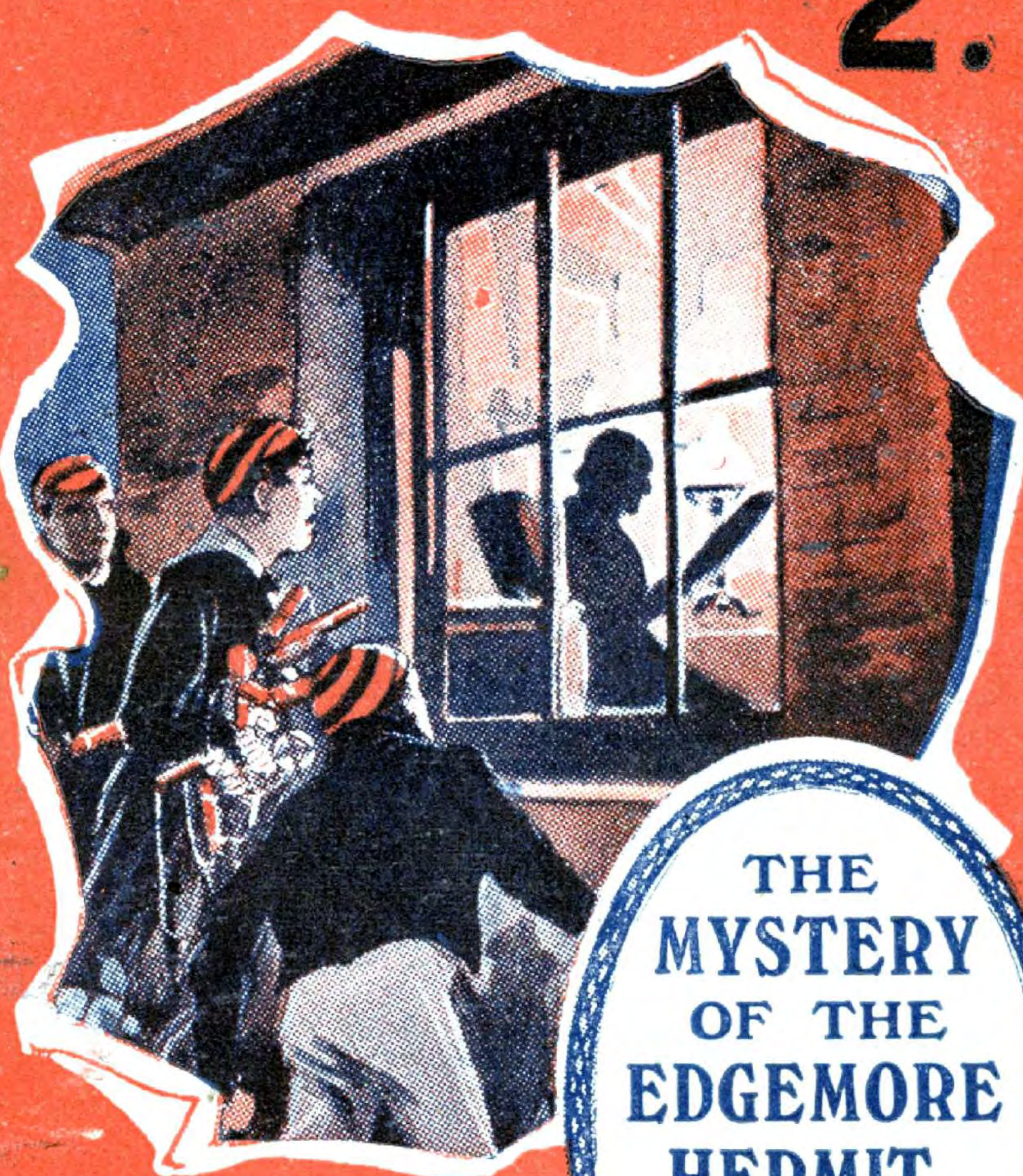


TWO MAGNIFICENT LONG STORIES OF NELSON LEE!

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**THE  
MYSTERY  
OF THE  
EDGEMORE  
HERMIT.**

This Week's Grand  
Long Complete Story  
of the "Fifth" at  
St. Frank's.





"We've got to get inside!" said Handforth grimly. "The old man's in there, and he's got to be rescued——"





# The Mystery of the Edgemore Hermit!

A lively story of the "Fifth" at St. Frank's, in which Handforth & Co. indulge in a prank in memory of Guy

Fawkes, the victim being a mysterious new character who has made himself unpopular with the juniors. But the prank assumes an unexpected and tragic turn, Handforth & Co. finding themselves in a terrible position.—  
**THE EDITOR.**

*(The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.)*

## CHAPTER I.

### PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH.

**Z** ZZZZZ—bang!

"Great Scott!" yelled Reggie Pitt. "What the dickens——"  
He broke off, and jumped about two feet into the air. Something extremely energetic was bobbing up and down at his feet, and making a fearful noise about it. Pitt dodged this way and that, and the thing seemed to follow him.

"Fathead!" said Pitt wrathfully, glaring round. "What's the idea of letting off fireworks in the Triangle?"

Owen minor, of the Third, grinned.

"Sorry!" he said, although he looked very pleased. "It was your fault, old son, for buzzing out just at that minute. You'd better steer



clear, because I've got a few Chinese crackers here—cannon crackers, too!"

Bang! Bang!!

"Yaroo!" roared Pitt, as he leapt clear.

"My hat! You—you young——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He gave chase, but Owen minor was already fleeing, and he ran like a hare round the gymnasium, and disappeared in the direction of the playing-fields. Pitt gave up the chase, breathing hard.

"Some of these kids will get into trouble if they don't look out!" he murmured grimly. "Letting off fireworks in the grounds is forbidden. But I don't suppose it can be helped, with Guy Fawkes Day so near at hand. The kids are bound to get a bit reckless."

As a matter of fact, quite a number of the Remove fellows at St. Frank's were busy with fireworks, too. The famous Fifth would soon be here, and large numbers of juniors were already spending their spare cash on fireworks. They invariably chose squibs or crackers—anything, in fact, that would make a noise. They believed in having value for their money.

It was a half-holiday, and a clear, crisp day. It was certainly ideal weather for letting off fireworks of the explosive kind. Mr. Sharpe, the village ironmonger, had been doing a roaring trade in fireworks, and bangs and hisses could be heard from all sorts of mysterious places.

Of course, there would be a big display at the school on the actual night—big set-pieces, a tremendous bonfire, a guy, and all the rest of it. Provided the evening was fine, there would be a large amount of sport, and plenty of fun.

But the juniors simply couldn't wait until then. With money in their pockets, they had to spend it on crackers and other noisy abominations. And although the letting off of fireworks in the school grounds was strictly forbidden, the masters generally winked at little crimes of this kind.

Owen minor dodged into the entrance of Little Side, and stood looking for a moment. I was at football practice with a few members of the Junior Eleven and some of the reserves. There was no important match on to-day.

"Hallo! Going strong?"

Owen minor turned round, and discovered that Willy Handforth had come up in his rear. Willy was looking full of confidence; and his pockets bulged suggestively. He grinned as Owen turned.

"All serene!" he said calmly. "I've got stacks of 'em!"

"Crackers?" asked Owen eagerly.

"Cannon crackers and jumping crackers!" replied Handforth. "You can take it from me, my lad, that we're going to make somebody jump. Where are all the other members of the gang?"

"Messing about with some gunpowder,"

replied Owen minor. "Chubby's got an idea that he can make a bomb, or something, and for the last five minutes I've been expecting to see the toolhouse go skywards, with Chubby and Juicy and a few others amid the debris."

Handforth minor chuckled.

"We'll go and see how they're getting on!" he said crisply.

Willy Handforth had only been at St. Frank's a short time, but he was already the recognised leader of the Ancient House fags. In the Third Form he was the "big noise." He had certainly startled the natives, for he had introduced all sorts of new ideas, and had proved himself to be a bunch of tremendous energy. Once Willy was fairly on the go, he needed a great deal of pulling up.

The Third was proud of him, and followed his leadership blindly. For Willy's elder brother—the great and one and only Edward Oswald—the fags had nothing but supreme contempt. They considered that Willy was about a hundred times as brainy as his major.

Yet, in many respects Willy was the very counterpart of the leader of Study D. He was always ready to punch anybody's nose without the slightest warning—and he had a right swing which was like the thrust of a steam hammer. He had the same aggressive jaw, the same glare, but when it came to a matter of ideas, Willy was all there. His schemes were sound. Handy's were generally weird and wonderful, and hopelessly impracticable.

"If those fatheads are getting up to anything dangerous, I'll soon flatten their noses!" declared Willy, as he marched towards the toolhouse. "Trying to make a bomb! Huh! Dotty idiots!"

They went round the shrubbery, and then arrived at the little wooden shed where Cuttle, the school porter, kept his brooms, and other odds and ends. The door was slightly open, but no sounds came from within.

Willy marched up, and entered.

"Hi!" howled an urgent voice. "Stand back, you blithering ass!"

"Eh?" said Willy, turning in the doorway.

"Come back! You'll be blown to bits!"

"Great pip!" gasped Owen minor, bunking like a hare.

Willy caught a vision of three scared-looking faces. They were the faces of Chubby Heath, Dicky Jones, and "Juicy" Lemon, of the Third. Obviously, they had dodged out of the way for safety.

"Come back, you ass!" gasped Heath again. "There's a bomb——"

Zzizzh! Boom!

Willy Handforth was aware of a terrific flash, a puffing, roaring explosion, and the next second he was enveloped in a tremendous cloud of acrid smoke. He staggered back, gasping and choking, and



he sat down upon the gravel with a jarring thud.

"Great pip!" he gasped wildly.

Even then, as he fought for breath, he knew that he was hardly hurt. The bomb was a failure; instead of exploding with a fearful report, it had hissed out in one long puff. And Willy had caught the full force of it, including all the smoke.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Chubby Heath. "He's—he's killed!"

"It—it was your fault!" breathed Lemon fearfully. "I told you what would happen if you made that rotten bomb!"

"Poor old Willy—he's finished!" moaned Dicky Jones.

They rushed up to Handforth minor, and bent over him. Their faces were pale, but Handforth minor's was not. It was, in fact, very similar to the face of a sweep—blackened all over, with one or two patches here and there. The three fags bent over him with tremendous concern.

Biff! Biff! Biff!

The deceased Willy acted with remarkable speed, considering that he was a corpse. His right fist shot upwards in three rapid blows, and three noses were punched in succession, and with lightning-like speed. Chubby Heath and Jones and Lemon reeled back, howling.

"That's for being funny!" said Handforth minor, sitting up.

"Why, you—you—" began Heath.

Biff!

"And that's for making a rotten bomb!" said Willy firmly. "And take that—and that! I'll show you!"

Jones and Lemon took "that" and "that," and howled afresh. And Willy was quite satisfied. He felt that due punishment had been inflicted. He calmly took Heath's handkerchief out of his pocket, and proceeded to wipe his face.

"It's all right, my sons—you needn't look scared!" he said. "I'm not going to swipe you any more. But you'd better jolly well understand that I don't stand rot of that kind. You might have killed me!"

The fags quite understood, however, that Handforth minor was very much alive. They held their noses, and gazed at him warily.

"That's my handkerchief you're using!" growled Heath.

"Well, it was your bomb!" said Willy. "And this inky smoke stuff hasn't made it any blacker! It looked like a piece of crepe before I touched it!"

"It was clean this morning!" roared Heath.

Willy handed the handkerchief back—looking something like a piece of cotton-waste which had been used for cleaning railway engines. Heath took it without a word, and put it in his pocket. It was rather unsafe to say too much to Handforth minor.

Willy was quite himself again. A mere

explosion was quite a detail, and although his face looked rather streaky, he had no intention of going indoors to wash. His collar, too, was in mourning for something.

"Come on!" said Willy briskly. "We're going on the giddy war-path!"

"Where to?" asked Owen minor.

"Oh, anywhere!"

They went off in a mob, Heath trying to explain exactly what the idea of the bomb had been. It was an experimental model, and, if successful, Chubby was to have manufactured a larger one, for the sinister purpose of tying it beneath Mr. Suncliffe's chair the next morning.

Mr. Suncliffe was the master of the Third, and he was generally acknowledged by the fags to be a beast. And the idea of tying a bomb under his chair seemed rather attractive to Chubby Heath.

But Willy put the ban on the scheme, declaring that he had a much better idea. What this was he wouldn't divulge. And the fags sallied out into the lane, and Willy came to a sudden halt.

"Gaze upon it!" he said, grinning. "Absolutely asking for trouble! Here it comes, strolling along with dainty footsteps! It's booked for trouble!"

The person disrespectfully referred to as "it," was none other than Archie Glen-thorne, of the Remove. Archie was just coming up from the village, and he was resplendent in a new tweed suit of the very latest cut and style. He swung a cane in his hand, and he felt at peace with the world. He wouldn't soon.

As he came nearer, there was no sign of any members of the enemy. He had the lane quite to himself, and he sang slightly—to use one of his own expressions. He softly hummed a tune as he strolled towards the school gateway.

And then, suddenly, something dropped down just in front of him. It was white, and seemed rather wormy in appearance. And a tiny wisp of smoke was coming from it. Archie paused, and adjusted his monocle.

"I mean to say, what?" he murmured. "Dashed queer! Why, gadzooks! The bally thing appears to be—"

Bang—bang—bang! Bang—bang—bang!

The wormy thing suddenly broke into intense life. It jumped about round Archie's feet, firing like a machine-gun. It was, of course, a jumping cracker—an extra big one, and it seemed to be filled with a deadly determination to follow Archie wherever he went.

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Archie. "This—I mean to say—this is absolutely frightful! Great Scott, and so forth! Wow! Yow! That is, yaroooh! Large assortments of the good old S.O.S.! In other words, help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sound of ribald laughter floated over the hedge. About half-a-dozen other crackers floated over the hedge, too. The



fell round Archie, and proceeded to go off. Bang—bang—bang! Bang—bang—bang!

"I mean to say, what?" panted Archie, leaping up and down like a cat on hot cinders. "Dash it all! This is positively poisonous! It appears that the lads of the village are somewhat sporty, and all that kind of rot! I mean, fireworks, etc., and this and that! Absolutely! Somewhat disturbing to the old tissues!"

The crackers continued their merry song, and by this time Archie was rather breathless. But he was free from the danger-zone, having leapt into the hedge, much to the detriment of his wonderful suit.

And he found himself gazing upon a number of grinning faces. He stared at them with growing severity, and jammed his eye-glass firmly home.

"What-ho!" he said. "That is, what-ho! So here we are, what? I mean to say, you, as it were, are the absolute young chappies who hurled the exploding material? Allow me to remark, laddies, that you are a set of somewhat foul blighters?"

"Have some more, Archie?" asked Willy calmly.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie.

"You wouldn't like a couple of squibs, for example?"

"Absolutely not, with yards of emphasis!" replied Archie hastily. "Desist, laddies! I mean to say, be good enough to shove on the old brakes! This kind of thing has positively put the old heart into a flutter. I beseech you, dear ones, cease the rough stuff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's all this?" demanded a voice from the rear. "Who the dickens do you think you're talking to, fathead?"

Archie turned round stiffly, and found that three juniors had come down the lane, and were now gazing at him as he clung to the hedge. The juniors were Edward Oswald Handforth and his faithful chums, Church and McClure.

"What?" said Archie mildly. "I mean, what?"

"Haven't you got more sense than to let jumping crackers off in the lane?" demanded Handforth, with a snort.

"But, my dear chappie, absolutely not!" said Archie. "It appears that you have been exercising the old bean in the wrong direction. The fact is, as it were, these fearful laddies in the offing got busy on the dirty work."

"Dotty?" asked Handforth. "There's nobody here except you."

Zizz—bang—bang!

A jumping-cracker sailed over the hedge, and alighted on the top of Handforth's head. Somehow or other, it got stuck there, and proceeded to explode with great rapidity. Handforth danced and roared, and dragged his cap off, and threw it on the ground. He jumped on it with great force.

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, the old headgear, what? Hardly calculated to do it a frightful amount of good, old darling!"

Willy and Co. burst through a gap in the hedge, and they stood grinning. Handforth glared at them with rising wrath.

"Hallo, old 'un!" said Willy cheerfully. "How goes it?"

"My hat!" said Handforth thickly.

"You mean your cap, I suppose?" grinned Willy.

"You—you—you——" Handforth paused, and pulled himself together. "Look here, my lad, you'd better understand straight away that I'm not putting up with any of your silly rot! You may be my young brother, but if you get cheeky I'll slaughter you!"

"Keep your hair on, Teddy!" said Handforth minor. "You don't think I take any notice of your lectures, do you? For two pins I'll drop a few crackers round you, and make you dance like a wild Dervish! You look a bit like one already, and it would be a bit funny to see you dancing!"

Handforth deliberately rolled up his sleeves.

"I don't like doing this, but it's a matter of necessity!" he said grimly. "The pater told me to take you in hand if you got a bit too saucy—so here goes! I'm going to wipe up the lane with you, and after that I'll give you a chance to apologise!"

Willy roared.

"Poor old Teddy!" he chuckled. "He thinks he can touch me! I don't want to cause trouble, so I think I'd better vanish over the landscape!"

He dodged away, and the other Third Formers accompanied him. Handforth stood there rather aghast. He apparently expected his minor to calmly wait there until the thrashing was administered. But Willy didn't see eye to eye with him, and a moment later he had vanished with the rest of his gang!

"That," observed Archie, "was rather priceless, what?"

## CHAPTER II.

### SIMON DOONE, THE HERMIT!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH rolled down his sleeves.

"All right!" he growled. "The young ass may think he's safe—but he isn't! The nerve! Talking to me like that—me, you know! ME!"

"Awful!" said Church.

"Disgraceful!" declared McClure.

"A young shrimp like that!" went on Handforth. "He's no good—he's absolutely a young rotter! I've never known him to say a sensible thing in his life, and it's a mystery to me why he was born!"

Church nodded sympathetically.



"Yes, he's a bit of a handful," he remarked. "He's an awful young beggar—"

Biff!

"Yow!" howled Church wildly. "What—what—"

"That's for calling my brother an awful young beggar!" said Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to have my minor insulted?"

Church stared.

"Why, you—you fathead!" he roared. "You called him a young rotter yourself! You said he was no good—"

"Never mind what I said!" growled Handforth. "He's my minor, and I can call him what I like! But if anybody else runs him down, I'll jolly well biff them—and quick, too! Willy may be a young bounder, but he's my brother!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure diplomatically. "As a matter of fact, Willy is a jolly smart little kid! He's got brains—he's done tremendous things in the Third. He's full of ideas, and knows how to work them out, too! A jolly brainy kid—"

Biff!

McClure staggered back, clutching at the air—then at his nose.

"What—what's that for?" he hooted.

"Sneering at me, eh?" roared Handforth. "Willy's got ideas, has he? He's a brainy kid? That means to say I'm not? I'm not standing any insults!"

Church grunted.

"There's never any pleasing you!" he growled. "If we run your minor down, you get huffy, and if we praise him up, you're just the same. In future we won't say a word!"

"Not a syllable!" said Church.

"Oh, so that's it?" said Handforth grimly. "Let me tell you this—if you ignore my minor I'll make you sit up!"

"Then what shall we do?" yelled Church.

"Oh, change the subject!" put in McClure. "We were going to the village, weren't we? Come on—let's be off! I'm fed up with this argument. It'll only lead to more trouble!"

They passed down the lane towards the village of Bellton, and at length entered the establishment presided over by Mr. Sharpe. Mr. Sharpe did not care for Handforth—with excellent reason. For Handy had caused trouble in the ironmongery shop on more than one occasion. However, Mr. Sharpe was not averse from business, and he supplied the leader of Study D with a five shilling box of fireworks—which mainly consisted of crackers and squibs and catherine wheels.

With this prize the three juniors made off, and they returned to St. Frank's by way of the towing path.

"We'll wait until dark before we fire these off," suggested Church. "There's not much sense in letting off fireworks in the daytime. They lose their value altogether."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "As soon as we get indoors I'm going to get busy."

"Indoors?" said Church.

"Yes!"

"But, my dear chap, we can't let fireworks off in the study!"

"Who said so?"

"But—but it'll be a dotty thing!" declared Church. "We shall have prefects and masters on our track in no time! And that'll mean lines! Strictly speaking, we're not allowed to have fireworks at all—"

"Do you think I care for rules?" said Handforth witheringly. "Rules and regulations, my son, were only made to be broken. And we're going to let off these fireworks in the study. We can have tea while they're going off!"

"Lovely!" said McClure. "The tea ought to taste nice!"

