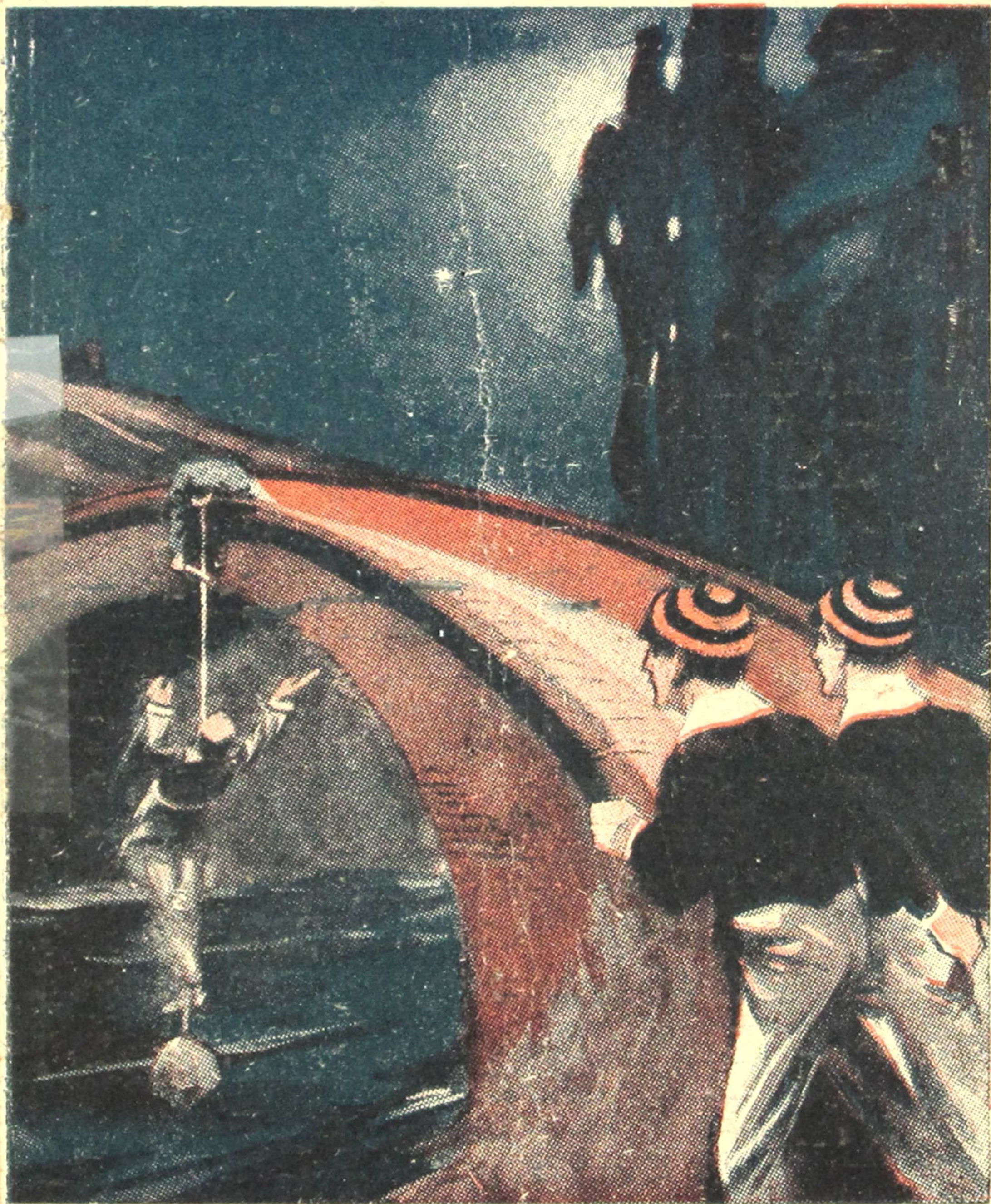


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**THE MESSAGES OF MYSTERY!**

Another Tale of NELSON LEE & NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE. Set down by NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Verdict of the School," "The City of Burnished Bronze," etc.

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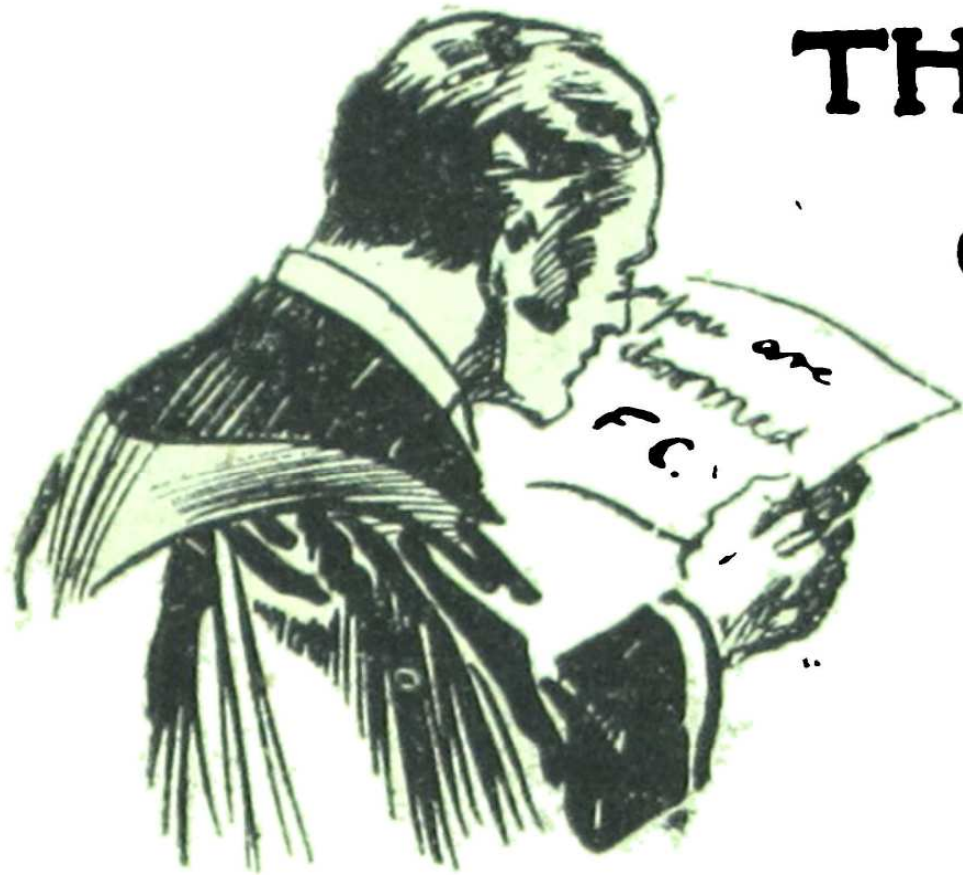


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# THE MESSAGES OF MYSTERY!

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE.

*Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College for a period of several months. Having incurred the hatred of the Fu Chang Tong, a murderous Chinese Secret Society, Nelson Lee and Nipper have been forced to adopt new identities until the time of peril has passed. Nelson Lee is a Housemaster, and Nipper a junior schoolboy. Nipper himself writes of the events which took place during his life as a member of the Remove Form in the Ancient House at St. Frank's.*

## CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD RECEIVES A RAGGING WHICH HE DIDN'T EARN—BUT DESERVES, ALL THE SAME—THERE IS A LITTLE MYSTERY.

**T**EDDY LONG, of the Remove Form of St. Frank's College, thudded into the common-room in the Ancient House. Long always thudded; he was fat and short and stumpy, and altogether cumbersome.

"I say, chaps, who's been playing the giddy ox?" he exclaimed curiously.

Nobody took any notice of Teddy Long. Tregellis-West and Watson and I were over by the window, chatting. Handforth and Hubbard were having a little argument concerning rabbits, and Handforth, as usual, was doing most of the talking. There were several other juniors in the common-room, but Long only addressed the empty air.

The fact of the matter was, Teddy Long was scarcely tolerated in the Remove. He was a necessary evil, so to speak. I had given him two or three

hidings, and he received, on the average, about twenty thick ears a week. I've heard that a leopard can't change his spots; Long, at all events, couldn't change his nature. He was a sneak and a worm generally.

Of course, you know who I am—that's general knowledge. At St. Frank's my name was Dick Bennett, but I'm really Nipper, renowned to fame as the assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee, the world-famous crime investigator.

As to why I was at St. Frank's, a member of the Remove, or why the guv'nor was posing as Mr. Alvington, the Housemaster of the Ancient House—well, that's general knowledge, too. We were there because we wanted to escape the unwelcome attentions of the Fu Chang Tong.

I'd had a few ups and downs already—mainly due to the hatred and enmity of Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the leader of the Ancient House Nuts—but Fullwood and Co. were somewhat discredited at present. Their trickery over the affair of Justin B. Farman, the American junior, had caused them to hide their heads for a time.

"I say, ain't you listening to me?" asked Teddy Long indignantly.

Of course, I'd heard the young bounder at first, and now I condescended to look over in his direction. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I, in fact, were talking cricket, and we didn't want to be disturbed.

And we certainly weren't going to be disturbed—by Teddy Long. I, of course, was skipper of the Remove—in the Ancient House, at least. Bob Christine ruled the roost over in the Monk's camp. Christine was really the junior captain, and he was the elected leader of the College House juniors—known as the Monks. The Ancient House fellows were generally known as Fossils. Until recently they had lived well up to their name, but I had managed to put some go into them, and before long I hoped to bring the Ancient House Remove well up to the level of the rival house juniors.

"What's the matter with you, Long?" I asked impatiently. "We don't want your yarns here; go to Study A if you've been eavesdropping. I dare say Fullwood will like to hear——"

"I haven't been eavesdropping!" declared Long warmly. "'Tain't likely I should! I'm a bit above that sort of thing—as everybody knows. I've got principles——"

"By gad! You don't say so?" exclaimed Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez, and regarding Long with great interest. "Did I understand you to say that you've got principles?"

"Of course you did!"

"It's wonderful how you conceal 'em, dear fellow," said Sir Montie. "I don't think you've ever shown us that you were principled—unless we put an 'un' in front of it, begad! I'm quite interested."

Teddy Long snorted.

"Oh, dry up, West!" he said plaintively. "I want to know who's been playing the ox. Who's been chalking that writing on the House steps? Something about fearing something or other."

"My dear kid, we're not interested in chalk marks on the steps," said Tommy Watson. "Buzz off! Go and bother somebody else."

"But it's jolly queer," said Teddy. "It's a kind of warning, you know. Something about the hour of vengeance. I don't believe any' of the chaps did it.

It's a message to somebody—to 'One who fears,' it's written."

"Dotty," said Watson, tapping his head significantly.

"No need to tell us that," went on Long. "We know you're dotty——"

"I meant you, you ass!" roared Watson.

"Oh, don't be a fathead, Watson!" protested Long. "I ain't dotty. If you don't believe me, you can go and look for yourself. All I say is that it's jolly queer. A lot of chaps are talking about it."

Just then Owen major and Farman and Canham, of Study H, rolled in.

"Say, I guess some galoot's feelin' gay," remarked Justin B. Farman, in his pure English. "He's feelin' that gay that he's been chalkin' a message on the steps. It's a dandy message, sure."

"So you've come in with the same yarn, eh?" I asked, with interest.

"Oh, it's only some funny ass or other," said Owen. "Wanted something to do, I suppose. Some of the chaps seem to think that there's something in the message. I don't. Rats to it!"

"We're at a disadvantage, dear fellows," said Sir Montie. "We haven't seen this interesting message. Suppose we stroll out, an' have a look at it? A breath of fresh air won't do us any harm—what?"

"Oh, all right," I said. "Come on, Tommy."

We went out of the common-room. Tregellis-West wasn't in need of fresh air; he'd been lounging by the open window of the common-room for half an hour. It was nearly dark, and the evening was still and fine.

When we got outside, we found that Handforth had followed us, picking up his two bosom chums, Church and McClure, on the way. On the steps, in the gathering dusk, were several Removites.

"What's the trouble here?" I asked.

"No trouble, Benny," said Armstrong. "These chalk marks are a bit queer, though. Somebody must have written 'em while we were all at prep. Anyhow, nobody seems to know anything about it."

We passed down the steps, and then turned. The writing was on the bottom step of all. This was broad and wide, and provided a splendid place for chalk-

ing writing. Bending down, I read the words:

"To one who fears. The hour of retribution is near.—F. C."

"By Jove, it's a bit melodramatic, dear Benny," drawled Sir Montie. "I'm feelin' quite shivery, begad! 'The hour of retribution is near'—what? I'm glad I'm not 'the one who fears.' That interestin' person must be tremblin' in his shoes. It's really entertainin'. I'm all agog for developments."

I puckered my brow.

"This isn't a jape," I remarked. "How can it be? There's no point in it—except to the fellow who understands it. And who's F. C.? Anybody in this House with those initials?"

"There's Church," said Armstrong thoughtfully.

"My initials ain't F. C.?" roared Church. "My name's Walter, you ass. Do you think I wrote this piffle? And what do I want to bring retribution on anybody for?"

"Well, there's Chambers, of the Fifth," said Watson. "His Christian name's Frederick, I believe. That's F. C., isn't it? But Chambers wouldn't write this rot here. He's a quiet sort of chap."

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie suddenly.

"What's biting you?" asked Handforth.

"Dear fellow, nothin's bitin' me. But I've had an inspiration," replied Tregellis-West, his face beaming. "A brain-wave, I might say. In fact, I've hit upon the truth—I have, really. It's quite amusin'. I can see possibilities. There's goin' to be trouble for somebody."

"Don't speak in riddles, you dummy!" bawled Handforth. "I don't believe you've hit on the truth at all. You haven't got sense enough, anyhow."

Edward Oswald Handforth sniffed, but Sir Montie only beamed more genially than ever. Nothing ever upset his superb equanimity; even Handforth had no effect upon Tregellis-West, and most of the fellows jibbed at Handforth. He couldn't speak without bawling, and he fondly imagined that his opinion was the only opinion worth listening to in the whole wide world.

"What's your idea, Montie?" I asked.

"Well, dear boy, I've been thinkin'. You're the one who fears."

"I am?" I ejaculated.

"Exactly," drawled the dandy of the Remove. "Of course, you don't fear really, but you're supposed to. And the retribution that's goin' to descend upon you is really nothin' to be worried over. This is a kind of hymn of hate, you know. It's a wheeze of the Nuts."

"The Nuts!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Fullwood and Co. haven't done this you prize ass!"

Sir Montie smiled serenely.

"Dear boy, that's where you're wrong—they have," he said. "I'll just explain my brilliant elucidation of the puzzle. Begad! I'm scintillatin' this evenin'—I am, really. I'm copyin' the methods of Sexton Blake—"

"You tame lunatic!" I grinned. "What are you getting at?"

