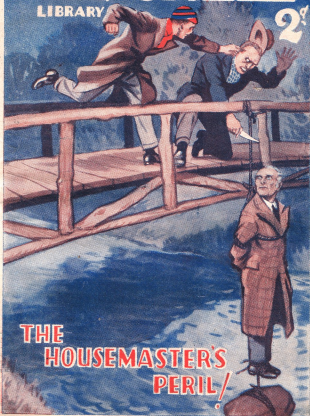


"THE PRAIRIE SHOWMEN!" Thrilling Wild West  
Story—Inside!

# THE NELSON LEE

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THE  
HOUSEMASTER'S  
PERIL!

New Series No. 6.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 25th, 1923.



# The HOUSEMASTER'S

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Mystery Message!

**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.

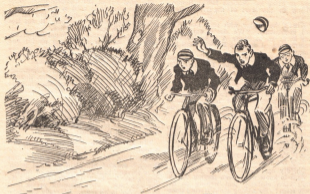
"I say, chaps, who's been playing the giddy ox?" he exclaimed curiously.

Nobody took any notice of Teddy Long.

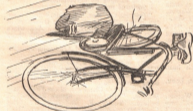
Tregellis-West and Watson and I were over by the window, chatting. Handforth and Hubbard were having a little argument concerning rabbits, and Handforth, as usual, was doing most of the talking. There were several other juniors in the Common-room, but Long only addressed the empty air.

Teddy Long was scarcely tolerated in the Remove. He was a nuisance. 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

Full-Of-Thrills Yarn Of The Chums Of St. Frank's.



With startling suddenness, mysterious messages appear at St. Frank's — messages that spell deadly danger for Nelson Lee, the Housemaster. Who is the avenger that seeks his life? Thrilling, dramatic, complete, this stirring story, told by Nipper and set down for publication by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, will grip your interest to the last line.



his spots; Long, at all events, couldn't change his nature. He was a sneak and a worm generally.

## PERIL!

Of course, you know who I am. At St. Frank's my name is 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 gov'nor was posing as Mr. Alvington, the Housemaster of the Ancient House—well, that's known only to a few. We were there because we wanted to escape the unwelcome attentions of the Fu Chang Tong.

I'd had a few ups and downs at St. Frank's already—mainly due to the hatred of Ralph Leslie Fullwood, the leader of the Ancient House knuts.

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

Of course, I'd heard the young bouncer 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 had become the 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 nose, 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 Fallwood 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 'up' 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 fathhead, Watson!" protested Long. "I'm not 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 interestin' 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 late evening, which was still and fine.

When we got outside, we found that Handforth had followed us, peking up his two boom chums, Church and McClure, on the way. On the steps 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 chalking 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. 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 a brain-wave 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 nothing to be worried over. This is a wheeze of the knuts."

"The knuts!" gasped Tommy Watson. "Fullwood & 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 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 & Co. Understand? That's near enough, isn't it? In their sublime ignorance, they imagine that you fear them. You've been having a few heated arguments with the knuts lately, and they're after your skin. 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—his fond of publicity. The knuts'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 & Co. And there wasn't anybody else who would have written such a dramatic message. It fitted the knuts perfectly.

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

We peered through the heavy dusk. A figure was loomng 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 "gooky" fellow—a regular "gay-dog," 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 roisterer—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'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 shan't cry over it. But I believe Montie's right—Fullwood wrote this fatheaded 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



Nelson Lee, the famous detective, as he appears as Mr. Alvington, the Housemaster of St. Frank's.

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 Wreton 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 lowest 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 knut's head was jerked to and fro. His nose rubbed along the step violently. The step wasn't exactly smooth, and 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 knut 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 boulder—"

"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.

"Bogus!" 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 2.

### The Lurking Figure!

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST grinned serenely.

"My brilliant idea seems to have been wrong," he yawned. "Never mind, dear boys. It's disappointin', but I'm not grieved. Fullwood 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 isn'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 G. Here we switched on the light—for it was getting 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 sloosh hat."

"Dear fellow, you have amazin' eyesight," 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, peay 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 banked 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. "Shan'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 tersely.

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 soothingly.

"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 amidst fragments of broken glass.

I grinned.

"Some of the kids, messing about with a cricket ball, I expect," I chuckled. "This is where you go on the warpath, 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?"

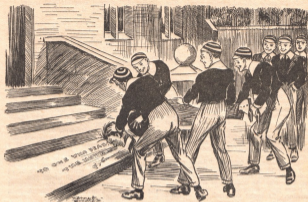
I heard a distant hail.

"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





"I tell you I didn't write this—— Yow! Gurrh!" Fullwood's words were cut off abruptly as Handforth pushed his face down. At the same time the knut's head was jerked to and fro, his nose rubbing the message on the step violently.

thought some of the Fossils—or—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 saw some faintly 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. Those 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 Cheng Tong had found us!

## CHAPTER 3.

### Tarred!

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 puv'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 knuts 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 those chaps—"

"But—but—but—"

"Outside!" roared Bob warmly.

"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."

"Begod!" 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!" bowled 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 directions, 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 swore, 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. Begod! There he is—look!"

Just ahead of us a dim, indistinct figure was slinking along. I thought quickly, wondering if it was wise to rush to the attack. The man 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 knuts. 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."

"Yes—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."

"Bogad!" murmured Montie. "I'm gettin' it already, dear boy. I don't know who the fellow on my chest is, but your knee's pressin' against my windpipe—"

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

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 knuts!

Fullwood and Merrell were holding me down; Gulliver and Noya had got Sir Montie; and Marriot 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 step, 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 Noya. "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, Marriot, my son."

In the dim light of the single candle I saw Marriot 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 knut loader.

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

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 Elons, and my face.

Then the pot was handed over to Gulliver—who anointed Sir Montie. Poor old Tregeillis-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 peep across the rough gravel of the Triangle in your stockings. Does the prospect delight you? Your feet may get out—"

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

"Nothing, you idiot—"

But Fullwood paused as a hail came faintly 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 & 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 knuts 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 gasped. "Great guns!" he roared. "What— How— Oh, crumbs!"

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

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Attacked!

**WE**—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 knots 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 knots back in our own time, and in our own particular way.

Most of the Removers 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

gun'oor 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 browner 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 stiff 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 box-kite, or is it an advertising stunt?"

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 or overnight, 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 doggone Chinks used to monkey around with, way out in California!"

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

I stared out now with renewed interest. Flying high above the school now was the 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. Eren Fullwood's turned out. And—begad!—Lang 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. "For 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 myself this morning, and was done before anybody else. Then I strolled into the Triangle, and made my way round the corner of the Ancient House.