"H'm the fumes, you mean?" said Handforth. "I'd forgotten that. Still, we can have the tea afterwards. It would be a bit risky, I suppose, to use the crackers, and so we'll let off the catherine wheels and the Roman candles. By the way, did old Sharpe put some Roman candles in the box?"

"I didn't see any," said Church.

They paused just against a clump of willows which grew near the towing path, and Handforth proceeded to open the parcel. The fireworks were contained within a strong cardboard box, and Handforth removed the lid.

"My hat!" he said warmly. "No Roman candles!"

"Of course there are!" said McClure. "Six of them. Those long, fat things—they're Roman candles."

"Ass! They're squibs!"

"All right—have your own way!" said McClure. "But I've never seen any squibs that size in all my life! They must be an extra large variety—"

"Well, we'll soon make certain!" declared Handforth, taking out a box of matches. "We'll light one now!"

Church and McClure made no objection, and Handforth struck a match and lit the end of the firework. It smouldered lazily, but nothing else happened.

"It's a dud!" said Handforth.

"Give it a chance!" put in Church. "I know all about fireworks—they often keep you waiting like this!"

Handforth turned to him and carelessly allowed the Roman candle to point into the box. And, of course, at that very moment it started into life. A series of powerful sparks shot out.

"Hi!" roared Church. "Look out, you ass! You'll set the whole box afire!"

Handforth dropped the Roman candle with a shout, and at that very moment about half-a-dozen jumping crackers started going off. The noise was tremendous, and Handforth yelped. He was holding the box in his hands, and it seemed to him that he was not extremely safe.

He gave one wild yell, and hurled the box completely over the willow tree. A series of cracks and bangs and explosions sounded.



And Handforth glared at his chums wrathfully.

"Look what you've done now!" he snorted. "Five bob wasted!"

"Look what we've done!" gasped Church. "Why, you ass——"

"I was looking at you, and your blessed face caused all the trouble!" snapped Handforth unreasonably. "It's all very well to deny it——"

"Listen!" broke in Church, "there must be somebody there!"

There was no question about it, for, intermingled with the noises of the exploding fireworks came all sorts of shouts and angry exclamations. Church and McClure were inclined to flee, but Handforth saw no reason why he should do so. He marched round the willows, and then grinned.

An elderly man was performing what appeared to be a cakewalk, and all round him fireworks were going off. Blue and green and red stars shot out from the Roman candles, to say nothing of countless sparks.

The crackers were shooting out in every direction, and every second or two there would be a terrific burst of quick fire, like the rattle of machine guns. Squibs were hissing and exploding. And two or three pots of red and green fire were flaring up with a big amount of noise.

The elderly man was just escaping from the danger zone.

"Infernal young brats!" he stormed furiously. "Darn my bones! I'll have ye all locked up for this! Impudent young varmints—throwing fireworks at harmless folk who don't mean no harm to anybody!"

"My hat! Sorry!" said Handforth. "I didn't know you were there——"

"Didn't know—didn't know!" shouted the stranger. "I'll have the police on ye—that's what I'll do! Why, I might have been killed! Many a nervous man would have fallen down dead!"

"I've apologised once," said Handforth stiffly. "No need to make all this fuss! What about me? I've lost five shillings' worth of jolly fine fireworks. Absolutely wasted—all the whole lot! I think you might have saved a few, instead of locking on!"

The old fellow raised his stick threateningly.

"Get ye away!" he roared furiously. "I won't have none o' this talk! I'm going straight to the school, and I'm going to report ye to your Headmaster! He'll make ye sit up doing things like this."

Handforth looked rather alarmed.

"Look here, there's no need to say anything to the Head!" he said hastily. "After all, it was a pure accident, and you needn't get huffy. We chucked that box over the tree without knowing you were there."

"That's right!" said Church, hurrying forward. "It was an absolute accident,

Mr. Doone. There's no need to report us, surely?"

The man calmed down a bit.

"Oh, so ye know who I am, eh?" he demanded.

"Why, yes," said Church. "We've seen you over at Edgemore."

"Well, that won't help ye!" snapped Mr. Doone. "I'm going to make ye thoroughly understand that it won't do to go letting off fireworks on a public footpath! It's dangerous to ordinary mortals!"

He was still in a temper, although he had cooled down a good deal. And the juniors could see that he was not so old as he first looked. He was about forty or fifty, with a long beard and whiskers and heavy moustache. He had bushy eyebrows, and his skin was weather-beaten and rough.

Mr. Doone was attired in a thick reefer suit, and a slouch hat. He seemed to be some kind of a seafaring man—although what the juniors knew about him amounted to very little.

He lived in a cottage just on the outskirts of Edgemore. He had been there for close upon six months, having bought the property. And he lived absolutely alone, and the country people in the neighbourhood were already beginning to refer to him as the Edgemore hermit.

Church had seen him once or twice, and so had most of the other juniors. He sometimes went for a walk to Belliton, where he generally purchased a few odds and ends at the grocery shop.

He never received any visitors, according to what Church knew, with the exception of one youngish man who generally went over about once a week. This man was popularly supposed to be old Doone's nephew—and this was right.

Being a hermit, Mr. Simon Doone was looked upon with awe by all the village children. They seemed to regard him as some kind of ogre, and were half scared of him. Yet, probably enough, he was merely an ill-tempered old chap who had retired, and had gone to live in peace and quietness in his country cottage.

Handforth and Co. did not care for him at all.

Their first impression was by no means good, and within a few minutes they thoroughly detested the old hermit. For it chanced that two figures came strolling along the towing path from the direction of the school.

They were the figures of Dr. Stafford and Mr. Lee.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Church. "Here comes the Head."

"Eh?"

Handforth turned and whistled.

"Better bunk!" suggested McClure hurriedly. "It'll be safer——"

"Rats!" exclaimed Handforth. "I'm not bunking. If this old chap likes to get us into a row, I'll jolly well make him pay for



it. The Head can't do much, anyway, About fifty lines each, I suppose."

Mr. Simon Doone shook his stick at the boys.

"Now'll ye'll see!" he said triumphantly. "Now ye'll see!"

"All right—do your worst!" snapped Handforth.

"Oh, so that's your tone, is it?" said Mr. Doone. "All right, my lad! This has saved me the trouble of going up to the school—but it don't make any difference to you. I'll make ye suffer for this job."

He hurried forward, hobbling as though his feet hurt him. And as he approached Nelson Lee and the Head, he raised his stick again, this time pointing it in the direction of the three juniors.

"I want ye to punish these young rascals!" he shouted excitedly. "And I won't stand no nonsense, neither! They've been letting off fireworks so that folk can't walk in peace. I won't have it! Do ye hear? I won't have it!"

Dr. Stafford adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear me!" he said mildly. "Please calm yourself, sir—"

"I am calm!" shouted Mr. Doone. "These young brats have annoyed me!"

"If you have any complaint to make against the three boys, kindly do so calmly and concisely," said the Head, stiffening. "I shall be obliged if you will tell me the precise nature of your trouble."

"Fireworks, sir—fireworks!" stormed Mr. Simon Doone.

"We really need no information on that point," smiled Nelson Lee, with a glance at the smouldering remains of the fireworks. "It is quite against all the school rules for any boys to light fireworks to the annoyance of the public. Will you please tell us what happened?"

Mr. Doone did so—in a savage voice, and he added a good many embellishments. According to the way he told the story, it really seemed that Handforth and Co. deliberately attempted to set light to him with the fireworks.

The Head frowned with rising anger.

"Boys, is this true?" he asked severely.

"Well, not exactly, sir," replied Handforth. "It was absolutely an accident. The fireworks went off by mistake, and I flung them away from me—"

"Do you mean that the fireworks went off quite by accident?"

"In a way, sir."

"What do you mean—in a way?" repeated the Head sharply.

"Well, sir, I was holding a Roman candle," explained Handforth. "Of course, I didn't mean to light the other giddy fireworks with it, but it went off too quick, and in a jiffy the sparks set all the others off."

"Then you freely admit that you were lighting at least one firework?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you further admit that you threw



Willy Handforth was aware of a terrific flash, a puffing, roaring explosion, and the next second he was enveloped in a tremendous cloud of acrid smoke.

the whole box of fireworks over a tree—without knowing if any pedestrian happened to be beyond?"

"I couldn't see through the tree, sir," growled Handforth.

"You have really no excuse, my boy, and I must be severe," said the Headmaster. "It is against all rules for you to set light to fireworks upon a public footpath or highway. There is a special time and a special place for these displays. You must realise that I do not make rules in order to have them broken."

"I'll be more careful in future," said Handforth meekly.

"I think you will!" said the Head, with a grim note in his voice. "You will write me one thousand lines, Handforth, and the other boys will write five hundred lines. I shall require them by to-morrow evening."

Handforth reeled slightly.



"A—a thousand lines, sir?" he gasped.

"Yes!"

"But—but that's awful, sir!"

"That will do!" said the Head curtly.

"You must understand, Handforth, that I am making an example of you in this matter, and I trust that all the other boys will profit. I cannot allow people to be annoyed in this manner—and not only annoyed, but placed in a position of considerable danger. That will do."

"Thank—thank you, sir," said Handforth faintly.

"I trust you are satisfied, sir?" said the Head, turning to Mr. Simon Doone.

"No, no, I am not satisfied," snapped the old hermit. "I think the boys ought to have been severely flogged. You treated them with ridiculous leniency. But it is none of my business, and I won't interfere. But I have a good mind to report to the police, and—"

"I don't think you'll do that, Mr. Doone," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly.

Simon Doone gave the schoolmaster-detective a sharp look.

"This time I won't!" he growled. "But if I'm annoyed again by any of these boys I won't have no scruples!"

He shook his stick at the juniors, and then marched off, grumbling to himself.

### CHAPTER III.

#### HANDY ON THE WARPATH.



"A THOUSAND lines!" said Handforth dully.

"Five hundred lines!" exclaimed Church.

"All your fault!"

"What?"

"So it was!" agreed McClure. "We didn't tell you to light that firework here; and it was a dotty thing, anyhow, to set light to all the others! This is what comes of being so jolly careless!"

"Why, you rotters!" said Handforth stormily. "So that's the way you treat me, is it? All right, I won't do anything now! But, by Jingo! I'll jolly well make you sit up later on."

He turned away, looking thoughtful.

"I've got an idea!" he went on, after a minute. "That's why I'm not going to slaughter you on the spot! I'm going to get even with that old rotter who blabbed against us! The miserable sinner!"

"Yes, by Jove, he ought to be kicked pretty hard!" said Church wrathfully. "Speaking to the Head and getting us into a row! I'd no idea he was such an old rotter! I've got an idea, too."

But Handforth wasn't listening. He walked on towards the school, his brow puckered, and his eyes gleaming. By tea-time practically all the Remove knew of the incident, for Church and McClure had seen no reason why they should remain silent. They warned

the other fellows that old Doone had better be avoided.

Handforth was chipped considerably during the evening. A good many juniors asked how he was getting on with the thousand lines, and they wanted to know his opinion of fireworks.

"All right, my sons—you can cackle!" said Handforth darkly. "But I've got an idea! I'm going to make old Doone wish he'd never been born!"

"How?" grinned Reginald Pitt.

"How—just wait and see!" said Handforth mysteriously. "It won't take me long to show you how! Wait until the Fifth!"

"Oh, you're not going to do anything until the Fifth?" inquired De Valerie.

"I'm not saying a word about it," replied Handforth, "not a word! So you needn't waste your breath by asking me questions. But if something mysterious happens at old Doone's cottage, don't be surprised!"

"Something mysterious?" said Tommy Watson.

"Yes!"

"Oh, so you're going to do something to old Doone's cottage?" inquired Pitt. "That is interesting, anyhow—"

"How the dickens did you know anything about my plans?" said Handforth suspiciously. "You rotter! You must have been listening—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth snorted, and stalked out of the common room. He went straight to Study D, and his chums followed him. They found Handforth pacing up and down, still frowning deeply.

"What's the wheeze, Handy?" asked Church.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, but look here!" exclaimed McClure. "You can tell us, surely? We shall be in it, and you can rely on us to keep it mum!"

"Well, I don't know!" said Handforth. "Perhaps it'll be all right. I might as well let you into the wheeze. Now, it's my scheme to wait until the Fifth of November—it's only a day or two, anyhow. On Guy Fawkes night we'll creep up to old Doone's cottage, and get on the roof!"

"On the roof?"

"Exactly!"

"But what's the idea of that?"

"If you have a little patience, and listen, you'll know!" replied Handy, with a snort. "Always wanting to know things too jolly quickly! We'll get on the roof, and then we'll drop about twenty cannon crackers down old Doone's chimney. See?"

"Yes!" said Church without enthusiasm.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, not bad—"

"Not bad!" roared Handforth. "It's thundering good! We'll scare the old fellow out of his wits, and he jolly well deserves something like that for getting us into trouble! If you can think of a better idea, think of it—but I'll bet you can't!"



Church grinned.

"Your wheeze is all right, but there are one or two things you've forgotten!" he said. "For example, how do you suppose we can get on to the roof without old Doone knowing anything about it? He's a bit deaf, I believe, but that wouldn't prevent him from hearing us as we crawl over the roof. It's only a bungalow, you know, one storey, and he'd hear us in a minute. At least, he'd hear you!"

Handforth scratched his head.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that," he admitted. "I daresay you're right, in a way."

"And dropping a dozen cannon crackers down the chimney wouldn't do the place much good," added Church. "It would probably blow the whole fireplace out, and if old Doone happened to be in the way, he'd be badly hurt. Those cannon crackers are pretty powerful, you know—especially when you get a whole lot together, and they all go off at once."

"Half a minute," whispered McClure suddenly.

"Eh?" said Handy.

McClure tip-toed towards the door, grabbed the handle, and flung the door wide open. Teddy Long, of the Remove, plunged headlong into McClure's arms. He gasped and spluttered, and McClure held him firm.

"You spying little worm!" said McClure hotly.

"Oh, really!" protested Long. "I—I was just picking something up, you know—I—I dropped something—"

"And happened to bend down so that your ear came close to our keyhole!" roared Handforth, coming out, and grabbing Teddy by the scruff of the neck. "Catch hold, you chaps! We'll bump the little cad!"

"Yow! Lemme go!" howled Long. "If you touch me, I'll jolly well yell for help, you—you bullies—"

"All right—yell!" said Handforth grimly.

Teddy Long did yell—not that this helped him much. He was lifted high, and then bumped on the floor with tremendous force. Again and again he suffered this treatment, and when he was finally released, he felt sore all over, and could only just manage to crawl away.

"That's taught him a lesson!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Has it?" asked McClure. "He'll probably go along to the next passage, and listen at the first door he comes to. He's always at it, the blessed little sneak!"

"Well, never mind him now—he didn't overhear much," said Church. "We can't use this idea of Handy's, anyhow."

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't practicable—and it might be dangerous!" said Church. "It wouldn't be such a bad wheeze to have the fireworks outside—"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth.

"That's the scheme! Outside! I've just thought of it—a really stunning wheeze!"

"Good!" said McClure.

Handforth paced up and down for a few minutes in silence.

"Here we are," he said, at length. "I've got it all cut and dried now. It's a bungalow, isn't it—this cottage?"

"Yes—you've seen it plenty of times!" replied McClure. "It's a little place just a little way off the lane near Edgemore. The roof comes down so low that you can reach the gutter from the ground."

Handforth nodded.

"That's right!" he said. "Well, look here. We'll string up a lot of fireworks—but we'll use fuse instead of ordinary string, and fix the fireworks in such a manner that they're all connected up. How's that?"

"Pretty good!" said Church approvingly.

"Then we'll tie this string of fireworks all along the gutter, with a particular section hanging over the front door," grinned Handforth. "This special section will have about a dozen small Roman candles hanging down. See the idea? They'll be shooting off just as old Doone wants to come outside, and he won't be able to get past. He won't know a thing, because we sha'n't appear. He can think what he likes, but he'll never be able to prove who did it."

Church nodded.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed. "It'll be a fitting revenge, too. Old Doone asked for some trouble, and so we'll give him it. But let's hope it keeps fine. If it rains on Guy Fawkes night we shall be dished!"

For once in a way both Church and McClure were quite enthusiastic. They heartily agreed with Handforth's idea. His original suggestion had been a bit too "thick," but this one was all right.

It would be quite good to pay out the old hermit in such a fitting manner. It was, in fact, the very punishment that was needed. And Handforth and Co. had something to occupy their attention for the rest of the evening and during the next day.

The other fellows made inquiries now and again as to what scheme he had in mind, but Handforth remained very close. He wouldn't give anything away. But he certainly made it quite clear to the rest of the Remove that he was preparing something very pleasant for old Simon Doone.

The morning of the Fifth dawned brightly, with a touch of frost in the air, and every prospect of a clear evening. The juniors were relieved and glad. It so often happened that Guy Fawkes day turned out to be wet and miserable. But this was absolutely the right kind of weather for the occasion.

And the whole Remove looked anxiously forward to the evening. Handforth and Co. spent a good deal of time in their study, putting the finishing touches to their special string of fireworks.

If Handforth had been left to his own devices, the thing would probably have been



a sad failure. But Church and McClure were on hand, and although they only consented to help, they really did the whole thing.

The fireworks were so arranged that the fuses were all connected up. And they were all hung on fine metal wire, so that as they started into action, they would not fall off.

A special rapid fuse had been used, and it was arranged that the juniors should fire both ends at once, so that the fireworks would start off from two sides of the cottage.

The previous evening Church and McClure had done some scouting. They had viewed the enemy's stronghold, and they discovered that it would be a very simple matter to fix up the string of fireworks in the desired way. And there was no possibility of a mishap, because thick, damp grass grew right up the very walls of the house—untidy and uncared for. The juniors would not like to cause any damage to the property. It was, after all, only a jape.

And so, soon after tea, Handforth and Co. set out.

It was quite dusk now, and growing darker every minute. The St. Frank's celebrations would not commence for over an hour, and so there was plenty of time to get this Edgemore business over, and arrive back. Handforth and Co. hurried themselves, for they didn't want to be late.

And by the time they arrived in the outskirts of Edgemore—a tiny hamlet just over a mile from St. Frank's—the darkness had set in completely. Clouds overcast the sky, but there was no sign of rain.

The juniors came within sight of a small cottage which was set back a little way from the road. It was very dim in the gloom of night, particularly as trees grew all round. A stiffish wind was blowing, and causing the almost leafless branches to sway to and fro. Under foot, there were myriads of fallen leaves.

"Here we are!" breathed Handforth. "This is the place."

"He's at home, too!" whispered Church.

"Good! Let's creep in."

With stealthy footsteps, they entered the little gateway, but did not go up the path towards the front door. They trod in the grass, and approached the house like three black shadows.

The bungalow cottage was quite small, and in front there were only two windows, with a door in between, the cottage being double-fronted. On the left-hand side the window was dimly illuminated.

"He hasn't pulled the blind down!" said Church, softly.

"That means we shall have to be extra careful," whispered McClure. "I think you'd better stop behind, Handy——"

"Eh? Why?"

"Well, because I mean, Church and I can do it all right," said McClure. "Besides, you're so jolly sharp when it comes to keep-

ing on the watch. You're the very man for the job."

Handforth hesitated. He didn't quite realise that his chums wanted him to stay behind, because they were afraid he would give the show away. McClure had put it so neatly that he felt complimented.

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't think much of a watch is needed," said Handy, at length. "So there's no need for you to trouble. I'll come with you, and do all the fixing. You can give me a hand."

"It's a good thing the old chap's a bit deaf!" murmured Church.

They went on, until at length, they were quite close against the house. Handforth ventured to take a peep through the window. At first he could see very little, for the light was dim inside the room. A lamp was burning low on a little table, and Mr. Simon Doone was sitting in a chair with his back to the window. He was reading, and quite unaware of any coming trouble. Handforth could see the old fellow's quaint smoking cap above the top of the chair.

"It's all serene!" whispered Edward Oswald. "He's reading! My hat! He'll get a bit of a shock when these things start going off. It's a good thing the blind is up, because he'll be able to see it all."

The windows themselves were heavily barred on the outside, and it was quite impossible to effect an entrance, except by the front door, and this was probably bolted. Old Doone had eccentric ways.

Without any further ado, Handforth and Co. started their operations. These, after all, were not very elaborate. They had brought the string of fireworks all coiled up in readiness.

It was only necessary, therefore, to fix the whole collection along the gutter. And this was made extremely simple by the fact that there were metal projections every two or three feet.

The wire was hooked round these projections, and in less than ten minutes the whole thing was done, with the two ends of the fuse hanging down, one on either side of the little building.

"That's all serene!" breathed Handforth, grinning. "This, my sons, is going to be jolly rich. Just imagine it! When the old chap comes out, he'll find the whole front of the house hissing and banging and flaring red and green and violet fire! It'll make a grand show, too."