"Listen, dear Bennett, and you will hear," said Tregellis-West. "This is what I make of it. F. C. stands for Fullwood and Co. Understand? That's near enough, ain't it? In their sublime ignorance, they imagine that you fear them. You've been havin' a few heated arguments with the Nuts lately, and they're after your skin like Prussians after babies, begad! An' they're goin' to make you sit up—that's the retribution."

I nodded slowly.

"That sounds jolly near the mark, Montie," I said. "Blessed if I thought you were so keen. Fullwood's just the chap to make a mystery like this—he's fond of publicity. The Nuts'll cackle like one o'clock if they're allowed to carry out their little scheme."

Everybody was grinning now.

"You've hit it, West," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "This is Fullwood's work, of course. I was thinking the same thing, only you happened to speak first. In fact, the explanation flashed into my brain as soon as ever I read the message."

"An' then flashed out again—what?" smiled Sir Montie. "It must have been a quick flash, Handforth, dear fellow. It was so swift that you didn't have time to grasp it. But never mind. I've solved the riddle. I'm happy. But I'll be happier when Fullwood's been made to own up."

I wasn't absolutely sure that Montie's explanation was correct, but the chances

were all in favour of it. F. C. certainly stood for Fullwood and Co. And there wasn't anybody else who would have written such a dramatic message. It fitted the Nuts perfectly.

"Hallo! Here's Fullwood!" exclaimed McClure suddenly.

We peered through the heavy dusk. A figure was lounging towards the Ancient House from the direction of the gates. The Triangle was nearly deserted, and we easily recognised the elegant figure of Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

Fullwood was a "goey" fellow—a regular demon, in his own opinion. In the opinion of all decent fellows, he was a young blackguard of the first water. He was an out-and-out rotter—and he hated me like poison. I was rather flattered, really. To be hated by a fellow like Fullwood was something of a distinction.

"Let's collar the beast right away," suggested McClure, in a low voice. "He can lie like a German News Bureau, and he'll deny everything if we question him."

Handforth nodded.

"That's the idea," he agreed. "Scrag him first, and ask questions afterwards."

"Well, it won't do him any harm, anyhow—even if he's innocent of this particular crime," I said cheerfully. "He deserves a scragging every day, and if we drop on the wrong fellow I sha'n't cry over it. But I believe Montie's right—Fullwood wrote this fathcaded message."

"We'll make him rub it out," declared Watson firmly.

"With his nose," I added. "That's my idea."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The mighty Fullwood came up, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and with his eyeglass in his eye.

"Want all the steps?" he asked sarcastically. "Shift your carcass, Hubbard—you're in my way."

Hubbard, who still regarded Fullwood with something like awe, hesitated.

"Hold on, Fullwood," I said, grasping his arm. "A word with you."

"Don't lay your dirty paws on me, you cad!" growled Fullwood savagely. "I'm rather particular about who touches me."

"Well, I'm rather particular, too," I said. "But I'm overcoming my scruples

for once. What's the idea of writing that message on the step? I suppose you meant it for me?"

"I don't know what you are talkin' about, confound you!" snapped Fullwood.

"Rats!" put in Handforth. "You know well enough, you rotter. Look here, Bennett, don't beat about the bush. Didn't we agree to rub his nose on the giddy step? He'll only lie until he's blue in the face——"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood shook himself free.

"You silly fools!" he shouted. "What do you think you're doing? I've been in Bannington all the evening. If you don't let me pass, I'll smash you. Hi! Look out! What are you up to, you idiots?"

Fullwood soon found out what we were up to!

I grabbed one arm, Sir Montie another, Handforth the left leg, and Watson the right. McClure and Church hovered in the background, ready to lend a hand if necessary.

Fullwood struggled violently, but he was quite powerless.

His monocle went flying one way, his straw hat the other. Then his head was forced down to within an inch of the lower step.

"You're going to rub out that rot!" I said grimly. "This is just a lesson, Fullwood, my buck. You've got to learn that threatening messages of this sort ain't tolerated. Down with him, you chaps!"

"You mad idiots!" howled Fullwood. "I didn't write this piffle! I didn't——"

"You didn't expect to rub it out, did you?" grinned Tommy Watson. "What shall we make him do—lick it off, or rub it out with his nose?"

"Dear boy, his nose is the larger," said Sir Montie thoughtfully. "He might refuse to lick it, you know—an' he can't help rubbin' it out with his nose. At least, his nose'll be used for that purpose—we'll do the rubbin'!"

"I tell you I didn't—— Yow! Gurrh!"

Fullwood's frantic words were cut off abruptly. Handforth, who was always heavy handed, had pushed Fullwood's face down. At the same time, the Nut's head was jerked to and fro. His nose rubbed along the step violently. The step wasn't exactly rough, and it wasn't

smooth. Fullwood's nose suffered somewhat.

"That's enough," I grinned, after a minute. "He's had his lesson. We can't make him rub it out, literally. But I don't think he'll write any more idiotic messages of this sort. Understand, Fullwood? Take warning, my son."

We dropped him suddenly, and he sprawled on the gravel. But he was up in a moment, purple with fury. His nose was dusty and rather twisted. But he wasn't hurt much.

"I'll make you pay for this, you cads!" he snarled hoarsely. "By Jove! I'll make you pay for it!"

He was too furious to say anything else; and if he had said anything he wouldn't have been heard. For the fellows were roaring with laughter. He snatched up his straw-hat, and stamped into the Ancient House.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We stood at the foot of the steps and grinned rather loudly. Then Merrell and Noys, of Study G, came along. They were pals of Fullwood's, and we didn't intend to waste much time over them.

"What's the rumpus?" asked Merrell curiously.

"Just been giving your chief-Nut a lesson," grinned Handforth. "He's been writing threats on this step, and we've shown him the error of his ways. The rotter came out here in the dusk, and chalked——"

"That's rot!" interrupted Noys.

"Oh, is it?" roared Handforth. "Look here, you smoky bounder——"

"Hold on!" gasped Noys, who wasn't a fighting man. "Don't be an ass, Handforth. Fullwood's been in Bannington all the evening. He went to the cinema with us; we've only just got back. Didn't you see him come in?"

"Well, he did come in a minute ago," I remarked.

"Begad!" grinned Sir Montie. "Have we made a bloomer, dear fellows?"

"Oh, Noys is lying, as usual——"

"Phillips and Bryant, of the Fifth, were there, if you want to know!" shouted Noys warmly. "They're just comin' in now. They saw us in the cinema—Fullwood as well. Fullwood's been away from St. Frank's since tea-time!"

There couldn't be any further doubt. We had punished Ralph Leslie Fullwood for something he hadn't done!

## CHAPTER II.

I RECEIVE A BIT OF A SHOCK—AND SO DOES THE GUV'NOR—THEN ANOTHER MESSAGE ARRIVES IN A DRAMATIC MANNER, AND NELSON LEE IS VERY GRAVE.

SIR MONTIE grinned serenely.

"My brilliant idea seems to have been wrong," he yawned. "Never mind, dear boys. It's disappointin', but I'm not grieved. Fulwood deserved a raggin', anyhow. I don't feel called upon to apologise, you know."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about the cad," I exclaimed. "That ragging did him a world of good. But, if Fullwood didn't write this message, who did? It didn't write itself, I suppose? I don't like to be diddled over it."

"Well, the warning ain't for you, so I don't see why you should worry," said Handforth. "I'm finished with it, anyhow. Rats to it. We've done our duty, so everything's all right. As a matter of fact, I was pretty sure that Fullwood was innocent all the time."

And Handforth, having delivered himself of that remark, went indoors with Church and McClure. Nobody felt in the least bit sorry for Fullwood. The fact that he hadn't written the message struck the fellows as being rather funny.

Watson and Sir Montie and I entered the House, and went along to Study C. Here we switched on the light—for it was now nearly dark—and grinned at one another.

"Fat lot of good your ideas are," chuckled Tommy. "My dear old Montie, your explanation was ingenious, but it was off-side. Now, who the dickens wrote that rot on the step? I'd like to know."

"I expect we shall find out before long," I said. "Somebody's idea of humour, I suppose. Let's get on with our prep. It ought to have been done long ago. I want to have a word with Christine about the cricket, later on."

We dismissed the matter from our minds, and were soon busy with prep. Sir Montie and I finished ours long before Watson, and we decided to run

over to the College House to have a chat with Bob Christine.

We left the study, and strolled along the passage. Fullwood and Gulliver were coming up from the common-room, and they both scowled at us savagely. Fullwood's nose was rather inflamed.

"Rather unfortunate, that little mistake," I chuckled. "But cheer up, Fullwood; you can console yourself by the knowledge that you deserved—"

"Hang you!" snapped Fullwood, pushing past.

"Shockin' temper he's got," murmured Tregellis-West, as we passed out of the lobby into the Triangle. "He can't take a joke at all. Some fellows are hard to get on with, Benny. It's a sad world. And a dark one, too, begad!"

It was certainly dark out in the Triangle. Most of the lights of both Houses were subdued by dark blinds. The entrance porch of the College House was just visible across the wide space.

The Triangle itself was deserted and quiet. Sir Montie and I emerged quickly, and as we did so I saw something move across one of the lighted study windows—a shadow. But it was not the shadow of somebody within the study; it was outside. And, as I watched, I saw a tall figure steal away round the House.

"Hold on, Montie!" I whispered.

"What's wrong, dear fellow?"

"I don't know. Did you see it?"

"See what?"

"Why, that figure, of course," I murmured. "It wasn't a junior, Montie. There's a man lurking about—There you are! Did you see his shadow pass that window? I say, this looks queer."

Tregellis-West stood quite still.

"One of the masters, I suppose," he whispered.

"My dear chap, a master wouldn't slink about like that," I replied. "It's a man of some sort—tall, with rounded shoulders, and a slouch hat."

"Dear fellow, you have amazin' eye-sight," murmured Sir Montie. "I didn't see all those details, you know. Begad! I wonder if this fellow is the author of that merry message?"

I started.

"That's likely," I said quickly.

"Look here, we'll investigate. You're game, I suppose? The chap may be a tramp—"

"My dear old boy, pray don't be absurd," protested Tregellis-West. "Am I game? I'll go anywhere, Benny boy. I'll do anything. Lead the way, an' I'll follow. I'm good at followin', but no good at leadin'. That's why I rely on you."

I couldn't help grinning.

"Come on, then," I said, in a low voice.

I had a pretty shrewd idea that the lurker, whoever he was, was standing still, watching us. He had passed one dimmed window, but there was another just beyond—and he hadn't passed that. The inference, therefore, was that he was standing in the dark space between the two windows.

I made straight for this spot, running lightly and softly, Sir Montie close beside me. Just before we reached the place there was a sudden movement, and a face appeared in the subdued light which filtered through the green blind.

The face was lean and clean-shaven; I saw it dimly for a fraction of a second. And it seemed to me that the eyes were narrow, and that the skin was—yellow! The next second the man, realising that we were upon him, turned on his heel and fled.

"Begad!" gasped Montie. "You were right, old boy!"

"Collar the rotter!" I panted.

We simply tore round the Ancient House; but, fast as we ran, the stranger went faster. He cut across the Triangle like an elusive shadow. He made no sound whatever on the gravel; and quite suddenly I lost sight of our quarry.

"Where is he?" I asked, turning my head.

"Goodness knows!" said Montie. "He seems to have vanished into thin air."

As I ran I tried to pierce the darkness. But it was black and impenetrable over here, by the hedge which shut off the playing-fields. And the strange, silent-footed man had completely disappeared.

Tregellis-West and I came to a stop. We held our breath, but not a sound was to be heard, except a far-distant chorus of boyish laughter.



"We've lost him, Montie," I muttered.

"It looks like it, Benny," he replied. "Who was he, anyhow?"

"Somebody who had no right here—that's certain," I said. "He wouldn't have bunked if he'd been in the Triangle for a lawful purpose. What a pity it's so beastly dark. We can't possibly locate him now."

"Suppose we call help?"

"What's the good? The chap may be half-way to Bellton by this time," I said quickly. "Look here, I'd better tell old Alvy about this. We must report it, anyhow. Can't have tramps loitering about the school premises—I suppose he was a tramp. Come on."

We hurried back to the Ancient House. It would have been a sheer waste of time to remain out there. In the darkness we could do nothing. And a startling, terrible thought had come to me—a suspicion I couldn't possibly share with Montie.

When we got to the Ancient House steps, I hurried up them without a pause.

"I'm going to the Housemaster," I said. "Sha'n't be long, Montie. We'd better not both go—although you can come if you like, you know."

"No, dear boy; I'll go and tell Tommy the excitin' news."

I had been pretty sure that Sir Montie wouldn't elect to come with me; and I was very glad of that. For I didn't want him with me. I was anxious to have a few words with "Mr. Alvington" in strict privacy.

Arriving at his study I tapped on the door, and entered. Nelson Lee, in his character of the Housemaster, was lolling in a chair, smoking a cigar and reading. He looked round at me inquiringly.

"Oh, it's you, Bennett," he exclaimed, using my newly-adopted name easily. "Well, my boy, what do you want?"

I shut the door firmly, and walked forward into the cosy apartment.

"Something's happened, gov'nor," I said tensely.

Nelson Lee realised, by my tone, that something was wrong. He sat up, laid his paper aside, and looked fully into my flushed face.

"Go ahead, young 'un," he said quietly, in his old natural tone.

"Some time this evening, sir, there was a curious message chalked on one of the House steps," I exclaimed. "This message was just a few words: 'To One Who Fears. The Hour Of Retribution Is Near.—F. C.' That's what it was, sir."

"The words were chalked on the step, you say?"

"Yes, gov'nor," I replied, falling into my old way of address readily, now that we were alone together. We might have been in our consulting-room, at Gray's Inn Road.

"Do you know who did it?"

"I don't exactly know, sir—but I suspect."

"Ah, you've got something more to tell me," said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"At first, I thought it was just a joke of one of the boys, gov'nor," I said. "But nobody knows anything about it. And, a few minutes ago, Tregellis-West and I were crossing the Triangle when we saw a strange man lurking there."

"A strange man, Nipper?"

"I wouldn't come here unless I was jolly sure about it, sir," I said gravely. "We didn't see the man really distinctly, but I just caught a glimpse of his face. And then he scooted off. Of course, he may have nothing whatever to do with that message—but it's rather queer."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It may be queer, Nipper, or it may not," he said thoughtfully. "It is quite possible that you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. These chalk marks are evidently of no importance, and the man himself may be a tramp who is lurking about for what he can catch."

"That won't do, gov'nor," I said, shaking my head. "Oh, I know what you're getting at! You've had a deep suspicion, and you don't want me to know about it. So you're trying to make me easy in mind. But it won't do, sir—I've had that suspicion, too."

"And what is your idea, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"Well," I said deliberately, lowering my voice. "'F. C.' stands for 'Fu Chang,' doesn't it? The message was to 'one who fears'—and that must be you, sir. And my impression is that

the man I saw had a yellow face. He was a Chinaman!"