There was the 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, threatening the gov'nor's life, 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 terrorise 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 Change, sir!" I muttered quickly.

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

"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-flyin' is the Chinese national pastime! Those rotten Fu Change—"

"Hush!" Tregelia 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 looking 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, know 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,



The narrator of these school stories—Nipper, Nelson Lee's assistant—Dick Bennett to St. Frank's.

and after breakfast. Meanwhile, the kite was hauled down by Warren, who considered this a task quite outside his duties; and, therefore, desecrating of a special tip. 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 arguing 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 "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 bath. 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 fog, 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, Benny 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 Tommy and Sir Montie. 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 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 bury itself—

"Ride like fary!" I yelled frantically.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie responded nobly. We all three tore down the road at a breakneck pace, roaring like demons.

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 see 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

farther. 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 shaky.

## CHAPTER 5.

### The Midnight Visitor!

**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 House-master 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 a mystery message, 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 footpad. I don't suppose he meant to use that knife. He was just going to try a dodge on—pinch Mr. Alvington's watch, you know. The 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 Mentie 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 baths at Calstone Bay, but I was all on edge to get back to the school.

## START COLLECTING, BOYS!

I was studying the other day a copy of the new Nestle's Free Gift Book, which contains some marvellous gifts that would delight the heart of any boy. Clockwork Speed Boats, Cricket Bats and Sheath Knives are only three of the dozens of exciting things that you can get if you collect the Free Gift Coupons which are to be found in any wrapped variety of Nestle's Chocolates. If, however, you write to Nestle's (Gift Department), Silverthorne Road, Battersea, London, S.W.3, they will send you a copy of the new Nestle's Free Gift Book and a Voucher for five free coupons.

When, at last, we did arrive, Tommy and Sir Mentie 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 only got a glimpse of his face," 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 premeditated, 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 musn'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. 'Pee 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 foolhardy 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 joky, and I don't think anybody had the slightest idea that I was really off my rooker 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, you 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 lights-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 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 fulfil 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 anything you like," murmured Sir Montie. "You lead the way, Benny, an' I'll follow. Barglars, you say? Have you looked at Fullwood's bed? You may have spotted the cheery knuts comin' in after a roarin' time at the White Harp!"

"Fullwood & Co. are all asleep!" I replied softly. "They're not playing the goat tonight. 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 bed-room. 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 pelled 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 bed-room 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!

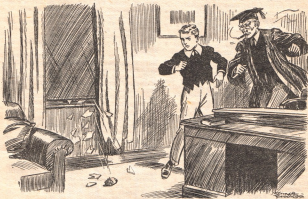
I couldn't think much more, for there were many interruptions.

Lights appeared along the passages, and juniors and seniors came on the scene. Then Mr. Crowell, the Remove master, emerged from his bed-room, 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.



Crash! Nelson Lee and I were suddenly startled by the sound of smashing glass at the window. Something hit the drawn blind with a smack, and then dropped to the floor amidst fragments of broken glass.

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 6.

### 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.

From the gov'nor's bed-room 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 unearthly 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 bed-room, 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 bed-room 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 Chumsman 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 bed-room 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 bed-room, 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 West 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 bed-room 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 second had entered the bed-room, 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.

"Haden'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 looked uncertain, too. But 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 bed-room. 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 bed-room 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 bed-room 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!" chorused 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 unseemly matter is exaggerated and enlarged by gossip. For the honour of the school itself, I must ask you to seek some other sanctuary. You realize, 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 Housemasters it has ever been my good fortune to have with me, and I shall feel you less 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 scotting 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 was a bit of a wrench—but it was the nature of our departure which galled me more.

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

## CHAPTER 7.

### Missing!

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 classroom, Mr. Crowell found me quite attentive.

In fact, I concealed my feelings completely. I felt though as if 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 gov'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 give an interesting talk—and the fellows were all eager to go. For, as I had found out

(Continued on page 24.)

## Step Right Into The Office For—



Letters to the Editor  
should be addressed  
to NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House,  
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, CHUMS.—How do you like our new pals? I mean, of course, the "Prairie Showmen," Buck and Billy, who, with their tame boxing bear, Bandy, make their first appearance in this issue of the NELSON LEE. Aren't they great guys? There is no doubt Buck and Billy are going to be very popular characters with readers in the weeks to come. Their Wild West adventures get more thrilling in each story. I know, because I have read every yarn of the series. You can take it from me, chums, there are some first-class story treats in store for you, so don't miss one of them.

Buck & Co. hit the trail again in next week's nerve-tingling yarn, "The Fighting Trio!"—and promptly walk right into another thrill-a-minute adventure!

So do Nipper & Co. in the next exciting St. Frank's story, which is entitled

### "THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY!"

The Remove chums have a strange adventure after being ragged by Fullwood & Co., the knave. It is an adventure that leads to many more, all centred around a sinister-looking place called the Bridge House. For mystery, thrills, fun and adventure, I strongly recommend you to this splendid yarn.

Our popular serial gets more exciting every week. Bud's a character that you can't help liking, isn't he? Straightforward and honest—but as cute as they make 'em! Follow his adventures for thrills.

There is an age-old saying, "Laugh and grow fat." Whether you grow fat or not, you will simply have to laugh at the comical capers of Trickett Grim and Spiciner, the two new mirth-makers in the NELSON LEE. You'll get laughs galore from the next set of cartoons which, together with over a dozen "Smilers" that are funnier than ever, make up two more pages of sparkling fun, adding the finishing touch to another super number.

Have you given your newspaper a standing order for the NELSON LEE yet? If you haven't, don't delay. Our coming issues are too good to risk missing.

### GUIDING LIGHTS.

"What are the little illuminated towers used for that are to be seen in many parts of the country nowadays?" asks "J.W.," of

Basingstoke. I think you must be referring to the location lights that show 'plane pilots in fog or darkness where it is safe to land in emergency. "J.W." These are beacons which light up automatically as soon as it becomes dusk or foggy, and if a pilot has to make a forced landing, he can do so without fear or danger in the vicinity of a beacon. These landing-ground location lights are lit by gas, and the reservoirs only require refilling about once every six months.

### HEARD THIS ONE?

Why is money called "dough"?  
Because it is "knoded" so!

Cheerio until next week!

