"

"Fighting, and so forth!" explained Archie. "I'm ready to rally round at the old bugle call! Just sound the old tootle, and Archie's there! Rallying round like the very deuce, and what not!"

Pitt grinned.

"Well, that's a comfort," he said. "But I can't help thinking of Jack all the time. What happened to him? How was he spirited away like that? It's so mysterious that I can't think clearly——"

"The old brain refuses to perform, what?"

"Yes."

"The works are somewhat sluggish, and so forth?" asked Archie.

"Something like that."

"I mean to say, large consignments of sympathy," said Archie, stretching out his pyjamaed legs and adjusting his monocle. "Absolutely! I know the feeling, old walnut! Every time! A most frightful feeling, too. I generally get it when there's a lot of thinking to be done. The old cogs run most deucedly stiff, and a fearful amount of oil is required. The bally trouble seems to be that no amount of lubrication seems to make any diff."

Pitt grinned again.

"All right, Archie—your works are pretty good," he said. "You're not so sluggish as you make out——"

Pitt broke off abruptly, for just then the door opened slowly. There was a small light in the room—an electric table standard lamp, with a heavy shade. It cast a light just where Pitt and Archie were sitting, but all the rest of the apartment was in gloom.

The door opened wider—and Jack Grey entered.

Pitt sprang to his feet.

"Jack!" he exclaimed joyfully.

"Gadzooks!" muttered Archie. "Considerable yells of relief, and all that!"

Pitt dashed across the room, seized Jack Grey, and pulled him further in. But Jack Grey did not respond. It would naturally be supposed that the two juniors would clasp hands and greet one another warmly.

But all the warmth was on Pitt's side.

Jack Grey remained cold and indifferent. He seemed irritated, in fact, by Pitt's fervent clasp. He shook himself free.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Reggie, with sudden alarm.

"This is Yung Ching's room," said Jack, looking round. "Yes, yes! I have not made a mistake. And Yung Ching is there! Yung Ching is in bed—still and quiet! Good! It will be easy!"

The two juniors stared.

"Easy?" repeated Pitt. "What do you mean?"

"It will be very easy!" murmured Jack Grey.

"I mean so say, deucedly peculiar!" observed Archie. "Dear old tulip, pray cease this rot! A frightful amount of worry, don't you know! The dear laddie is most dashed pleased to see you—and yet you don't do the old reciprocating stuff. Absolutely not!"

"I can't make out what's the matter with him," said Reggie uneasily. "He's not himself at all. Jack—Jack! Why the dickens don't you behave properly? Where have you been all this time?"

"Yung Ching is there!" muttered Jack Grey, turning towards the bed. "Yes, I can see him. He is there!"

"Of course he's there, you duffer," said Pitt. "You only need half an eye to see that. But that's no reason why you should keep talking about it. Ching's fast asleep, and doesn't know anything. The best thing to do is to let him sleep. Did Mr. Lee find you?"

Jack didn't answer, but walked across the room to Ching's bedside. How was it possible for Pitt and Archie to realise what was about to happen next? How could they know that Grey had his hand upon the dagger in his pocket—and that Fu Chow's evil will was still holding full sway over Jack's mind?

Whether it was instinct, or pure luck, Pitt could never afterwards say, but he moved with Jack towards the Chinese boy's bed. Perhaps his action was prompted by his study chum's extraordinary behaviour, and his queer, listless speech and manner. At all events, Pitt was near by.

And then, without a second's warning, Jack Grey uttered a gasping cry.

And at the same second he whipped out his knife.

It flashed aloft!

"Good heavens!" shouted Reggie, frantically.

Archie Glenthorne saw, but he was so far distant that he could do nothing. The knife whizzed down, and if Pitt had been

only a foot further away the blade would have plunged into Yung Ching's heart.

But, in a flash, Pitt flung himself forward, pushed Jack's arm aside, and the knife thudded harmlessly down upon the extreme edge of the bed, to bury itself amid the blankets.

The next moment Jack and Pitt were struggling fiercely. But Grey had very little fight in him. And just as the pair were struggling in this way I dashed into the room.