"He'll be treated to fireworks for nothing!" grinned Church. "Well, who's going to light the fuses? We shall have to be quick, because we've got to get back to the school. We don't want to miss the big show."

Handforth and McClure crept up, and less than a minute later the two ends of the fuse were ignited.

And Handforth and Co. waited.

Little did they guess what the result was to be.



CHAPTER IV.

NOT ACCORDING TO PROGRAMME!



"HERE we go!" whispered Church expectantly.

Bang! Zizzz! Bang!

The fuse, after hissing for a few moments, had got fairly on the go. A trail of sparks made its way upwards towards the gutter. And, once there, the first crackers started exploding.

And so neatly were the fireworks arranged that the display commenced at the very same second from both ends. There were small crackers at first, then jumping crackers, squibs, red fire and green fire, and all sorts of other concoctions, with a string of Roman candles in the centre, just over the door, to make a sort of grand finale.

But these Roman candles were pointing downwards, so that the fire from them would shower down upon the broad stone steps. The effect was likely to be quite interesting.

Handforth and Co. watched from the roadway, just behind some bushes, where they were not visible.

"The big crackers will be going off in a minute!" murmured Handforth. "That'll bring the old man Doone out, and then he won't be able to get back, because of the shower of fire from the giddy candles!"

Church and McClure chuckled.

And they watched with interest. For now the black evening sky was being lit up by a lurid glare, and the atmosphere was becoming filled with sundry hisses and reports. Then, suddenly, the jumping crackers started.

They were fixed, and so they couldn't jump, with the result that they banged away merrily. Then a number of cannon-crackers went off—deep, heavy reports, accompanied by brilliant flashes. And the squibs and other fiery articles were on the go.

"Great!" said Church. "Worth seeing, eh?"

"Rather!" said Handforth. "But why doesn't old Doone come out?"

There was certainly no sign of the old man, but there was nothing much in this. He was hardly to be expected yet, for only a few moments had elapsed, and quite possibly the old hermit was getting on his slippers and cap, before coming out to see what all the noise was about.

"Hallo, somebody coming!" said McClure suddenly.

They looked round, and saw two country yokels hurrying up. They were farm labourers, and they wore scared expressions as they gazed at the hermit's cottage.

"Lor' sakes, Tom, 'tis a fire!" shouted one breathlessly.

"Don't ee be silly, John!" grinned the other. "'Tis no more than them fireworks, arter all! My! But I never thought as old Mr. Doone was that there kind! Rare good they seem, too!"

"Ay, mate, an' so they do!" agreed the

other. "Hullo! What's this 'ere? Why, some o' them young gents from the big school! Ay, but I thought it was queer if Mr. Doone had done this hisself!"

The rustics had spotted Handforth and They grinned, and moved off to a spot further along the lane. They disappeared, but they were probably watching the firework display through another gap.

"That's done it!" whispered Church.

"What do you mean?"

"Those chaps saw us," said Church. "At least, they saw you. Why the dickens did you lean forward like that—"

"What does it matter, anyway?" demanded Handforth.

"Why, you chump, they're bound to speak if any inquiries are made, and then we shall be in the cart."

"Rats!" said Handy. "The men didn't recognise us; they only know we're from St. Frank's. They can't prove anything. I'm worrying about old Doone. The whole thing's going to be a frost, by the look of it! He's ignoring the show completely! Blessed rotter!"

Handforth was quite disgusted.

And there was certainly some reason for this, for old Simon Doone had taken no notice of the noise and the glare from just outside his cottage. The Roman candles were going off now. They were discharging their sparks and coloured stars with tremendous energy, shooting the fire in all directions. Not being fixed solid, they naturally acted like live things, and jolted about with tremendous vigour, pouring out sparks all the time.

And still there was no sign of old Simon Doone.

By all appearances, he was remaining indoors, and the most likely explanation was that he had fallen into a sound sleep in his easy chair, and knew nothing about the display.

This, to say the least, was certainly enough to disgust anybody.

After all the trouble that Handforth and Co. had taken, they felt distinctly disappointed. It was as though they had been swindled out of something which was rightfully theirs.

"I'm fed up!" snapped Handforth, at length. "Look here, there's still about a minute left before the display's all over. I vote we chuck some dirt at that window, and wake the old boulder up. What do you say?"

"What was that?" asked McClure, staring.

"Eh?"

"I—thought I saw something—"

McClure paused, and caught his breath in sharply. His face could easily be seen in the light from the hissing fireworks. And it seemed to his chums that he had suddenly gone very pale. There was a scared look in his eyes, and he was fairly quivering with excitement.

"What's the matter with you ass?" demanded Handforth.



"Look!" breathed McClure. "Look!"

He pointed, and both Handforth and Church gulped. Now that the dazzling glare had died down a bit, something else had become noticeable. The Roman candles were still going, but over the two windows there was no longer any live fireworks. And the window of Doone's sitting-room was no longer dimly illuminated by lamp-light.

Instead, there came from within a glare—a lurid, flickering glare!

"What—what is it?" stammered Church huskily.

"It's on fire!" shouted McClure. "Don't stand there, you asses! The place is on fire! And old Doone's in that room; he was fast asleep, and didn't know anything about it!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

For a moment Handforth and Co. stared at one another in utter dismay. They had come here upon a practical joke, and had expected to see much fun. They had had no fun, for Simon Doone had not carried out his part of the programme. And now, on the top of the disappointment came drama—startling, terrifying drama.

The bungalow was on fire!

Only for a moment or two did Handforth and Co. remain inactive. Then, with one accord, they rushed to the little gateway, burst through, pelted up to the cottage, and rushed to the window.

One glance was enough to startle them afresh.

The whole interior of the room was like a living furnace. Flames were leaping up in a great roar, and it was obvious that the fire had been going strong for two or three minutes.

Owing to the dazzling fireworks, the watchers had not been able to see this. And even as Handforth and Co. stood there, two panes of glass splintered with tremendous cracks, as the flames leapt against them.

They reeled back, too staggered to realise the awful truth.

But Handforth was the first to collect his wits together. When it came to a real emergency, Handy was quite a useful fellow. He proved it on this occasion. For he suddenly grabbed Church and McClure so tightly that they yelled.

"We've got to get inside!" said Handforth grimly. "The old man's in there, and he's got to be rescued——"

"But we can't do it!" sobbed Church. "He's dead by now!"

"Burnt up!" said McClure hoarsely.

"There's no telling; he may be in one of the other rooms!" shouted Handforth. "Perhaps he managed to crawl out."

Without saying another word, he rushed to the front door, and threw his weight against it. But the door was tightly locked, and Handforth's efforts had no perceptible result.

The other window was also barred, and it was impossible to get in that way. A reflected glare could be seen within, clearly

proving that the fire was creeping in this direction.

Handforth and Co. hurried round to the rear. There were two other windows, and these were barred in just the same way. And the back door was immovable. It was impossible to get into the house.

"Good heavens!" gasped Church. "This—this is awful!"

"You chaps do just what I say!" snapped Handforth. "I'm going to dash into Edgemore for help. One of you go to Belton like the wind, and rout out the local fire-brigade. The other will try and get some water. Buck up—quick!"

Under the circumstances, Handforth and Co. acted very promptly and commendably. They had caused this terrible catastrophe, and they were doing their very best to cope with the consequences.

Handforth fairly flew into the little hamlet, yelling at the top of his voice as he ran. He soon had plenty of people round him. He shouted out that old Doone's cottage was alight, and that help was needed, because the old hermit was lost in the house, and apparently helpless.

If Simon Doone had been conscious, he would have made his escape. But it seemed that the fire had started, and that the old man had been caught by the fumes or flames before he could get out of the room.

McClure was the first back on the scene. He had been endeavouring to get some pails of water from the nearest cottage. Church was hastening with all speed towards Belton in order to get the fire-brigade on the scene. He had little hope of succeeding, for the Belton Fire Brigade was very old-fashioned and slow. By the time it arrived at the cottage the worst would be over.

McClure had run into the two rustics who had been looking on at the fireworks. They were quite flabbergasted, and didn't know what to do. But McClure shouted to them that pails of water were required.

Just a little way beyond lay a row of cottages, and water was quickly obtained. Men, women, and children came hastening up to the hermit's bungalow in an excited crowd. They could see the glare among the trees as they approached. And as soon as they obtained a clear view, they knew that their water was useless. It had been brought for nothing.

For the cottage was now alight from wall to wall, from roof to ground. Every window was belching forth volumes of living flames, which licked towards the roof in great tongues of fire. And the sparks roared up in a vast column, to be driven among the trees by the wind.

And even then, as they watched, horrified, a portion of the roof sagged, and there was a minor crash at one corner, followed by a tremendous cloud of sparks, and an outburst of flame which roared upwards twenty or thirty feet.

"Oh, it's no good—it's no good!" groaned McClure.



"'Tain't no use bringin' this water," said one of the villagers. "'Tis like a drop in the ocean, as the saying is. 'Twouldn't be of no use. Not as we can get near the place, anyhow."

And then Handforth arrived.

He brought another following of villagers, to say nothing of an immense great pole—which Handforth had intended to use as a battering-ram for the front door.

But one look showed him that it was hopeless.

"We can't do anything, Handy!" panted McClure, coming up. "The only chance is that the old chap got out before the fire fairly started."

"If he got out he'd be here!" said Handforth dully.

"But—but he might be somewhere round the back—"

"How can he be, when all the windows and doors are locked?" demanded Handforth impatiently. "It's no good—the poor old chap was locked in his own cottage, and he was burnt alive—burnt to cinders!"

"Oh, it's terrible!"

"And we're responsible—we did it!" said Handforth remorsefully. "It's no good talking, old man—we did it!"

McClure looked scared out of his wits.

"Shall—shall we be arrested?" he asked faintly.

"Yes, I expect so!" said Handforth, in a dull voice. "Anyhow, we shall be sacked, and—and goodness knows what else! Just as if we could tell that one of the fire-works would go inside!"

"I—I can't understand it!"

"It's clear enough—a spark must have got in the room—"

"But it didn't!" interrupted McClure. "There was no glass cracked, or anything, until the fire was well alight. The window was tightly closed. It's a mystery! Absolutely a mystery!"

Handforth nodded.

"Yes, but that doesn't make any difference to us!" he muttered brokenly. "We set fire to the place, and we're responsible. Oh, my goodness! What a fool I was to start the thing at all!"

"We were all in it!" growled McClure.

"But it was my idea!" insisted Handforth. "Don't you worry, old son, I'll take the blame. It was all my wheeze, and it's only fair that I should stand the racket. If it means prison—"

"Don't, Handy—don't!" pleaded McClure. "You didn't know! How can they blame you? And Church and I will stand by you. We'll all share the blame together."

"No, we won't!" declared Handforth. "I'm absolutely responsible."

He was quite firm on the point—and this was an excellent indication of Handy's true worth. When it came to a crisis, he was ever ready to shoulder any trouble—no matter how big it might be.

He was always prepared to punch Church



"I mean to say—what?" Archie murmured. "Dashed queer! Why, gadzooks! The bally thing appears to be—"

and McClure until further orders, but, at the same time, he was so attached to them that if big trouble was in the air, his first thought was to protect them.

But this affair was the most fearful tragedy that had ever come into their lives. And it had come so swiftly—so sharply—that even now they could hardly realise what the consequences might be.

Two facts stood out in bold relief.

They had set fire to the cottage—and old Simon Doone was dead!

## CHAPTER V.

### FACING THE MUSIC!



INSPECTOR JAMESON of the Bannington police, stepped out of a Ford car, and was at once surrounded by a number of villagers.

He had just arrived on the scene of the fire—urgently called over by the local constable, who had been instructed by Church. The facts were quite simple. Old Simon Doone's cottage had caught fire, and the hermit himself had been caught in the flames and burnt alive.

It was essentially a job for the police.

Church arrived back shortly before the inspector put in an appearance. And he found things in a hopeless state. Handforth and McClure were standing in the lane, pale, shaky and remorseful.

Of the cottage there remained nothing but a smouldering mass of ruins.



The Bellton Fire Brigade, remarkably enough, had got to the scene of the disaster in really record time. This was mainly because they were all in readiness. It was Guy Fawkes night, and the chief of the brigade—one of the Bellton shopkeepers—happened to be a shrewd man. He realised that a fire on such a night as this was not only possible, but probable.

And so, at the first alarm, the brigade was ready.

When he arrived at Doone's cottage, however, he was too late to do any practical good. The roof had not fallen in entirely, but flames were spurting out from the windows and doors. The hose-pipe was turned on the cottage, and shortly afterwards the lurid glare died down.

The mass of debris steamed and smouldered, but there was no further spark. The fire had been put out, leaving a mass of sodden rubbish. The entire interior of the cottage was burnt out and gutted.

Handforth and Co. turned towards St. Frank's, sick at heart.

They didn't want to escape, but they felt that it would be better to be at the school when the trouble arrived. They knew well enough that Inspector Jameson would soon pay a visit to St. Frank's when he heard all the facts.

Handforth meant to forestall him. He would go straight to the Headmaster, and tell him the whole truth from beginning to end. It would be the best way—the only right way.

And Handforth wanted to take all the blame on his own shoulders.

In the meantime, the firework celebration at St. Frank's was going at full swing. We noticed, of course, that Handforth and Co. were absent, and wondered at it. But at that time we knew nothing of the Edgemore catastrophe. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves in the big meadow behind the Head's garden.

Dr. Stafford himself was about to join the merry throng when an urgent visitor was announced. And this visitor turned out to be one of the labourers who had witnessed the beginning of the fire.

He was excited and nearly bursting with his information.

And into the Head's startled ears he poured the whole story.

He told how he had seen three St. Frank's boys letting off fireworks at Simon Doone's cottage. They had actually placed the fireworks along the gutter, and these were going off with a tremendous amount of noise and commotion.

The Head's brow darkened as he listened.

"This is an outrage!" he declared grimly. "I have no difficulty in guessing the identity of these three boys. Only a day or two ago they annoyed Mr. Doone with their fireworks—and this, no doubt, was adopted as a measure of revenge. You can be quite sure, my man, that I will deal

with the boys very drastically when they come in."

"But—but I ain't told you all yet, sir!" gasped the villager. "You ain't give me a chance! Them boys set the cottage on fire, sir—"

"What?" shouted the Head furiously. "They set the cottage on fire?"

"Ay, they did that, sir!"

"Upon my soul!" stormed Dr. Stafford, his face becoming absolutely set. "I shall flog those boys publicly—"

"Ay, sir, an' Mr. Doone ain't been seen!" said the yokel.

The Head started, and grasped at his desk.

"Mr. Doone has—not—been—seen?" he repeated deliberately.

"That 'e ain't, sir!"

"Heavens above, man, what do you mean?" demanded the Head hoarsely. "Out with it! What do you mean?"

"The police are on the job, sir—and the firemen, and everybody!" panted the villager. "It seems as how Mr. Doone was in the cottage, and didn't have no chance to get away. Like as not he's been burnt up, sir!"

Dr. Stafford breathed hard.

"But—but this is impossible!" he muttered, pacing up and down. "Quite—quite impossible! I am overwhelmed. To think that boys from my school should set fire to this man's cottage with their insane practical joking! That is bad enough, but I will not believe that Mr. Doone has perished in the flames! It is too horrible—too awful!"

He turned to the rustic.

"You can go!" he said, his voice harsh with anxiety. "Here, my man, take this! I thank you for your information!"

The fellow pocketed a half-crown eagerly—it was really what he had come for—and hastily made his departure. And the Head, after a moment or two, rang the bell, and told Tubbs to bring Nelson Lee to his study.

Nelson Lee was outside, in the meadow, attending to some of the firework arrangements—for the schoolmaster-detective always entered heart and soul into the boys' amusements.

He came at once in response to the Head's summons, and found Dr. Stafford in a very fine state of agitation.

"Is anything wrong?" asked Nelson Lee quickly.

"I don't know—I can't believe it to be true!" murmured Dr. Stafford. "Tell me, Mr. Lee—have you noticed if there are any boys missing this evening?"

Nelson Lee thought for a moment.

"Yes, there are three," he replied. "Handforth and Church and McClure, belonging to the Remove."

The Head groaned.

"Then there can be no question about the truth of this story!" he said. "Mr. Lee, a tragedy has occurred, and the three



boys you just mentioned are involved. It will probably be a task for the police."

Nelson Lee looked very anxious.

"One of the boys has got hurt?" he asked quickly.

"No—no!" said the Head. "But they are responsible for the death of Mr. Simon Doone, of Edgemore. Listen, and I will tell you."

As rapidly as possible Dr. Stafford related the circumstances as he knew them. And Nelson Lee listened with great interest and attention. When the Head had done, Lee was looking very concerned.

"This is very serious news!" he exclaimed. "But we must not be too hasty, Dr. Stafford. It is possible that the boys will have some natural explanation. I cannot believe that they were so careless as to cause this fire in the way that the villager indicated."

"You were always optimistic, Mr. Lee, but I am afraid that your optimism is misplaced on this occasion," said the Head sadly. "The facts appear to be altogether too plain—too terribly plain."

And in the meantime Handforth and Co. were hurrying towards the school. For once they were silent. Conversation seemed superfluous. They could not speak. Their hearts were so full of misery and remorse that ordinary conversation seemed quite out of the question.

The one fact which kept dinning itself into their heads was that the old hermit of Edgemore was dead. There was no question about it. The house had been locked up—bolted and barred—and Simon Doone was inside.

He had fallen a victim to the fire before he had had time to make his escape. And this fire had been caused by the juniors. Not deliberately, but nothing could get away from the fact that they were responsible. It was too terrible for words. But, at last, just when they were nearing the school, Handforth found his voice.

"I say, yiu chaps," he muttered hoarsely. "Just a word!"

"Don't—don't talk, Handy!" groaned Church. "I can't bear it!"

"It's no good—you've got to!" said Handforth. "I want you chaps to sneak off to the celebration as soon as we get into the Triangle. Mix with the crowd, and pretend you've been there all the time."

"What for?" demanded McClure.

"Because I say so."

"We won't do it!"

"You've got to," said Handforth fiercely. "Do you hear? You've got to!"

"And what are you going to do?" asked Church.

"I shall go straight to the Head, and tell him all about it!" replied Handforth.

"I'll confess that it was my fault, and I'll make out that I did the whole thing alone. There's no reason why we should all be in it. It wouldn't be fair to you, anyway. It was my wheeze."

His chums warmed towards him.

"Good old Handy!" said Church softly. "But it won't do! We're not going to allow it! You're going to stand your part of the racket, and no more. We're all going to the Head together."

"Of course!" agreed McClure.

"You—you idiots!" snapped Handforth, seizing their arms fiercely. "You're mad! You're off your rockers! Think of—of your people! Think of everything! It's bad enough for one of us to go through the mill. There's no need for three to share the same fate!"

"All right—we'll draw straws for it!" said Church. "The one who loses—"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "I'm going to take the blame—understand? If I have any more of your piffle, I'll jolly well punch your noses!"

"Well, we're here!" said McClure, as they turned into the Triangle. "There you are—they're having the fireworks over in the meadow."

"I don't want to see 'em! I hate fireworks!" said Handforth fiercely. "Fireworks are rotten things! I don't want to see another one as long as I live! They're dangerous!"

They turned into the Triangle, and just then a figure loomed up, and resolved itself into Nelson Lee. As a matter of fact, he had been watching for them.

"So you have come back, boys?" he said quietly.

"There's—there's been an accident, sir—something terrible!" said Handforth. "I'm going straight to the Head to tell him all about it. It was my fault, sir, and I want to make that quite clear—"

"Don't take any notice of him, sir!" said Church quickly.

"We were all in it, sir!" put in McClure.

"I might as well tell you boys, that the facts are known to Dr. Stafford already," said Nelson Lee. "But I am very pleased to hear that you had decided to go straight to the Headmaster. You will follow me."

"Does—does the Head know about the fire, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Yes!"

"And about old Doone being killed, sir?"

"Yes, he does!" replied Nelson Lee. "I'm hoping, boys, that the actual truth will be different from the story which we have already heard."

"What have you heard, sir?"

"I cannot speak now, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "You must tell your story to the Headmaster and then we shall be able to judge."

And so the three juniors, unknown to all the rest of the school, followed Nelson Lee into the Head's study.

And while this was going on—this little drama, involving the safety and future of Handforth and Co.—all the other fellows in the school were keenly enjoying themselves, knowing nothing of the circumstances.



It was rather a curious position, when one comes to realise it.

"Boys!" said the Head quietly. "I have been told that you set fire to Simon Doone's cottage at Edgemore, and Mr. Doone perished amid the flames. I am not accusing you, and I am not scolding you. Before I do take any action at all, I must have more details."

"I am willing to give them, sir," said Handforth firmly.