## RESULT OF OUR "WORD-MAKING" COMPETITION

OWING to the fact that thirteen competitors sent in Correct Solutions in this popular contest, in which a HOME CINEMA was offered as FIRST PRIZE, I am faced with the difficulty of dividing the Home Cinema into thirteen equal parts. It just can't be done—not unless I take a hatchet and do it! And if I did that the thirteen prizewinners would want to look for me with a hatchet! As the cost of the Home Cinema is £3 5s., the best and fairest way out of the difficulty is for me to divide that amount equally among the thirteen competitors. This I have done, and accordingly postal orders for five shillings have been forwarded to each of the following competitors:

W. D. Anderson, Greytokes, Penrith, Cumberland; P. Arnold, 78, Constantine Road, London, N.W.3; J. Clephane, 8, West Claremont Street, Edinburgh; F. M. Cudlip, 4, Balloch Road, Cuford, S.E.4; R. Everest, 30, Oliver Crescent, Farningham, Kent; J. Foster, 51, Bentley Bar, nr. Atherstone, Warks; H. Haslam, Barwood Mount, Ramsbottom, Manchester; S. Johnson, "Glensak," Avenue Road, West Hartlepool; A. Motfield, 28, Mendip Road, Bedminster, Bristol, 3; K. Ringer, 189, Twickenham Road, Leytonstone, E.11; T. H. Smith, 5, Woodcote Village, Purley, Surrey; E. Snowden, 12, Retford Place, Bradford; W. L. Vinton, 83, Spring Grove Crescent, Hounslow, Middlesex.

One hundred "RIGBY" MODEL PLANES were also promised to runners-up, but in the checking it was found that no less than one hundred and thirty-nine readers, whose efforts each contained one error, tied for them. Therefore, to avoid disappointment to any of these entrants, the number of prizes has been increased by thirty-nine, so that every one of them shall have a model plane. Owing to lack of space we are unable to print such a long list here, but the winners' names may be seen on application at our office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.—TUX BROTHERS.

# "Smilers"

Jokes from readers wanted for this feature. If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 8, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. Splendid pocket wallets, penknives, and grand prizes are awarded for all efforts published.

## A READY RETORT.

Fat Boy: "You look as though you've been through a famine!"

Thin Boy: "And you look as though you caused it!"

A penknife has been awarded to "A Reader," 47, Ferndale Court, Stockwell, S.W.9.

## BACK-BREAKING.

Parting Guest settling bill: "By the way, what do you stuff your mattresses with in this hotel?"

Landlord: "The best straw in the county, sir."

P.G.: "Ah! Now I know where the straw came from that broke the camel's back!"

A pocket scuffler has been awarded to A. Jackson, 69, Stanley Street, Chadderton, Oldham.

## COMFORTING.

Passenger (to nigger chauffeur who is driving dangerously): "I wish you would not drive this car so fast round the corners, driver."

Chauffeur: "Do what ah do when yuh come to do corners—shut yuh eyes, sah!"

A penknife has been awarded to J. Gracey, Westway Drive, Ballygomartin Road, Belfast.

## TOO FILLING.

Soprano: "Did you hear how my voice filled the hall last night?"

Contralto: "Yes; in fact, I noticed several people going out to make room for it!"

A pocket scuffler has been awarded to J. Telfe, 87, Chidswell Lane, Dewsbury.

## NOT SO EASY.

Jack: "How are you getting along with arithmetic, Sam?"

Sam: "Well, I've learned to add up the noughts, but the figures still bother me!"

A penknife has been awarded to J. Dunn, 11, Peter Street, London, E.2.

## STILL GOING STRONG!

Hostess to guest up from the country: "How is that new gas fire I put in your room going?"

Guest: "Them new inventions be wonderful! I lit it four days ago and it hasn't gone out yet!"

A pocket wallet has been awarded to G. W. Davies, 11, Bevon Terrace, Mumbles, Glam.

# The Remarkable Adventure TRACKETT GR

## The Dud Detective



s of  
**M & SPLINTER**  
 and — His Assistant



## "Smilers"

### TORTOISE AND TURTLE.

First Motorist (after crash): "I tell you I came round that corner like a tortoise."

Second Motorist: "I suppose that's why my car turned turtle!"

A penknife has been awarded to S. Ings, Stoneleigh, Sketty Park Road, Sketty, Swansea.

### MURPHY'S MISTAKE.

Sergeant: "There was an escape of gas in the boiler-room, sir, and I sent Murphy down to locate it. He struck a match and——"

Inspector: "What! Struck a match? That should have been the last thing on earth he did."

Sergeant: "It was, sir!"

A pocket scalpel has been awarded to J. Tomson, 22, Reading Road, Ipswich.

### NASTY.

First Boy: "Let's see who can make the ugliest face."

Second Boy: "No; it wouldn't be fair."

E.B.: "Why not?"

E.B.: "Look at the start you've got!"

A penknife has been awarded to R. Davis, 9, Bambery Road, Worthing.

### A PLEASED PRISONER.

Magistrate sternly: "The next person who interrupts the proceedings will be sent out of court!"

Prisoner: "Hooray!"

A pocket scalpel has been awarded to R. Chaplin, 46, Sun Street, Birmingham.

### FOOLED.

Jones: "You believe anything a fool tells you."

Bones: "Not always; but sometimes you are quite convincing!"

A penknife has been awarded to M. Legal, 9, Melville Terrace, Edinburgh.

### ONCE ENOUGH.

Boss: "You are the last to arrive in the morning and the first to depart in the evening. Why?"

Office-boy: "Well, sir, I don't like being late twice in one day!"

A pocket scalpel has been awarded to "A Reader," "Etnedene," Bullards Lane, Finchley, N.12.

### THREE SHIRTS ONE YARD!

The negro servant was wearing a splendid new shirt, which brought from his mistress the question:

"How many yards did it take for that shirt, Sambo?"

"I've got two more like dis, muma," said Sambo, "and all out ob one yard!"

A grand prize has been awarded to J. McKenzie, 13, Grosvenor Street, South Dunedin, New Zealand.

## THE HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!

(Continued from page 20.)

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.

"Begad! 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 chaps 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 gov'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 gov'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 Remove 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 armchair, and gave myself up to my thoughts. Out in the Triangle I heard rain pelting 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 gov'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 asses," 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 Bellon 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 gov'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, slipped on an overcoat, and hurried out 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 just 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 desay 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 gov'nor's been there this evening. 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 gov'nor didn't go to the village, where did he go to? May I take a couple of fellows and go out if 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 Lee 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 Pagett was positively sparklin' this evening!— 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—"

## PEN PALS

Albert H. Boddy, 50, Avenue Emile Labassiere, Limoges, Haute Vienne, France, wants correspondents anywhere; interested in stamps, picture post cards, snaps, etc., also languages. Ages 16-18.