The great detective lay back in his chair.

"A Chinaman, eh?" he mused. "Are you sure, Nipper?"

"No, that's just it," I replied. "I'm not sure. It's only an impression. But, seriously, don't you think there's something in what I say? Didn't you jump to the same conclusion yourself?"

"I certainly did, my boy," replied Nelson Lee. "But there is no necessity for us to worry ourselves. I don't think the Fu Chang scoundrels have discovered us. There is nothing to show that the message was meant for me, and 'F. C.' may mean quite a different—"

Crash!

I nearly jumped a yard, and Nelson Lee hopped out of his chair. The crash of smashing glass had sounded at the window. Something hit the drawn blind with a smack, and then dropped to the floor.

I grinned.

"Some of the kids, messing about with a cricket ball, I expect," I chuckled. "This is where you go on the war path, gov'nor. The asses! Fancy chucking a cricket ball through a Housemaster's window!"

"Don't speak so loudly, young 'un," said Lee softly.

He laid his cigar down and crossed over to the window. He bent down and picked up the cricket ball—that's what I thought, at least. But when I looked I saw that he had a big stone in his hand. A short piece of string was tied to it, with a scrap of paper at the other end.

"Hallo! What's that?" I asked curiously.

The gov'nor didn't reply for a moment. He pushed the blind aside, jerked up the window-sash, and leaned out. I remained on the other side of the room.

"Can you see anybody, sir?" I asked.

"Nothing, Bennett, nothing at all!" replied Lee sharply. "It is most extraordinary. Who has dared to hurl a stone through my window? Ah! Who is that—who is that over there?"

I heard a distant hail.

"Oh, it's you, Christine," Lee exclaimed. "Do you know anything about this affair? Did you see anybody throw a stone?"

I heard Bob Christine run up to the window.

"My hat! Was it your window, sir?" he asked. "I heard a crash of glass, but I thought some of the Fossils—er—Ancient House chaps, were having a lark, or a row, of some sort."

"You didn't see who threw the stone, my boy?"

"Oh, no, sir. I just heard the crash."

The gov'nor thanked Christine; then he withdrew his head, and allowed the blind to fall into place. He was looking annoyed.

"Accidents are bound to happen, of course, but this wasn't an accident, Bennett," he exclaimed. "Somebody deliberately threw that stone at my window, and slunk off after committing the act. It will be quite impossible to discover who was responsible."

"What's that piece of paper tied to the stone, sir?"

"Paper, my boy?"

"Didn't you see it?" I asked, in surprise. "Why, it's hanging from your hand now."

The Housemaster looked down at his hand, and then whistled softly. He laid the stone on the desk, and twisted the little piece of paper out of its loop of string. Then he unfolded it, and looked at it intently.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed softly.

"This is interesting, young 'un."

"Why, what is it, gov'nor?"

Nelson Lee handed the little piece of ragged paper over to me. It was a scrap of newspaper, torn from a sheet near the margin. And on the blank space of the margin I faintly saw some pencilled words—written in curious, irregular capital letters:

"You are doomed. Prepare yourself.—F. C."

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "It's—it's another message!"

"And, on this occasion, Nipper, there can be no doubt as to whom it is addressed. It was delivered into this very study—proving that it is I who must prepare myself—it is I who have to meet my doom."

For fully a minute Nelson Lee and I looked at one another seriously. I had gone quite pale, but the gov'nor was calm. He looked rather curious in his disguise as the elderly schoolmaster, but I'd grown accustomed to that long ago.

"It's the Tong-men!" I whispered, at last.

"There can be no other explanation, Nipper," nodded the great detective. "The Fu Changs have found us at last. It's a pity—a great pity. We were just getting on swimmingly, too. I'm afraid this will upset matters terribly."

"Can't—can't we do anything?" I asked huskily.

"Not to-night, Nipper. You had better go back to your chums, now—they'll be wondering why I have kept you so long," said the gov'nor. "Don't worry, my boy. Leave this matter in my hands. These threats don't affect me in the least. And, remember, the Tong-men can only suspect—they can't know for certain. It may be only a try on. Good-night, young 'un."

"Good-night, gov'nor!" I muttered.

I left the study without another word. The passage seemed grey and cold to me. Everything had grown dismal. In spite of Nelson Lee's forced cheeriness, I knew that he was as upset as myself.

Our sanctuary was safe no longer!

The Fu Chang Tong had found us!

### CHAPTER III.

TEDDY LONG BRINGS NEWS, AND SIR MONTIE AND WATSON AND I SALLY OUT UPON A MAN-HUNT—THE CHASE ENDS IN WARREN'S SHED—AND THEN THINGS HAPPEN!

I DID my best to look cheerful as I walked into Study C, in the Remove passage. I found Sir Montie there, chatting with Tommy Watson. Christine was there, too, having come over for a chat. He'd been on his way across the Triangle when that stone buzzed through the gov'nor's window.

"You've been a jolly long time with old Alvy," said Watson, looking at me curiously. "What's all this about somebody chucking stones?"

"Oh, nothing," I replied. "Some ass or other tried to see if Alvy's window would bend—and found it wouldn't. One of the Fags, I expect. An accident, of course."

"I was just coming across," remarked Bob Christine. "I heard the crash, but I didn't see anybody. The Triangle was quite deserted. I hope old Alvy doesn't think I——"

"Rats!" I grinned. "Alvy knows it wasn't you, old son. He's told me not

to look upon that message too seriously, Montie. It may be only some silly joke on the part of a Third Form kid."

"Message?" asked Christine.

I patiently explained all about it, and the leader of the Monks grinned.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said. "I shouldn't be surprised if one of your clumsy Nuts did it, after all. Now, look here, about the cricket——"

The door opened abruptly, and Teddy Long appeared, excited and scared.

"I say——" he burst out.

"Oh, rats! Go and say it somewhere else!" exclaimed Christine. "I'm talking cricket to these chaps——"

"But—but—but——"

"Outside!" roared Bob warnily.

"Hold on!" I said. "Long seems scared over something. What's wrong, ass?"

"There's a man in the Triangle!" gasped Teddy Long. "A—a tramp, or—or something. I—I spotted him, you know. He—he came for me, but I bunked. I ain't a coward, but I can't stand up to a whacking great tramp. I—I thought of going for him——"

"Rot! A Second Form fag's about your mark!" interrupted Watson bluntly.

"The—the chap's there now!" panted Long, looking uneasily over his shoulder. "A—a frightful ruffian, you know. He—he had a bludgeon——"

"Look here, this seems serious!" I interjected sharply. "Ordinarily, I wouldn't take any notice of this idiot's jaw; but we saw this tramp chap ourselves, Montie. He's still lurking about."

"Begad!" yawned Tregellis-West lazily.

"He'll get away if you don't hurry!" shouted Teddy Long.

"Oh, we'll go on the warpath—we'll run the fellow down," said Sir Montie. "But you're such a young fibber, Lanky——"

"It's the truth!" howled Long.

"Come on!" I exclaimed. "We'll see for ourselves."

We all hurried out, Christine with us. Long remained in the background, probably thinking that it was better to witness the excitement than take any active part in it.

Out in the Triangle all was deserted, as before.

"We'd better spread out," I said crisply. "We'll search in different direc-

sions, and if we see anything we'll give a hail. You search your side, Christine—you know it better."

"Right-ho!" said Christine, cutting off.

Tommy and Montie and I ran in different directions, but, almost at once, I heard a gasp from Montie.

"This way, dear fellows!" he panted.

I swerved, and saw that Watson had done the same. Christine, probably, hadn't heard the hail, and we forgot all about him. Sir Montie was trotting along in the shadow of the hedge which divided the Triangle from the playing-fields.

"Did you see him?" asked Watson.

"Plain as day, dear boy!" said Tregellis-West. "He was rompin' along this way. Begad! There he is—look!"

Just ahead of us a dim, indistinct figure was slinking along. I gripped my teeth, and wondered if it was wise to rush to the attack. The man was a Chinaman—a member of the Tong! And he would certainly be armed.

But I cast aside these thoughts, and pelted forward.

The stranger gave up all pretence of secrecy now. He turned and fled straight towards a little clearing ahead—a kind of backwater in a corner of the Triangle, where, amid the trees, stood a little shed, used by Warren, the porter.

"My hat! We've got him!" panted Tommy. "He's making for the shed!"

The rascal was, indeed, heading for the door of the shed. We were almost upon him as he reached it. The door opened, and I caught a glimpse of a dim light. Sir Montie and Watson and I burst into the shed all together.

And then— Well, then things happened!

The door of the shed closed sharply, and a series of low murmurs of satisfaction came to my ears. Next second I was bowled over, and felt somebody sitting on my chest, and somebody else on my legs. Various gasps and kicks told me that Tommy and Montie were in a similar condition.

"Now, my son!" gasped a triumphant voice. "Now we've got you!"

"Great Scott! Fullwood!" I breathed furiously.

"Fullwood—and Company!" he agreed. "We're all here, Bennett—all the select, noble order of Nuts. Tricked you nicely, eh? I dare say you'll

slaughter Long later on—but that'll be his trouble. If he hadn't done as I ordered, I should have slaughtered him—so it makes no difference."

"You—you cad!" gasped Watson. "We—we thought——"

"That a tramp was lurkin' about—eh?" grinned Ralph Leslie Fullwood. "Exactly! That's what I wanted you to think. The wheeze has worked like a dream. This is where you get it in the neck."

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "I'm gettin' it already, dear boy. I don't know who you are—the fellow on my chest, I mean—but you're chokin' me, you rotter. Your knee's pressin' against my windpipe——"

"Sorry!" said Gulliver, with a chuckle. "That better, ass?"

He pressed his knee harder, and Sir Montie gurgled painfully. I was staring round me—as well as I could, under the circumstances—and calling myself about fifty different names every second. I'd been lured into this trap by Fullwood. It was all a trick of the Nuts!

Fullwood and Merrell were holding me down; Gulliver and Noys had got Sir Montie; and Marriott and Bell were attending to Watson. There was no escape. Once on our backs we couldn't do a thing.

Teddy Long, of course, had been in the plot—and I had to admit that he had acted his part well. He'd taken us all in, anyhow. But I didn't blame the little beggar much; he was forced to do it.

Fullwood had taken advantage of the circumstances to lure us out.

"We knew that you'd come rompin' out if you heard there was a tramp skulkin' about the Triangle," he grinned. "And now we've got you, my bucks. I'm goin' to pay you back for that raggin' you gave me this evenin'—with interest! Rub my nose on the steps, would you?"

He pulled one of my ears viciously.

"Say you're sorry, you cad!" he exclaimed, with a sneer.

"I'm sorry—awfully sorry!" I replied meekly.

"By Jove! Don't apologise to the beast!" gasped Sir Montie.

"I'm sorry I didn't rub your nose more violently," I finished up calmly.

"That's how sorry I am, Fullwood. You

deserved that ragging—even if you didn't write those chalk marks."

"You cheeky rotter!" snarled Fullwood.

"I dare say you'll take your revenge in your own peculiar way," I went on. "Tear up our clothes, or something like that. Go ahead. You'll regret it if you do. You're only top dog for the minute."

"Let's get it over, Fully," muttered Merrell. "I—I believe some other chaps are out in the Triangle, an' they might hear us——"

"An' spoil the fun!" said Noys. "Let's tar 'em right away!"

"Tar!" roared Watson. "You cads! Are you going to tar and feather us?"

"Feathers ain't obtainable, so we're usin' the tar alone," grinned Fullwood. "Shove it over, Marriott, my son."

In the dim light of the single candle I saw Marriott reach out, and push across a big pot of tar—which Warren used for some good purpose or other. There was a brush, too, and Fullwood pulled it out, dripping with the inky stuff.

"Watson first!" grinned the Nut-leader.

"Don't you shove that rotten stuff on me!" howled Tommy. "Rescue, Fossils! Rescue, Remove! Res—— Yow! Ooouugh!"

Tommy Watson ceased yelling abruptly. Fullwood had savagely jammed the tar brush into his mouth, and he was effectually silenced. Then Fullwood smeared the tar all over poor old Tommy's head.

"You beastly cad!" I said hotly.

"Afraid of your turn, eh?" chuckled Fullwood. "Sorry, Bennett, but this is a reprisal, you know. My nose smarts yet."

As he spoke, he tarred my own head. I didn't struggle. What was the use? I certainly didn't want any of the stuff in my eyes. Tar's jolly fine stuff for putting on roads, or fences, but it's not exactly a good hair-lotion. The stuff dripped over my collar and tie, and my Etons, and my face.

Then the pot was handed over to Gulliver—who anointed Sir Montie. Poor old Tregellis-West was nearly frantic. His clothes were things of joy, and his hair was his chief pride. But he didn't yell a bit.

"This is just the start," said Fullwood savagely. "Did you think we'd finished

with you? We're goin' to rub a lot of sawdust into your hair now—instead of feathers, you know. Then we're goin' to tie your boots round your necks, an' make you pelt across the rough gravel of the Triangle in your stockings. Does the prospect delight you? Your feet may get cut——"

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Noys nervously.

"Nothing, you idiot——"

But Fullwood paused as a hail came dimly into the shed.

"In the shed, Christine!" I bellowed. "Rescue!"

I heard Christine's answering hail; he had evidently been searching for us. He was probably alone. But Fullwood and Co. didn't know that. They exchanged startled glances, and Fullwood nodded.

"Better clear out," he said savagely. "They've had a good dose, anyhow."

With one accord the Nuts jumped to their feet and hurried out of the shed. They met Christine outside, and bowled him clean over in the darkness. I heard him roaring as I struggled to my feet.

Then he jumped up, and came into the shed.

"What the dickens has been happening——" He paused, and gaped. "Great guns!" he roared. "What—— How—— Oh, crumbs!"

Fullwood and Co. were pelting across the Triangle, and the performance was apparently over. They had been successful—but not so successful as they would have liked. Tommy and Montie and I were quite satisfied, however.

"What the thunder has happened?" gasped Bob Christine faintly.

"Dear fellow, we've been the guests of the delightful Fullwood," said Sir Montie calmly—he always was calm, under any circumstances. "We've been tastin' the joys of tar as a hair restorer, begad! It's shockin'."

"But—but what about the giddy tramp——"

"My dear old scout, there wasn't any tramp," I interrupted. "The whole thing was a wheeze of Fullwood's. I say, the Triangle's deserted just now. There'll be crowds as soon as those rotters spread the yarn. Let's cut in!"

"But, look here——"

We left Christine to voice his remarks to the desert air; we could explain matters to him afterwards, and, incidentally, thank him for butting in before

the rest of Ralph Leslie Fullwood's delightful plan could be put into effect.

By wonderful luck we reached the bathrooms before the Fossils heard of the affair. We locked ourselves into one of the bathrooms, and then started operations. For a full hour we laboured, and even then, although the worst of the horrid stuff was-off, we still smelt something like a newly made road on a hot day.