"You must realise, boys, that this whole affair is deadly serious—so serious that I doubt if you quite realise what the consequences will be," said the Head. "However, you must tell me what took place."

Handforth tried to keep himself steady. Church and McClure made no such attempt. They were pale, shaky and utterly scared.

"It is all my fault, sir," said Handforth quietly. "It was my idea, and these chaps didn't have anything to do with it—"

"It's not true, sir," panted Church. "We're as much to blame as Handforth!"

"Rot!" snapped Handy. "Don't believe them, sir—"

"Boys, you will let Handforth speak," said the Head. "I shall easily be able to judge the actual truth when I have heard all. For his sake, and for your own sakes, remain quiet."

Church and McClure hung their heads, and remained silent.

And Handforth, in all details, told Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford precisely what had occurred. He explained how he had decided to get his own back for the incident of the other afternoon.

Then he went on to describe the planning of the fireworks and the fuss—how they had gone to the cottage and set them along the gutter. He left out no details, but told the precise truth from start to finish.

"You tell me, Handforth, that Mr. Doone was in the cottage when you first arrived?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir."

"You saw him sitting in his chair?"

"Yes, sir, but I believe he was asleep."

"You are quite sure that he was actually there?"

"Absolutely positive, sir?"

"And there's just one other point," said Lee. "You fixed these fireworks, I understand, along the gutter?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the sparks, according to what you say, were all directed downwards?"

"All of them, sir," put in Church. "There were hardly any went up into the air—they either went downwards or out-

wards. We never dreamed they'd cause any harm, because sparks from fireworks go out in no time."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Nelson Lee. "I am trying to discover how the cottage was set alight. The fire originated in the room where Doone was sitting, I think you said."

"Yes, sir, and it spread like lightning."

"And yet you tell me that the windows were all tightly closed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Handforth, are you absolutely sure of this?" asked Lee. "Think carefully, and answer truthfully. Was that window closed top and bottom—closed in such a manner that no sparks could enter?"

"Yes, sir, it was absolutely closed," said Handforth firmly.

"That's what we couldn't make out, sir," said Church. "We couldn't understand how the place got on fire. It's a mystery to us, sir. Even now we're completely in the dark."

Nelson Lee slowly stroked his chin.

"Well, boys, I cannot say anything further now," he exclaimed. "I shall probably go to the scene of this disaster before long, and then perhaps I shall be able to glean a few facts. It certainly seems very mysterious that this fire should occur so suddenly, and without your being aware of it until the flames had obtained a good hold. It is even more mysterious that Doone did not awaken and make his escape. I am hoping that the man may be alive."

"But he can't be!" sobbed Church. "There was no sign of him—and we know that he was in the house when the fire started. And all the doors were locked!"

"But are you absolutely certain that Simon Doone was alive?" asked Nelson Lee significantly. "You saw him in the chair—he was motionless. If he was asleep the exploding crackers would have awakened him—and they exploded, remember, before the fire started. Yet Simon Doone made no sign—he remained still and motionless. Was he dead or alive when you saw him in the chair? It is a point which may be of the greatest importance. I shall certainly look into the matter."

Before Nelson Lee could get any further Tubbs appeared, and announced that Inspector Jameson urgently wanted to speak to Dr. Stafford. This had been expected, and the inspector was at once admitted.

As he came in he looked at the three juniors grimly and significantly. Then he bowed to Dr. Stafford.

"Apparently, sir, you know why I have called?" he asked.

"Yes, Jameson, I do," said the Head. "Do you bring any fresh news?"

"It all depends upon what you know already, sir," replied Inspector Jameson. "According to my information, three of your boys were larking about with some fireworks at the cottage occupied by a man named Simon Doone. These fireworks set

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fire to the place, and Doone was killed in the flames."

"That's stale!" growled Handforth.

"You had better be careful, young man!" said the inspector curtly. "It is my duty, let me tell you, to make very full inquiries, and you boys may find yourselves in grave trouble."

"Never mind the boys for the moment, Inspector Jameson," said Nelson Lee. "You need not fear that they will run away. Have you made any examination of the ruins of the cottage?"

"Not yet, sir," replied the inspector. "They're too hot."

"The cottage, I understand, is absolutely burnt out?"

"Nothing but a shell left," said Jameson. "There's no question about the fact that Doone was there, and it's very doubtful if any of his remains will be recovered. The fire was so fierce that everything within the four walls was burnt to a cinder. I doubt if we shall find much there."

"Nevertheless, we can, at least, make an attempt," said Nelson Lee.

"You intend coming to the scene, sir?"

"I do!"

"And what about these boys, sir?"

"You may rest assured, inspector, that they will be kept under close guard," said Dr. Stafford. "Boys, you will be placed in the punishment room, and I hope with all my heart that it will not be necessary for the police to take you away. But you must fully understand that expulsion will follow this affair—even if nothing worse results."

Handforth nearly choked.

"I—I don't care what you do with me, sir!" he broke out. "Let the inspector take me away—it doesn't matter! But—but it's not fair on these other chaps, sir! It's a shame, sir—it was all my doing!"

"You freely confess that you were the ringleader?"

"Of course I was, sir!" said Handforth eagerly.

"He wasn't, sir—we were all in it!" shouted Church.

"I think I can safely take your word, Handforth," said Dr. Stafford. "Under the circumstances, it may not be necessary to deal quite so severely with these other boys. But I can say nothing further at the moment. I must wait until Mr. Lee has made his inquiries—and until the police have quite settled the course they intend to follow."

The Head spoke stiffly and gravely, and a cold chill seemed to descend over the room. Handforth and Co. were taken out, escorted by Lee. And soon afterwards they found themselves in the punishment room—securely locked in, so that there was no escape.

Truly, this Guy Fawkes night was one that would live in their memories for all time.

And the immediate future was terrible to contemplate.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WILLY'S APPEAL!



"RUBBISH!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, priceless piffle, and all that kind of rot! The rumour, so to speak, is fearfully ridic.—not to say prepos., and what not! Sorry, old peach, but I don't believe it. Absolutely not!"

Armstrong shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it seems true enough to me," he said. "I heard it from one of the under-gardeners. A chap from Edgemore told him only ten minutes ago."

"It's just a yarn," growled Tommy Watson.

"Begad! It must be," growled Tregellis-West. "It must, really!"

"Well, it's jolly queer that Handforth and Co. can't be found anywhere," declared Armstrong. "That's all I've got to say. They weren't here for the fireworks, and there's no sign of them. Where are they?"

"There's never any accounting for Handforth," I put in. "I'll agree that things look a bit significant regarding this yarn, but it must be exaggerated. It's even possible that Handforth and Co. started a fire at old Doone's cottage. But you know what these villagers are. They always enlarge."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Personally, old top, I positively refuse to allow the bally thing to sink upon the plates of memory. I mean to say, there's nix doing. Absolutely not!"

But even Archie had to take on a different tone very soon afterwards.

For the story got about the school like lightning. Everybody was talking about it—seniors, juniors and fags. And it was quite impossible that we should all be labouring under some misapprehension.

Finally, it got out that Handforth and Co. were in the punishment room. Then three adventurous Fifth Formers came back from Edgemore on their bikes. They had sneaked off on the quiet—and obtained information at first hand.

And it was true!

Handforth and Church and McClure had set fire to Simon Doone's cottage, and the old hermit had been burnt to cinders in the conflagration.

The police were on the spot, and Handforth and Co. were locked up previous to being carried off to the Bannington cells! It was a first-class sensation, and the whole of St. Frank's was throbbing with it.

The usual Fifth of November celebrations were forgotten. We had had the fireworks, but it generally happened that all sorts of fellows had private shows of their own afterwards. Most of these were abandoned.

And in the Triangle, in the passages, and



in the common room—everybody was talking about the stunning news. Handforth and Co. had caused the death of Simon Doone—accidentally, no doubt, but the thing was, nevertheless, deadly serious.

When the Third Form got hold of the story they wouldn't believe it at first. Willy Handforth and his immediate chums were busily making some experiments with a new patent cracker which Handforth minor had invented.

The news came just in time to avert a disaster, probably, for the crackers were never tested. Willy stared aghast when he heard the rumour.

"My major!" he exclaimed. "Set fire to a cottage and killed somebody? What absolute rot!"

"But it's true!" declared Hubbard, of the Remove, who had imparted the information.

"Teddy's a bit of a fathead, and he does all sorts of dotty things," said Handforth minor. "But he's not quite so dotty as all that. You can't kid me. Go and eat coke!"

"Why, you cheeky fag!" snapped Hubbard. "I'll twist your giddy ear!"

"Try it!" said Willy aggressively.

Hubbard didn't try it. As a matter of fact, Handforth minor could knock him out in a couple of minutes.

Although Willy didn't actually believe the news, he was, nevertheless, unsettled. And he went across the Triangle and was soon mixing with all the other fellows. And he was present when the three Fifth Formers came in with first-hand information. Willy changed completely.

His air of indifference and disbelief completely went. He knew that it was true. And he was so startled that he didn't know which way to turn. The one awful fact was that his brother was in terrible trouble.

He went out into the Triangle and stood there with clenched fists. Then his chums came round him and offered their sympathy.

"Jolly sorry, old son!" said Chubby Heath. "But, of course, your major always was a bit of a reckless fathead——"

Crash!

"Yow-yarooooch!" howled Heath, reeling back.

"Don't talk to me—and don't stand there mooning!" snapped Handforth minor, as he rubbed his knuckles. "Sorry if I hurt you, Chubby—but I felt like it. I wanted to hit something, and you were nearest!"

"You—you dotty ass!" gasped Chubby.

"I want to be alone—and I don't want any interference," went on Willy. "My major's going to be arrested, or something, and I don't know what to do. My hat! I've got it!"

Without another word he turned on his heel, and sped like a hare into the Ancient House. He raced along the passages until he came to Nelson Lee's study. He burst in like a miniature whirlwind.

But the study was dark and empty.

"Oh, rotten!" grunted Willy breathlessly.

"You wanted to see me, my lad?" asked Nelson Lee, from the rear.

Handforth minor turned and found the famous detective close behind him. Nelson Lee had just come up from the direction of the Head's quarters, and merely intended visiting his study for the purpose of getting a powerful lens, and one or two other necessary articles.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Willy. "I—I want you to help me, sir!"

"In what way, Handforth?"

"About my brother, sir," panted Willy.

"Is it true that he set fire to a cottage, and that somebody was killed?"

"As far as I know—yes."

"But it can't be really true, sir," declared Handforth minor. "I won't believe it! I'll never believe it! It's—it's too awful! You'll do all you can, sir, won't you? I want you to prove that the yarn's all rot, sir!"

Nelson Lee patted the fag on the back.

"I would like to prove that, my boy," he said. "I like your brother very much; in spite of all his faults, he is honourable, straightforward, and one of the best. I shall do everything in my power to get at the truth of this matter."

Willy grabbed Nelson Lee's arm.

"Oh, thank you, sir; you're a brick, sir!" he exclaimed huskily. "I've heard some of the details, sir, and it seems all rot, you know! I mean, it couldn't have happened, sir!"

"What do you mean, my lad?"

"Why, about the fire, sir," said Willy.

"My major only put fireworks along the gutter, and all the windows were closed. It wasn't possible for the fire to have been started by a few crackers and some Roman candles!"

"Have you any theory of your own, young man?" asked Nelson Lee curiously.

Willy looked up with his eyes shining.

"Well, it may seem an awful cheek, but I believe that something happened inside the cottage," he declared. "It was just a coincidence that the fireworks were going off at the same time. Perhaps the old chap fell in a fit, and knocked the candle over. That seems pretty likely to me, sir."

"I can see, Handforth, that you are very shrewd!" said Nelson Lee, approvingly.

"Why, do you believe that, too, sir?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, no!" said Nelson Lee. "At the same time, your suggestion has told me that you are very much on the alert. And your appeal will not be in vain, for I intend visiting Doone's cottage at once."

"Oh, that's fine, sir!" said Willy fervently. "I sha'n't be able to rest until you come back; and I know you'll bring good news, sir! I'm sure of it!"

"I sincerely trust that your optimism is well founded," said Lee.



Willy half turned, and then he hesitated. "I—I suppose I couldn't come along, sir?" he said uncertainly.

"You are quite right, Handforth minor!" replied Nelson Lee drily. "You certainly cannot come. Try not to worry, and take no notice of the wild stories which are being circulated by many of the boys."

"You—you mean about my brother going to prison, sir?"

"Yes; stories of that kind," said Lee. "There is, naturally, a big sensation over this affair, and I shall do my best to clear it up as quickly as possible, and thus avoid any scandal."

Willy went out of Nelson Lee's study looking quite cheerful. Somehow or other, the great detective's very attitude of unconcern

saw the gov'nor slipping over towards the little private gate. And I ran across to him at once, for, to tell the truth, I had been waiting for something like this.

"You are going to Edgemore, sir?" I asked breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I'll come, too, sir!"

"No, indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "I don't know that I shall give you permission——"

"Oh, come off it, gov'nor!" I protested. "I might just as well go. There's nothing to do here, except stand about, jawing. And this may be a really intricate case. I'd just love to be in it, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Come along!" he said crisply.



**"But—but I ain't told you all yet, sir!" gasped the villager. "You ain't give me a chance! Them boys set the cottage on fire, sir——"**

had made the fag quite hopeful. It seemed absolutely impossible that anything really serious could happen to Handforth and Co. while Nelson Lee was on the job.

But Lee did not delude himself.

He knew that this matter was of very deadly seriousness, and he would have to be very smart indeed if he was to save the chums of Study D from sheer disaster. As things looked at present, the case against Handforth and Co. was very complete.

They had foolishly fixed fireworks on to Simon Doone's cottage, and these fireworks had in some way ignited the little building. And old Doone, probably asleep in his easy-chair, had fallen a victim to the fumes before he could make any attempt to get out.

And so he had been trapped in the blazing furnace.

Nelson Lee lost no time in making all haste to the scene of the tragedy. He left the school quietly; but, even so, a good many fellows saw him go, and I was included among these.

I happened to be in the Triangle, and I

I knew that I should have my way, and we went off together, before any of the other fellows could gather round. And before very long we came within sight of the destroyed cottage. We went by way of the footpath to Edgemore—a short cut. And when we arrived we found crowds of villagers staring at the ruins.

It seemed that half the population from Bellton had come on the scene, in addition to the inhabitants of Edgemore. But they were held back by the police. A good many constables had come over from Bannington, and they were needed, too.

Inspector Jameson had got back to the spot, and he was busily engaged with one or two of his men raking through the debris, which had now considerably cooled. It only steamed and smouldered in one or two places.

For the most part, the ruins were sodden charred masses of soaked ash. And the police were working by the light of numerous storm lanterns, which had probably been borrowed from neighbouring cottages.

The scene, altogether, was an impressive



one, and there was a gruesome touch added to the scene by the fact that the spectators knew that the police were searching for old Doone's remains.

We could see that the roof had been burnt through in many places, although a good deal of the charred rafters had not collapsed. But the interior of the cottage was a mere shell. Everything within had been consumed in the raging flames.

Nelson Lee spoke to one of the firemen who was hovering about, and we were allowed to pass through. Inspector Jameson regarded us grimly as we approached him.

"An ugly business, sir," he remarked.

"Yes, it certainly appears to be so," said Nelson Lee. "Any discoveries yet, inspector?"

"Nothing fresh yet, Mr. Lee," replied Jameson. "And I don't suppose for a minute that we shall find anything. The poor old fellow must have been reduced to ashes in the blaze."

"By the way, have you communicated with Doone's relatives?" asked Lee.

"Yes, and there's only one, by all that I can hear," said the inspector. "A nephew, named Walter Terry, I think. I've sent a man to Bannington on purpose to bring Terry here."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You expect him soon?" he asked.

"Within an hour."

"Do you know anything about this man, Terry?"

"Well, nothing much," said Jameson. "It seems that he occasionally visited his uncle; the Edgemore folks have seen him several times in the village. I think he runs a small business in Bannington."

"Concerning old Doone himself," went on Lee. "He was a hermit, I think?"

"Well, he lived alone, if that is what you mean."

"Do you know if he had any property, or money——"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't had time to go into those matters," interrupted the inspector. "Really, Mr. Lee, I don't see that they matter. This is not a crime case. The old man was burned by the accidental firing of his cottage, for which three of your boys are responsible. I don't suppose there will be any serious case against them, although the coroner may have a few caustic remarks to make concerning the reckless use of fireworks."

"Yes, yes, quite so," said Lee thoughtfully.

The inspector moved away, and joined two of his men amid the debris.

"Do you think Handforth and Church and McClure will get into serious trouble, sir?" I asked. "I mean, will the police——"

"The three young rascals will suffer severely," put in the guv'nor grimly. "They will certainly be flogged by Dr. Stafford, but I cannot say what action the police will take. There appears to be some little excitement brewing, young'un. We will see what it is."

Inspector Jameson was talking excitedly, and he was taking something from one of the constables. It seemed that something had just been dug out of the charred, sodden mass of black rubbish which half-choked the cottage.

"Good gracious me!" said Jameson huskily. We approached him.

"The last doubt is settled, Mr. Lee," exclaimed the inspector in a hushed voice.

"You mean——"

"We have just discovered Mr. Doone's remains," said Jameson quietly.

"Oh!" I whispered.

I was rather horrified; but I need not have been. In the inspector's hands there were several blackened pieces of stuff which looked like wood. At first I was puzzled.

"Bones!" said Jameson impressively.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "This is exceedingly interesting. So you were right, Jameson. The fire all but consumed the poor old fellow. May I have a look at them?"

The inspector seemed only too pleased to get rid of the grisly relics. He handed them to the guv'nor with obvious relief.

"Upon my soul!" said Lee softly, as he examined the articles. "Very wonderful—and very instructive. You see, Nipper? These are undoubtedly human remains. Bones which have been charred and nearly burned through by the fierce intensity of the fire."

I looked at them askance.

"The bones of old Simon Doone!" I muttered. "It's—it's horrible, sir!"

"There's not a doubt that Doone was asleep when the cottage caught fire," said the inspector. "The flames caused him to lose consciousness, and he probably never knew anything about the fire. That's a good thing, anyway. The poor old man had no pain."

"Your theory also accounts for the fact that the boys heard no cry from within the cottage," said Nelson Lee. "H'm! I am very greatly interested. May I keep two of these relics for inspection, Jameson?"

"Sorry, sir, but I cannot let them go out of my possession."

"My dear man, I won't keep them," smiled Lee. "For one hour, say? I give you my word that I shall return them within an hour. Is it all right?"

"Oh, very well, Mr. Lee," said Jameson grudgingly. "But it's not in accordance with our official regulations. I trust you, sir, to let me have those bones within the space of an hour. But I can't for the life of me understand what you want with them."

"Just a little whim of mine," said the guv'nor.

While we were talking I noticed that there was a strange little gleam in Nelson Lee's eyes. And he watched with acute attention while other remains were dug out of the debris.

There was not a shadow of a doubt that these bones were human, and there was



even less of a doubt that they were the bones of poor old Simon Doone, the hermit. We moved off just as the skull was being raked out.

And Nelson Lee was smiling—grimly.

## CHAPTER VII.

### NELSON LEE SPRINGS A SURPRISE!



"GUV'NOR," I said, "you've got something up your sleeve."

"Quite so," smiled Nelson Lee—"my arm, Nipper."

"Oh, don't be funny, sir,"

I went on. "You can't kid me. I know that gleam of yours. You've discovered something, and probably got Jameson's theiry knocked into a pulp."

"Such a thing is not impossible," said Nelson Lee blandly. "However, we will see, young 'un. For the present we are going back to St. Frank's."

"Now, sir?"

"Now."

"But what for?" I demanded.

"I wish to make a few experiments in the laboratory," replied Lee briskly. "You will see why when we get there. Come along! Hurry! Jameson wants these bones back within an hour, so we have no time to waste."

We walked smartly along the dark country lane, and Lee refused to speak further. I knew better than to question him. And at length we arrived at St. Frank's, and made our way straight to the guv'nor's private laboratory.

It was by no means late even now, and the juniors were still gathered about in various parts of the school, discussing the exciting situation. Handforth and Co., of course, were in the punishment room, and the Head had taken care to place a couple of prefects on duty, so that no other juniors should go near.

Many of the juniors were quite pessimistic. They had caused the death of old Simon Doone, and this was tantamount to murder. Handforth and Co., therefore, would be hanged. De Valerie thought it wouldn't be so bad as that. It was his idea that the unfortunate juniors of Study D would be sent to prison for life, after being committed for manslaughter.

And while all this discussion was going on, Nelson Lee was busy in the laboratory. I watched him with intense interest. He put the bones through a most exhaustive test.

To begin with, he cleaned them thoroughly, after which he scraped them, and very carefully got to work with a fine saw. One of the bones he divided into two portions, and intently examined the freshly cut section.