A. Woods, Ipswich, Stephen Street, Fremantle, Western Australia, wants a Spanish correspondent.

Robert W. Nicholson, Dalton Close, Kingsgate, Bridlington, Yorks, wants correspondents interested in stamps; 18-15.

Norman Smith, New Bethesda, Graaff-Reinet, Cape Province, South Africa, wants a correspondent in China; wishes to exchange stamps, coupons and cards.

A. Goldschmidt, Highgate, Cambridge, Cape Province, South Africa, wants members for the Springbok Correspondence Club; ages 12-16.

Miss Marjorie Spragg, 59, Second Avenue, Mount Lawley, Perth, Western Australia, wants girl correspondents out of Australia; art, music, travel, photography; age 18.

Miss Mary E. Weaver, 44, Walcott Street, Mt. Lawley, Perth, Western Australia, wants girl correspondents; music, literature, all sports. Age 18.

Bernard Wright, 84, North Street, Portslade, Sussex, would like correspondents; ages 15-17.

D. Frew, Boston Street, Teneriffe, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wants correspondents; interested in stamps and wireless.

Charles Wilkie, South Lodge, Inchmarlo, Banchoy, Kincardineshire, N.B., wants to correspond with a French boy.

Miss Betty Phillips, 22, Sudley Road, Beggar Regis, wants girl correspondents anywhere, especially South America and Canada.

Miss Elsie B. May, 46, Noel Street, Islington, London, N.I., wants to hear from readers who are interested in poetry.

W. Coughlan, 106, Station Road, Shirebrook, Derbyshire, wants to hear from foreign readers. Age 14.

B. R. Curran, 67, Seventh Street, La Rochelle, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants correspondents in England; exchange snap.

J. M. Barker, Ocean Avenue, Double Bay, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, would like to hear from stamp collectors anywhere, especially foreign countries.

Miss Dora Batterfield, 2, Cranby Grove, Watcloon, Huddersfield, Yorks, wants to hear from girl readers in Canada and Australia.

Mervyn E. Light, 133, Marsh Street, Armidale, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents in America and Africa.

Miss Jessie Mackay, 5300, Parke Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, wants to hear from girl readers.

"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 god!" 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 gunner. I'd seen his footprints too often to be mistaken.

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

"It's amazing," 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 some time—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."

We 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 Bennington—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 some 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 gunner 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-toes!"

"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— Hallo! 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 at 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.

Could there be any doubt as to what that

"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



I started as I looked upwards. The words on the streamer straightened by a gust of wind, stared right down at me: "The Blow Will Fall To-day.—F.C." It was another message of mystery threatening the life of Nelson Lee!

"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—

I couldn't think any further—I dared'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 have pitched his victim into the Stone, 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.

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 song-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 en 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 from it.

"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 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 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!

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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 8.

## The Madman!

TREGELLIS-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 evidently sprung upon the gov'nor unawares, 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 bowl 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 as he reached 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 clunched 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 feet 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 words.

It told me that the man wasn't a Fu Chang murderer, after all, as I had so fondly believed; and it made me realize, 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, odd 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.

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, and, with my chums holding my feet, I was just able to reach the gov'nor's ankles. I slashed through the ropes, thus releasing the boulder.

After that, it was quite easy to haul him up and release him from 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 as 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 written those messages! 'E. 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 seeing 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

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blows—the quarrel, of course, being of Charlson's pecking.

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 side whiskers.

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 would have been 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.

(Details of next week's grand long complete St. Frank's story and other splendid features appear above.)

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# The PRAIRIE SHOWMEN!



By STANLEY AUSTIN

## The Battling Bees.

**G**REAT jumping snakes!" The grizzled, sunburnt cow-puncher rose slowly from his seat on the bottom step of the Dead Eagle Hotel, and stared blankly along the dusty prairie trail.

Over the wide grasslands the shadows were lengthening, but there was still plenty of sunlight, and a strange trio could be seen clearly as they ambled wearily along the trail towards the cow-town.

First came a tall figure, big-boned and lanky, in chaps and Stetson, who carried a bundle over his shoulder. Next came a slim youth in travel-stained store clothes and a battered straw hat. And he was leading, on a long chain, a huge, brown-grizzled bear.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the staring puncher.

He grinned and turned to the bunch of

cowboys and loafers on the veranda of the saloon.

"Say, come and take a look, boys!" he bawled. "Search me, ef the circus ain't come to town!"

There was a good-humoured guffaw as the bunch turned, looked along the trail, and sighted the strange trio. Rarely had the tough inhabitants of Broken Gulch seen such an outfit.

The dusty trio came to a halt at last in front of the Dead Eagle Hotel, and the bear grunted and sat down on its haunches comfortably. The two strangely assorted newcomers did not seem one whit disturbed at the laughter. Their dusty, sunburnt features broke into cheery grins.

"Waal, I'll tell the world!" exclaimed the grizzled puncher, grinning back a welcome. "Say, boys, what's the big idea? Hev' you 'uns bin and lost the circus?"

Meet Buck, Billy and Bandy, the bear, the boxing partners! They earn their living with their fists in cow-towns of the Wild West—and, by way of a pastime, make it hot for rustlers, gunmen and bandits!



The lanky youth dropped his bundle and grinned again.

"I reckon you've said it, mister," he answered. "Leastways, the circus hev' lost us, hev'ing gone bust! An' as we got to live, me and my pard an' old Bandy here are goin' round the cow-towns givin' boxin' exhibitions."

"I guessed I'd seen you youngers afore," nodded the puncher. "Ain't you the bombers as was boxin' in the circus over at Pine City last week?"

"You've said it agen," said the lanky youth. "Yep, that were us, mister. But some goldarned, all-fired road-agents held up the boss, shot up some of the hands, and cleaned out the safe wot held the boss's savin's and a blamed month's takin's. Consensus was the old boss had to sell out, and we 'uns had to hit the trail. And now, gents, as we ain't 'ad a bite since sun-up, p'haps you'll allow us to give our dandy performance."

"We shore will," said the nearest puncher heartily. "Her, boys!"

He popped his grizzled head inside the saloon, from whence came the chink of glasses and noisy talking. Soon a swarm of ranch-hands and punchers were pouring out, and they cheered when they heard what was afoot. Such entertainments were few and far between in that section.