One glance was sufficient to tell me that the danger was averted.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" I gasped. "It's all right?"

"Yes—but—but what does it mean?" gasped Pitt, horrified. "Jack—Jack, my chum! He tried to kill Yung Ling!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, the whole thing was frightful! Absolutely tried to dig the old dagger into the heart department! Most shocking business, old lad!"

"But he didn't—"

"No, of course not," said Pitt. "I stopped him just in time!"

Jack had ceased struggling by now, and Pitt held him firmly.

"Jack—Jack!" he gasped. "Why did you do it?"

"I—I—want to sleep!" muttered Jack Grey dully.

"He didn't do it—he couldn't help himself, Reggie," I said. "It wasn't his will that was working—it was Fu Chow's!"

"Fu Chow's!" repeated Pitt, staring.

"Yes—that foul rotter hypnotised him, or something," I said tensely. "He made him come up to the school, and told him to get into this room and stab Yung Ching to the heart!"

"He nearly succeeded, too!" said Pitt shakily.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "That is to say, most dashed near the knuckle, as it were. But Reggie was on the old spot. Zing! The old knife whizzed down, like a butcher doing a jazz with the old sirloin. And then Reggie butted in and sliced up the blankets. Frightful destruction, but better than making a bally hole in Chingy!"

"But, I can't understand it," went on Pitt. "How on earth could Fu Chow do a thing like that?"

"It's no good asking how," I said grimly.

"He did it. You've seen proof of that, haven't you? You know that Jack wouldn't try to murder Ching. When he wakes up he won't know anything about it—he won't know a single thing. And it's up to us to keep it absolutely quiet. Jack must never know anything about this affair, or he'd worry himself off his head!"

"You're right," said Pitt. "I sha'n't say anything."

"Trust me, laddies!" said Archie. "The old secret is locked up. Positively embedded on the plates of memory, but

there it remains. Absolutely! Trust me, and Archie won't do the splitting stuff."

"Good!" said Pitt. "I know we can trust you, Archie. But—but it's terrible all the same!"

"Just wait until you hear what's been happening," I went on. "I'd never have believed that such things could take place in England. The gov'nor and I came rushing up to stop things, but Mr. Lee was detained, talking to a couple of Scotland Yard men. He left me to rush up here."

"And you're too late!" said Pitt.

"I should have been," I admitted. "Thank goodness you were on the alert, Pitt. What made you suspect?"

"Well, I didn't suspect," replied Reggie. "I was jolly anxious about Jack, and then I saw him pull that knife out—and I just stopped him in time."

"Well, we're getting near to the end of things now," I said fervently. "Thank goodness for that! I think Fu Chow will be collared to-night—and then things will be quiet."

But the adventures of the night were not yet over.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT IN THE WOOD.



NELSON LEE came to a halt in the lane as he saw a number of boys coming down towards him. They were Tommy Watson, Montie, and the others. They had paused for

a while after I had left them—for, of course, I had questioned them regarding Jack Grey before dashing into the school.

"My hat!" muttered Watson. "It's Mr. Lee!"

Nelson Lee came up after a moment, and regarded the boys curiously.

"Dear me!" he said. "What does this mean, boys?"

"We—we—"

"That is to say, sir, we came—"

"Begad! Pray be reasonable, sir—"

"I think one of you had better speak," interrupted Mr. Lee. "What are you doing out here in the middle of the night, fully dressed?"

"We—we wanted to find out what had become of Christine and those other chaps, sir," said De Valerie. "We couldn't sleep, sir, and we thought we might come in useful."

"Oh, indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "Well, boys, I don't know exactly what to do. You had no right to—"

He paused, for at that moment I came tearing down the lane.

"Well, Nipper?" exclaimed Lee sharply.

"All serene, sir!" I exclaimed.

That was sufficient—there was no need for me to go into details—for these other

fellows need never know why Jack Grey had gone to the school, or what had happened there. Nelson Lee did not even question me.