I watched, wondering why the guv'nor was doing all this. At first glance, one would

hardly recognise these remains as human bones, for they were charred and partially burnt away, and had no actual resemblance to any well-known bone of the human body.

"What's the idea, sir?" I asked at length. "Do you believe that Jameson's made a bloomer?"

"I do," said Nelson Lee shortly.

"They're not human bones at all?"

"They are certainly human bones," said the guv'nor. "But it may interest you to know, Nipper, that these relics form part of the anatomy of an unfortunate gentleman who lived about four or five hundred years ago!"

I stared blankly.

"What—what do you mean, sir?" I asked.

"Well, my meaning is fairly clear," smiled Nelson Lee. "In the first place, the bones are not those of Simon Doone; they are not gruesome in the least bit, for they are merely the remains of an ancient skeleton which has no doubt done duty for many years in more than one school of anatomy."

"I'm blessed if I can understand it, sir!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "I know you wouldn't make a bloomer; but, at the same time, it seems jolly rummy! How could a skeleton like this get into old Doone's cottage?"

"My dear Nipper, I'm quite as mystified as you are," said Nelson Lee. "I came home because I wanted to make absolutely sure of my suspicions. I believed from the very first moment that these relics were ancient. Now I am certain. And we are going back to Doone's cottage at once, to make a few other inquiries, and possibly a few investigations. I mean to get to the bottom of the matter as soon as possible."

"But haven't you any theory, sir?"

"Yes."

"You mean that—"

"At the moment, young 'un I do not feel inclined to discuss the matter," interrupted Nelson Lee crisply. "You may come with me if you wish, but I should advise you to remain here—"

"Save your breath, guv'nor! I'm coming!" I put in.

We went off, my mind filled with all sorts of doubts and wondering problems. If these bones were not those of Simon Doone, where was the old hermit? Had he been burnt to death in the blaze? It seemed impossible that he could have escaped, for there had been no sign of him, and he had certainly been in the cottage when the fire had first started.

The whole thing was an intricate puzzle.

It was to me, at all events, although I believed that Nelson Lee had already arrived at the truth. He was now going back to make certain.

We had only been away a comparatively short time—a great deal under the hour that Inspector Jameson had stipulated. And when we arrived on the scene we found the crowds still there, and the police still in attendance.



But now they were not probing among the ruins. The bones had been recovered, and there was nothing further to look for. Inspector Jameson was not to be seen, and a constable informed us that he had been called away, but would shortly return.

So Nelson Lee produced an electric torch, and went forward into the shell of the burnt cottage, and there he commenced searching round.

He probed among the debris, but would give me no inkling as to what he was looking for. A constable had pointed out the spot where the bones had been found, and Nelson Lee paid particular attention to this place.

With a short piece of stick he carefully raked over the sodden masses of ash and rubbish. And after a while he uttered a little exclamation of satisfaction. He picked up a short, twisted piece of wire. It was almost burnt through with the heat, but still recognisable as wire.

Soon afterwards the guv'nor found one or two other pieces, and also some little blobs of metal. He carefully wrapped them up, and placed them in his pocket.

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

"Merely a little item of evidence, Nipper," replied Lee. "I think I can prove that my theory is correct. It is

hardly feasible that Mr. Doone's bones were wired together in his body!"

I whistled.

"My hat!" I grinned. "You mean that there was a skeleton in the room—one of those wired-up skeletons like they use in hospitals for teaching the students?"

"Exactly," said the guv'nor. "And here comes the worthy inspector. It is rather a pity to upset his case so completely, but these things have got to be done. No doubt the gentleman with him is Mr. Walter Terry."

We moved forward to meet the pair as they approached.

"I'm much obliged, Jameson, for the loan of these little relics," said Nelson Lee, as he handed the bones back. "You will observe that I have cleaned them, and one is now in two sections. It was just a little whim of mine to examine them with a great degree of care."

"I hope you're satisfied!" growled the inspector. "I can't see that it was necessary to go to all that trouble. This is Mr. Walter Terry—Mr. Doone's nephew."

Nelson Lee bowed.

"Allow me to extend my sympathy, sir," he said gravely.

Mr. Walter Terry was a man of about thirty-five, clean-shaven and tall and dark,

(Continued on next page.)

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He seemed rather excited and agitated, although he tried hard to keep himself well under control.

"You are one of the masters from the school, I believe?" he asked.

"That is so," replied Lee. "My name—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" interrupted Terry.

"The inspector has told me. You are Mr. Lee. I am glad to meet you, sir, and I hope that the police will take no action with regard to the three boys. As far as I can see, the affair was a lamentable accident, and I don't think there's any necessity to make a big fuss over it."

"You are very generous, Mr. Terry," said Nelson Lee. "I had been fearing that you would display a certain spirit of animosity towards the boys for causing the death of your uncle."

Mr. Terry slowly shook his head.

"I am more deeply grieved than I can say regarding my uncle's death," he exclaimed quietly. "At the same time, I should not like to be vindictive. I have heard all the details, and it seems to me that the whole matter was quite accidental. I know, of course, that the boys had no deliberate intention of setting fire to the cottage. Still less had they any idea of harming Mr. Doone."

"I quite agree that the boys were participating in what they believed to be a harmless practical joke," said Nelson Lee. "Being the Fifth of November, the youngsters planned their joke on seasonable lines."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Terry. "It was a foolish thing to do, but boys are generally thoughtless. A chance spark or two, and the place was on fire. Being old, it burned like tinder, and my uncle obviously had no chance to get out. It is horrible that he was consumed by the flames in such a way."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Exactly, Mr. Terry," he said smoothly. "At least, it would be horrible if your uncle had really perished in the way you say. But are you quite sure that Mr. Doone was in the cottage at the time of the fire?"

The man stared.

"Sure?" he repeated. "Of course I'm sure—and so is the inspector! There's no question about it—"

"Not a shadow of doubt!" put in Jameson acidly. "I must certainly remark, Mr. Lee, that you are acting in a very strange way. What is your reason for making all this fuss and bother over such a trivial, straightforward case?"

"I was not aware that I was creating any fuss and bother," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I have been merely attempting to get at the truth. Apparently, Jameson, you would prefer to see only the surface, without making the slightest attempt to probe deeper—towards the truth!"

"It seems that I should get on much better if it wasn't for the interference of

amateurs!" snapped the inspector curtly. "You will oblige me, Mr. Lee, by allowing me to conduct this matter in my own way."

Nelson Lee's eyes glinted.

"I am sorry, inspector, but I cannot agree," he said, rapping out his words with a sting. "If you force me to adopt this tone, I greatly regret it, but I have no other alternative. It seems that it is necessary for me to give you a few instructions in the way an inquiry should be conducted."

I grinned with delight, and the inspector squirmed.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated. "This is intolerable—"

"Man alive, haven't you got any wits at all?" demanded Lee curtly. "It was my intention to take you aside and give you the benefit of my investigations in private. But since you imagine me to be so ignorant, I have half a mind to let you blunder on in your own way. I would certainly do so but for the fact that justice would fail to be done."

"I don't know what you mean!" growled Jameson coldly.

"Then perhaps it will interest you to know that Mr. Simon Doone was not in the cottage when it was burnt down!" said Lee.

"Not in the cottage?" repeated the inspector. "Good gracious! What nonsense is this? We found Mr. Doone's bones—"

"You found some bones, but they happen to be two or three hundred years old!" interrupted Nelson Lee calmly. "They are, in fact, the remains of some unfortunate gentleman who lived in a previous century."

The inspector gazed at Nelson Lee blankly.

"But—but this is astounding!" he ejaculated. "Surely, Mr. Lee, you are joking?"

"I do not joke on such subjects!"

"Apparently Mr. Lee has blundered!" put in Terry rather warmly. "I agree with you, Inspector Jameson, that it is a great pity that amateurs should be allowed to interfere. Personally, I haven't the slightest doubt that my uncle died in the fire, and—"

"Considering that your uncle is non-existent—and that he has never existed at all, it is to your interest to bluff the matter out," said Nelson Lee curtly. "Inspector Jameson, I should advise you to place this man under arrest at once, pending inquiries."

"You—you infernal fool!" roared Terry, his voice harsh with alarm and anger. "You must be mad! I—I—"

"One minute!" put in the inspector. "I can see that there is more in this affair than I at first imagined. I apologise, Mr. Lee, if I was officious just now. Do you mind explaining matters?"

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "But it so happens that this gentleman with us is no less a person than Simon Doone himself!"

"What!" I yelled.



"But—but I cannot understand!" gasped the inspector.

"And yet it is quite simple!" said the gov'nor calmly. "It was rather careless of you, Terry, to leave these tell-tale hairs on your waistcoat," he added, plucking at Terry's clothing. "Apparently they fell from your false beard. You should have used a clothes brush."

"Hang you!" snarled Terry. "This is all nonsense! My uncle was killed in the fire, and these accusations are ridiculous and monstrous. Everybody knows that my uncle lived in this cottage. I visited him regularly——"

"Very clever of you!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "But, after all, it was quite a simple device. I should be very interested to find anybody in Edgemoor who can positively state that you and your uncle have been seen together. Come, come, my friend. You cannot bluff things out now. This man, Jameson, has been living in this cottage for months past as Simon Doone. I should like to get a few details as to how he worked matters, but——"

"Look out, sir!" I shouted quickly.

Terry, half-aided by the gloom, had clenched his fist behind him. But I saw the movement, and made a grab at him. His fist flashed out, and went crashing into Inspector Jameson's face.

The inspector had had no inkling of what was coming, and he went over with a grunting gasp. Terry charged forward just as Nelson Lee made a clutch at him. He wrenched himself free, and dashed across the untidy little garden.

"Quick!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Capture that man!"

There were still one or two police officers about, but most of them were near the road, keeping the crowd back, or chatting with the firemen. Terry was making for the rear of the cottage.

Beyond, there was open country—fields, with clumps of trees, and dark, friendly woods. Once he got in amongst them, all hope of capturing him would be gone. The gov'nor and I dashed away in pursuit.

The police were slow on the job, and we were yards away before they made any movement at all. Terry was running like mad, but Nelson Lee ran well, too—and was slowly overtaking the fugitive.

Jameson, by this time, had picked himself up.

He felt rather dazed, but he had wits enough left to know that he had made a very poor exhibition of himself. The very fact that Terry had fled proved beyond doubt that Nelson Lee's statement was correct.

And Jameson expended his annoyance on his subordinates.

"You helpless dolts!" he raved. "Haven't you got him?"

"He didn't come this way, sir——"

"Confound your idiocy!" roared Jameson.

"Can't you go after him? I'll make it hot for every one of you if that man gets away."

Terry was now running across a ploughed field, heavily and pantingly. He was in poor condition, and his breath was already giving out. Nelson Lee, of course, was as fresh as paint, and was now overhauling the man rapidly.

Terry saw that this was the case, as he cast a hasty glance over his shoulder. And he probably realised that he would never get away. For, suddenly, he turned, and picked up a great clod of earth.

Whizz!

It came hurtling towards us. I didn't see it in the gloom, but Nelson Lee did, and he ducked. It reminded me of one of those film comedies. The clod of earth shot past the gov'nor, and caught me in the chest with a thud.

It didn't hurt me much; but the confounded thing burst into moist fragments, and sprayed all over my face. I staggered back, and sat down in a furrow. And by the time I scrambled up, the gov'nor was grappling with Terry.

"All right, sir!" I gasped hotly. "I'll lend a hand!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### EVERYTHING O.K!



MY assistance was not required.

By the time I pelted up, grimly determined to smother Mr. Terry's face with a portion of the field, as a kind of reprisal,

he had collapsed, and Nelson Lee was kneeling on his back.

"It's all right, young 'un!" he said calmly. "I've got the fellow down."

"Rub his face in the mud, sir!" I said fiercely.

"Hang you!" snapped Terry, gulping for breath. "All right—I give in! No need to get violent. The game's up—I know it! But the police would never have got me—I fooled them right enough!"

"It is rather unfortunate for you that I came on the scene, then," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Nipper, just take a pair of handcuffs out of my side pocket. Got them? That's the idea! Now slip them over Mr. Terry's wrists. We may as well make certain of him this time."

Securely handcuffed, Terry was yanked to his feet.

And by this time Inspector Jameson and a pair of constables had come plodding over the ploughed field. They joined us, and the inspector tried to look important. Under the circumstances, his effort was not very successful.

"So that's the game, eh?" he said. "Please understand, Mr. Terry, that you are under arrest. It is my duty to detain you until inquiries have been made——"



"All right, Mr. Parrot!" growled Terry. "All you can do is to repeat Mr. Lee's words! I've got to thank him for this—not you! I had you on a piece of string all the time!"

Jameson grunted.

"Don't be too sure of that!" he snapped. "I wasn't quite satisfied with you, my man. Now, what does it all mean? So you are Simon Doone, eh? What on earth was the idea of leading a double life like that?"

"No doubt Mr. Terry insured the cottage for a nice little sum!" said Nelson Lee shrewdly. "He may even have fooled the officials of some life insurance company, too. Am I right, Terry?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the good of keeping up a bluff

"It was an infernal catastrophe! You see, I prepared for this thing in every possible way. Why, I've been working up towards it for over six months!"

"You evidently believe in doing things thoroughly," remarked Lee.

"It was the only way," said Terry. "It would have been child's play but for those fireworks, and all this fuss. Yes, I started this game right back in May, at the very beginning of the summer. I thought I could make some easy money, and got busy on the job."

"How did you set to work?"

"Well, the first thing was to make everybody believe that I had an uncle," said Terry, with a bitter laugh. "That wasn't so hard, for these people round here don't



**Terry was now running across a ploughed field, heavily and pantingly. He was in poor condition, and his breath was giving out. Nelson Lee, of course, was as fresh as paint, and was now overhauling the man rapidly.**

when there's a man like you about?" he snapped savagely. "It'll all come out, anyhow, so I may as well admit it. Yes, it's true, and I nearly put the thing over, too!"

"I am rather interested in this case, and I must admit that you were very shrewd and cunning," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps you will just give me a few details, Mr. Terry? Somehow, I cannot help admiring your cleverness."

This piece of flattery had the desired effect.

"I was clever enough for the police, anyway," said Terry boastfully. "I didn't reckon on having you against me, and it was only those confounded boys who upset the whole apple cart!"

"Exactly," said Lee. "But for them I should not have investigated this matter at all. It was rather unfortunate for you that the St. Frank's boys were mixed up in the case."

"Unfortunate!" repeated Terry gruntingly.

seem to be particularly smart. I came to Bannington on purpose, and bought a business. For a week or two I ran it in person, then got a pal down from London to look after it while I was supposed to be on other business in town. As a matter of fact, I faked myself up as an old chap, and bought this cottage, giving myself the name of Simon Doone."

"I imagine that you have been an actor at some period of your life?" asked Nelson Lee.

"I was on the road for ten years!" said Terry sourly. "I never got to the West End, although there are plenty of actors in good jobs there who can't hold a candle to me when it comes to acting!"

"I believe you!" said Nelson Lee calmly.

"Thank you!" said Terry. "The men who get to the top of the profession must have luck, and I never had any. Well, I saw no reason why I shouldn't put my experience to some good use. It was pretty



easy for me to make all the folks round here believe that Simon Doone was an elderly man, retired, and fond of a hermit's life. I pottered about most of the time, making myself genial with the villagers. But frequently at night I popped off to Bannington—and there, of course, I discarded my make-up, and became myself."

"Bless my soul!" said the inspector.

"It seems pretty intricate, but it was as simple as A.B.C.," went on Terry. "Now and again I would come over from Bannington as you see me, and I took good care to let the people in Edgemore know that I was Simon Doone's nephew. I used to go to the cottage, and if anybody happened to be passing, I'd talk loudly. Then I'd put my disguise on, and show myself in the garden. There wasn't a man or woman in Edgemore who didn't believe there were two of us all the time."

"Quite an astute dodge," said Nelson Lee. "And the motive?"

"Money, of course," said Terry. "I insured the cottage for about three times what I gave for it, the fact that I bought it at bargain price put the idea of collecting the insurance into my head. And I insured my life, too, but in the character of Doone. It was a bit of a risk, putting myself up for examination in make-up, but I fooled the insurance doctor all right. He thought I was remarkably healthy for an elderly man. Well, anyway, I got a good policy, and in the event of my death the money was to go to my nephew. It was all fixed up nicely. I got it all planned out. Without anybody being hurt or injured, I reckoned to collect about five thousand pounds."

"And what was your exact plan for the fire?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Why, I decided all along that it would be better to plan the fire for the Fifth of November," replied Terry. "You see, there would be a reason for it, because I could make suggestions to the insurance company officials. I could say that the remains of a rocket might have fallen on the cottage, and set it going. As everyone knows, there's always more danger of fire on the Fifth of November than any other night. The brigades usually hold themselves ready."

"That's true enough!" said the inspector.

"I happened to get hold of an old skeleton in London," said Terry. "I bought it at a lumber shop in the Old Kent Road district for fifteen bob. Early this evening, I made final preparations. I shut the cottage up, with all the windows closed and barred, and left a candle burning in the front room."

"The boys mentioned that a figure was sitting in the chair," said the inspector.

"There was a figure—the skeleton," said Terry. "I faked it up with its back towards the window. I propped up a newspaper, too. Anybody happening to look through the window, would say that Doone was having his evening read."

"That was quite an excellent idea," remarked the gov'nor.

"Yet in spite of all these plans, the whole thing's gone west!" said Terry bitterly. "It's enough to make a man say a few nasty things! You see, I soaked half the place with petrol and paraffin, and at the bottom of the candle I put some gunpowder, and a trail leading to a mug of petrol. When the candle burnt down it set light to the fuse, and a minute later the whole was flaring up. I reckoned that nobody would notice the fire at first—because this cottage is isolated. And everybody would believe that the place had been burning for half-an-hour after it had been first seen. And it would be too late, then, to save it. I figured that by the time the fire brigade arrived the cottage would be a heap of ruins, and even if it was examined, only a few bits of charred bones would be found. The whole thing would be set down as an accident, and I should collect the doings."

"Didn't you anticipate an inquiry?" asked Jameson.

"Of course," said Terry. "The insurance were bound to have an inquiry. But what could they find? Dozens of witnesses to say that old Doone was a cheerful, genial old chap, and that his cottage had obviously caught fire by accident. I should step forward in my own name, and asked for the insurance. I reckoned that they'd hand it over without a murmur—simply because they would have no reason for objecting. There are plenty of other details I could mention, too; but I don't reckon you'd be interested."

"You failed in your scheme, Mr. Terry, because you were just a little bit too clever," said Nelson Lee. "It would have been better, perhaps, if you had not used the skeleton. You should have known that old fossils are very different from new bones. And you were not particularly genial the other afternoon when I met you on the towing-path."

Terry scowled.

"You mean when I was made up as Doone?" he asked.

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "You were justified, perhaps, in being angry, for the boys had surrounded you with fireworks. But I was suspicious, even then. There was something about your appearance which did not fully satisfy me. I said nothing at the time, but I was resolved to keep my eye on you in the immediate future."

Terry swore.

"Yes, I've got to thank you for this mess-up!" he said sourly. "I got the police nicely trapped, but I didn't count on you butting in. Those boys, too! With their confounded fireworks! They ruined the game, too!"

"I really think you must thank the boys entirely for your present predicament," said Nelson Lee calmly. "However, it is just as well that the affair happened. You have



been prevented from perpetrating a particularly daring swindle. And it is for the police and insurance company to charge you accordingly. So far as I am concerned, I am satisfied, and I trust, Inspector Jameson, that I have been of some little service."

"Don't rub it in, Lee!" said the inspector gruffly. "You were right all along, and I don't feel particularly pleased with myself. Let's say no more about it, sir, but I'm hoping you will accept my regrets."

Lee chuckled.

"I am quite content with that," he said lightly. "I am particularly pleased, because it has now been proved that the St. Frank's boys did not fire the cottage at all, and therefore there is no case whatever against them. I want to hasten back to St. Frank's to get them released from the punishment-room, where they are at present suffering undeservedly."

Five minutes later we had left Inspector Jameson to deal with his prisoner, and we hurried back to the school at a brisk walk. It seemed to me that hours had passed, but the November evening was long, and when we reached St. Frank's, there still remained a full twenty minutes before the Remove was due to go up to bed.

Coming along, I had congratulated the gov'nor on his astute work. The way in which he had found out the truth struck me as particularly acute. And now, instead of Handforth and Co. being sacked, they would probably receive nothing worse than a severe lecture from the Head, and a few hundred lines.

We had hardly got inside the Triangle before a figure came dashing towards us. I recognised it at once as the form of Willy Handforth.

"I've been waiting ages, sir!" he panted eagerly. "Have—have you brought some good news, sir?"