They formed a ring round the strangers. The youth in store clothes took off his dusty jacket and handed his straw into the paws of the grizzly, who took it with a grunt. The lanky youth threw down his shabby Stetson and raised a hand in best showman fashion.

"Afore we starts the performance, gents," he bawled, "I guess I'll interduce us. This here boss-faced guy in the dude duds is Battlin' Billy Baxter, of Bolton, a dandy Britisher wot'd hev' been champion of Great Britain if the blamed champ. had let him. This hairy gent on my left is Bandy, the Battlin' Bear, the only boxin' bear in existence, 'cep'ting a few more. As for this guy—wasl, I'm Buck Malone, and, bein' a modest hombre, I'll only say as there ain't a boxer in the Yewunited States, and then some, as can knock me out of once I gets a few yards start. That's us, gents, renowned the world over—since last week, at least—as the Battling Bees! First of all, me an' my pard will give a sparring exhib. an' then any gent as wants ter knock out Bandy ken hev' the mitts on with him. Ready, pard?"

"Yes, I'm ready, Gus!" grinned Billy Baxter. "But hold on—hadn't we better hold the show somewhere else!"

"Somewhere else nix, you homeheaded Britisher!" snorted Buck. "Right hyer, I see!"

"But you know what happened at Buzzard City yesterday, you long-legged, pie-faced chump!" retorted Billy Baxter. "Didn't the greaser of the saloon turn the hose on us—said we were taking his customers away!"

"Aw! Nix to that durned coyote!" said Buck Malone. "We're holdin' the show right hyer, I see, an' if you call me a long, pie-faced chump—"

"Well, supposin'—"

"Aw! Quit chowin' the rag! An' get these mitts on, Britisher!"

As he spoke, Buck Malone drew a pair of worn boxing-gloves from his bundle and sent them whizzing towards his partner. The gloves hit Billy Baxter full in the face. Evidently they hurt, for instantly Billy grabbed them up again and sent them whizzing back. The gloves hit the mark again, and Buck gave a yelp and sat down with a bump.

That did it!

"Ef it's a lickin' you're after askin' for, pard," he bawled, scrambling up again heatedly, "I guess this guy'll oblige you!"

The next moment they were going at it hammer and tongs amid a roaring crowd of grinning punchers, the gloves and the sparring exhibition alike forgotten.

"Go it, Britisher!"

"Ride 'im, cowboy! Haw, haw, haw!"

But the two needed no urging. As a matter of fact, though the greatest of pals, Buck Malone and Billy Baxter had an unfortunate habit of scrapping together on the least provocation. As a rule it needed less than a good-humoured insult to start them off. And when they did start they took some stopping.

But the spectators undoubtedly enjoyed it. They yelled excitedly as the two hammered and battered each other with keen enthusiasm. The only spectator who did not seem to be enjoying the scrap was Bandy, the bear.

He shook his massive head, as if frowning upon his two thoughtless and youthful partners. Bandy was used to such little excitements, and he seemed to know at once when it was a business spar or not. When it wasn't a business spar he always stepped in and stopped it.

He did so now.

Granting his disapproval, he ambled between the two and cuffed each playfully. One cuff from Bandy was enough. Both howled and jumped away, to sprawl over in the dust, with a roar of laughter from the punchers.

Buck and Billy scrambled up, each rubbing his head ruefully.

"That blamed bear agen!" groaned Buck. "Wasl, pard, I guess old Bandy's our business manager, and he's got more boss-ness than us galoots. I guess we'd best get the mitts on now an' start—"

Buck paused. After all, they had given a "sparring exhibition" already, and the punchers seemed delighted. And both Buck and Billy were tired and hungry.

"I guess we'll git on with the next item in the programme, gents," he went on hurriedly. "Now, gents, what guy'll step forward and hev' the mitts on with Bandy, the world-famed boxin' bear? I guess it's

a cinch—the chance of a lifetime, hombre! Don't all speak at once, gents!"

"Wot's a guy get ed he knocks that bear out, younker?" grinned Luke Bolt, the grizzled old puncher.

"No guy'll knock 'im out, chum," said Buck calmly. "Only a boxin' elephant'd stand a chance o' doin' that. But of a guy loses, then he gets a nice wooden box an' a harp, an' me an' my pard'll buy flowers. Now, gents, who's goin' to hev' a go at Bandy, the bear?"

While speaking, Buck and Billy had been fastening boxing-gloves on Bandy's huge paws.

But there were no takers—only guffaws. Either the size of the bear, or Buck's significant remarks respecting wooden boxes, harps and flowers, caused the punchers to be backward in coming forward.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" sighed Buck. "Ain't any of you gents got the sand to stand up to poor old Bandy? Aw, waal, I shore am surprised, an' it's this guy he'll hev' to take Bandy on. My gloves, pard!"

The grinning Billy Baxter helped Buck on with his gloves. Buck squared up cheerfully to Bandy, who seemed quite at home with the gloves on. Actually, Bandy was well-trained and rarely hit hard; never hard enough to hurt seriously. But just as the sparring exhibition was about to begin there came an interruption.

Through the excited cowpunchers a man came pushing—a small, swarthy-faced man, with a heavy, oily moustache, black, beady eyes and thick gold earrings.

His dark velvet charro costume, decorated with silver buttons and fancy braid, and his battered sombrero, proclaimed him a Mexican. He was covered with the white dust of the trail.

His beady, crafty eyes glittered as they rested on the Battling Boes.

"Waal, I'll tell a man!" snapped Luke Bolt. "Hyer, you goldarned greaser, whatcha mean by pushin' in hyer like you wuz the durned sheriff? Light out, goldarn you, sfore—"

"Carsa!" pants the Mexican. "But say hav' teefed my bear—my Bandy, yes! Zat bear, eet belong to me, so! Carambo! Zat ees my bear, and thees young coyotes, sey have stolen heem, amigoss!"

"Gosh! It's that reptile Gomez!" breathed Billy Baxter.

"Jumpin' rattlesnakes! It shore is!" roared Buck Malone. "Wot's that, you durned greaser? That bear yours? I guess you was it's trainer, shore 'nough! But old Bandy belonged to old Joe Sandley, an' old Joe gev' him to us when we lighted outer the circus, you blamed liar!"

"It belonga me, leetle boxin' peeg!" snarled Gomez, showing dirty yellow teeth. "I claim eet, you teef—"

"Call me a thief, you doggoned skunk!" howled Buck. "Why, I'll knock your durned block off!"

The indignant Buck advanced on the Mexican, but he pulled up swiftly as he

glimpsed the wicked barrel of a six-gun in the greaser's dirty hand. Just then another voice, hard and steely, rang out:

"Put that gun back, greaser! I gussa we allow no gun-play round this burg! Park it, an' park it pronto!"