Undoubtedly Fullwood and Co. had scored—but they would have to pay for their amusement before long. At least, they called it amusement—we didn't!

#### CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER MESSAGE ARRIVES IN A MOST EXTRAORDINARY MANNER—THE GUV'NOR, A BICYCLE AND A BOULDER BECOME SOMEWHAT MIXED—BUT, FORTUNATELY, THE DAMAGE IS ONLY SLIGHT.

**W**E—that is, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and myself—were chipped considerably by the other fellows in the Ancient House Remove. For Fullwood & Co. spread the yarn far and wide.

The majority of the fellows considered that the Nuts had played a dirty, caddish trick; but they chuckled all the same. That's human nature. A jape's a jape, but smothering a chap with tar, and ruining his clothes, is an outrage.

Of course, we couldn't sneak; and the events which followed immediately afterwards made us forget Fullwood & Co. For strange things occurred at St. Frank's.

Fullwood half expected trouble in the dormitory that night; but he didn't get any. I was too worried to think of ragging him, and I had advised Tommy and Montie to let the thing drop for the time being. We'd pay the Nuts back in our own time, and in our own particular way.

Most of the Removites went to sleep fairly quickly; but I lay awake for a full hour. I had a lot to think about.

Should I have to leave St. Frank's? That was the question I asked myself. I didn't care a rap about the Fu Chang Tong, or the danger. But it was galling—it was exasperating—to think that, just as the gov'nor and I had got settled down, we should have to seek another refuge.

St. Frank's was the ideal place; and yet, it seemed, the Tong-men had found us! I felt miserable. I liked St. Frank's; I liked Sir Montie and Tommy, and the life generally. The rest was doing Nelson Lee worlds of good. And I felt healthier and brawnier than I had done for months. This enforced holiday was just what we required. And yet—!

I suppose I went to sleep while I was still thinking. Anyhow, I don't remember any more until the rising-bell clanged out its unwelcome tune. I was the first fellow out-of bed; I invariably was, in fact.

The other chaps couldn't quite understand why I was so alert and fresh and keen immediately after waking. They didn't know—and I didn't trouble to explain—that this knack of mine was the result of Nelson Lee's excellent training.

It was a glorious morning, and the late summer sun was shining in at the tall dormitory windows in a blaze. A stiffish breeze swayed the branches of the elms and chestnuts out in the Triangle.

"Ripping morning." I remarked cheerfully. "Half-holiday to-day, too. Hope this weather lasts—Hallo, what's this? Somebody flying a peace-kite, or is it a new-fangled air-raid warning?"

I was looking out of the window interestedly.

"Jolly queer," I said.

"What is it, ass?" demanded Handforth.

"You've got legs, I suppose?" I replied. "Come and see, my son."

Curiosity is a wonderful thing; Edward Oswald Handforth would have remained in bed until the last possible moment; but my remark had interested him. In a moment, in fact, a dozen fellows had tumbled out.

"Rotten shame, rousin' us out at this unearthly hour!" growled Gulliver. "I reckon we ought to be allowed until ten o'clock!"

"I dare say some chaps need to sleep until ten," said Tommy Watson sarcastically—"especially if they play the giddy ox over-night, and don't get to bed until the small hours!"

Gulliver scowled, but he didn't pursue the subject.

Quite a crowd of fellows came to the window, and stared out

"Waal, say, that's surely dandy!" exclaimed Justin B. Farman admiringly. "I guess that's a real peach of a kite. It reminds me of the kites those dogone Chinks used to monkey around with, way out in California!"

"Chinks!" I ejaculated. "My hat!"

I stared out now, with renewed interest. For, flying high above the school, was a large, rough-and-ready kite. It was crudely constructed—we could see that easily—but it was efficient. And, some little distance below it, tied to the string, a long streamer was flying. The end of the cable seemed to be fixed to a fence, close by the gymnasium.

"Who the dickens does that thing belong to?" asked Hubbard, yawning. "Silly rot! Some of the Third, I s'pose."

"Dear boy, it's an amusin' pastime," remonstrated Sir Montie. "It's a harmless, instructive pastime, in fact. Just consider how useful it is. If that kite hadn't been flyin', we should have been lyin' in bed still. But our overpowering curiosity got the better of us. Even Fullwood's turned out. And—begad!—Long is actually dressin' himself!"

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez, and regarded Teddy Long's squat, tubby form with keen interest.

"Oh, don't be an ass, West!" mumbled Long.

"It's marvellous!" said Montie. "'Pon my word, I shall have to tell the Head to have kites flyin' every mornin'. It seems to work miracles!"

It was, indeed, extraordinary for Teddy Long to be out of bed; he usually stayed between the blankets until every other fellow was on the point of going down. Then he'd tear into his clothes, wash himself within twenty seconds—which, in his opinion, were so many wasted seconds—and thump down.

I hurried over my ablutions (isn't that a rotten word?) myself this morning, and was done before anybody else. Then strolled into the Triangle, and made my way round the corner of the Ancient House

There was a kite, soaring aloft, and riding splendidly in the breeze. There seemed to be some words on the streamer, but the beastly thing wouldn't keep still. It kept blowing into folds—

But a big blow came along, and the streamer stood out straight. I started as I looked upwards. The words on the length of white material stared right down at me; and I stood rooted to the spot.

For the words were these:

"The Blow Will Fall To-day.—F. C."

I was glad that I stood alone at that moment. The blow would fall to-day! These mysterious messages were getting into a nightmare. They were worse than an actual attempt on the gov'nor's life. The whole object of the messages, no doubt, was to terrorize Nelson Lee into a jelly.

If so, then the plan certainly missed fire—badly.

For, as I noticed a moment later, "Mr. Alvington" himself was standing over by the clump of chestnuts, looking up into the sky. He was reading the words on the streamer. I walked casually over to him.

"That's rummy, sir, isn't it?" I remarked.

"It is certainly curious, Bennett," replied the gov'nor, in a steady voice. "Who can have sent this kite up?"

"The Fu Changs, sir!" I muttered quickly.

"Steady, young 'un—steady!" warned Nelson Lee. "We've got a moment to ourselves here. This is another warning—as you see. Take no notice of it. Go about just as usual."

"But—but something's going to happen—"

"Perhaps—and perhaps not," interjected the gov'nor. "At all events, don't worry yourself."

"This is the last bit of proof we need, sir," I murmured bitterly. "A kite! Why, kite-flying is the Chinese national pastime! Those rotten Fu Changs—"

"Hush!"

Tregellis-West and Watson and two or three seniors were strolling across the Triangle—the seniors trying to look quite unconcerned; but, in reality, being as curious as the Removites.

Soon a whole crowd had collected, and Nelson Lee had gone in. Well, he wasn't worrying, so I shouldn't. He knew best. I trusted the gov'nor absolutely. I'd been told to "carry on" as usual—and I would do so.

"Hallo! There's writing on that giddy streamer," said Handforth, shading his eyes with his hand, and look-

ing up. "Some rotten advert., I suppose. Like their cheek, sending up their kites over St. Frank's!"

But the words were soon read by all; and then there was quite a stir. It was another message! Nobody except the gov'nor and I, of course, knew about the message that had been delivered, via a pane of glass, the previous evening, into the Housemaster's study. This streamer message was regarded as the second—while, in reality, it was the third.

There was a lot of talk before breakfast, and after breakfast. Meanwhile, the kite was hauled down by Warren, who considered this a task quite outside his duties; and, therefore, deserving of a special tip. Warren was quite modern in his ideas. I don't think he got the tip, though.

By dinner-time most of the talk had subsided, and I was glad.

Of course, a lot of fellows were still trying to ferret out the truth. Handforth was quite certain that Fullwood was the culprit, and no amount of argument would convince him otherwise.

As for Tregellis-West and Watson, they contented themselves by dismissing the matter completely. I was really alarmed; I was uneasy and fearful. The blow would fall to-day!

Yet I didn't allow my feelings to show themselves. Although I felt miserable and "jumpy" inside, so to speak, I maintained a cheerful smile. And, as the gov'nor had told me to act as usual, I did so.

Therefore, directly after dinner, Sir Montie and Tommy and I wheeled out our bicycles and strolled to the gates. We were off to Caistowe Bay, for the purpose of enjoying a bathe. Cricket practice would come later on in the afternoon.

As we were wheeling our jiggers down to the gates I saw the gov'nor. He'd got his bicycle, too, and was evidently off for the village. I bitterly realised that he was probably going to make arrangements for our departure.

When we mounted our machines, out in the road, Nelson Lee was two hundred yards away, spinning leisurely down the gentle slope, a trail of dust in his wake. The afternoon was hot, and the sun shone down with considerable intensity.

"Just the day for a bathe," said Tommy, as we rode off.

"Dear fellow, I'm longing to see the briny ocean," drawled Sir Montie. "It's a frightful fag, havin' to ride three miles to the sea, but the bathe's worth it. I heard that Handforth and Church and——"

"Great Scott!" I roared suddenly. Tregellis-West stared at me.

"Begad! What's the matter, Bonny boy?" he asked. "What——"

"Look at that chap!" I shouted. "Hi! Hi! Oh, that's done it!"

Tregellis-West and Watson, now that they knew the cause of my alarm, were staring ahead, down the shady lane. Nelson Lee was quite a long way ahead; we could see him riding along easily.

Then, abruptly, a man appeared from amongst the trees which bordered the road. In his hand he held a great chunk of stone—a boulder. It was the sight of this chap that had caused me to yell out.

But, before I could shout a warning—at least, before the gov'nor could make anything of my yells—the stranger threw up his arm, and sent the great stone crashing into his victim. Nelson Lee himself, had seen nothing of this, because the fellow was concealed by a clump of bushes.

But I was a good distance behind, and the road curved; so the stranger was quite visible to me—and to Tommy and Sir Montie, too. We saw the boulder fly through the air, and a sickening feeling came over me.

The next moment there was a crash. Quite distinctly, we saw the stone strike the rear wheel of the gov'nor's bicycle. If the boulder had been aimed at Nelson Lee's head, it was a rotten shot. As it was, the bicycle crashed over, and the gov'nor went flying.

He lay on the road, half-dazed by the fall. Then, as Tommy and Montie and I started pedalling with frantic haste, we saw the unknown assailant rush forward. In his right hand he held a long, wicked-looking dagger! And the deadly weapon was raised, ready to strike, the sun glinting on the polished steel.

"By gad!" gasped Tregellis-West.

Nelson Lee was, at the moment, helpless. The whole incident had not taken more than ten seconds. But, unless something was done quickly, that knife



would descend, and would bury itself—

“Ride like fury!” I yelled frantically.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie responded nobly. We all three tore down the road at a breakneck pace, roaring like demons. It was a terrific howl; the very air seemed to quiver.

And the stranger with the knife, after a moment of hesitation, looked round at us. He saw three boys bearing down upon him at express speed—and he lost his nerve. For, the next second, he turned on his heel, and dived headlong into the wood.

“Thank goodness!” I gasped.

I jammed my brakes on, and simply fell off my machine. “Mr. Alvington” was just scrambling to his feet, and he looked decidedly rocky. There was a graze on his head, and a little blood was flowing.

“Are—are you hurt, sir?” I asked breathlessly.

“Nothing much, my boy,” replied Lee, remembering that Tregellis-West and Watson were present. “Did you see what happened? A tramp threw a stone into my wheel and brought me down.”

“And then meant to stab you, sir!” put in Watson, with a gulp. “Did you see that knife of his? Shall we chase him, sir?”

“No; the fellow has escaped by this time,” replied the gov'nor, scrambling to his feet. “Thank you very much, boys, for coming to my assistance so promptly. I have no doubt that you saved me from a serious mauling, for the fellow was obviously determined to use that knife of his. Indeed, it is quite possible that you saved my life.”

“It's queer—it is really!” said Sir Montie thoughtfully. “Tramps don't stab people, begad! It looks to me, sir, as if this was a deliberate attempt upon your life. The rotter was waitin', you know, an' he tried to catch you on the head with that boulder. Begad, it was a rotten shot! Do you think this affair is connected with those mysterious messages, sir?”

“Probably, my boy,” replied Nelson Lee quietly. “No, you needn't trouble any further. Go on your way, and I will return to the school. This place on my head is nothing serious.”

And, without waiting for us to make

any further remark, the gov'nor picked up his damaged bicycle and commenced walking back to St. Frank's. I knew, of course, that he was in no danger now; but that desperate attempt on his life had left me all quivery and shaky.

## CHAPTER V.

### EXCITEMENT AND LIGHTS OUT—THE TONG-MAN!

**T**OMMY WATSON looked thoughtful as we rode away.

“I wonder who that rotter was?” he asked. “And do you think he really meant to kill old Alvy? I say, it's a bit thick, you know! Why should anybody want to kill old Alvy? He's the best Housemaster we've ever had!”

“My dear old Tommy,” exclaimed Tregellis-West. “We've got to look at the facts, you know. They're rummy. First of all we have all sorts of messages, written by goodness knows who, and then one this mornin' sayin' that the blow would fall to-day. Begad! The blow nearly did fall, too—on poor old Alvy. It's as plain as anythin' that he's the chap these messages are meant for.”

“Seems like it,” I said absently. “But, of course, the fellow may have been an ordinary foot-pad. I don't suppose he meant to use that knife, really. He was just going to try the dodge on—pinch Mr. Alvington's watch, you know. This affair may have nothing to do with those messages.”

I wanted, if possible, to divert the suspicions of my chums. I think I could soon have brought Tommy round; but Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, for all his lazy, languid ways, was about the keenest fellow at St. Frank's. He wasn't taking any bluff.

He knew as well as I did that the attack on the gov'nor was all part and parcel of the same plot. But even Sir Montie did not guess that I was intimately connected with that plot, too. I couldn't enlighten him, naturally, and I was worried and anxious.

We had our bathe at Caistowe Bay, but I was all on edge to get back to the school. When, at last, we did arrive, Tommy and Sir Montie went off to Little Side. I made an excuse and went indoors. Careless of consequences,

I went straight to "Mr. Alvington's" study.

The gov'nor was there, pacing the room restlessly.

"Well, sir, how is your head?" I asked abruptly.

"As you see, young 'un, it is bandaged," he replied, smiling at me. "But the damage is really very slight. That was a narrow squeak, Nipper. If you hadn't come down at that moment, I should have been knifed mercilessly. By the way, did you see the fellow clearly?"

"I didn't see his face at all," I replied. "Did you, gov'nor?"

"No. The stone hit my back wheel, and I crashed down. I struck my head, as you know, and I was somewhat dazed for the moment. When I had partially recovered my wits, you and your two friends were beside me, and the man had gone. But it was obviously a pre-meditated, deliberate attack."

I looked glum.

"I suppose we shall have to leave St. Frank's this evening?" I asked gloomily.

"Not this evening, Nipper," was Nelson Lee's quiet reply. "But I am certainly making plans for our departure very soon. It is all extremely annoying and aggravating. I can't imagine how those accursed Chinese got on our track. But you mustn't remain here, my lad. What did you come for?"