"The very best, young man!" said Nelson Lee cheerfully.

"Didn't—didn't my major cause the fire at all, sir?" asked Willy breathlessly.

"The fire would have happened in any case," smiled Lee. "It was a plot, Handforth minor—and the presence of your brother and Church and McClure was just a coincidence. Simon Doone fired the cottage deliberately, and you can be quite sure that he didn't die. He's in the hands of the police at the present moment for attempted fraud."

Willy gave out one terrific yell.

"Hurrah!" he howled. "Oh, ripping! By George! You're a brick, sir—I'm blessed if I know what to say! I knew you'd do the trick, sir!"

"I am glad that you had such faith in me, my boy!" said Nelson Lee. "But there is really no need to get quite so excited—"

"But it's great, sir!" shouted Willy. "Of course, my brother's an ass, and it was just like him to get into all sorts of trouble over nothing. But I shouldn't like him to be sacked, or sent to chokey!"

"That would indeed be disastrous," said Nelson Lee. "But I must remonstrate, Handforth minor, for your slang—"

"I'm sorry, sir!" said Willy breathlessly. "But a chap can't help letting himself go at a time like this! I say, sir, can I buzz indoors and tell my major that everything is O.K.?"

"No, you cannot!" said Nelson Lee. "Handforth and Church and McClure will be taken to the Headmaster, and they will probably be out after five or ten minutes. Nipper, you had better remain here."

"Right you are, sir!" I agreed.

Nelson Lee went off, making his way straight to the Head's private door. And before I could stop Willy Handforth, he dodged into the Ancient House like a young whirlwind.

The lobby was deserted, but the Remove passage was quite lively. All the juniors were standing at the doors of their studies, talking in groups, waiting for the bell to ring, which meant bedtime—and also waiting for news concerning the fate of Handforth and Co.

And then Willy burst on to the scene like a tornado.

Archie Glenthorne was talking to Phipps in his own study at the moment. And Archie was frowning deeply, and looking very worried.

It seems to me, Phipps, that it's rather up to us," he was saying. "I mean, what about it?"

"You are referring to Master Handforth and his chums, I gather, sir?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "Well, dash it all, what else? I mean to say, the poor chappies are somewhat in the mire, so to speak. That is to say, the dear laddies are considerably overwhelmed in the soup! To be absolutely exact, Phipps, we might say they've caught a rather weighty packet in the neck!"

"In a way, yes, sir," agreed the valet. "But Mr. Lee is doing his utmost for the three young gentlemen—"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "But, at the same time, it strikes me that we ought to rally round. You get me, Phipps! The Remove ought to gather itself together, in a way of speaking, and launch forward on the old rescue stunt. Now, I've got an idea—What-ho! What-ho! What-ho! Sounds from without, Phipps! Large consignments of commotion, in fact!"

"There certainly appears to be some excitement, sir."

Archie rose to his feet.

"Absolutely!" he ejaculated. "We will stagger forth and investigate. Open the portal, Phipps, and allow the young master to trickle blithely out."

Phipps obeyed, and Archie strolled out. A second later he was lying flat on his back, gasping. Chubby Heath, Lemon, and two or three other Third Formers, swept on without even apologising. Archie sat up rather dazedly.



"I mean to say!" he panted. "Has the earthquake subsided, Phipps? Gadzooks! What was it?"

"Merely some of the young gentlemen in a hurry, sir," said Phipps calmly. "Allow me, sir."

He helped Archie up, and just then Chubby Heath and Co. came dashing back. Archie gave one yell, but failed to stand clear. He went over again, flying, and Phipps helped him to his feet. Only a cloud of dust in the passage remained.

"This is what a chappie might call somewhat foul!" breathed Archie. "I mean to say, what's the trouble? What's the idea? What, in fact, does it mean? Dashing backwards and forwards, knocking innocent ladies over the skittles! Phipps, old bird, we will retire into the place of peace. The young master has no further desire to inquire into the commotion—Yooooop!"

"It's all serene, Archie!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, as he slapped Archie's back. "Mr. Lee's done the trick! Handforth and Co. haven't killed anybody, and they didn't set the cottage on fire! They'll be with us in a few minutes!"

Archie quite forgot his minor troubles.

"That, so to speak, is somewhat priceless!" he said. "All serene—What? Good! Dashed good! In fact, bally good! Ring the old bells, and let the voices peal forth! Hurrah! and all that sort of rot."

"Yes, it's certainly decent!" grinned Pitt. "We shouldn't like to lose Handforth and Co., and an hour ago it seemed that they were booked for the boot, at least. How should we get on in the Remove without our one-and-only?"

While they were talking, a knot of fellows appeared at the end of the passage. They

were talking excitedly. Handforth and Co. were in their midst, and grins were general.

Church and McClure looked a bit scared, but the relief on their faces was obvious. They had just heard all about it from Nelson Lee, and they considered themselves overwhelmingly lucky to get out of the thing with a thousand lines each.

Handforth didn't seem relieved at all. There was an expression of supreme confidence on his face, and he was talking with all his customary assurance.

"Of course, I guessed it all along!" he declared, as he came to a halt. "You can't kid me that Simon Doone was killed! I knew he was disguised—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody could see it," declared Handforth stoutly. "But naturally I kept it dark. Anyhow, I reckon the police ought to be jolly thankful to me for exposing the rotter and probing out the truth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!" chuckled Pitt. "But where does Mr. Lee come in?"

Handforth sniffed.

"Well, I'll admit that Mr. Lee did a bit," he conceded somewhat grudgingly. "But you can't get away from the fact that I started the thing. If it hadn't been for me, that chap Terry would have worked the whole swindle. If the insurance has got any decency, it'll give me about a hundred quid for bringing the case to a successful conclusion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody yelled; and everybody was of the opinion that Handforth would never see a farthing of the insurance company's money.

And, much to Handforth's disgust, everybody was right!

THE END.

## Editorial Announcement.

Readers are invited to write to the Editor on any matter of interest concerning this journal or themselves, and should address their communications to The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—I hope that every one of you who indulge in pyrotechnic displays on the "Fifth" will be more fortunate than Edward Oswald, who received so little reward for his "Pains".

Willy Handforth is rapidly rivalling his elder brother as a celebrity at St. Frank's, for he is to be the central figure in the story that is to follow this week's, namely, "The Riddle of Demon's Gap!" All that is best in mystery, school and detective ad-

venture are here skilfully blended together in a perfect, long complete story which cannot fail to please the varied tastes of my readers.

With regard to last week's Problem Story Competition, I hope to publish the results in our issue of December 2. In the meantime, I am preparing another Problem Story Competition for the week after next.—Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



# Nipper's Magazine

No. 50.

EDITED BY NIPPER,

November 4, 1922.

Editorial Office.,  
Study C,  
Ancient House,  
St. Frank's.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—I was just about to prepare a petition on behalf of Handy against his expulsion for accidentally setting fire to Doone's cottage, but the Guv'nor has made this painful ask unnecessary by twigging old Doone's little game just in time. In spite of all his faults, St. Frank's would be a dull place without Handy, and I never realised this so much as during the last twenty-four hours, when I thought that the Leader of Study D had this time gone a bit too far, and could hope for nothing less than expul-

sion. At it happens, he has now got his own back on old Doone, and unconsciously succeeded in bringing that rascal to justice.

## A NEW ATTRACTION.

Among next week's attractions will be a magnificent pen drawing of Bellton village by the clever artist whose brilliant sketches of the Old School were published in the Mag. a few months ago. Bellton has been so often referred to in my narratives that a realistic view of it will be highly appreciated by my numerous chums who follow these adventures week by week. I hope to run a series of these pen-drawings of the well-known environs of St. Frank's.—Your devoted Pal.

NIPPER

## THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

By JOSH CUTTLE.

**W**AS there visions about? Was I dreaming? Ask me!

There was. But it was no dream. It was worse than that—far worse. Times were bad at St. Frank's. They was very bad. There was rumblings and mutterings.

And there was shooting and firing. There was flames and sparks. The sky was all lit up as light as day.

Why was all that? Ask me!

It was to hide a murder!

Ever since it got dark in the evening there had been rumblings and mumblings. Then came a terrible bang. I looked out of my window and I saw a number of dark figures walking stealthily about.

Tings were fine indeed when such happenings take place in the Triangle. I left my lodge and approached a little group right in the centre of the Triangle.

As I did so there was a terrible hissing sound. Something came towards me. There were sharp bangs, and then a fiery serpent leapt at my legs. Was I afraid? Ask me!

I rushed back to my lodge. When I looked out again the sky was as light as day. It was as red as a fire. It was bad—very bad. And in the centre of the Triangle I saw a large fire.

Then I saw something worse. Several Juniors held a ragged figure in their arms. And as I looked I saw it was the Duke of Somerton.

How did I know it was the Duke of Somerton? Ask me!



**And then a fiery serpent leapt at my legs**

I recognised him by his clothes. Ragged they were. The hat was old and had only half a brim. The trousers was all torn. The coat was in tatters. I recognised the figure all right.

And then I saw that the Juniors were going to throw him on the red fire they had lit. Things was worse than ever. I shouted and ran towards them. I told them to stop the terrible murder. For though trouble do a man's heart good, murder was too terrible.

But as I reached the Juniors they flung the poor fellow into the middle of the flames. In a few minutes he was all burnt away. I touched Master Nipper on the arm and told him things were very bad. But he only laughed.

"That's all right, Cuttle," he said. "That wasn't Somerton. It was only our old Guy in some of Somerton's clothes!"

Who is old Guy? Ask me!





# PODGE & MIDGE

THE DEADLY DUD DETECTIVES  
BY **BOB CHRISTINE**

## THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

FIRST PART.



### CHAPTER I.

#### MISFORTUNE DOGS THEIR FOOTSTEPS.

**C**LAPHAM COMMON was deserted, with the possible exception of Silas Fogg, the notorious housebreaker from the Old Kent Road, and, of course, Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge, the never-say-die sleuths, who were engaged at that moment in shadowing Mr. Fogg.

The sly Mr. Fogg must have perceived their intentions, for he led them into the interior of the Common, where it was as black as ink. It was not surprising that Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge were hopelessly fogged, or to be exact, completely dished.

Not wishing to admit defeat, Mr. Podge distorted himself into an imitation gnarled tree, while Mr. Midge was sent off to reconnoitre disguised as a stray sheep.

Their efforts went unrewarded, and worse luck awaited them. They missed the last car to Victoria by ten seconds, Mr. Podge's record for the quarter-mile sprint being wasted by the inability of Mr. Midge to keep up with him.

### CHAPTER II.

#### SHRIEKS IN THE NIGHT.

"Twice I have been foiled in one night!" declared Mr. Podge vehemently, bitterly annoyed at the prospect of having to walk home. "I'll get even with that conductor some day!" he growled, and then lapsed into a moody silence.

They had progressed about half a mile along by the edge of the Common when a woman's terrified shriek assailed their ears. Both Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge stood rooted to the ground. Another and more agonising shriek immediately followed the first, and then there was a brief commotion and a loud crash as of broken glass. By this time the two detectives were able

to localise the sounds as coming from the ground floor of a lonely house near by.

"Silas Fogg!" ejaculated Mr. Podge shakily.

"I'm afraid it's m-murder!" quaked Mr. Midge faintly.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A GRIM DISCOVERY.

Messrs. Podge and Midge thereupon decided to act promptly. Cautiously they advanced up the carriage drive of the lonely house, and stopped to listen outside the windows of the room from where the shrieks came.

Ali was now quiet. Peeping through the window blind, they observed that the room was empty. Swiftly and silently they forced an entrance.

Mr. Podge surveyed the room with his torch. Broken crockery and the remains of a meal lay scattered on the floor and on the table. But what was worse, Mr. Podge dis-

covered that the mirror of a chiffonier had been shivered into a thousand pieces.

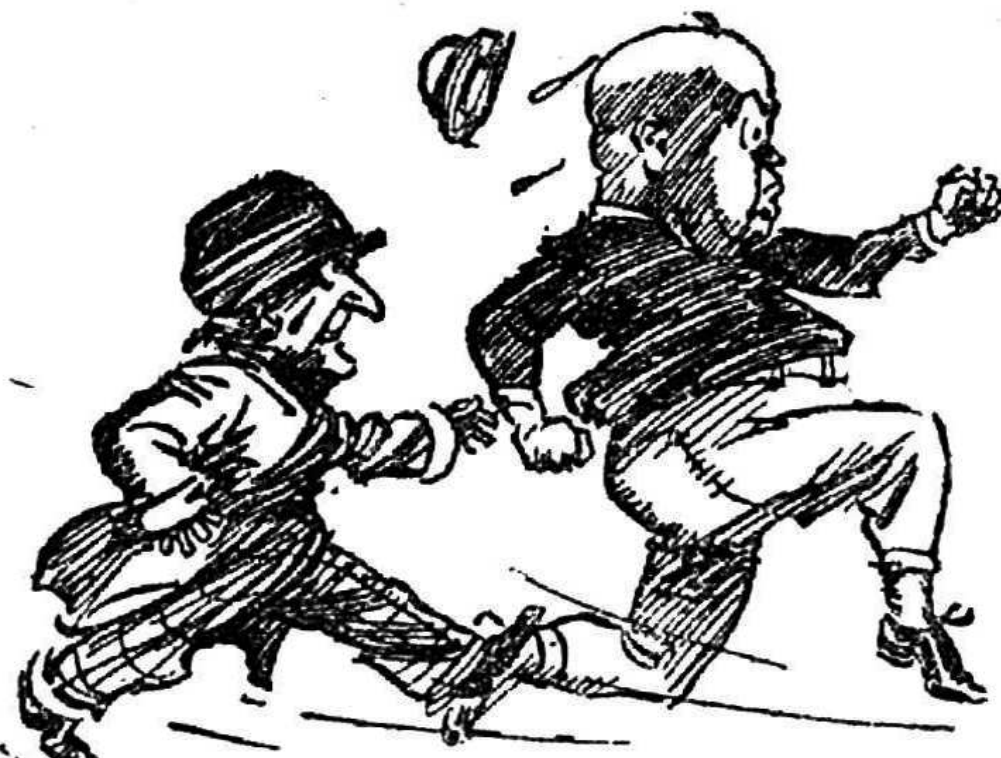
"Seven years bad luck!" he exclaimed gloomily.

"It's too awful to contemplate!" wailed Mr. Midge.

As Mr. Podge swept his torch around the room, he suddenly recoiled in horror at something that had hitherto escaped his notice.

"Mr. Midge," he called quaveringly, "you are right! It is murder!" he gasped to his horrified partner. "Look there!" And he pointed to the apparently lifeless body of a woman on the floor, with a broomstick clutched tightly in her right hand!

(The concluding episode of these amazing adventures of Podge and Midge will be unfolded next week.)



Mr. Podge's record for the quarter-mile sprint was wasted by the inability of Mr. Midge to keep up with him.



# The Strange Affair at Heather Hall.

A Gripping Mystery Story of the Adventures of  
NELSON LEE, the famous Gray's Inn Rd. Detective  
and his able young assistant, NIPPER.



## BRIEF SUMMARY OF PART ONE.

After five years in South Africa, Harry Beverley is welcomed back to his old home, Heather Hall, by his uncle, Sir Roger Beverley. One night, about a month afterwards, Harry disappears. Nelson Lee, who is staying in the neighbourhood, is called in, and succeeds in finding the dead body of Sir Roger's nephew, lying just off the road, about a mile from Heather Hall. A handkerchief and a brace of pheasants are found near the body. The handkerchief is traced to Ben Lockett, a poacher, who is known to have had a grudge against Harry Beverley. Recent tyre marks of a motor car are discovered near by of a suspicious nature. Sir Roger is terribly upset by the tragedy, and it is feared that his mind has become unhinged by the shock, for he declares, one night since the murder, that he has seen the ghost of his dead nephew cross the lawn in front of the house.

(Now read the solution of the mystery of Harry Beverley.)

## PART TWO

### I.

#### THE STORY OF THE GHOST.

At ten o'clock that night, less than half an hour after William Coombe had called through to the police-station at Eastwood and poured his amazing story into the ears of Inspector Basham, Nelson Lee's car stopped in front of Heather Hall, and the Detective and his two companions got out of it, and mounted the steps to the terrace.

The butler was standing in the open doorway of the dwelling, a revolver in his hand; and behind him, at the rear of the wide hall,

were several frightened servants who were talking to one another in low tones.

"Here we are, Coombe," said the inspector. "I've brought Mr. Lee and his boy with me."

"I'm glad they've come," replied William Coombe, who was in a state of agitation. "You'll need their help, sir."

"I'll need their help? How is that? Why are you armed, and what is this tale about a ghost?"

"It is most extraordinary, sir," the butler answered. "I had hardly more than finished talking to you on the telephone, which is in the library, when I heard a shout from somewhere in the garden. And a few seconds later two pistol-shots were fired close together, and there was another shout. I snatched the master's revolver from a drawer in the desk and hurried out. A third shout, not so loud as before, drew me round one side of the house, and into a plantation at the rear of it. I went through by a footpath, as fast as I could; and when I broke from cover, on to open ground, I saw by the dim light of the moon three men running across a meadow to the north.

"One was well in the lead of the others, who were chasing him. As they were a good distance ahead of me, I stopped and watched them until they disappeared in another plantation, the one man still in the lead. It would have been no use my going any farther, so I waited for a bit, not hearing any sound at all, and then I came back.

"The news has made Sir Roger worse than he was before, and I don't wonder at it. I'm worried about him. What with the murder, and his talk of seeing his nephew's ghost, I'm afraid the master will be having a serious illness. He will be glad that you have brought Mr. Lee and the boy with you, sir. I'll tell him that—"



At that instant Sir Roger Beverley appeared from the library. He was flushed and excited, and the hand he offered to the inspector shook like a leaf.

"There is nobody I could have wished to see more than you, Mr. Lee!" he cried. "So you have come with the inspector! You are aware of the telephone message that was sent to the police-station, and Coombe has told of what has occurred since!"

"Yes, he has been telling us," Nelson Lee assented.

"And what do you think of it all?" exclaimed Sir Roger, gripping Lee by the arm. "Isn't it absolutely bewildering? Can you imagine what a shock it was to me? I haven't got over it, and I sha'n't! Not until the mystery has been solved! My poor murdered nephew lying dead at the village mortuary, awaiting the coroner's inquest! Yet, before my very eyes he walks across the lawn, as if in flesh and blood. I saw him! I swear I did! And what of those three men who were lurking in my grounds, and went round the house to the north? Two of them in pursuit of the other, and firing at him as they ran, trying to kill him! It is distracting, Mr. Lee! It is enough to drive me mad! I'm not superstitious! I've always believed that sort of thing to be rubbish! But, by gad, sir, unless you can give me a common sense explanation of—"

"You are over-excited, Sir Roger. Pull yourself together, and give me as brief and clear a version as you can of what you saw. I don't want to lose any time in picking up the other thread of this strange business."

"I can tell you in a very few words. I was sitting by the fire, thinking of my sad bereavement, when I felt a draught from the nearest window, and rose to lower the blind.

"The moon was shining dimly, and just as I got to the window the form of a tall young man appeared on the lawn from the left. He was about a dozen yards beyond the terrace, and was in plain view. He seemed to glide rather than to walk, and his movements were slow. He had my nephew's build and features. He was the very image of Harry."

"I tried hard to call to him, but I could not utter a sound. It was as if a hand was clutching me tightly by the throat, and I was choking. It was a weird experience. The blood was cold in my veins, and I trembled so violently that I grasped a chair for support. I could hear no sound of footsteps."

"For a few seconds I watched the figure gliding over the grass, until, after pausing for a moment, it darted swiftly on, and vanished amongst the trees and shrubbery to my right."

Then, recovering my voice, I shouted for the butler, and he hurried to the room. I

told him what I had seen, and he telephoned to the police-station."

"It was immediately after Coombe left the telephone, I think," said Nelson Lee, "That you heard the shout and the pistol-shots."

"It was shortly afterwards," Sir Roger replied.

"And the figure went in that direction?"

"It did, Mr. Lee."

"You were under the impression that it was the ghost of your nephew you saw?"

"I was. How could it have been otherwise? It was Harry's face."

"Was the figure moving diagonally towards the house, Sir Roger?"

"No, parallel with it."

"Where was it when it stopped?"

"It was almost directly opposite to the steps that descend from the terrace."

The old baronet sat down on a chair in the hall, shaking his head in bewilderment. Nipper glanced at his master, and Inspector Basham shrugged his shoulders.

"It was an hallucination, Lee," he said in a whisper.

"It was not!" declared Sir Roger Beverley, hearing the low words. "It was no hallucination, for I saw and recognised Harry's face! Yet it could not have been him, nor can I believe that it was a phantom figure. What is your opinion, Mr. Lee?"