The Mexican hastily holstered his six-gun as he found himself staring down the barrel of a Colt. Behind the gun glistened a pair of icy, steel-grey eyes. On the breast of the tall man holding the gun was a star. His face, hard-bitten, with iron-grey moustaches, was grim.

"What's this rookus, you 'uns!" demanded the sheriff, for it obviously was that officer. A dozen voices told him at once.

"You got any proof as this hyer bear belongs to you, greaser?" demanded Sheriff Tobin, eyeing Gomez keenly.

"Carambo, I hav' not see proof, but see bear, eet belongs to me—I hav' trained heem."

"You trained him right enough—and a dashed cruel trainer you were, Gomez!" snapped Billy Baxter hotly. "You trained him like you trained the rest of the animals in the circus—with a steel-thonged whip. The circus boss—old Joe Sandley—gave us that bear as a parting present, you rotter!"

The argument became more and more heated, and the sheriff looked on, gnawing his moustache. He was plainly at a loss to know how to settle the dispute justly. But suddenly Luke Bolt chipped in with a brain-wave.

"I guess you c'n settle it this-a-way, boss!" he said, grinning. "Ef the bear'll go with the greaser, let him take him. An' ef he won't go, then thees younkere c'n keep him. I reckon that's fair, boys!"

There was a murmur of approval, and the sheriff nodded, glad to see a way out of his predicament.

"Waal, thet's square 'nough, boys," he said—"ef you 'uns all agree!"

The boys grinned and nodded. The Mexican also nodded, his teeth baring as he loosened a raw-hide whip from round his waist. He advanced towards Bandy, the boxing bear, his whip cracking like pistol-shots. Bandy backed away, his little ears on his old trainer. He backed until he brought up against the side of the hotel.

Gomez grinned, gave the bear a vicious slash with his whip, and then reached for Bandy's chain.

Then Bandy decided the matter in his own way.

He swung a huge paw and gave Gomez a hefty wallop on the head.

Biff!

Gomez let out a fearful yell and went head over heels, turning a complete somersault. He lay there groaning and half-stunned. A roar of delight came from the spectators.

"I reckon that settles it, boys," grinned Sheriff Tobin in a drawl. "The younkere keep t' bear. Hyer, you greaser, you got that? You've had a square deal, and you're lost! And now, in case you thinks



Just as the rope tightened to hang Gomez, Buck took a hand. Crack! There was a loud report from his gun, and the bullet snipped through the rope. The strands parted, and the shrieking Gomez collapsed in a heap.

to pull a gun again, you can light out this liver burg—and hit the trail pronto!"

"That's the talk, sheriff!" grinned Luke Bolt. "Waal, I reckon that bear shore gave the greaser a peach of a wallop! An' I guess that should end th' performance, and ef you yonkers will have some grub wi' me after th' collection, I'm your guy!"

The Battling Bees decided it should end their performance. The old straw hat was handed to Bandy, and the bear ambled round while the grinning cowpunchers tossed their contributions into it. After which Buck and Billy gave Bandy a good feed, and then entered the Dead Eagle Hotel with Luke for a much-needed food themselves.

#### Ambushed!

**C**RACK! Bandy, the boxing bear, gave a convulsive start as the bullet whipped a tuft of hair from his shaggy coat.

The sharp, vicious crack of the shot rang and echoed across the sunlit prairie.

It was the next morning. The Battling

Bees had spent a pleasant evening with the friendly cowpunchers at Broken Gulch. They had slept the night at the Dead Eagle Hotel, and, after a breakfast of ham and eggs, had started out on the trail shortly after sun-up.

It was after they had been trudging on along the prairie trail for an hour that the shot rang out—a shot which startled Buck Malone and Billy Baxter as much as it did Bandy, the bear.

"Gosh!" gasped Billy. "What the thunder—"

"Light down, you durned bonehead!" yelled Buck.

Crack! Another shot rang out, and Billy took cover hastily as he felt the wind of the bullet whip past his face.

Buck Malone cast a quick glance around as he took cover. Even as he ducked he glimpsed the white puff of smoke and the top of a dirty sombrero over a cluster of rocks just off the trail.

Instantly he grabbed a handy chunk of rock and let fly. The ex-puncher's aim was deadly, and the sombrero whizzed away.

Then followed a wild yell and the sound of a fall.

"I guess that got the darned galoot where he lives!" rapped out Buck, and in a flash he was on his feet and racing for the spot.

Billy Baxter was not a second in going after him. They found the man who had ambushed them just scrambling from the ragged mesquite beside the trail. Billy Baxter gave a yell as he sighted the swarthy, evil face.

"Gomez! It's that dirty greaser, Buck!"

"It shore is, pard," snapped Buck. "I guess—holly smoke!"

Buck yelled a warning as the greaser snarled and leaped to recover his six-gun that lay a yard or so away. But Billy was wise to the danger. His fist shot out, and he slammed home a powerful punch that lifted the Mexican clean off his feet.

Buck whipped his own six-gun from his holster and covered Gomez.

"You darned, treacherous skunk!" he hissed. "So that's how you was aimin' to square accounts, greaser! What's your tarantula game, Gomez? Last night you was aimin' to get back th' bear, an' now you aim to let daylight through Bandy and us hombres as well. What's your *darned* game?"

The Mexican's beady eyes glittered up at them, but he said nothing.

Just then came the thud of hoofs, and

through the long grass of the prairie came three horsemen at a gallop.

They were up to the spot almost as soon as they were heard, the long grass and soft ground deadening the thudding hoofs. Both Buck and Billy glanced round, fully expecting it to be the sheriff's posse or a bunch of punchers. But they realized the truth as a hoarse voice rapped out:

"Put 'em up! Drop that gun, puncher!"

Such situations were not new to Buck Malone; he dropped his six-gun and raised his hands. Billy also raised his hands as he got a good look at the newcomers.

They were tough-looking men, with evil, stabbly fares, and all three wore black masks, half hiding their faces.

"I reckon I knows when to put 'em up, mister," drawled Buck coolly. "What's the rookus?"

"Keep a broad on these galoots, Pete!" snapped the first man, and he dropped from his bronchee, his eyes, hard and cruel, scanning the trio.

He was a big man, with a broken nose and heavy, drooping black moustaches. He gave an evil grin as his eyes lingered for a second on Billy's store clothes and straw hat.