"Why, to see how you were."

"Well, I'm all right," smiled the great detective. "And don't look so miserable, Nipper. 'Pon my soul, you've got a face as long as a mile! That won't do at all. Keep smiling, young 'un, and everything will come right. We shall probably have to leave St. Frank's, but I'm quite determined to foil these Fu Chang rascals."

I grinned.

"I'll try and keep cheerful, gov'nor," I said. "But, look here, you're not to go out again to-day—they are my orders!"

"Your orders, eh?" chuckled Nelson Lee. "Very well, my boy, I will obey them. As it happens, however, I had already decided upon that point. After what has happened it would be fool-hardy for me to venture out again."

I was feeling a little relieved as I walked off to Little Side to join the cricketers. But, although I had grinned

in the gov'nor's study—although I had said I was going to be cheerful—I wasn't cheerful in the slightest degree. How could I be?

After cricket practice we had quite a merry tea in Study C. There were visitors—Owen major, Farman, and Canham, the Study H trio. There was much talk, of course, about the strange attack upon the Housemaster, but I didn't join in it much.

Then, later on, when most of our fellows were in the common-room, I kept away. I knew how the talk would run, and I was anxious to steer clear of it. Besides, I was uneasy and restless. Every little unusual sound made me start.

It was windy, and the rustle of the trees in the Triangle sounded ominous to me. I wondered if Nelson Lee had made any preparations—if he had informed the police—if the arrangements for our departure were completed.

And where were we going to?

How could we steal away without the Fu Chang devils getting on our track?

It was a worrying matter, and when bedtime came I didn't feel at all like sleep.

Yet, in spite of my agitated state of mind I kept up a cheery outward aspect. I was smiling and jokey, and I don't think anybody had the slightest idea that I was really off my rocker with worry.

It's not surprising that I didn't sleep. I tried to. I tried to sleep all I possibly could, because I wished to forget all about the confounded business. But I lay awake long after all the others had gone off. Eleven chimed out, then the half-hour, and then after an age, midnight boomed.

"This won't do!" I mumbled, turning over in bed. "Get to sleep, your ass!"

By this time, of course, the whole school was in bed. Some of the masters were in the habit of sitting up late, but never after midnight. But although I told myself to sleep, I still remained awake.

I stared up at the ceiling, and at the star-spangled sky through the open window. The prefect who had seen light's-out had pulled up the blinds, so that we should obtain plenty of fresh air. And the windows were wide open.

I was looking at the stars, and listening to the faint rustle of the trees when, quite suddenly, a different sound came



Nelson Lee receives another mysterious message.—(See p. 8.)

to my ears. It wasn't a sound of the night; it wasn't a natural sound.

I knew, in a second, that it had been made by a human being. For I recognised it in a second; it was the noise of a boot crunching upon gravel!

I sat up in bed, instantly alert. Then, with a quick movement, I slipped from between the sheets and ran lightly to the window. Leaning far out, I gazed down upon the dark Triangle.

Almost at once I caught a glimpse of a dim form stealing round the corner of the building. The figure was progressing stealthily, and as I watched, it disappeared from view. No master would walk in that way; no master, in fact, would be in the Triangle at that hour.

In a second my mind was made up.

The man was an agent of the Fu Chang Tong, and he had come to fulfill the task he had blundered over during the afternoon!

Within three minutes, probably, he would be within the house! And then—

I went straight to Tommy Watson's bed, and shook its occupant steadily and firmly. Then, while Tommy was still rubbing his eyes, I roused Sir Montie.

"What's the matter, dear fellow?" murmured Tregellis-West sleepily. "Begad! It's pitch dark. What's the idea of this? Who shook me up? I was just dreamin' of—"

"Never mind what you were dreaming of, Montie," I interrupted. "You've got to get dressed—quickly. There's a burglar, or somebody, breaking into the Ancient House. We're going to collar him."

"By gad! Are we?" said Sir Montie dreamily.

He tumbled out of bed, and was soon pulling his clothes on. Tommy Watson did the same, without making any remark, except that I had probably been dreaming.

"I don't know what it's all about, old boy, but I'm game for anythin' you like," murmured Sir Montie. "You lead the way, Benny, an' I'll follow. Burglars, you say? Have you looked at Fullwood's bed? You may have spotted the cheery Nuts comin' in after a roarin' time at the White Harp?"

"Fullwood & Co. are all asleep!" I replied softly. "They're not playing the goat to-night. You chaps ready?"

"Just wait till I get my collar and tie on, dear fellow—"

"Bother your collar and tie!" I snapped. "Come without 'em!"

"But, my dear old Bennett, I can't go about without a collar," said Sir Montie plaintively. "It ain't reasonable. I should be uncomfortable—"

I didn't want to hear the remainder of Tregellis-West's complaints. I grabbed his arm and led him towards the door. Just before I opened it I turned my head.

"Don't make a sound!" I murmured warningly.

"But what's the idea?" whispered Watson. "I'm blessed if I know what we're going to do. We can't search the House, Dicky; we'd better go and rouse old Alvy—"

"That's my idea exactly!" I put in. "We're going straight to Mr. Alvington's bedroom. Don't forget that attack on him this afternoon."

"By Jove!" murmured Sir Montie. "Do—do you think—"

"Can't stop to think now!" I interrupted. "Come on!"

We passed outside, into the wide dormitory passage, and, even as we did so, we all three caught sight of a tall, dim figure over by the end window. As we moved down the passage, the figure shifted quickly, and disappeared round the corner.

"After him!" I exclaimed crisply.

We gave up all pretence of silence now, and simply pelted down the passage. The man had got into the House, and was even upstairs!

Turning the corner, we caught sight of him on the wide landing. But he didn't make for the staircase. He ran swiftly along the corridor which contained the masters' bedrooms.

"Stop, you scoundrel!" I gasped.

The man gasped out something guttural, in a furious voice; but did not slacken his speed.

"Collar him!" I panted. "He can't get far—"

"Whoa! He's stopped," said Sir Montie. "Look out for trouble, dear boys."

In the gloom we could see that our quarry had come to a halt before one of the bedroom doors. Instinctively, I knew that it was the gov'nor's bedroom door. And now we were only ten yards away.

"Got him!" roared Watson excitedly. And then, with a snarl, the stranger burst the door open, hurled himself into the bedroom—and locked the door!

Even as the key turned I hammered furiously upon the panels.

"Mr. Alvington—Mr. Alvington!" I shouted urgently.

But there wasn't a sound from the gov'nor. Instead, there came to my anxious ears a low, horrible laugh of triumph.

I nearly turned sick with horror.

"The Tong-man—the agent of the murderous Fu Chang Tong—was in the bedroom, alone with his victim!"

## CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THERE IS MUCH EXCITEMENT AND COMMOTION—AND ANOTHER MESSAGE.

"GOOD heavens!" I exclaimed huskily.

And yet, even as I uttered the exclamation, I realised, vaguely, that the gov'nor was surely a match for this yellow scoundrel.

I couldn't think much more, for there were many interruptions.

Lights appeared along the passages, and juniors and seniors came on the scene. Then Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, emerged from his bedroom, looking rather scared. He switched on the corridor electric-lights.

"Dear me! What is the meaning of this disgraceful commotion?" he asked sharply. "Boys, why are you out of your dormitory? Watson—Bennett—"

"By gad! Listen to that!" said Montie suddenly.

From the gov'nor's bedroom came the sound of heavy, muffled blows, followed by a snarl of absolute fury.

"Did—did you hear those thuds?" gasped Tommy. "That awful scoundrel must have been stab—stabbing Mr. Alvington—"

"What rubbish is this?" demanded Mr. Crowell curtly.

"Yes. What's the rot about?" asked Chambers of the Fifth. "What are you kids doing out of your beds at this un-earthly hour?"

Just at that moment I felt too awful for speech. Tommy Watson's words had gone right home. Those thuds! Was it possible that Nelson Lee had been taken unawares—that he had been stabbed in his sleep?

I beat on the door-panels frantically.

"Break the door down!" I gasped.

"Oh, we must do something—"

"Don't excite yourself, Bennett!" exclaimed a calm voice behind me.

"There's nothing to be alarmed about!" I twisted round abruptly.

Nelson Lee, in dressing-gown and slippers, stood before me!

"Why, what— How the dickens— Great Scott!" I yelled. "We—we thought you were in your bedroom, sir!"

"Which only shows, Bennett, that you should never be sure of things," replied the gov'nor smoothly. "As it happens, I was sleeping in another bedroom to-night. Tell me, in a few words, what has happened."

I could have yelled with relief.

And I realised that most of my fears had been silly—idiotic! As if the gov'nor would have been surprised in his sleep! As if the gov'nor would allow a rotten Chinaman to get the better of him!

Of course, Nelson Lee had taken the precaution to sleep in another room. And I had nearly gone off my chump with worry!

I explained, very quickly, that I had heard a footstep on the gravel, and that I had aroused Watson and Tregellis-West; I explained that we had intended rousing the Housemaster straight away, but had spotted the intruder immediately, and had given chase.

"The brute came straight here, sir," I finished up. "That's all. He's in your bedroom now. Those snarls he gave must have been expressions of rage—when he found the bed empty!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Very probably," he said. "This gentleman is apparently very determined to test the efficacy of his knife upon my innocent person. I am afraid he has been sadly disappointed."

Sir Montie grinned at me.

"Begad! He's a cool 'un, if you like!" he murmured. "Fancy him sleepin' in another bedroom, an' givin' us this surprise! It's as good as a play, by Jove!"

I looked down the passage, and chuckled. I felt like chuckling—now. I could see Handforth and Church and McClure; Armstrong and Owen major; Farman and Canham and Hubbard; and several Fifth Formers, and, away in the distance, two or three frightened Fags.

The whole house, in fact, was aroused. Mr. Crowell waved his hand sternly.

"Go back to your dormitories at once!" he ordered. "How dare you leave your beds? Go back at once, boys!"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Watson.

"Watson and Webb and Bennett may remain, for the time being," put in the gov'nor.

Watson and West and Bennett grinned; and I waved my hand to the others, as they melted away. I could hear Handforth stating his mind in no uncertain terms. If there was a desperate character to capture, Handforth was the fellow for the job. It was like Mr. Crowell's nerve to pack him off—

Handforth's indignant voice died away; but I just heard him declare that he washed his hands of the whole affair. If the burglar escaped, it wouldn't be Handforth's fault—that was all!

Nelson Lee had his ear to the keyhole of the bedroom door.

"There is no sound within the apartment," he exclaimed, rising. "You are quite sure the man went into this room, Bennett?"

"Why, of course, sir," I replied. "We saw him go in—and the door's locked, isn't it?"

"To be sure—to be sure!" said the gov'nor.

He knew as well as I did that the scoundrel had entered the bedroom, but he didn't wish to appear too keen. At St. Frank's he was an elderly, staid schoolmaster, and he had to live up to his character.

"Hadn't we better smash the door in, sir?" I asked eagerly.

Mr. Alvington looked uncertain.

"What do you think, Mr. Crowell?" he asked.

The Remove master not only looked uncertain—but he was uncertain. The gov'nor's attitude was assumed; Mr. Crowell's was genuine.

"I—I really do not know what to do, Mr. Alvington," he exclaimed nervously. "These boys declare that a—a desperate character entered the bedroom. Had we better ring up the police, and let them enter the room?"

"That would be a sad waste of time," said Nelson Lee. "I think we must smash the door down, as Bennett suggests. It will be a simple task, for the

lock is only a common one. But we must prepare ourselves for an onslaught."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Crowell.

Before he could raise any objection, however, the gov'nor sent his shoulder crashing against the door. There was one swift, abrupt crash, and the door went swinging inwards. In the same second Lee shot his hand inside the bedroom and switched the electric lights on.

"Look out, boys!" he cried.

But his warning was unnecessary, for there was no rush, and, a moment later, we knew that the bird had flown. The window was wide open. The would-be assassin, finding the apartment empty, had realised the impossibility of escaping by means of the door; and so he had used the window.

A rope was tied to the bedstead, and it trailed out of the window to the ground. The bedroom was only on the first floor, and so the distance was comparatively slight. The Triangle was dark and deserted.

"H'm! This is annoying," said Mr. Alvington. "The fellow has escaped—and by the look of things he must have slipped away several minutes ago. By this time he is probably completely off the school premises."

"I am thankful for that!" said Mr. Crowell fervently.

Just then Dr. Stafford, the Headmaster, appeared.

"Something is the matter, surely?" he asked, as he entered the room. "I have heard many strange sounds—"

"A burglar—or, at least, an intruder of some sort—entered the House some little time ago, sir," said Mr. Alvington. "These three boys gave the alarm, but the man has managed to escape."

"Will you come to my study, Mr. Alvington?" said the Head quietly. "You will, I am sure, be able to explain fully there. And perhaps Bennett had better come with you—as he is concerned in this strange affair."

"Very well, Dr. Stafford," said the gov'nor. "Watson and Tregellis-West, you must go back to your dormitory. Bennett will follow shortly. I shall be able to tell you of my appreciation in the morning; you have acted splendidly. Good-night, boys."

"Good-night, sir," chorussed Tommy and Sir Montie.

They went off to the Remove dormitory, and Mr. Crowell went back to his

own room. And the gov'nor and I followed Dr. Stafford to the latter's study. I knew well enough what this visit to the Head's sanctum meant.

Dr. Stafford, of course, knew our real identities—he knew that we were Nelson Lee and Nipper, and that we were menaced by the Fu Chang Tong. And he wanted to have a private talk with us. This was a good opportunity.

Once inside the Head's study, he closed the door tightly.

"Now, Mr. Alvington," he said quietly, "can you explain this matter? You were murderously attacked this afternoon—and again to-night. What is your final opinion of the affair? We had a few words this evening, but——"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"To tell you the truth, doctor," he said, "I believe that the Fu Changs have found me. It is very unfortunate, and very trying—for you. Unhappily, we were unable to capture this man; and it is, of course, useless to search the school grounds."

Dr. Stafford looked very concerned and troubled.

"I am distressed more than I can say," he exclaimed. "I was convinced that you would find a safe shelter within these walls, Mr.—er—Lee. Now, it seems, our views were all wrong. But what if we have this man captured and handed over to the police? Would that make any difference?"

"I am afraid not," said the gov'nor. "The Fu Chang Tong is a terrible society, and it is grimly determined to take my life. If one agent fails, another is sent to take his place. I cannot allow this school to suffer in any way because of my own personal troubles. I am aware that unwelcome publicity is already——"

The Head waved his hand.