"It was a real man you saw," Nelson Lee answered. "There can't be any doubt of it."

"Then how account for his striking resemblance to Harry?"

"It was imagination, Sir Roger. I would suggest that the delusion was due to the fact that you were thinking of your nephew while you sat by the fire."

"I daresay you are right, sir. I am in a more sensible mood now."

"Furthermore, it was the same man whom your butler saw in flight from the other two."

"Then who was he?" exclaimed Sir Roger.

"What brought him here to-night? Who were the men who gave chase to him, and why did they shoot at him?"

"They are not easy questions," Nelson Lee replied. "Perhaps I will be able to solve the problem, though. I hope so. But there is reason to fear that—"

He did not finish the sentence. There was a glitter of keen apprehension in his eyes, and Nipper, observing it, made a shrewd and startling guess. Inspector Basham shrugged his shoulders again.

"I know what your theory is, Lee," he said.

"Indeed?" Nelson Lee murmured. "What?"

"You think the young man was a burglar," the inspector answered, "and that he was pursued by a couple of constables who caught sight of him on the road, and followed him into the grounds of the Hall. If so, you are wrong. None of my men



could have been in the neighbourhood."

"That's quite right," declared the butler. "The men I saw were not policemen. They were in plain clothes."

Nelson Lee merely nodded. "This is a serious affair, one of vital importance," he said gravely. "We have wasted time in talking, and we must be off at once, without further delay. We will have to go on foot, Basham, of course. You need not come with us, Coombe, but you can give your revolver to my boy. The inspector and I are armed. We are going after those three men, Sir Roger," he added, "and we will probably have some news for you before morning. Meanwhile you had better get some sleep. Don't sit up waiting for us."

## II.

### SOME OMINOUS DISCOVERIES.

HAVING left the Hall, and gone round by the right to the back of it, Nelson Lee and his two companions struck into a plantation by the footpath Coombe had spoken of, and soon reached the farther side of it.

As the butler had given them guidance to a certain point they did not search for footprints, nor would they have found any if they had; for the ground was hard and dry, there having been no rain for a week.

Inspector Basham had not been trained in deductive methods. His mind had not grasped the significance of all that had occurred. But Nipper had his suspicions, and his theory was the same as that held by Lee, who was convinced that he had practically solved the entire chain of mysteries, beginning with the murder of Harry Beverley.

"I am worried," he said, half to himself. "I fear the worst."

The three went swiftly across a broad meadow, and plunged into the other plantation mentioned by Coombe. They walked rapidly through it, holding to a path; and when they emerged from it Nelson Lee took his electric-torch from his pocket, and played the light around him.

"Hallo! What's this?" he cried. "There's been a struggle!"

"It looks so, doesn't it?" Inspector Basham exclaimed.

"Sure thing, guv'nor," said the lad. "A struggle, and somebody hurt."

By the edge of the plantation, on open ground that was soft, various signs were visible—a number of confused footprints, two large depressions of the shape of a man's body, and several red stains that were comparatively fresh. Nelson Lee scrutinised them all, moving about as keen as a hound while he held the torch close to the earth.

"The prints can be picked out separately," he muttered. "There were three men, and it would seem that one of them got the better of the others."

Still flashing the torch, he pushed slowly ahead for half a dozen yards, pausing at intervals, and returned to his companions.

"Find anything else, guv'nor?" Nipper asked.

"More footprints," Nelson Lee replied. "The men went on, all three of them."

"There couldn't have been less, as there aren't any bodies scattered about," remarked Inspector Basham.

There was a note of sarcasm in his voice, for he was beginning to resent the fact that the London detective had from the first taken the whole conduct of the sensational affair into his hands, and also that he had withheld from him what theory he had in regard to the recent mysteries at Heather Hall.

Nelson Lee noted the sarcasm, and flashed a retort back.

"Do you want me to withdraw from the case, Basham?" he inquired.

"No, I don't," the inspector said sulkily. "Honestly, I don't," he added in a different tone. "I am no match for you in cleverness."

"It is not a question of cleverness, or wit, or deductions now. We have got past that stage."

"You have, you mean. What are your theories, Lee?"

"Have a little patience, and you will know. I believe that in the space of several hours or less, we shall make a startling discovery that will solve the mystery."

The inspector had to be content with that. Nelson Lee dropped the subject, and spoke briefly of the deductions he had made on the spot.

"The signs tell a plain tale," he said. "The young man who was pursued, the one whom Sir Roger Beverley saw on the lawn, waited here at the edge of the plantation, and when his pursuers appeared from it he took them by surprise, and after a short struggle he knocked both of them down, and resumed his flight. They gave chase to him again, but he probably had a considerable start; and, either for that reason, or because they were afraid of raising an alarm, his enemies did not fire at him, though they must have been armed. As for the bloodstains, I daresay one of the pursuers received a hard blow on the nose that spilt his claret."

"They meant murder, guv'nor," Nipper replied. "If they caught up with the other man, they'd have killed him."

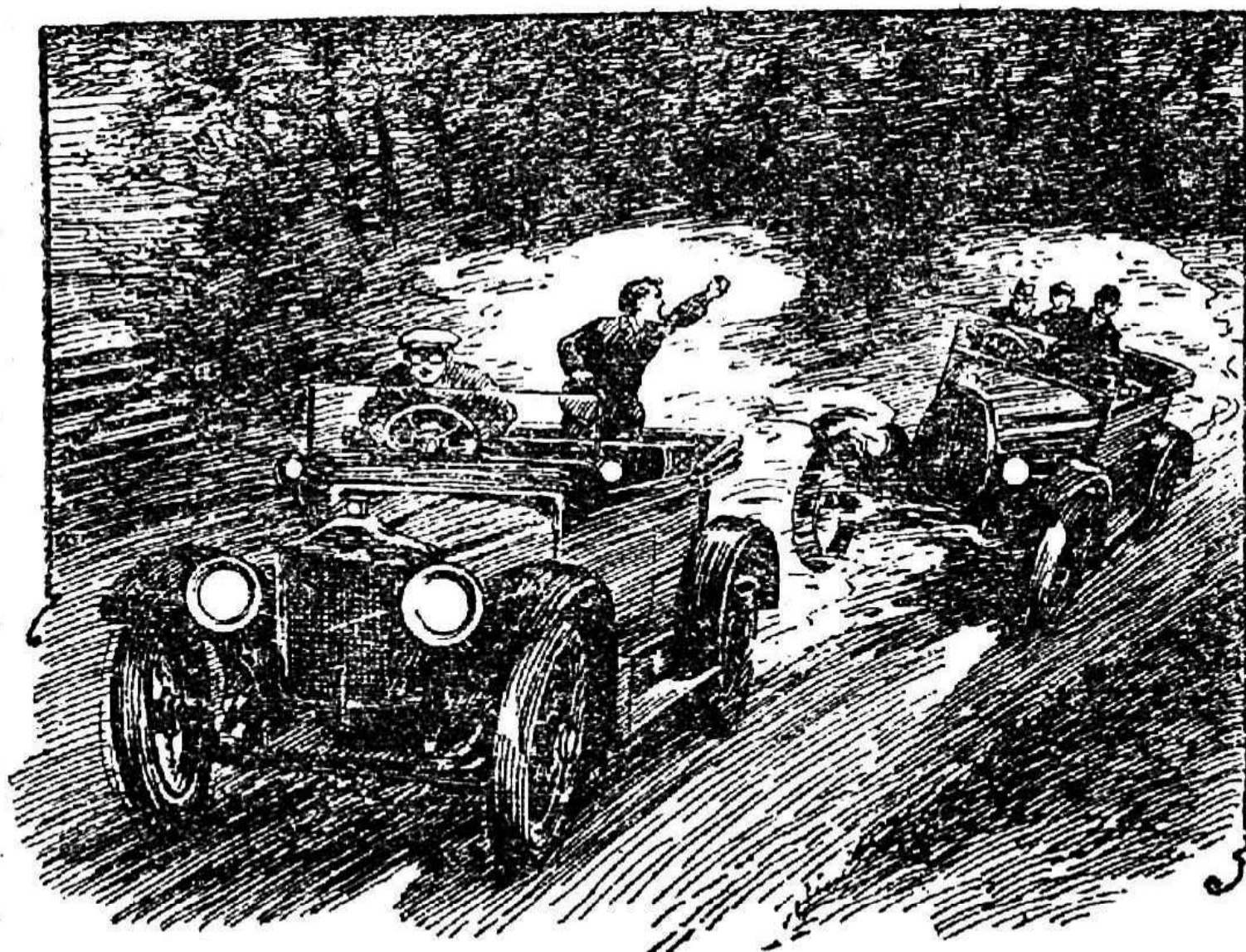
"It isn't likely they caught him, if he had a good start," said Inspector Basham.

"The chances are that the fellow escaped."

"I think so myself," Nelson Lee assented. "There is no telling, though. And now to be off," he added.

It was a fairly dark night. There was a half-moon, but it was hidden by drifting clouds, through which it shed only a sickly glow. To the north, within a quarter of a mile or so, was high ground, and in between was a stretch of damp marshland covered





**One of the occupants of the leading car turned, and something glittered in his hand!**

with a thick growth of emerald-green grass.

The soil was firm, however, and it easily bore the weight of Nelson Lee and his companions as they pressed rapidly forward, the detective in the lead. They had no difficulty in keeping to the trail of the men. The electric torch showed vague footprints here and there, and tufts of grass that had been trodden flat.

Lee was apprehensive, in suspense. There was a fear in his heart—the fear that a cruel murder had been done.

Not a word was spoken while the little party crossed the marshy waste, and when at length they came to a range of low and wooded hills they lost the trail of the three men. It ended here abruptly.

Bidding his companions wait, Nelson Lee penetrated the trees and shrubbery for a short distance, flashing his torch, and soon returned.

"The ground is hard and dry," he said. "There isn't a trace of footprints."

"What are we to do?" asked Nipper. "Go back"

"There is nothing else for it, I suppose," said Inspector Basham. "It would be useless to go any further. Those men had half an hour's start of us."

Nelson Lee nodded absently. He stood in thought for a moment, and then, as something occurred to him, he moved along the base of the hill, followed by Nipper and the inspector. He went slowly and alertly on for a number of yards, using his torch; and presently he stopped, and uttered a low ex-

clamation as he played the light in front of him.

"Look!" he bade. "Do you see?"

"My word" murmured the lad.

It was a significant discovery Lee had made. Here on the damp earth and grass at the edge of the marsh, pointing to the south, were the footprints of two men, and of two only.

That fact was perfectly obvious. Nipper whistled under his breath, and Inspector Basham stared.

"So the two men have returned as they came," he exclaimed. "And what of the third one?"

"That's the question," said Nipper.

"Did his pursuers overtake him and kill him, or did they abandon the chase?"

Nelson Lee shook his head gravely. He was silent for a few seconds, his brows knit in conjecture. He feared the worst, yet was hopeful of the best.

"The third man may have been caught and killed, or he may have succeeded in escaping," he said. "One is as likely as the other. But we won't search for him now. It is of the other men I am thinking. It was their car, Basham, that was in the lane the night Harry Beverley was murdered."

"No doubt it was," the inspector assented.

"And, in all probability, the men left it at the same spot to-night."

"I daresay they did, Lee."

"I am sure of it," Nelson Lee declared. "That is the point I have in mind. Come, we will go back at once. Every minute is precious. We must do our best to arrest those scoundrels, and I believe there will be time enough."

With that he set off, with Nipper and the inspector at his heels. They did not follow the trail of footprints. They cut straight across the marshland to the first plantation, from that over the meadow to the second plantation, and through that to the rear of Heather Hall.

Panting for breath, they hastened round to the front of the dwelling, and sprang into the detective's car. And, just as they started, the door of the house was opened, and Sir Roger Beverley and the butler appeared.



"It is all right, Sir Roger!" Nelson Lee called to him. "We are in a hurry! I will see you in the morning!"

## III

## A THRILLING CHASE.

LEAVING William Coombe and the old baronet standing in the doorway, gazing in speechless amazement, the car sped round the short stretch of the drive, and raced down the shaded avenue and out by the gates to the road, when it bore to the left.

Nelson Lee sent it flying forward at a dizzy speed, reckless of the risk.

"There is a chance, assuming that my theory is right," he declared. "A slim chance."

"We'll be too late, in my opinion," replied Inspector Basham.

"I don't think so," said Lee. "The footprints at the base of the hill yonder were quite fresh, and when we discovered them the men could hardly more than have crossed the marshland."

"Then they are somewhere ahead of us, if they were bound in this direction."

"They were, Basham. I am almost certain that their car was hidden in that lonely lane, and if so they are hurrying towards it. They may reach it in time to escape, but I am hopeful of overtaking them on the way."

Nipper had nothing to say. He shared his master's hopeful view. He was seated by Lee, and the inspector was behind. The fleet air stung like needles, and the landscape rushed past in a blur.

Even faster went the powerful car, leaping like a thing of life, moving at so furious a rate of speed that it seemed as if it would rise above the ground of its own impetus like an aeroplane.

It shot by the footpath that led to Heather Hall, and by the lonely spot where Harry Beverley had been murdered.

In the meantime, while he drove, Nelson Lee had been glancing to both sides of him, as well as in front. He had his bearings. He knew just where the lane was, and he had no more than stopped within a short stretch of it, meaning to listen, when a throbbing noise was heard.

The next instant, as Lee drove on, two flaming lamps appeared from the mouth of the lane on the left, within less than a hundred yards, and as they swerved, the flare of them was partly obscured by the dark body of an open car, in which two persons could be perceived.

"My word, guv'nor, there they go!" Nipper cried in consternation.

"I told you so, Lee!" declared Inspector Basham. "I told you we would be too late!"

"We haven't lost them yet," Nelson Lee quietly replied. "I don't believe they can beat my Rolls-Royce."

The mysterious men had reached the lane

first, with several minutes to spare; and now they were in flight, dashing along the road like a streak, doubtless suspecting that they were being pursued.

Nelson Lee was calm and confident. He sent his car spinning on at full speed, and slowly but surely he gained, gradually lessening the space that intervened, until the dazzling light from his lamps shone on the rear of the leading car.

The two occupants of it uttered angry shouts. One was looking behind him, and something glittered in his hand. There was a sharp report, and a bullet was heard to strike the ground. The inspector rose, and clutched the back of the seat in front of him.

"That fellow is trying to burst one of our tyres!" he exclaimed. "That's the game!"

"Well, you must try to burst one of theirs," said Lee. "You and Nipper. Be quick about it."

Inspector Basham whipped his revolver from his pocket and fired, and the lad did same, both aiming low.

Their fire was returned, and for a few moments, while the two cars raced on with the space of about thirty yards between them, red jets of flame spat in the darkness, and the three revolvers cracked briskly.

At length a bullet pierced the glass screen of the detective's car, splitting it into the shape of a spider's web, and whistled by the lad's ear.

"By heavens, that was a deliberate attempt at murder!" cried the inspector.

"It was, Basham," Nelson Lee assented. "Those scoundrels are desperate now."

"And our lives are in danger, Lee. I'll have to cripple that fellow with the revolver, if I can."

"No; you might kill him, and I don't want any bloodshed. We will drop a little behind, and continue the chase until——"

There was another pistol-shot from in front, followed by a loud explosion; and, with that, one of its tyres burst, Lee's car skidded to the side of the road and turned half over, throwing its occupants on to a strip of grass by a hedge.

Happily, not one of them was hurt. As they scrambled to their feet a shout of defiance rang in their ears, and with keen disappointment they stood gazing after the other car, watching it until it had vanished in the murky gloom.

"There they go!" Inspector Basham said bitterly. "Confound the luck!"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders. "It's no use grumbling," he quietly replied, though the loss of the fugitives was a hard blow to him.

"What are we to do, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "Go back to look for the third man?"

"No, not yet," Lee answered. "I want to find out first in what direction those rascals have gone."

The car having been righted and examined, it was found that, with the exception of the



punctured tyre, it had not sustained any damage.

It, fortunately, carried a spare tyre, and Nelson Lee and his companions promptly set to work to put that on in place of the injured one. They completed their task in a little more than a quarter of an hour, and then, getting into the car, they drove towards the village, moving slowly at first.

It was impossible for them to distinguish the tyre-marks of the other car, however, as there had been a great deal of traffic during the previous day; so they went swiftly on to Eastwold, passing two or three cross-roads on the way, and stopped at the police-station. A sergeant was on duty—Davies by name—and Lee questioned him.

"Did you see or hear a car go by recently?" he asked.

"I heard one," he sergeant replied. "I didn't see it, sir. It went by less than half half an hour ago."

"Didn't you get even a glimpse of it, Davies?"

"I didn't, Mr. Lee. I was writing at the desk at the time."

Nelson Lee nodded. "It is just as I supposed, Basham," he said. "Those two scoundrels came from London, and they are returning there. We'll have to let them go. It would be useless to wire to Scotland Yard to have a watch kept for them, for we have no description of the car, or of the men. It is most unfortunate that they should have —"

He paused at the sound of footsteps. A shadow darkened the open doorway, and into the station, with a limping gait, walked a tall, bronzed young man, who wore shabby clothes and a cap. He had a fair moustache, and there was a stubbly growth of beard on his face.

"By Jove, it's Lockett!" the inspector exclaimed in surprise.

"Lockett?" Nelson Lee and Nipper repeated in one breath.

Ben Lockett hesitated for a moment, as if he was inclined to take to flight; and then, stepping forward, he sank wearily down on a bench opposite to the desk.

The little group of four gathered around him. They observed that he was fatigued, and that his boots and trousers were thickly coated with dust.

"So you have come back to confess, have you?" said Inspector Basham.

"No, I haven't," the young man doggedly answered, a gleam of defiance in his eyes. "Nothing of the sort. I've come back to face things, and stick up for my innocence."

"Innocent men don't run away, Lockett."

"It depends on circumstances, inspector. If you had been in my place, I reckon you'd have done the same. I'll admit that I had a grudge against Harry Beverley because of his fooling about with Peggy Marsh, who was engaged to me, and brope it off. Close on six years ago that was. Through the young swell I lost the girl I loved, and the

grudge has rankled in my mind ever since, and I spoke of it openly not long ago.

"But I had no thought of doing Sir Roger Beverley's nephew any harm. I never dreamed of such a thing. There might have been hot words between us if we had met, and it would have ended at that. I didn't want to meet him. I've been keeping out of his way since he returned from—"

"Get on with your statement," the inspector interrupted. "I must warn you, though, that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"You needn't warn me," Ben Lockett replied. "I'm not afraid to speak the truth. I'll tell you what happened that night. I had been poaching, and as ill luck would have it, I came out of the woods to the road, with a brace of pheasants. I had snared, just at the spot where Harry Beverley was lying dead in the ditch."

"I could see plainly enough that he had been murdered, and what with that awful discovery, and the thought that everybody knew of the grudge I had against him, I lost my head, fearing I would be suspected of the crime. I took to flight as fast as I could, and it wasn't until I got home that I remembered I had left the brace of pheasants behind, and found that I had dropped my handkerchief somewhere."

"I knew I was sure to be arrested, with such evidence against me, so I walked to a railway station a few miles distant, and travelled up to London by train early that morning."

"I read in the papers that the police were after me for the murder, and after wandering the streets of the big city for a couple of days, and sleeping in cheap lodgings at night, I got fed up with it, and felt that I had better come back and face the charge."

"And here I am, inspector. I had only enough money to pay the railway fare to Ely, and from there I walked to Eastwold."

The young man paused. "It's all true, every word of it," he continued earnestly. "I'm perfectly innocent. I swear I am. I never laid the weight of a finger on Harry Beverley. He was dead when I discovered him by the roadside, and he must have been dead for some little time. At all events, there wasn't anybody in sight near-by."

Nelson Lee had listened in silence to the story. "Did you hear any sounds of a struggle as you were coming through the woods?" he inquired.

"Not a sound of any kind, sir," Ben Lockett answered.

"Did you see or hear a motor-car while you were hurrying home?"

"No, sir, I didn't. No car passed me."

There was a brief silence. Inspector Basham fetched a pair of handcuffs from the desk, and he was about to lock them on the young man's wrists, when Nelson Lee checked him by a gesture.

"Don't do it," he said. "This fellow has told us the truth. He is as innocent as I am, else he would not have returned. More-



over, he could not have deceived me if he had lied."

"You believe he is innocent?" Inspector Basham asked.

"I am certain he is. You can take my word for it."

"I hardly know what to do, Lee."

"Let him go, and I will be responsible. You will not be making a mistake."

The inspector hesitated. "I won't detain you in custody, Lockett," he said. "You are free. You can go home to your father now."

Ben Lockett was almost incredulous at first, scarcely able to realise what he had been told. And then, with words of fervent gratitude on his lips, his haggard face bright with joy, he hastened from the station.