"Say, we've darned well struck a travellin' show, boys," he grinned. "This hyer dude and that there bear! Looks as ef they ain't a blamed dollar atween— By the great horned toad!"

The trail-thief's black eyes had suddenly

## "THE TAMING OF THE TYRANT"



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fallen on the prostrate Mexican. He gave a hoarse yell.

"Jumpin' snakes! It's that darned double-crossin' greaser, boys! Waal, carry me home to die! Ef this ain't a stroke o' luck!"

Evidently Gomez did not think it a stroke of luck for him—certainly not good luck! His swarthy face went a curious greenish-grey, and he cowered back in fright under the glittering eyes of the bandit.

"Black Carter!" he panted. "Carambo! Ect ooo—"

"It shore is, Gomez!" said Black Carter, grinning evilly. "I guess you're our mutton with the wool on! Hope the double-crossin' polecat up, boys!"

One of his men dropped from his horse. With his lariat he swiftly tied the shaking Mexican's hands behind him, and he did it none too gently. Obviously Manuel Gomez was far removed from being a friend to the bushwhackers. Black Carter turned to the pals.

"Who the blamed thunder are you, and what are you doin' in cabcoots with that skunk!" he exclaimed.

"We're boxers, hombre, what's trailin' round the cow-towns, givin' exhibitions—us an' Bandy, th' boxing bear," said Buck. "This hyer greaser ambushed us and tried to let daylight through us."

"Just what that skunk would do, I allow. But, say," went on Black Carter, evidently still suspicious, "what you doin' in puncher's outfit, hombre?"

"I guess I was a puncher afore I took up boxing," grinned Buck cheerfully. "Me, I'm the boxing puncher now—the's what they puts on the bills, mister."

Black Carter snorted.

"Waal, I reckon I'm not honing after liftin' cents off'n bobos," he sneered. "This 'ere greaser's our meat, he shore is! An' ef he don't spill the works over a little matter between him and me, he's goin' to be ebset pucet at a necktie party—he shore is! I'll just relieve you of your shootin'-iron, hombre, and then you can light out!"

He jerked up Buck's six-gun and slipped it into his belt. Then he waved his own iron.

"Hit the trail, and hit it quick! You'd best look lively, hombre, 'cose I'm agoin' to fan you!" he said briefly. "Hit it hard— pronto! I giv' you two darned ticks to hit the horizon!"

"Here's this galoot for the blamed horizon, then!" said Buck Malone hastily. "Hook it, Britisher!"

As he spoke Buck took to his heels in fine style. Billy hesitated, not quite grasping matters. But suddenly Black Carter's gun roared, and as a bullet whipped up the dust of the trail at his feet, Billy understood.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Oh, gosh!"

Billy Buxter fairly streaked after Buck as the bullets spattered around him amid spurring stones and dust. Billy badly wanted to tell Black Carter just what he thought of

him, but he realised it was not a time for back-chat.

He flew, and not until Black's gun ceased to roar did the pals stop, by which time they were panting and gasping. A glance back showed them that Black Carter and his ugly pals had mounted again and were tramping on to the prairie, leading Manuel Gomez, bound at the end of the lariat. The greaser's whining pleadings died away.

"Waal, that shore was interestin', pard!" grinned Buck. "Holy smokes! You oughtn' 'ave bin a track-racer, not a darned boxer, Britisher! I shore was surprised to see how you could leg it. You fair had th' darned wind up!"

"Why, you blinkin' idiot!" grinned Billy. "I was chasing after you because I wanted to stop you playing the lunk and running away!"

"Ef you see I was playin' the darned lunk, you bandy-legged, bontheaded Britisher—"

"Like a prairie rabbit, you ran, you silly, long-legged streak of chewing-gum!" said Billy candidly. "Why didn't you stop and help me fight it out, you chunk of misery?"

"Waal, that blamed-well does it!" said Buck, turning back his shirt-sleeves still more. "Ef it's after askin' for a fight you are, it's me as will oblige you, you animated choppin'-block! You an' me's had a few score of scraps, pard, but I guess it's time us proved which is the better galoot. Put 'em up, Britisher!"

"Chuck it, Buck," said Billy, becoming serious. "I say, doesn't a necktie-party mean a hanging?"

"It shore does!" said Buck grimly. "That blamed greaser's double-crossed them pizen skunks at some time or other, pard. I guess he's for the long drop—at the end of a rope!"

"But we can't see murder done, Buck," said Billy in alarm. "Greaser or no greaser, we've got to chip in. If you won't—"

"Aw, quit chewin' the rag, pard!"—said

Buck, jutting out his lower jaw aggressively. "I guess I ain't after honing much over that darned greaser. But I aims to get my shootin'-iron back off'n them rustlers. I'm with you, Britisher."

"Then let's—"

"Come on," snapped Buck. "We'll chain Bandy up to a tree, and I reckon he'll stay put till the job's done."

And with his blue eyes glinting, Buck Malone led the way back again. They were setting out on a perilous trail, but the Battling Bees grew fat on trouble.

#### The "Necktie" Party!

**B**UCK led the way swiftly back to the scene of the ambush. Billy soon saw what he was after. He searched about for a moment and then he found Gomez's six-gun among the mesquite, where it had lain unseen by the bandits.

But grinned as he rammed it into his holster.

"Black Carter will be shore surprised when he sees us galoots agen," he remarked coolly. "Now we gottar be sorter retainin' an' modest over this hyer rookus, Billy. Ef you shows jest us much as th' rust on that there straw-hat o' yours it'll want a new tenant, pard. There the blamed fire-bugs go!"

The bobbing stooges of the trail-thieves had dropped from sight beyond the rim of a hollow, but now the horsemen could be seen again in the distance. They were climbing a slight rise towards the chaparral, and the determined pals watched them grimly until they vanished amid the trees.

Then, after Bandy had been secured, Buck gave the word, and the chums got on the trail, crawling through the long grass, taking shelter in gullies and behind rocks where they could. It seemed a short time before they reached the chaparral from behind, and dived cautiously into the trees.

But no barking roar of a Colt came to tell them they were spotted, and with great caution they started to push through to the far side. Now they could hear husky, angry voices and terrified yells.

Suddenly the chaparral ended, and they sighted the bushwhackers and their Mexican prisoner.

Under a giant tree stood the greaser, his swarthy, dirty features grey with terror. The rope was already round his neck, and slung across a branch overhead. Holding the end of the rope were Black Carter's two companions. Black himself stood before Gomez, his dark eyes glinting.