"Good!" he said. "Well, now we can see about the rest of the work. By the way, Nipper, what about Grey?" he added, as though his first query had had nothing to do with Grey.

"He's gone to bed, sir."

"Ah, splendid—he will be all right in the morning."

"What was wrong with him, sir?" asked De Valerie curiously. "We couldn't make him out—he wouldn't tell us anything, and he seemed almost as though he were under the influence of some drug or something."

"Possibly that was the explanation," said Nelson Lee vaguely. "A good sleep will put him right. I'm sure I don't know whether you boys ought to come—in fact, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot permit any such thing."

"Oh, sir!"

"I cannot allow you to undergo any unnecessary dangers," went on Lee. "Therefore, lads, you will go back to bed at once—and remain in bed."

The juniors were very crestfallen. But there was no help for it. Under no circumstances could Nelson Lee allow them to go into the wood while Fu Chow's men were at large. Indeed, it might even be unsafe for them to remain out here. But, under all the circumstances, Nelson Lee could not very well be severe with them. In a way, they had helped.

But I, of course, accompanied Nelson Lee back to Bellton Wood. Just at the corner we paused, and there we were joined by Detective-Sergeant Melrose, of Scotland Yard. And soon after that I got a big surprise. For who should come striding across the adjoining meadow but Chief Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D.

"Why, hallo!" I said. "I didn't know you were down here, Mr. Lennard!"

"Wonderful!" said the Chief Inspector. "So there are some things you don't know, young 'un? And it's just like your infernal cheek to be out of bed at this time of night. What's this—a ragtime school? I thought junior boys were supposed to be in bed—"

"Here, come off it!" I protested. "None of that stuff, Mr. Lennard. I've been helping the guv'nor—and you know it! But, as far as I can see, you've done just about nothing!"

The Scotland Yard man chuckled.

"Well, I mustn't grumble—I asked for it!" he said. "But you're wrong, Nipper. I've been doing some very useful work. To be exact, our excellent friend, Mr. Fu Chow, is no longer in the land of the free."

"You've captured him!" I shouted.

"Exactly," said Lennard. "I'll admit that Mr. Lee gave us the tip, and we remained on the alert. Fu Chow tried to escape, but he was just a little bit too slow.

We've got him—and we'll hold him until he's deported to China. Once there it won't be many days before his head rests in a basket—and his body in another basket. They're pretty severe in China!"

"He deserves something worse than that," I said grimly. "A quick death is too good for him. But it's jolly good news to hear that he's collared. What about his men?"

"Oh, they're scattered—but we're roping them in," said the Chief Inspector. "At the present moment my chaps are trying to locate that tree. I understand there are three boys still imprisoned up there, Lee?"

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "We'll go to the spot at once."

And, without wasting any more time, we hurried into the wood and made our way towards the great tree, at the top of which Christine and Co. were prisoners.

Unknown to us, a little drama was being enacted up there, in the tree tops, of which we knew nothing until afterwards.

Christine and Yorke and Talmadge had recovered—they were, in fact, quite on the alert. But escape for them was impossible, since they were bound hand and foot. I had escaped this treatment, because my captors had thought that I was still drugged.

The Chinamen had taken Christine and Co. prisoners because they were afraid to let them go—and it was only necessary to hold them just for these few hours. They were placed at the rear of the little arbour on the platform, which was swaying gently as the wind stirred the tree top.

In front, two Chinamen were on guard. They had received no word of warning from Fu Chow—who had fled for his own safety—only to be captured, as I have already related.

"This is awful!" Bob Christine was saying. "We can't escape, you chaps, and goodness only knows what the end of us will be."

"But why are we here?" asked Yorke, for the hundredth time. "And why should we be collared by Chinamen? It's—it's uncanny! It's the most amazing thing I've ever heard of, you know!"

Of course, Christine and Co. knew very little about the affairs of Yung Ching, and, consequently, their capture by Fu Chow's men had come as a great shock. In the wood they had encountered six Chinamen, and their battle against the yellow fiends of Fu Chow had been a brief affair.

They had soon been overcome, and rendered helpless. In a very short time they had been unconscious, and hoisted up to the treetop. And there they had remained ever since.