"My dear sir," he interrupted. "I do not care a jot for the publicity—personally. But I have my boys to consider; my boys and their parents and guardians. In a school like St. Frank's we have to be very careful. Any unsavoury matter is exaggerated and enlarged by gossip. For the honour of the school itself, I must ask you to seek some other sanctuary. You realise, I am sure, that my personal feelings are entirely with you, Mr. Lee. I am deeply sorry that this has happened. You have proved yourself to be one of the ablest House-

masters it has ever been my good fortune to have with me, and I shall feel your loss keenly. Nipper, too," added the Head, looking at me with kindly, grave eyes. "Nipper has done wonders in the Ancient House. He has put new spirit into the junior boys, and I was hoping to see the Ancient House on a level with the College House as regards sports and games. But, with Nipper absent, I feel sure that another decline will set in. There is no boy in the school, at present, to take Nipper's place——"

"And we've got to go away, sir?" I asked gloomily.

"My poor lad, I'm afraid there is no help for it."

"It's—it's rotten!" I said.

"Cheer up, Nipper!" smiled the gov'nor. "We haven't left St. Frank's yet. We have all to-morrow, at least—and much might happen within twenty hours. We shall take our departure, suitably disguised, by the last train."

The Head looked worried.

"I shall, of course, explain to the other masters and to the boys that you are leaving because of circumstances which cannot be entered into," he said. "I suppose I shall have to call the school together in the morning——"

"Please don't do that," put in Nelson Lee. "There must be no word breathed of our projected departure. Everything must go on to-morrow exactly as usual. I do not think there will be much danger from the Tong-men. Having failed to-night, they will formulate another scheme, and put it into execution when the school is asleep again. By that time of course, Nipper and I will have departed; and certain measures will have to be taken for the reception of the enemy."

"Where are we going, sir?" I asked miserably.

"I can't tell you—yet," replied Nelson Lee slowly. "I have not made final arrangements, and I don't suppose I shall do until to-morrow. You had better go back to your dormitory now, Nipper, and Dr. Stafford and I will discuss this matter thoroughly. But don't look so unhappy: I dare say everything will come out all right in the end."

I returned to the Remove dormitory, feeling glum. Only another day at St. Frank's! The thought made me very unhappy, somehow. I knew, of course, that we should have to leave the school

sooner or later. It was only a temporary abode, anyhow.

But the idea of scooting away now, on the quiet, went against the grain. We should be fleeing—skulking away from the rotten Fu Changs. And we should leave in secret. I shouldn't even say good-bye to my chums.

Leaving St. Frank's wasn't much of a wrench—it was the nature of our departure which galled me.

Still, it was no good growling over the workings of Fate. I'm an optimistic chap, as a rule, and so I swallowed my disappointment and tumbled into bed, with the intention of going straight to sleep. As matters now stood, the gov'nor and I would leave the school by the eight-thirty train the following evening.

Fortunately, the Removites were all asleep again, and so I wasn't worried by countless questions. But still, there was nothing for the juniors to wonder at; the Head had taken me to his study to question me because I was the fellow who had first heard the burglar—that was all.

In the morning, as soon as the rising bell went, I was out of bed first, as usual. Handforth sat up, rubbed his eyes, and grinned at me.

"Well, I gave 'em warning!" he exclaimed solemnly.

"Eh? Gave who warning?" I asked.

"Why, those prefects—and Mr. Crowell," replied Handforth. "I told them quite plainly that if there was any desperate fellow to capture I was the fellow for the job. Well, Mr. Crowell sent me back to bed—like his cheek!—and so, of course, I've finished with the whole affair. I've washed my hands of it!"

"You do wash your hands sometimes, then?" I asked, grinning.

There was a chuckle from the other beds, and Handforth turned red.

"None of your cheek!" he growled. "I say I've washed my hands of the whole business. The burglar escaped, didn't he? Well, you can't blame me—that's one thing! I warned you! If I hadn't been sent off to bed, that rotter would have been in the hands of the police by this time!"

"That's the result of being too hasty," I exclaimed gravely. "If old Algy hadn't made such a mistake, things might have been very different now. How was he to know that Edward Oswald Handforth, the Mighty One of

the Remove, was a kind of Sexton Blake, a Nelson Lee, and a Sherlock Holmes, all rolled into one—with a touch of Scotland Yard genius added as a make-weight? How was old Alvy to know that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites chuckled gleefully, and Handforth glared.

"You silly ass!" he bawled. "I suppose you think that's funny?"

"Don't you think it is?" I grinned. "My dear Handforth, as a detective, you're right off the rails. Detectives have got to be nimble chaps, with soft voices. Now, who's going to accuse you of having a soft voice? Any burglar would hear you a mile off—and then he'd know he was safe. Finding that you were on his track, he'd know, of course, that there was nothing to be afraid of."

"You—you—"

Handforth was simply too indignant for speech. He leaned over the bed, grabbed up one of his boots, and hurled it at me with terrific force.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fullwood.

I ducked like lightning, the boot whizzed by, and caught the hilarious Fullwood a lovely smack on the side of his head. Handforth's action didn't seem to amuse him in the least—now. He chucked the boot back with vicious violence, but it flew wide, and caught Teddy Long on a broad part of his anatomy, which vulgar people describe as the bread-basket. Long gave a howl of anguish, and doubled up.

This seemed to restore Handforth's temper wonderfully, and even Fullwood was appeased. And after that there were no further remarks about Handforth's marvellous powers in the detective line.

And when Tommy Watson and Sir Montie and I went downstairs, we emerged into the Triangle for a breath of fresh air and some sunshine. And, almost the first thing we saw, was another message. This time it was nothing elaborate, and had evidently been done in a great hurry—while the scoundrel had been fleeing, in fact.

For the message was crudely scrawled upon the wall of the Ancient House, and simply said:

"Fool!—F. C."

Just that, and nothing more. Of course, it meant that the gov'nor was a fool for attempting to defeat the dandy



Fu Chang Tong. And there seemed to be more menace in that short message than in all the others combined.

## CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH I TAKE ON SOME DETECTIVE WORK, ASSISTED BY SIR MONTIE AND TOMMY--WE TRACE THE GUV'NOR TO THE POOL--AND THEN COME UPON A STARTLING SIGHT.

I DON'T exactly know how I got through that day. But my school-fellows had no idea of the bitter thoughts which surged through my brain. And, in the class-room, Mr. Crowell found me quite attentive.

In fact, I concealed my feelings completely. I felt as though I were about to perform some horribly mean action.

That evening I meant to slip away--quietly, stealthily, and in the dark. Tommy and Sir Montie would know nothing of it until I'd gone. It seemed to me that the whole thing was false and detestable. I wanted to confide in them--to tell them the whole truth; I even wanted to reveal to them my true identity.

Indeed, on more than one occasion I almost succumbed to the desire to be perfectly frank. But I realised that the guv'nor would not be pleased--even though Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were to be trusted.

And so I kept my pecker up, so to speak, and kept mum at the same time. But, during afternoon lessons, I deliberately earned a couple of hundred lines. You see, I wanted an excuse to be by myself during the evening. Sir Montie and Tommy would be at a meeting in the lecture hall--Mr. Pagett, the Fifth Form master, was going to tell some humorous stories from the trenches--and the fellows were all eager to go. For, as I had found out myself, Mr. Pagett was a very entertaining speaker, and decidedly popular at St. Frank's. He was sure of a good crowd.

This just suited me. After tea we hurried over our prep. in Study C, for the lecture was to commence at seven-thirty. This meant, of course, that anybody who wanted to hear Mr. Pagett, would have to be at the lecture hall not later than seven. The seniors, of course, had the best places reserved for them, but juniors had to scramble in where there was room.

"I can't come to that giddy meeting," I exclaimed ruefully.

"Regad! You don't mean that, dear fellow," said Sir Montie.

"That rotten impot. for old Crowell," I explained.

"Oh, that'll do afterwards--"

"He told me I had to take it to him before supper-time--and the meeting won't be over before then," I replied. "It doesn't matter much--I'm not particularly interested, anyhow. You chape buzz off, and enjoy yourselves. I shall be O.K."

They tried to persuade me, but I wasn't having any. In fact, I couldn't. I had to be ready to go off to the station at eight o'clock--the guv'nor would come for me just before the hour.

Soon after seven, therefore, I found myself alone in Study C. Sir Montie and Tommy little realised that, when they came from the meeting, they would find that Dick Bennett had vanished for ever! For, once away from St. Frank's, I should adopt a fresh identity.

I had no preparations to make--such as packing, or getting dressed. The guv'nor and I were going to slip away on the quiet. And, the next morning, the Head would announce that we had left the school for certain special reasons. I could just imagine my chums' feelings when they heard that!

Oh, it was rotten altogether!

Mr. Pagett's lecture was very lucky for me; I was able to pull a long face without anybody seeing it. The Renovo passage was nearly deserted. Fullwood & Co., it is true, were in Study A, in force--playing banker and smoking, probably--but they wouldn't disturb me.

And, just before eight o'clock, "Mr. Alvington" was coming for me. He had told me to wait in my own study until he came. So I carried out his instructions. He positively told me, however, that he would arrive before eight.

After Tregellis-West and Watson had gone, I flung myself into a big arm-chair, and gave myself up to my thoughts. Out in the Triangle I heard rain pelted down; it rattled against the window-panes, too.

But it didn't last long; the shower, although heavy, was soon over.

I wondered what the guv'nor was doing. Disguising himself, probably. And where were we going? How could we get away from this country place

without the Fu Chang spies spotting us, and following us?

Somehow, I began to feel almost panicky. But, after a while, I realised that this was sheer weakness, and I pulled myself together. I remained in the chair, thinking deeply. And I began to regret my secrecy regarding my study-chums. Why shouldn't Montie and Tommy know the truth? Now that it was all over, why couldn't they know that I was really Nipper, and that "Mr. Alvington" was Nelson Lee?

If I had told them that they would, at least, have understood the position. As matters stood, they would probably think all sorts of unpleasant things. Fellows don't leave schools abruptly without good reason—or, rather, without bad reason. Sir Montie and Tommy would assume that—

A voice floated into Study C from the passage; it was Merrell's voice.

"Can't stop any longer, you assen," Merrell was saying. "I haven't done my prep yet. Rotten bore, of course, but it's got to be done. It's a quarter-past-eight, and I haven't—"

I didn't hear any more of Merrell's remark, and I didn't know whom he had been speaking to. But I sat up abruptly, with a start.

A quarter-past-eight!

I tore out my watch, and looked at it. The time was, actually, twenty-past-eight!

And Nelson Lee had positively promised to come for me before the hour! What could it mean? Why, the last train from Hellton left at half-past! There wasn't time for us to catch it now!

"Something's happened!" I told myself quickly.

Why hadn't the guv'nor come? If he had made fresh plans he would have told me of them—I knew that. He wouldn't leave me in suspense. Somehow, I felt very alarmed. I grabbed up my cap, went outside, and hurried into the Triangle.

The night was dark, but many stars were gleaming through the clouds. The rain had been comparatively slight. I spotted old Warren, the porter, over by the gates, and I ran to him.

"I say, Warren," I called.

"Hey? What's that? Who's a-callin' o' me?" demanded the porter, turning.

"Oh, it's you, Master Bennett. What'll you be wantin', now?"

"Have you seen Mr. Alvington?" I asked.

Warren scratched his head.

"Not this last hour or more," he said. "Mr. Alvington went hout jest afore seven, if I remembers aright—"

"On his bicycle?"

"No, a-walkin'," replied Warren. "He ain't come back since—not what I've seen, an' I've been about all the time. I dessey he'll come in afore long."

I turned away and ran like mad towards the Head's private door. I entered without ceremony, and was soon tapping at the door of Dr. Stafford's study.

"Why—er—Bennett, I thought—"

The Head paused after the first few words, and glanced at the clock. I had just entered, and I closed the door tightly.

"I understood that you were leaving by the eight-thirty train—"

"That's what I understood, sir," I interrupted anxiously. "Mr. Lee hasn't come back, it seems. He went out just before seven—"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head, starting. "Do you suspect that your master has met with foul play, my boy?"

"Well, it's queer, sir—after what we arranged," I said. "I—I thought, perhaps, that you'd ring up the station, to find out if the guv'nor's been there this evening. Or—or—"

Dr. Stafford nodded, and took up the telephone at once.

He rang up the station, the post-office, and several other places, but nobody had seen "Mr. Alvington" that evening. It was clear, in fact, that he hadn't been to the village.

"It's very strange, sir," I said, as the Head left the telephone at last. "If the guv'nor didn't go to the village, where did he go to? May I take a couple of fellows and go out of the gates? I may be able to discover something?"

Dr. Stafford looked very grave.

"Do you think it would be safe, Bennett?" he asked doubtfully.

"Safe as eggs, sir—especially if I take two other boys with me," I replied. "You see, I'm used to this kind of work—tracking, and all that—and I may be able to find Mr. Lee at once. And I'm anxious—awfully anxious."

The Head nodded.

"Of course you are, my boy," he said kindly. "Very well, you may go. One moment; I will give you the necessary pass."

He scrawled something on a piece of paper, and I took it. Then, with a hurried word of thanks, I left the study. Nelson Leo had vanished! Of course, I may have been alarming myself for nothing. But—

It was a very sinister "but!"

I made straight for the lecture-hall; and, as it happened, the fellows were just crowding out. I collared Tommy Watson and Sir Montie at once, and led them aside. They were both looking satisfied.

"Rippin' entertainment, dear fellow," said Sir Montie. "Old Pugett was positively sparklin' this evenin'— But what's wrong, Benny boy? Your brow is wrinkled, an' your eye grave. What's worryin' your mighty brain?"

I realised that a certain amount of diplomacy was necessary.

"Look here," I said. "You remember what happened to Mr. Alvington yesterday? He was attacked in the lane, wasn't he? And then some rotter broke into the school last night—"

"We know all that, old scout," interrupted Tommy.

"Well, Alvy went out just before seven this evening—and he hasn't come back yet," I said impressively. "Yet he promised to be in before eight—I know that. It looks to me as though there's been trouble."

"By gad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"But we can't do anything, can we?" asked Tommy, staring.

"Yes, we can," I replied. "I've got a pass here—a pass for the three of us—from the Head himself. We're favoured, you know; and we're going out on the trail. See? We're going to find old Alvy."

"Great corks!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Do—do you mean to say that the Head gave you permission to search—"

"Of course he did," I interjected, realising that I couldn't go into details. "Come on, you asses! It may be jolly serious. We'll take the towing-path, and hurry to the village. It's been raining, and there may be footprints."

"Footprints!" ejaculated Sir Montie faintly.

"Of course!" I said. "Come on."

I hurried them out of the Ancient House, and we roused old Warren from his lodge—for the gates were locked now. He told us that Mr. Alvington hadn't come in, and he looked at the Head's pass rather closely. It was rather unusual for juniors to have a pass, written by the Head himself.

Once out in the road, I pulled out my electric-torch—which I had placed handy, in case of urgency. I flashed this on the slightly muddy roadway, and waved it to and fro for a few moments. There was practically no traffic on the lane—especially after dark—and there were no boys out of the gates.