Inspector Basham gazed after him as he disappeared, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder if you are right, Lee?" he murmured.

"There isn't a doubt of it," said Nelson Lee. "The two men who escaped from us to-night are the murderers of Harry Beverley."

"I had some such idea myself. But what was their motive? Why did they come down from London to commit such a crime?"

"I could throw some light on the motive, but I will wait until we have learned more. I am hopeful of getting some information in the space of a few hours."

Nelson Lee glanced at his watch as he spoke. "Once or twice, when I have been for the shooting on previous occasions," he resumed, "I have seen a gentleman in the village accompanied by a big bloodhound."

"That's right," Inspector Basham assented. "The gentleman is Captain Marker, and he lives at the Gables, a quarter of a mile to the south of Eastwold. He has had the dog for several years. Nero he calls it."

"Is the hound any good at tracking?"

"Uncommonly good, Lee, from what I have heard. The animal has been in a couple of trial tests with other bloodhounds, and he has beaten them all by running his man to earth first. You want to borrow the dog, I daresay."

"I do, Basham. The hound may be able to trace the young man who was pursued by those two scoundrels to-night. They may have overtaken and killed him, but I am more inclined to think that he succeeded in giving them the slip, and that we shall find him alive somewhere."

"That's a fine idea," said the inspector. "Captain Marker is not at home. He's somewhere up in Scotland. But he went by rail, not in his car. His chauffeur, Joe Grigson, is at the Gables, and is in charge of the bloodhound, Nero. He and I are very friendly, and I have no doubt he will be glad to lend us the animal, and to accompany us, if you should like him to do so."

"Very well," Nelson Lee replied. "Let us drive to the Gables at once, and rouse your man Grigson. This has been an eventful night, Basham, and the probabilities are that

it will have a sensational ending. Only so it is not a tragic one! There is a grave element of doubt."

#### IV.

##### ON THE SCENT WITH A BLOODHOUND.

THE night was nearly over, and the first rays of the dawn were quivering above the horizon, when Nelson Lee's car stopped on the road at a point about a quarter of a mile beyond Heather Hall, and to the west of it.

And from the car stepped the detective, followed by Inspector Basham and Nipper, Captain Marker's chauffeur, and a huge liver-coloured bloodhound with pendulous ears.

Lee was in a grave and quiet mood, and it was evident that worry was preying on his mind.

Putting himself at the head of his companions, he led them through a fringe of trees and bushes, and thence diagonally across the wide area of marshland that stretched to the range of hills, keeping the Hall to the right.

They trudged steadily on, finding it stiff going amongst the thick grass; and when they had covered the better part of a mile, and were drawing near to the high ground, Nelson Lee put a question to the chauffeur.

"Has the dog ever had a real experience in tracking a man?" he asked.

"Yes, he has had, sir," Joe Grigson replied. "It was last summer, a year ago, at Wargrave on the Thames. My master had a bungalow there, and a thief broke in one night, and stole some money. Nero was put on his track, and he ran the fellow to earth in a plantation two or three miles away. It was clever work."

"Then if the dog once picks up a scent he can be depended upon to follow it to the end."

"I haven't any doubt of it, sir. He has done so every time in trial-tests. Once he has a scent he will hold it."

A few more yards, and the little party reached the spot where the trail of the two men had been lost in the night at the edge of the hills, on hard and dry soil.

They stopped here, and Joe Grigson spoke a few words to the bloodhound, who showed by his actions that he understood what was required of him.

With lowered muzzle he trotted here and there, in a widening radius, sniffing and wheezing at the ground. And at length, with a low and eager whimper, he looked up at the chauffeur, and wagged his tail.

"By Jove, he's got it!" Nelson Lee declared.

"Yes, sir, he has the scent," Joe Grigson replied. "Find them, Nero!" he bade. "Find them!"

It could not be doubted that the sagacious animal had discovered the scent of the two men, and without delay the search was begun. The chauffeur attached a leash to Nero's collar and pushed ahead with him, Lee and the others keeping close behind.



It was daylight now, and the dew was glittering on the grass. The trail was not fresh, but it offered no difficulties to the bloodhound. Not once was he at fault.

Straining at his leash, his massive head bent low, he went steadily on amongst the rugged hills, by tangled thickets and large boulders, threading the maze of trees and undergrowth; on for half a mile and more, until finally he emerged from the cover at the edge of an open space that was sparsely dotted with clumps of heather and bracken.

"We can't have much farther to go," Nelson Lee said to the inspector. "We shall soon come to the place where those scoundrels either abandoned the pursuit and turned back, or overtook the man they were after and——"

He did not finish the sentence. He was in keen suspense, and so were Inspector Basham and the lad. For another hundred yards or so the dog trotted on, his nose to the earth.

Presently he slipped between two clumps of stunted trees, and a moment later, stopping abruptly, he squatted on his haunches, and whined mournfully.

"Good heavens, look!" Joe Grigson exclaimed.

"It's murder!" gasped the inspector.

The search was at an end. Nero had followed the trail to a shallow and circular glade, and it seemed at first that Nelson Lee's apprehensions had been justified.

In the middle of the glade was a pool, and lying motionless on his face at the edge of it, with his legs submerged in the water to his knees, was a man in a tweed suit.

Lee dragged him from the pool, and turned him over on his back. He was a young man with bronzed and clean-shaven features, and on his forehead was a purple bruise.

"He is dead, of course," said Inspector Basham, shaking his head sadly.

"I am afraid so," Nelson Lee assented, as he knelt by the prostrate form, and pressed his hand to the chest. "No, his heart is beating. He is only unconscious. Look at him closely," he added. "What is there familiar about him?"

"By heavens, he is the very image of Harry Beverley!" cried the inspector.

"Yes, the very image!" the chauffeur exclaimed. "The resemblance is wonderful!"

"It is more than a resemblance," Nelson Lee declared. "It is Harry Beverley himself you are looking at."

"Impossible, Mr. Lee!"

"No, Grigson, I am quite right."

Sir Roger Beverley's nephew alive! Who, then, had been murdered on the lonely road near Heather Hall. How was this amazing thing to be accounted for?

Inspector Basham and the chauffeur were struck dumb. They stared in stupefaction at each other, and at the detective, who quietly repeated his assertion. It was not a mystery to him, nor was it to Nipper. They had solved the problem on the previous night, from what they had learned at the

Hall, but they must learn much more before the case would be complete.

"I won't give you any explanation now, Basham," said Nelson Lee. "If you can't guess the meaning of this strange affair you are dull-witted. As for what occurred here, it is fairly obvious.

"Having caught up with young Beverley, those two scoundrels dealt him a stunning blow on the head, and flung him into the pool. The cold-plunge revived him, no doubt; and after his assailants had gone he dragged himself partly from the water, and lost consciousness.

"His injury is not a serious one. He is suffering from exposure, and I daresay he will recover after he has had proper treatment.

"I don't want our discovery to be made known for the present," he continued. "It will be best to keep it quiet. We won't take the poor fellow home, Basham. We will drive him to the cottage hospital at Brandon, and wait there until he has regained his senses, and is able to make a statement.

"No doubt it will be in his power to give us information of value—information which will enable us to find and arrest the men who tried to murder him."

"Who was it they did murder?" asked the bewildered inspector. "An imposter, I suppose."

Nelson Lee smiled and nodded.

"Come along," he bade. "We must not waste any time."

The four of them lifted the unconscious young man, and, with Nero trotting at their heels they retraced their course as fast as they could to the road.

Here they left the chauffeur. He turned back towards the village with the bloodhound, and Lee and his companions got into the car with their burden, and drove half a dozen miles to a small hospital that was on the outskirts of the little town of Brandon.

Harry Beverley was put to bed, and when Lee and the others had waited for a couple of hours the young man had so far recovered that he was able to clearly tell his story to them.

And shortly afterwards, having pledged the house-surgeon to secrecy, the three left the hospital. They drove rapidly back, and between ten and eleven o'clock, tired and hungry, they arrived at the police-station at Eastwold.

Nelson Lee was in cheerful spirits, for he had learned all that it was necessary for him to know. The whole of the mystery had been disclosed to him, and it, to a great extent corroborated the deductions he had previously formed.

"You can leave the rest to me," he said to the inspector. "I will see to that. Nipper and I will go to the White Horse now, and have something to eat, and get a few hours of sleep. We will travel up to town by the three o'clock train, and if we succeed in arresting the two murderers—I fully expect that we shall—I will send you a wire before we return.



"Meanwhile keep your mouth shut, Basham," he added. "Mind you don't let any person know that Harry Beverley is at the hospital at Brandon, not even Sir Roger. You had better call on him, though, and tell him that he will have a visit from me shortly, in a day or so."

## V.

## THE ARREST.

NELSON LEE and Nipper reached London by train at the close of the day, and, as they were in no particular hurry, they ate a hearty supper at their chambers in the Gray's Inn Road.

Later on they went to Scotland Yard, where they had an interview with the detective's friend, Inspector Lennard; and at nine o'clock that night, Lee and the lad and the inspector, and three constables in plain clothes, got into a cab in front of the big building on the Embankment, and set off in the direction of the City.

They were all armed, for they were bound on an errand which was likely to be attended with danger. They drove to the East End, and when they had gone for a considerable distance along the Commercial Road they left the cab, and made their way down a thoroughfare on the right which brought them to Canton Street in the heart of Limehouse, which ran parallel with the river.

It was a narrow and squalid street, and it bore an unsavoury reputation, for many of the inhabitants were of the criminal class. A brief consultation having been held, the little party took shelter in the mouth of an alley, and one of the constables was sent forward to a dwelling that was within thirty yards.

He slipped into it, and returned in a few moments.

"It is all right, sir," he said to Inspector Lennard. "The men are in their room at the back of the staircase on the ground-floor. I saw a light there, and heard voices."

"I thought they would be at home," the inspector replied. "Now for it, Lee," he continued. "We must take them by surprise, or there will be trouble. They are desperate fellows, as I have told you."

Leaving the alley, Nelson Lee and his



With lowered muzzle the bloodhound trotted along, sniffing at the ground.

companions moved warily towards the dwelling; and they were within several yards of it when to their dismay, two men of powerful build came out of the open doorway, and at once perceived the approaching group.

Their suspicions roused, they took to flight without an instant's delay; and after them went Inspector Lennard, with the detective and the police at his heels.

"We barely missed them, Lee!" he exclaimed. "If we had only been a minute sooner!"

"We'll get them, I think," Nelson Lee replied. "They haven't much of a start."

"But I dare say they have friends in the neighbourhood who will help them. That is what I am afraid of. We'll do our best, though."

"We will, Lennard. These scoundrels must be caught, risk or no risk."

It was a thrilling chase that ensued. Windows were opened and heads were thrust out, and a clamour rose and spread, as the men tore fleetly on, followed by their pursuers.

"Stop them!" the inspector shouted again and again. "Stop those fellows!"

The clamour increased. People swarmed from their houses, but they did not attempt to molest the little party. Having held along Canton Street, and turned from it to Limehouse Causeway, the fugitives dashed across the West India Dock Road, and from that wide thoroughfare into Pennyfields, the principal thoroughfare of Chinatown.

They had been gradually losing ground,



and presently, when they were only four or five yards ahead of their pursuers, they turned suddenly at bay, and one of them drew a revolver.

There was a jet of flame, and a sharp report. The bullet narrowly missed Nelson Lee, and, springing forward, he flung himself upon the man who had fired.

One of the constables darted to his assistance, and the next instant the second man was in the grip of Inspector Lennard and the lad.

A large and hostile crowd had by now assembled, most of them Chinamen; and the remaining constables held them off, threatening them with their revolvers, while the fight went on.

It was a desperate struggle. The odds were against the two men, however; and when finally they had been overpowered and handcuffed, and the angry crowd were about to attempt a rescue, half a dozen policemen fortunately appeared on the scene.

"Hallo, what's this?" one of them gruffly exclaimed. "What's going on here? What do you mean by—"

He stopped short as he recognised Inspector Lennard. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, touching his helmet. "I didn't know you at first."

"That's all right," the inspector replied. "I'm glad you've come, for we were in a tight corner. I have Mr. Nelson Lee with me, and his boy, and three of my men from the Yard. We have just caught a couple of crooks whom we chased from Canton Street."

The crowd having been partly dispersed, the whole party set off along the Poplar High Street, which was a continuation of Pennyfields.

The police formed an escort around the two bruised and dishevelled prisoners, who were led by Nelson Lee and the constable, and Inspector Lennard and Nipper.

They were followed by a number of people, who hooted and jeered at them, and threw stones; but without suffering any injury they reached the big police-station in the Barking Road, where Lennard briefly explained matters to the local inspector who was on duty.

"Why have we been arrested?" one of the prisoners demanded in a truculent tone.

Nelson Lee bent his stern gaze on the speaker.

"You will be charged with the murder of your accomplice, Gavin Reece, down in Suffolk," he said slowly. "And also with the attempted murder of a person whose name I do not care to disclose at present."

There was tense, hushed silence. The two men must have expected this statement, yet it was none the less a heavy blow to them. Their trembling limbs and ashen-grey features, and the look of horror in their eyes, showed plainly that they knew themselves to be in the shadow of the gallows.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DEAD ALIVE.

**I**N the library at Heather Hall were Sir Roger Beverley, and his nephew. The old man's face wore an expression of utter happiness.

"And now," he was saying, "tell me your remarkable story."

"It is a long tale, uncle," Harry Beverley began, "and I will tell it now as briefly as I can. On the vessel on which I sailed from Cape Town I met a young fellow of about the same age as myself, and he looked so much like me that we might have been taken for twins. Gavin Reece was his name, and he said he had been to South Africa to buy diamonds. We grew very intimate during the voyage, and I took him into my confidence, telling him all about you and Heather Hall, and my early life, and that you had forgiven me, and written to me to come home.

"I trusted him, but he proved to be an infamous scoundrel. On the day when we arrived in London he persuaded me to go to his dwelling in the East End with him that night, and he must have meanwhile sent word to a couple of accomplices of his, for I was drugged in a cafe in Whitechapel, and knew nothing more until I found myself lying bound and gagged on a bed in a wretched room. In an adjoining room Gavin Reece was talking to two men, whom he called Fowler and Baxter, and I learned from their conversation that Reece was to go down to Heather Hall to impersonate me, and that he was to get as much money as he could from you, and share it with his accomplices.

"He left the next day, and, to cut the story short, I was kept a prisoner by the two scoundrels for a month, without any chance of escape. At length the two men went off, and came back the next day. They returned early in the morning, and I heard them talking in the next room. They had been to Suffolk in a car, it appeared, because they had not received any money from Gavin Reece. They had got him out of the Hall in the night by whistling under the window of his bedchamber, and after he had accompanied them for some distance, they quarrelled with him, and killed him in a fight at some lonely spot.

"The men went out during the morning, and by desperate efforts, I got my limbs free, and escaped by a window from the house, which was somewhere in the East End. I realised my danger. I took it for granted the men would suspect that I had heard their conversation, and that it was their intention to murder me, so I would not be able to denounce them. I ought to have gone at once to the police, but I was in such a dazed state, from what I had suffered, that it did not occur to me to do so.

"I had money enough to travel down to Eastwold that afternoon, and as I was walk-

(Continued on page iii of cover.)



(Continued from page 40)

ing over to the Hall in the evening it flashed to my mind that my enemies might have got ahead of me in their car, and set a trap for me. So I crept into the Hall grounds by a hedge, and as I was passing the front of the house, keeping a sharp watch, I heard a sound that sent me swiftly into the shrubbery. Then footsteps approached, and I knew that I had been seen by the men.

"I took to my heels, and they shot at me as I ran. They came up with me beyond the second plantation to the north, and I knocked them both down and dashed on. But I couldn't shake them off. They caught me in that shallow glade, with a deep pool in it, on the farther side of the hills. One of them dealt me a blow that half-stunned me, and I was thrown into the pond. Fortunately the cold shock revived me, and I

hid amongst the rushes until the scoundrels had gone, when I dragged myself half out of the water, and lost consciousness. And the next thing I knew I was in bed in the cottage hospital at Brandon."

Harry Beverley paused.

"Mr. Lee will tell you the rest, uncle," he said: and the detective took up the thread.

When the narrative was finished Sir Roger Beverley could scarcely speak for emotion. He clasped the detective's hand, and looked up at him with moist eyes that shone with gratitude.

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Lee!" he said in a tremulous voice. "You saved my nephew's life, and in saving him you have put me heavily in your debt. I was broken-hearted, and now I am a happy man again. Never, as long as Harry and I live, can we forget what we owe to you."

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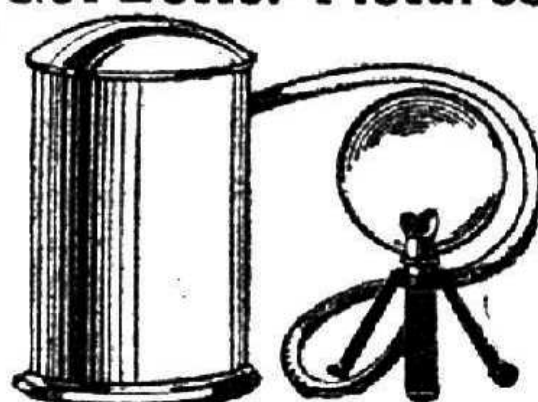
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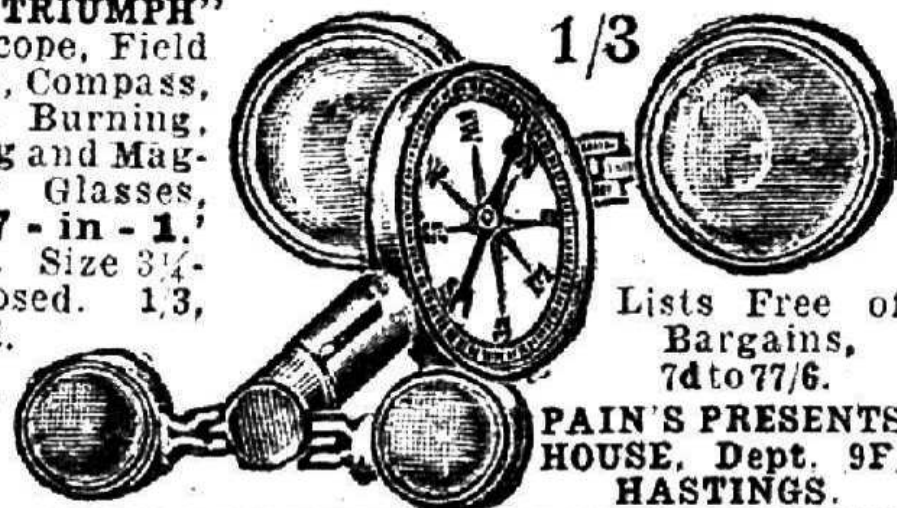
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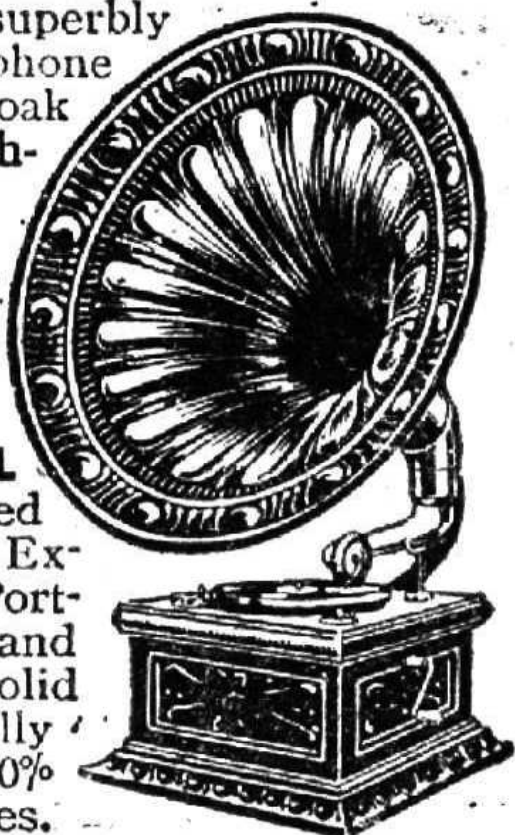
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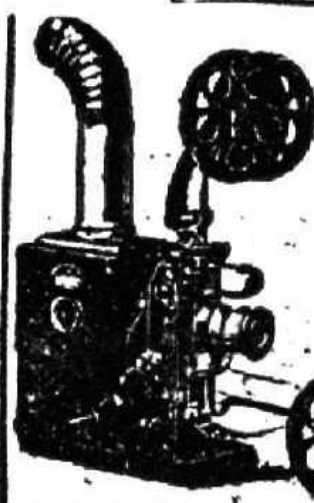
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