"I know Mr. Lee's on the job somewhere—and so is Nipper," said Talmadge. "I heard Nipper's voice not long ago. But it's all so strange. What are they doing in the wood?"

"I expect they came here to look for us," said Christine. "Why, hallo! I say,

you chaps, things are going to be exciting, by the look of it."

There was every reason for his remark, for just then, and without any warning a Chinaman came swiftly up over the edge of the platform. He was a fairly big fellow and he was on the platform before the henchman of Fu Chow could realise it. And he was swiftly followed by two others.

These three fresh arrivals lost no time.

They commenced fighting on the spot.

Fu Chow's men yelped with terror, but there was no escape for them. Christine and Co. didn't know the reason for this scrap, but they watched with bated breath. As a matter of fact, the newcomers were Yung Ching's guardians—the three Chinamen who had been watching over him since he arrived at St. Frank's. On more than one occasion they had saved him. But of late they had been completely subdued by Fu Chow's overwhelming forces.

Now, however, their turn had come.

And they took advantage of it to the full. On the top of that platform a tremendous battle took place. With these five Chinamen fighting there—and the three juniors at the rear—the platform was carrying a load which it could hardly stand. It was constructed, one must remember, on the topmost branches of a tree, and the moving figures of the fighters caused the platform to sway giddily.

Christine and Co. were hurled this way and that, and they clung to anything possible—and this was difficult, for they were bound. The platform reeled from side to side, creaking, groaning, and protesting.

On the ground, Nelson Lee, Chief-Inspector Lennard, Melrose and I stood—staring upwards, and listening to the pandemonium. The yelps of the Chinamen came down to us.

For this fight could end in only one way.

Fu Chow's men had no chance. They tried to save themselves by using knives, but it was useless. The first one received a blow in the chest which sent him staggering over the edge of the platform. He came crashing down to the ground—to fall in a huddled heap.

He had met a fate that he had deserved.

A moment later the second man came toppling off his perch. He was more fortunate, for he was caught by one of the higher branches, and hung there. But his enemies were relentless. They came swarming down after him. Fu Chow's man, screaming with terror, swung down, branch by branch, squealing.

He arrived on the ground in a heap, jumped to his feet, and was just in time to be neatly captured by the Chief Inspector and the sergeant.

By this time I was swarming up the tree for all I was worth. But I saw no sign of the three Chinamen who had started this last fight. They had scrambled into another tree, and had vanished in that mysterious

way for which they were famous. They had done something to help—but, as guardians of Yung Ching, I did not think they were highly successful. They certainly had had big odds to fight against, but I didn't believe in them much.

Panting and breathless, I reached the topmost platform, and crawled over. Christine gave a yell as I appeared.

"Hurrah!" he roared. "It's Nipper!"

"The one and only!" I grinned. "It's all serene, my sons!"

"Thank goodness!" gasped Talmadge. "I thought we were going to be tortured, and murdered, and all sorts of things! Oh, my hat! I shall be jolly pleased to get these ropes off!"

It was not long before Christine and Co. were freed. They followed me down the tree. Rather to my surprise, I found Nelson Lee was there alone. The Scotland Yard men had gone. Perhaps the gov'nor did not want the College House juniors to know the full facts—so I said nothing.

"Well, my boys, I am pleased to find that you've come to no real harm," said Nelson Lee, as he shook their hands. "You have had an exciting time—and a rather terrifying experience. Take my advice, and try to forget it. You won't do any good by talking about the affair to the other boys to-morrow. Indeed, I should like you to promise me that you will not do so."

"But why, sir?" asked Christine. "What does it all mean?"

The gov'nor realised it was up to him to make some explanation.

"It means, Christine, that Yung Ching—the Chinese boy in the Ancient House—has a number of very determined enemies. Quite accidentally you became involved in an affair which was planned for to-night. That is all you need know."

"And is Yung Ching safe, sir?" asked Yorke.