"Look here," I said. "Mr. Alvington came out just before seven. It was raining then, wasn't it? I remember, the rain started just about that time. Well, these may be Alvy's footprints."

I indicated a line of marks leading straight down towards the village. They were clear and distinct—and I knew quite well that they had been made by the gov'nor. I'd seen too many footprints, in my time, to be mistaken.

"My only hat!" gasped Tommy Watson. "He's—he's a giddy detective!"

"It's amazin'," said Sir Montie. "That's what it is, Tommy. But Benny always was full of surprises, wasn't he?"

I didn't think it necessary to explain to them that detective-work had been my strong point for years past—and that I was the assistant of the most famous private crime-investigator in the world! Besides, what I had done so far wasn't clever; it was elementary, in fact.

"Where did you find that rippin' torch?" asked Watson inconsequently.

"Rats to the torch!" I exclaimed. "We're tracking Alvy, you ass! If we follow these prints we can't go wrong, can we?"

"Don't ask me, dear fellow," said Montie. "I'm all muddled up, begad!"

I walked down the lane slowly, Tregellis-West and Watson close behind me. But, after I had gone a few paces, the line of footprints swerved, and disappeared into the grass bordering the road.

"Hallo! This is where we're stuck," remarked Tommy.

I frowned, and came to a halt. But then I saw a low stile in front of me. This led to a small meadow which bordered the playing-fields; and, at the

other side of the meadow, lay the towing-path and the River Stowe.

"Mr. Alvington decided to go by the towing-path," I said briskly. "This way, my sons. We shall pick up the trail again on the other side of the meadow. Hold on, though." I looked at a pile of heavy sticks which lay against the hedge. "We'd better grab some of these—in case of accidents."

"My hat! Nothing like doing it properly," said Watson, grinning.

We each selected a stout stick, and then proceeded across the meadow at a rapid trot. On the other side, just as I had predicted, we found Nelson Lee's footprints on the towing-path. Apparently he had been the only pedestrian during the evening, for there were no other foot-marks; no other freshly-made ones, at least.

"You're a marvel, Benny—you are, really," murmured Sir Montie. "If we weren't in such a hurry, I'd shake hands with you, begad!"

"But I'm blessed if I can get the hang of it," said Watson. "What's the idea of tracking Mr. Alvington? He may have gone on to Bannington—or he may be back at St. Frank's by now—or he may——"

"Or he may have met with some accident or other," I put in grimly. "My dear chap, you seem to forget that incident yesterday afternoon. I believe that Alvy's met with foul play, or something jolly near it."

I trotted on quickly, flashing my torch on the ground at intervals. I tried to be cheerful; but my mind was full of doubts and fears and anxieties. Where had the gov'nor got to? Why hadn't he returned? Should we be able to find out?

And then, suddenly, I came to a halt.

"By Jupiter!" I muttered. "Look at this, my sons—look at this!"

I flashed my torch about.

"Look at what, dear fellow?" asked Montie. "Is there somethin' rummy? I'm dull. I can't see anythin' startlin' you know."

"Why, there are some other prints now," I said, moving forward. "Can't you see? They're just beside old Alvy's. It looks to me as though some rotter was following him. See—the second chap walked on tip-toe!"

"You ass!" growled Watson. "How can you see that?"

"Why, it's as clear as daylight," I

replied, moving forward still. "Just look at the shape of—Hullo! What's this?"

I came to a stop suddenly.

Nelson Lee's tracks abruptly came to a stop, and, instead, there were several curious impressions on the soft, slightly-muddy earth of the towing-path. I bent down, and examined the marks closely, my heart beating rapidly. A sudden chilling fear had suddenly taken possession of me.

"He fell down," I said huskily. "Don't you see? This is where he went down—all these dull impressions. By Heaven! He must have been attacked from behind! It's the only explanation!"

My two companions were startled.

"I can't see it all, you know," said Sir Montie. "But these marks look a bit queer, I'll admit. But if Mr. Alvington was knocked down, where is he? Begad, you—you don't think he was thrown into the river? Great glory, what a thought!"

"It's—it's impossible!" muttered Watson hoarsely.

I walked on a few paces further. Then I saw, clearly enough, that something had been dragged along the path, like a sack of potatoes.

Something!

Could there be any doubt as to what that "something" was? Could it have been anything else but Nelson Lee's unconscious body? The reason why he hadn't returned to the school was clear now. He had been attacked, and—and——

I couldn't think any further—I daren't. But, somehow, the fact that he had been dragged along the towing-path seemed just a little hopeful. If his attacker had meant murder he would surely have pitched his victim into the Stowe, without any fuss?

I suppose my training stood me in good stead here; for Tommy and Sir Montie, I knew, could never have read the signs on the ground as I read them. And I wasn't merely suspicious. I knew—positively knew—that Nelson Lee had been attacked from behind, and that he had been dragged along the path. It was all perfectly clear to me; although it wasn't by any means clear to my chums.

"What's to be done?" asked Tommy, at last.

"Why, we'll follow this trail up," I

said, between my teeth. "It can't possibly lead far. Isn't there a bridge just a little way along, round the bend?"

"Yes, the old rustic footbridge."

"Yes, that's the one," I said. "Don't you see, my sons? Alvy's attacker might have carted him across that bridge—and if we can only keep on this trail we shall, sooner or later, run him to earth."

We started off at a quick walk. I switched off my torch now, for it was quite possible to see the path in the starlight. The clouds had all gone, and the stars were shining gloriously. If the Tong-man was somewhere ahead, I didn't want to give him any warning.

I'd forgotten all about the gov'nor's arrangements. I'd forgotten that he and I should really have been on our way on route for— Well, I don't know where for, but it was somewhere away from St. Frank's.

I was only aware of a dull, aching kind of alarm within me. It was something like a terrible pain. It made me shiver; it appalled me. What had happened to Nelson Lee?

"There's the bridge," murmured Sir Montie.

We had turned a bend of the river, and had come out beyond a big clump of willows. The quaint, rustic footbridge stood out clearly. It was quite close, and there seemed to be something hanging

"Down!" I muttered fiercely. "Down, you idiots!"

"Begad!" gasped Tregellis-West.

But both he and Tommy realised that I was serious, and they both flopped down into the damp grass.

"Don't jaw!" I muttered tensely.

I raised my head and looked at the bridge. Sir Montie and Tommy looked, too. And we all three saw a human form hanging from the bridge, midway between the woodwork and the surface of the water.

It was a terrifying sight.

The human form belonged to Nelson Lee. I knew that instinctively. His hands and feet were bound, and the rope which secured him to the bridge was fastened round his chest. But from his feet, dangling at the end of a foot of rope, there was a great boulder, weighing fully half-a-hundredweight!

"Good heavens!" muttered Tommy Watson thickly.

I was too horrified to say anything at all. On the bridge itself, standing right over the gov'nor, we could see a crouching figure, and we heard, now and again, a low, mocking laugh.

Even as we watched, we could see the man brandishing a long knife, and it was clearly his intention to cut through the rope! If that happened, nothing on earth could save Nelson Lee from positive death, for, with that weight tied to his feet, he would plunge down—

"Great Scott! He's right over the Pool, too!" breathed Sir Montie.

The Pool!

I shuddered. The river at this spot was terribly deep, and it was known as the Bottomless Pool. It was locally said that the river-bottom had never been discovered in the neighbourhood of the bridge. The water was still and black, and its depth was, at all events, tremendous.

Suppose that rope was cut?

Nelson Lee would plunge down, carried by the weight, and he would be utterly unable to save himself. He would be carried to the bed of the river—far, far below! Even if we reached the spot a second afterwards we could do nothing!

I turned almost sick and faint.

The knife had flashed, and I knew that, once the rope was cut, no power on earth could save the gov'nor.

## CHAPTER VIII.

I ADOPT A RUSE, AND NELSON LEE IS SAVED. I RECEIVE A SURPRISE, WHICH IS VERY WELCOME—AND EVERYTHING TURNS OUT ALL SERENE AT THE FINISH.

**T**REGELLIS-WEST gripped my arm feverishly.

"That's Alvy hangin' there!" he whispered. "He'll go to his doom in less than a second, Benny! What can we do? You're leadin', you know. S'pose we all stand up an' yell like blazes—"

"No!" I interjected sharply. "That won't do. The fellow's only taunting his victim now, and if we were to show ourselves he'd slash through the rope in a second, and then we couldn't do a thing! Even as it is, the situation is pretty hopeless!"

I was still dreadfully sick at heart. I recognised in this display the Chinese love for torture. The scoundrel had evi-

dently spring upon the gov'nor unaware, had knocked him senseless, and had then dragged him to this spot. Now he was bending over his helpless victim, uttering taunts.

How long would they last?

That was the question which meant life or death for Nelson Lee!

I knew well enough that if we revealed our presence the Tong-man would slash the rope and rush away. He certainly wouldn't rush away without slashing the rope. It was but the work of a second to commit the foul murder!

I don't think I have ever felt so terribly alarmed in all my life before or since. It was ghastly to see the gov'nor hanging there, knowing that he might plunge down before my very eyes any second.

"Look here!" I murmured, under my breath. "The only thing is to take the rotter by surprise! You see that line of trees? Well, we shall have to creep round them, behind their cover, and come out just opposite the bridge. Then, when we get to it, we'll rush forward like demons and bow! him over before he can cut the rope. Are you game? He's got a knife, remember!"

"Come on!" muttered Sir Montie, between his teeth.

"I'm with you!" said Tommy Watson grimly.

They were true blue, right enough, and I thrilled for the moment. There was plenty of danger—but what was our danger compared to Nelson Lee's?

Like shadows we crept forward until we reached the cover of the trees I had pointed out. They formed a kind of thick hedge, some little distance from the river bank. Once behind these, we ran forward swiftly. Quite suddenly we came upon the footpath which led to the bridge.

Stealing down this, we turned a slight curve, and came in full sight of the bridge itself. The Tong-man was still there, still bending down, still talking. All depended now upon the swiftness of our rush.

Further attempt at concealment would be futile. We couldn't possibly get any nearer without being detected; and so, with one accord, we collected ourselves for the fatal plunge on to the bridge.

"Now!" I muttered tensely.

We darted forward, with every ounce of strength we were capable of. I led

the way, but Sir Montie and Tommy were close behind. We were upon the bridge before the Tong-man even heard us. I saw him jerk himself upright and turn his face in our direction. Then a low snarl of fury left his lips.

Just as I had anticipated, he bent down, the knife flashing in his grip; but before he could reach over, I was upon him.

And his very position made our attack successful, for he was at a great disadvantage. As I rushed up, I clenched my fist, and drove it with all the force of my body on to the side of his head. It was a terrific drive, and my knuckles were almost laid bare.

The man crashed over on his side, and the bridge shook and quivered from end to end. I saw the knife jerk out of his hand and plunge into the water several yards away. My fist and arm were so numb that I could hardly feel a thing. But I started pounding away with my other fist as hard as I could go, hammering blows at the fellow's face.

Sir Montie and Tommy didn't have a look in during those first few seconds, but they came to my aid as soon as the scoundrel attempted to struggle to his feet. He was dazed and half stunned, but there was fight in him still.

That fight, however, was knocked out of him in less than a minute, for the three of us simply overwhelmed him. I grabbed his throat and held him down. Montie grabbed his arms and Tommy sat on his legs.

"Got him!" I panted breathlessly, and with a huge gulp of relief. "Good heavens, and I thought we should be too late!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "This is a bit of excitement—what? I'm feelin' quite quivery, dear fellows. But I fancy this fellow's a lot more quivery than I am."

As usual, Tregellis-West was serenely calm. Nothing could disturb his equanimity. Tommy Watson, on the other hand, was simply bubbling with terrific excitement. He couldn't speak because of it. He just gasped.

And then a voice came up from below the bridge.

"Well done, boys!" it said calmly. "You have undoubtedly saved my life. Make sure of that lunatic before you attend to me. I am all right for the

moment I thought the fellow was a Chinaman at one time; but he is English, and, I believe, a maniac."

This last piece of information was, I knew, expressly for my benefit.

It told me worlds.

It told me that the man wasn't a Fu-Chang murderer, after all, as I had so fondly believed; and it made me realise, with a gulp of relief, that the gov'nor and I wouldn't have to leave St. Frank's. In short the Fu-Chang-Tong hadn't discovered us at all!

And Nelson Lee had given me that piece of information so that I shouldn't give the game away in my excitement. It was very 'cute of him, and I took the tip on the instant. I was tremendously glad I hadn't mentioned anything of my real fears to my two chums.

"Isn't it ripping?" I gasped. "We've beaten the rotter! We've saved old Alvy! I don't care tuppence if he does hear me call him that! You're wearing a belt, aren't you, Tommy? Yank it off, old scout!"

I was wearing a belt, too, and I slipped it off in a moment. Then I wound it round the prisoner's ankles and buckled it tightly. With Tommy's belt I secured the man's wrists. He was now quite helpless. If he moved at all, he would probably jerk himself off the bridge, for there was no parapet. The rustic work was decidedly open, with spaces quite large enough to wriggle through.

But the scoundrel was too dazed and knocked out to think of wriggling. We left him lying there, and proceeded to rescue the gov'nor. The first thing I did was to climb on to the outside of the bridge, grab some of the rustic work, and then nearly invert myself. I was just able to reach the gov'nor's ankles, and I slashed through the ropes, thus releasing the boulder. As the top of Lee's head was only six inches from the bridge, this feat was quite easy.

After that, it was quite easy to haul him up and cut through his other bonds. There was an ugly bruise on his forehead, but he made light of it.

"I cannot tell you how greatly I am indebted to you, my boys," he said gravely. "And I am rather pleased that this affair has happened, now that it has turned out so well, for a worrying mystery is solved, and we are really none the worse."

"How did the rotter collar you, sir?" I asked curiously.

"Well, Bennett, I must admit that I was rather careless," replied Nelson Lee. "I was walking along the towpath towards the village, and I was keeping my eyes well open, having in my mind that attack of yesterday. But without warning I received a stunning blow and crashed over. The fellow must have crept after me like a shadow, for I heard nothing of him until the very moment of attack. When I came to myself, I found that I was dangling at the end of a rope, in the position in which you found me. I certainly expected to plunge to my death."

"But—but who is this ruffian?" I asked blankly.

The gov'nor smiled.

"He has been good enough to tell me his whole history," he replied. "It seemed to give him a great amount of pleasure, and I was not in a position to argue with him. It is owing to his talkative nature, in fact, that I am alive at this moment. His name is Frederick Charlson, and he came out of prison only a week or two ago."

"An ex-convict!" I gasped.

"But what did he want to attack you for, sir?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "Begad! He must be the fellow who's been writin' those messages! 'F. C.' stands for Frederick Charlson, doesn't it?"

"This man is undoubtedly the author of those mysterious messages," agreed Nelson Lee. "And his hatred is due to a sheer misunderstanding. But really, boys, you can learn all these details afterwards. We must see about getting back to the school."