"Quite safe," replied Nelson Lee. "And he will not be menaced any further. For these Chinese enemies have been captured and taken away. Indeed, there will be no further attempts on his life—and from now onwards everything will go along smoothly."

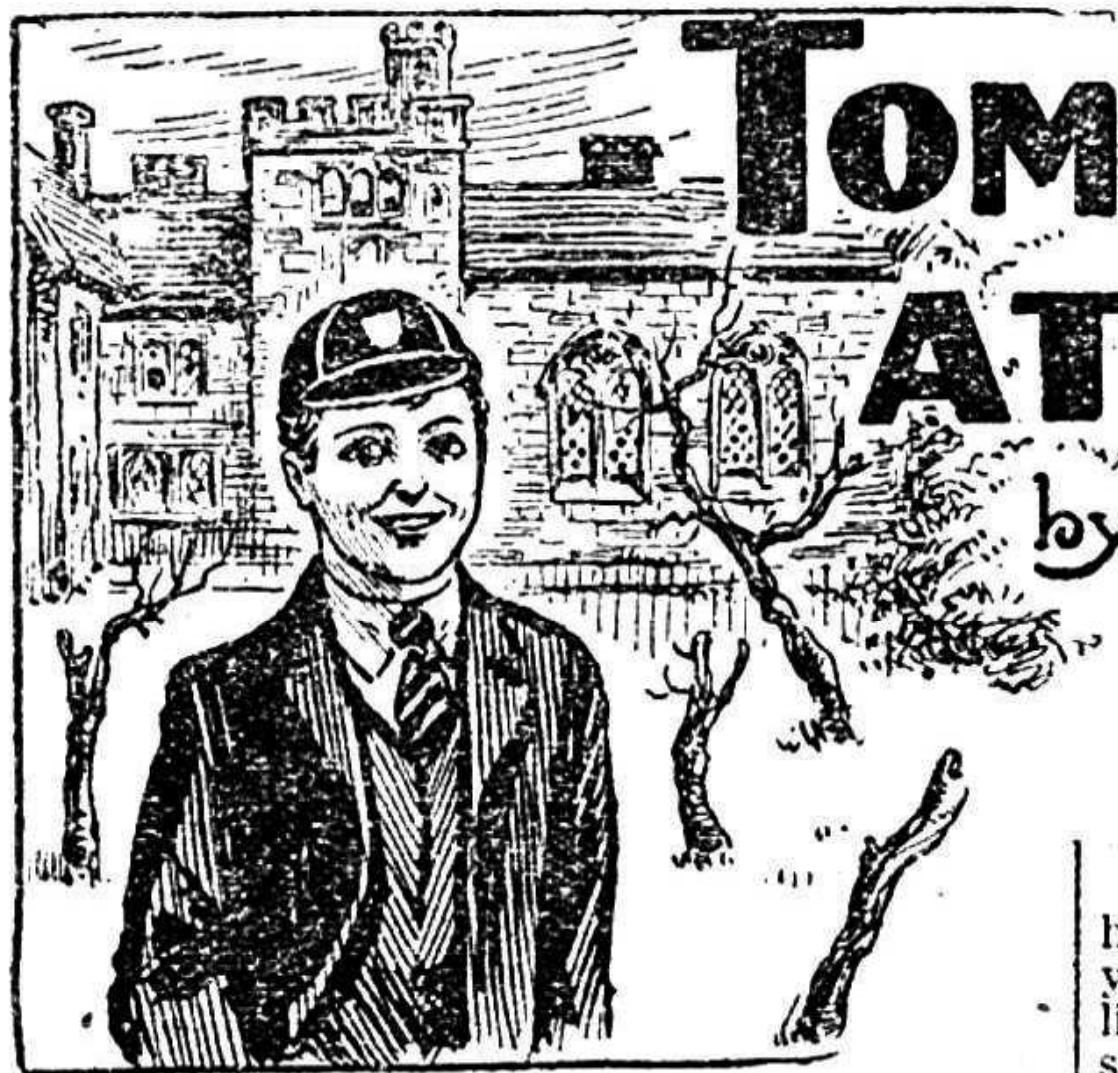
And so, it seemed, the excitements and perils were over.

And Nelson Lee came to the conclusion that no further risks could be taken. Things had become too hot, and Yung Ching would have to leave.

He did leave—but not in the way that we supposed!

For the climax was near at hand—and it was to be a climax which took us all completely by surprise, and which was to lead to adventures so startling and novel that we could not even guess of them in our wildest dreams. They were adventures which would take us to the tropics—to a desert island! In fact, we were shortly in for a very, very wonderful time.

THE END.



TOM TARTAR AT SCHOOL

by **HARCOURT BURRAGE**

(The World's Most Famous
School Story).

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Foster Moore, the rascally tutor of Wrasper's School, who has ruined Mr. Wrasper, the Head, in order to step into his shoes, may well rue the day that Tom Tartar came to the school. Tom, who stands for all that's best in a British lad, is the prime mover in the unmasking of Moore, of which you will read in the approaching climax that will bring this splendid yarn to a fitting conclusion.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER LIX.

The Tragedy in the Wood.

"I am poor," he said, "and penniless. Where am I to go to?"

"I would help you if I could," replied Mr. Wrasper; "but I am not strong enough to stand in the path of justice and stop her on her way. Believe me, there is little time to lose."

"And my boy," groaned Moore. "May I leave him here?"

"Does the man who destroys the parent viper, take the young to his bosom?" asked Mr. Wrasper. "No, not if he is wise. Jonah must leave this school. Your tool and accomplice in many crimes, Powner, has for a time, evaded the officers of the law. But he cannot long do so. The net to capture him has been widened, strengthened, and spread around. He can't keep out of it many days longer."

"I will go," said Foster Moore, "and Jonah must go back to his mother."

"I will send him there," replied Mr. Wrasper, "for I have only pity for him. It was natural, I suppose, that he should listen to the teachings of his father, and I do not for a moment suppose that he is in *all* your secrets."

Foster Moore arose from his seat in a stiff-ointed way, and took his hat from the table.

"To go as I am?" he said.

"You will find a small portmanteau in the hall," replied Mr. Wrasper, "ready packed for you. There are a few necessities in it—and a little money—but not much, as I have none to spare. My losses in your false company cannot be repaired by you. I must try to remedy my own mistaken past myself. Thanks to Tartar's father, I shall not be without a little ready money, he having kindly advanced me some."

"Tartar—always Tartar!" exclaimed Foster Moore, a flash of the old evil spirit in his eyes. "My bane—my curse!"

With an indescribable gesture full of anguish and despair, the wretched man half-staggered across the room towards the door.

Tom stood aside to let him pass, and when they were near each other Moore raised his hand as if to strike the boy down. But Tom never flinched. His eyes were fixed steadily on those of the broken man, and made him pause. He dropped his arm, and reeled from the room, leaving the door open. Tom saw him snatch up the small portmanteau prepared for him, straighten himself with an effort, and leave the house.

Then Tom and Mr. Wrasper went to the window, and saw him hurry across to the outer gate.

"He is gone," said Mr. Wrasper, with a sigh of relief. "In letting him go, I have obeyed the pleadings of my wife, and such poor, feeble promptings of humanity as I have in my heart. By the end of the week, he will either be safely away or in the hands of justice. But, promise me, Tartar, not to say anything about this for the present."

"I promise, sir," said Tom.

Unconscious of what had happened, Jonah Worrey ate his usual gluttonous tea.

When the meal was finished, Mr. Wrasper told him to go to the study.

"What for?" was the surly inquiry. "Who wants me?"

"Don't ask questions, but go to the study at once," said Mr. Wrasper quietly but firmly.

Jonah seemed disposed to disobey, but, changing his mind, did as he was told. Then Mr. Wrasper followed him to the study.

Little did any of the boys—with the exception of Tom—suspect that Jonah Worrey was

going from the school that very night never to return.

But it was so.

The interview between Jonah and Mr. Wrasper was a painful one, but the now reinstated headmaster softened the revelations he had to make, and so lightened the blow.