"And what about Charlson, sir?" said Tommy Watson.

"He's a problem," said Mr. Alvington. "Suppose one of you boys runs into the village for the constable? We will wait here until you have——"

"That's the idea!" said Sir Montie, at once. "I'll go, sir!"

"That's right!" I said promptly. "You cut along with him, Tommy. I'll stay here and bathe Mr. Alvington's head."

In less than a minute the pair were off, without a suspicion. As soon as they were out of earshot, I turned to Nelson Lee and grabbed hold of him, first of all

Being that our captive was quite incapable of hearing.

"Now, gov'nor, what does it mean?" I gasped out. "We—we thought this chap was a rotten Tong-man!"

"Exactly!" agreed Nelson Lee calmly. "But, you see, he isn't. I had an idea that we were on the wrong scent yesterday afternoon, and that was why I delayed our departure until late to-night. But I certainly had no idea of the real truth."

"And what is the real truth, gov'nor?" I asked.

"I'll tell you that later on, when I tell the others."

"But it means that we're to stay at St. Frank's, after all?"

"Of course!"

"The Fu-Changs haven't found us at all?"

"That's right, my lad."

I heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness!" I ejaculated fervently. "That's the best bit of news I've heard for years!"

• • • • •

The truth of the whole affair was sufficiently surprising.

Yet it was quite simple. Six years previously Frederick Charlson had been employed at St. Frank's as porter—the position which Warren had held ever since. Well, Charlson had been a pretty complete blackguard in every way.

At last he had been given notice to quit, and this had aroused his devilish temper. As a result, he and another servant had come to blows—the quarrel, of course, being of Charlson's picking.

In fact, the porter had murderously attacked his fellow-servant, and had nearly killed him. The other poor chap was gravely injured. Mr. Thorne, who was Housemaster of the Ancient House at that time, had witnessed the whole affair from his study window. Charlson had thought that his crime had been unseen, and he had left the injured man in the Triangle, to be found by other servants.

But, owing to Mr. Thorne's evidence, Charlson had been arrested and tried in a

criminal court. He was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, but had, owing to good conduct while in prison, earned a remission of his sentence. But it seems that while in prison he had nursed his hatred against Mr. Thorne until it had become a positive mania.

When released, his sole thought had been to take revenge upon the man who had sent him to prison, and so he had come to St. Frank's with the intention of killing the witness who had borne evidence against him. He was, of course, quite mad on that one subject.

Arriving in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's, he had started his campaign by delivering the mysterious messages. His kinked, insane mind had dwelt upon the melodramatic, and he had attempted to inspire terror in his intended victim.

But he hadn't considered the possibility of Mr. Thorne having left the school.

Of course, he hadn't questioned anybody. He had taken it for granted that Mr. Thorne was still at St. Frank's. In his madness, he had mistaken Nelson Lee for the former Housemaster. Mr. Thorne had been clean-shaven, but the gov'nor wore a beard and moustache.

If Charlson thought anything at all—which is doubtful—he obviously concluded that Mr. Thorne had grown whiskers. Only a madman would have made such a tremendous blunder. He was blinded by his hatred and insanity.

His scheme for killing his victim—by dropping him into the Pool—was certainly novel and effective; but luckily it hadn't been carried out.

He was certified insane by the police specialists, and removed to a criminal asylum; and Nelson Lee and I breathed freely again.

Our relief was tremendous. The Fu-Chang-Tong hadn't found us, after all, and we were to stay at St. Frank's.

There had been much excitement and considerable danger, but all my fears had been idle. Incidentally, Mr. Alvington's popularity was increased, and Study C—that is, Dick Bennett & Co.—scored a big triumph.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)



**BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!**

# The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

**Read this first!**

**TOM CRAWLEY**, light-weight boxer and stoker aboard *H.M.S. Flyer*, makes his first public appearance in a contest with **Jimmy Yowl**, lightning feather-weight. He wins the fight, and with the prize-money replaces his father's torpedoed fishing smack. Tom is jealous of

**BOB RANDLE**—who, the lad considers, is a "slacker"—on the grounds that Bob seems to find favour in the eyes of

**MARY THWAITES**, the pretty daughter of Fisherman Thwaites, of whom Tom is very fond.

**FISHERMAN CRAWLEY'S** smack is chartered as a mine-sweeper, which is torpedoed by a German submarine. Old Thomas Crawley is taken prisoner and carried on board the U-boat. The others are put afloat on a raft. They are soon picked up by a British destroyer and landed near Weathersea. Tom and Bob go to meet them, and Mary is very anxious about the fate of old Tom Crawley. Meanwhile a big boxing match is fixed up between Jerry Nelson and Tom. It is a draw, and just as the audience are about to leave the hall a whirring noise is heard. A moment later something strikes the building itself. The building however, is not much hurt, and Tom is able to get his mother home. He then goes round to see Mrs. Thwaites, and is much relieved to find her cottage is untouched. Bidding her good-bye he continues his way to the harbour. Here he sees Captain Walsh, the commander of the *Flyer*, who tells him the ship will be ready to engage the enemy in a day or two. The next day Mary asks him to go with her to say good-bye to Bob, who is leaving for the Front. Tom sees that Mary is crying as she bids Bob adieu, and all the way back he is filled with hate of Bob, of Mary and of himself. Just as they reach the harbour they meet a party of bluejackets. Immediately Tom boards the *Flyer* she goes to sea. Suddenly they observe a magnificent hospital ship approaching. When she is within

hailing distance there comes a loud explosion, and at the same moment Tom sees the low whale-back of a U-boat. The captain of the *Flyer* rams her as she rises, and Tom pluckily rescues a German as he comes up to the surface. The next instant another terrible explosion is heard on the hospital ship, and the order swiftly comes:

"Save yourselves who can!"

(Now read this week's instalment.)

## OUT OF THE DEEP.

Quickly the word was passed, and there was a general leaping overboard.

Into the boat beside the gangway crowded twice as many men as it was safe for her to carry, and yet her crew took the risk.

The overladen boat was pushed away from the side of the ship, and rowed slowly away.

She didn't get very far, for the water, suddenly bubbling over her gunwales, caused her to fill and sink almost immediately, leaving her human cargo floating and struggling helplessly in the water.

The scene was one never to be forgotten, and, as he saw the wounded clinging and clutching frantically to and at each other, Tom's heart leapt into his throat.

He couldn't bear it, couldn't, and so, with a hoarse cry, he plunged overboard for the second time, and swam swiftly to the rescue, covering the distance that separated him from the doomed men in record time.

At last he saw a head near him, and a man cried out to him.

"I'm done for, boy, unless you can hold me up," said the wounded Tommy, whose face was ghastly white.

"All right. I'll look after you," said Tom cheerily. And he seized the Tommy, and supported him, with a glad laugh to

think that he had already been of much use. And then—then, as they floated there, they looked at each other.

As their eyes met, the Tommy suddenly cried: "Why, it's Tom—here's a bit of luck!"

And Tom, with the tears gushing into his eyes, choked:

"Oh, Fred—Fred!" he cried. "It's Mary's brother Fred."

Men who are accustomed to travel are always asserting that the world is a very small place. What then can be said of the war world, or those parts of the habitable globe which have been riven and strained by the greatest struggle in the world's history?

To the men who go soldiering the most unexpected things happen, and the most unlooked-for meetings take place.

Yet surely nothing stranger than the dramatic meeting of Tom Crawley and Fred Thwaites at the sinking of the hospital ship has ever been recorded.

It seemed as if fate had decreed that young Tom Crawley should plunge from the deck of the destroyer *Flyer*, and swim to the rescue of the drowning and wounded soldier who had been left at the mercy of the waves by the sinking of the lifeboat which had gone down beneath his feet.

The first moment of surprise over, Tom applied himself resolutely to the task of saving his friend.

Though he was such a little chap, he had any amount of pluck, and was as devoid of fear in the water as he was in the boxing ring.

"Here, steady, Fred, old sport," he cried in a cheery voice. "Don't grab hold of me like that. If you do you'll drown us both. Don't struggle, and I'll manage it all right."

With much plashing of oars a lifeboat came speeding up, past the hull of the drifting destroyer. In a moment it was surrounded by clamouring and imploring men.

Many were the deeds of heroism accomplished ere all the wounded soldiers afloat in the sea could be dragged aboard the boat. Yet soon most of them had been saved, and the toll of lives was lightened.

"Never mind about us, mates," Tom called out cheerily. "I can manage for the pair of us, for a bit."

And so supporting Fred Thwaites in masterly fashion, kicking out now and then to keep his balance on the surface of

the sea, he managed with the utmost coolness to keep them both afloat.

Now with hissing of steam and dull clanging of machinery the *Flyer* edged towards him. Down from her deck peered the faces of Tom's shipmates—eager, earnest faces, bent on rescue.

"Here, catch a hold, mates," cried a voice, and a rope spun outward, uncoiling as it fell.

It dropped within a yard of Tom, and with a plunge that drove Thwaites' head underwater for an instant, he grasped it.

"Can you hold on to the rope, Fred," he gasped, for the soldier was gripping him fiercely.

Thwaites was a wee bit afraid, and much exhausted by this time.

"I—I don't know," he murmured.

"Of course you can, cheerio," gurgled Tom, feeling the strain at last, and wondering how much longer he could manage to hold out. "'Ere, let go my neck, will you, and try. Here's the rope; here, mate."

He shook one of Fred's hands free, and guided it to the rope, to which the soldier clung desperately a moment later, whilst the seamen aboard the *Flyer* hauled it taut.

Still partially supporting his friend Tom Crawley helped him onward as the seamen hauled in.

"Easy does it. Not so fast there," chortled Tom. "Fred, old boy, you'll be safe aboard in a jiffy."

Fred Thwaites wasn't so sure about that. He'd been through a lot, had Mary's brother, since he'd been wounded in the big push which was to have captured Lens.

He'd a flesh wound in the thigh, and several slighter wounds caused by bursting shrapnel in the side and back. Enough to rob a man of his strength and stamina be he ever so strong.

Fred could endure, and yet the torpedoing of the hospital ship within sight of port had come as a great shock. Then the sinking of the lifeboat, and all that had followed had added to the strain.

He felt his strength going fast. His hold of the rope seemed very insecure. His fingers were like jelly, and his head was buzzing terribly.

He felt a strange longing to let the rope go and quietly sink down deep in the sea, to his last rest.

*(Continued on p. iii of cover.)*

Why not? What did it matter? His jaw dropped, his mouth opened, and a deathlike pallor drove the last vestige of colour from his cheeks.

At the same moment his body touched the iron hull of the destroyer.

"Tom, old boy, I'm going!" murmured the fainting soldier.

"Not you," came in a ringing, laughing voice in his ear. "You're all right, Fred. They're pulling you up. In two seconds you'll be aboard. And, my, won't Mary be glad to see you. Won't the boys at Weathersea cheer when you come back home again."

The effort it took Tom Crawley to assume a lightheartedness he was far from feeling was no light one. Yet it had the desired effect.

The words "Mary," "the boys," and "home" acted like a tonic to the sinking man. He was a fighter, was Fred, all pluck like a bulldog. The old combative spirit was momentarily roused within him.

His grip of the rope tightened, he raised his head and looked upwards.

The seamen hauled at the rope. Tom Crawley gave him support from below, pushing himself under the sea in his effort to help, and so Fred Thwaites reached the level of the Flyer's deck.

Then he faltered once more, and his head drooped. His hold on the rope slackened. But before he could drop the gallant sailors had seized him by the wrists and pulled him aboard.

They left the rope dangling over the destroyer's side. Tom seized hold of it.

"Lend us a hand, mates," he called, and they pulled at it once more.

Tom swarmed up the side, and cleared the deck's edge.

"Thanks," said he, and then he bent over Fred, who had fallen on the deck in a swoon.

"Poor old Fred!" he murmured.

The German youth who had been saved from the sunken U-boat had watched the whole incident with staring eyes. He shuffled near now, looking a deplorable object in his sodden clothes.

He glanced down at the unconscious Thwaites, then across the sea at the fast-sinking hospital ship, lastly at the sailor boy.

"Tom Crawley! That's his name—Tom Crawley," he muttered, and his eyes lit up as he studied the sailor boy's face.

He opened his mouth as if to speak, but

was roughly pushed out of the way and ordered to "stand back."

He meekly obeyed.

## NEWS FROM ZEBRUGGE.

TOM cared no more for his second ducking than if it had never happened. What was a soaking to him, especially with the weather nice and warm like this? He saw them raise poor Fred up and bear him away.

"He's not dead, is he?" Tom asked, helplessly, of a petty officer who came back presently.

"No, boy. But it's touch and go, perhaps. Think what he's been through. Poor lad, poor lad. Pal of yours?"

"He's my girl's brother," choked Tom, the tears welling into his eyes as he thought of Mary.

"Well, if he survives, you'll have saved him, Crawley," said the petty officer, bustling aft. "Let that be a comfort to you."

For the next ten minutes the crew of the Flyer were busily employed in getting survivors of the hospital ship aboard. Doctors, nurses, privates of the R.A.M.C. and wounded soldiers were all included.

At last there were no more to be rescued, and the skipper and the chief officers of the hospital ship having finally abandoned the vessel, the destroyers and boats stood by at a safe distance to watch the sinking of the ocean liner.

She was near her end now. Her bows had almost disappeared. Her stern was raised high. She had heeled over dangerously, too.

Tom could see almost the whole of her upper deck as she leant to port.

The hole in her side could no longer be seen.

Seamen were desperately hauling the last boat clear of the wreck. As it drew clear a dog, a terrier, leapt down from the hurricane deck into the sea, and swam resolutely after the lifeboat. It was rescued amid loud cheering.

Then followed the second explosion since the torpedo had struck home. A portion of the main deck was blown out, and the ship at once settled down.

All of a moment the whole of her from bows to middle vanished in the sea. A half-minute later, the stern rose sheer out of the water, the propellers at rest at last.

(Continued overleaf.)

Boldly the whole stood out against a background of sea and sky. Then, with a sucking roar, the stern vanished, and a swirl and whirl of sea, covered with bubbles and oil and ... was left to show the spot where the great ship had gone.

"A groan of despair rang from the lips of all who saw, and some of the seamen who had faced the hell of battle unmoved sobbed and cried like children.

"Here was another, dastardly crime to be registered against the Hun, and counted in the final reckoning.

Tom Crawley turned away, with a mist before his eyes, and tried to gulp down the great aching lump that had risen in his throat.

As he walked heedlessly along the deck someone suddenly barred the way. It was the German sailor boy. Though Tom had saved the Hun's life, he felt now that he could murder him. The thought of that lost ship almost made him mad.

The Hun sailor spoke.

"Stand out of the way," cried Tom, spurning him, "lest I throw you overboard."

Still the German persisted.

"Wait," he cried, "I want to speak to you, Tomas Crawley."

"You seem to have got my name pat enough. What is it you want to say?" asked Tom fiercely.

(To be continued.)

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