On the whole, however, Jonah was not sorry he was going; nor was he much affected by his father's disgrace.

Mr. Wrasper got him out of the house without being observed, and sent him up to London by the night train.

It would be a great change for Jonah, for his mother was in poor circumstances, and would probably have great difficulty in maintaining him until he was old enough to earn his own living.

Tom was appointed monitor of his dormitory before he went to bed, and signalled his first night of office by doing away with the "bolting-in," which had hitherto been practised on all the occupants but himself.

Next morning the absence of Foster Moore and Jonah Worry was soon noticed, and, as might be expected, all sorts of wild rumours were afloat.

Tom kept his promise to Mr. Wrasper, and said nothing. Even to his chums he was mum on the subject, and when they learned that he had a good reason for maintaining secrecy, they forbore to pester him with questions.

Just after morning school had commenced, a labouring man arrived with a message from Rosy Ralph's old nurse.

She wanted Tom to go down to the cottage without delay. The sick boy did nothing but ask for Tom, and the nurse thought it might do Ralph good if his whim was acceded to.

Mr. Wrasper felt that he would like Tom to go, but not without a companion or two. Being fully aware who Tom's particular chums were, he decided to send Sam Smith and McLara with him.

"Go and see this poor boy," said Mr. Wrasper, "and, if you can do any good by remaining, stay with him until twelve o'clock."

The boys set out, and a brisk walk brought them to the cottage. They found the door open, and the old nurse sitting on a chair, wringing her hands.

Ralph was not there!

"Oh, and I'd only just turned my back for a minute and he was gone!" she said.

"Where?" asked Tom.

"Ah, that's not known to me!" she sobbed. All night long he kept talking about his feyther, and I heerd an owl hooting outside, which is a sure sign that summat is going wrong."

"I didn't know that he was strong enough to get about alone," said Tom.

"He can walk a bit in a feeble way," the old woman said; "but he's got no right to do it yet. Poor lad, he be a bit feathered in his head!"

"Light-headed," said McLara.

"Ay, light," said the old woman. "And he talked about the woods wild-like."

"We must go and look for him," said Tom.

He felt anxious about Ralph, who, he feared, was again suffering from delirium. It would never do to leave him to wander and die in the wood.

There was no time to seek help from the village, and, indeed, at that hour of the day very little help could have been got.

As the old nurse could not assist them in any way with regard to the way the boy had gone, they had to trust to their own judgment.

"You had better go to the doctor and tell him what has occurred," Tom said to the old woman. "Perhaps he may think he ought to be here when we bring Ralph back."

The last three words hung in his throat a bit. He had not very much hope of bringing Ralph back again, although he could not have clearly defined the feeling which prompted him to think so."

"Let us take the big wood first," he said.

This was the wood where many adventures had taken place. In it was the hut in which Foster Moore had passed the night previous to his attempted elopement with Miss Hatty, and there Diggles and the poacher had once been in hiding.

It was natural they should go there first, and thither they sped.

As they were running across a field that intervened between the cottage and the wood, they saw a lad hurrying in their direction.

A glance showed that it was Noddy Berrill.

He broke into a run, and they bore away a little to meet him.

"I've come down about Ralph," he said. "One of our boys says he saw him crawling through the wood yonder."

"When?" asked Tom.

"An hour ago."

"We are in search of him," said Tom.

"I'll join you," replied Noddy.

Away they went together, and on reaching the wood spread out, so as to search it like beaters in the sporting season.

"Keep within hail," said Tom; "call out to each other occasionally."

Away they went, breaking through the undergrowth, Tom eager to know the best or worst.

Cries were exchanged, and so they got on half through the wood when Tom came upon Ralph.

Not walking or crawling, but lying out straight upon the sward.

Tom uttered a cry of alarm, and the others rushed up in time to see him raise the boy's head.

"Ralph—what is the matter?" they heard him ask.

Ralph moved a little, and opening his eyes faintly said:

"Feyther did it. He say that I've been agin him all through, and ruined he. He ha' killed me now. Good-bye, Tom—it be all over with me."

"Ralph, you must not talk in that way," said Tom, with tears in his eyes.

"But I maun do so," the boy answered, "acause it be true. Feyther have killed I." He stopped for breath, and they could hear a curious bubbling in his throat. "Last night he came a hooting round the cottage, and I

heard he, but I didn't go out till morning, when I brought him food, thinking he might want it. I reckoned he'd be found in the hut here, and he were there."

Ralph paused and looked sorrowfully from one face to another.

None of the boys spoke, for their hearts were full.

Although they could not see any marks of external injury they felt sure that what Ralph said was true. His last moments were at hand.

"It can't harm feyther what I'm saying," said Ralph, "as I know there's lots o' other things out against him, and you won't say anything agin him if I ask you not to. You won't, will you?"

"No," Tom replied, huskily.

"I see him in the hut a sitting on the ground wi' his arms on his knees, and his eyes wild-like—wilder than ever I've seen 'em before. 'Feyther,' I ses. Then he looks up and ses, 'Oh! it's you—I've been hoping you'd come.'"

"Then he comes out," continued Ralph, lowering his voice a little and speaking with evident pain, "and I was holding out the bag o' food I'd brought wi' me. He takes the bag and throws it right away among the bushes. After that he ketches hold o' me and ses. 'I owe all my misfortins to you and to them as you've took up with, and I'll be even with you now.'"

Ralph stopped again and his breath came

harder. They could see that it cost him an effort to speak at all.

"Then—he beat me—and kicked me—here," motioning towards his breast, "and the pain were great, but I forgive he, and I hope that he'll never ha' to suffer for it *anywheres*. And while he was a doin' it, and cursin' me as loved him so, I see a light all about, and my dear mother's face, and I knowed that I'd been called at last.

"Don't be sorry for me," he went on softly "for I be glad to go. I'm only a poor rough boy, with no good ahint me, and sorrow anyway would ha' been my lot. Oh! Tom, don't give way so."

But Tom was completely broken down for the time, and the tears rained fast from his eyes.

The other boys had turned aside with their hands over their eyes. The pathetic face of poor Ralph was more than they could look upon.

"You've been kind to me, Tom," said Ralph, "and so's Noddy here, and others, and I know that when I'm gone you will think and talk of me kindly. I've loved you all, but it never seemed as if I did quite belong to ye, for ye be so different—with good clothes, and money, and friends—while I was only Ralph—Posh Powner's son."

"Oh, Ralph—Ralph!" was all Tom could say.

(To be continued.)

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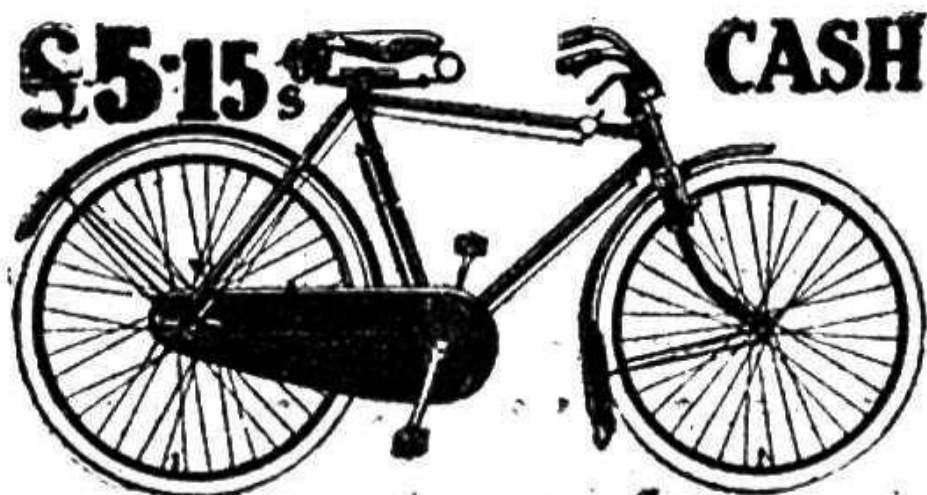
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