"Waal, you doggoned, double-crossing greaser," Black was roaring, "we got you to rights now, you all-fired skunk! Are you aimin' to spill the works, or are you aimin' to swing? I giv' you one darned minute!"

"Carambo! But eet is zee trooth zat I tell you!" shrieked Gomez. "You shot me—"

"I guess we shore did—I winged you, though I aimed to do more'n that, greaser," snarled Black Carter. "Are you goin' to spill the works an' tell us where—"

"But eet is ze mistake, senor—"

"You blamed liar!" roared Black in sudden rage. "Up with the darned coyote, boys!"

The rope tightened, and Gomez shrieked again. Just as it tightened Buck Malone took a hand. There came a sudden spurt of fire. Crack!

It was a deadly shot. The bullet snipped through the rope, clean as a whistle. The strands parted, and the shrieking Gomez collapsed in a heap.

"Holy smoke! What the heck—"

Black Carter's hands flew to his holsters. But they never reached them. Buck Malone, cool and steady, his eyes like ice, stepped from the trees.

"Put 'em up, you 'uns! Let them guns alone, Black, you darned coyote!"

Black Carter swore berisly, but he left his guns alone. He had seen quite enough of the

boxing puncher's shooting. A guy who could cut a rope, even at such short distance, was a guy to respect!

Billy Baxter, grinning cheerfully, followed Buck into the open. Buck coolly jerked Black's two six-guns from their holsters and pitched them far into the chaparral. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, Buck drew his own gun from the rascal's belt with his free hand.

"That's that, rustler!" he exclaimed. "I guess you oughta know as it ain't lucky to take another guy's iron. Now, Britisher, jest run over them guys, and string 'em tight!"

With the ruffians' eyes burning with rage, Billy relieved the fuming rascals of their weapons. Then he trussed them up with rope. Black Carter looked like making trouble, but a move of Buck's gun made him change his mind. He submitted in angry silence as Billy trussed him and bundled him, with his pals, against a giant cottonwood.

"I reckon that's fine," grinned Buck, relaxing then. "You sees why I runned away afore now, pard! I runned away to fight another day, an' I'm shore surprised as you didn't see it at th' time, Billy, instead of insultin' a gent like what you did. Now cut that greaser loose and help him to burn the trail!"

Billy cut the greaser's bonds and dragged him upright. The Mexican's terror was gone now, but his look of relief changed to sudden anguish as Billy planted a hefty boot behind his tight velvet trousers.

"That's the style, pard! Now, greaser, hit the horizon afore I'm tempted to pump lead into your pesky hide!"

Billy just had time to get another helping kick home, and then the Mexican leaped away with a yell, his tightly-encased legs fairly whizzing under him. Buck loosed a stray shot in the air after him, and he vanished, going like the wind.

"I likes a guy as don't stop to argueefy," grinned Buck. "Waal, I guess it's time we vamooseed, pard!"

"Doggone you!" hissed Black Carter, his eyes glittering with fury. "You figure you're goin' to leave us hyer, puncher!"

"Yep—you've said it! But we'll send the sheriff to cut you loose—ef he wants," said Buck cheerfully. "I reckon the sheriff'll be shore delighted to become acquainted with you dandy bushwhackers. Come on, pard. I'm honin' to get astride a hoss agen."

"You're going to take their horses!" gasped Billy.

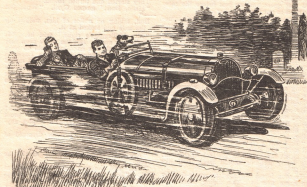
"I shore am, Britisher! I guess I ain't walkin' when hosses are handy for the askin'. Them cayuses is bound to hev' bin rustled, anyway, an' us'll hand 'em to the sheriff. Come on, an' quit chewin' the rag."

Leaving the raging trail-thieves to yell curses and threats after them, the Battling Boss mounted two of the bronchos, leading the third on a riata.

(Continued on page 44.)

# OPEN THROTTLE!

By DAVID GOODWIN



## Fuel Pizy!

"LADDIE," cried McTaggart, shaking Bud enthusiastically by the hand, "I'm as pleased as if ye'd gi'en me a thousand pounds. If ye'd been killed in a car o' my tuning I'd never ha' held my heid up agen!"

"It's a matter o' luck," said Bud. "I once fell off a push-bike at eight miles an hour, and I was in hospital a fortnight. Went through the rail of a bridge forty feet high into a river with a motor-lorry another time, and me and the driver weren't even scratched. But I'll be getting along now," he added, trying to rise to his feet. "I want to have a look at that car."

"No, you don't, my boy," said the doctor. "You're coming to the ambulance house with me before I pass you out. You've had a shock, and you're my patient."

"He might have some internal injury," said Cyril anxiously.

"Internal grand-mother!" retorted Bud. Bud there was no help for it. The doctor made the men lift him on the ambulance, and took him

away to the first-aid sheds. Bud protested that it was making a fool of him, but he had to go.

McTaggart took Cyril with him to inspect the Bugatti. Though greatly relieved to find Bud apparently unhurt, McTaggart was distressed by the tragic breakdown of the racing-car. He was almost weeping, for he considered himself disgraced.

The race was lost. Cyril's car had stopped just short of the finishing-line. But it was not Bud's fault, and by now Cyril had almost forgotten there was a race at all. Better fellows than Bud had lost bigger races by a narrower margin. It was the luck of the game. They set about hauling the broken car into McTaggart's shed.

Meanwhile, Bud was taken into the ambulance house and laid on a bed. The doctor, though he could find nothing wrong with him, insisted on his lying quiet for awhile. Bud gave it up, and obeyed orders.

He was not sorry to have a rest. He was feeling rather sick and shaken, though getting

## THE OPENING CHAPTERS

*Bud Kelly, a clever young motor mechanic, gets a job as chauffeur-a-let to Cyril Babbit, a youthful millionaire. He has a suspicion that Helene Finch and Barney Finch, Babbit's uncle and cousin respectively, and Joe Clench, a rascally chauffeur, are in league "to get rid" of Cyril, who is driving in a big race at Brooklands. Babbit sprains his wrist and Bud takes his place. Barney offers him a bribe not to drive, and Bud knocks him down. The car crashes in the race, and Bud has a miraculous escape.*

better all the while, and he was able to think.

Bud lay on his back and thought it over. The more he thought, the more there was to think about. His brain began to function busily.

He remembered what had happened in London the night before, and the scene in the library with the two Finches. Then there was that queer business just before the race. He tried to put it all together.

"By gosh!" he murmured. "There's something fishy here! I wish I could see my way through it. Can't make head or tail of it. And that chap Cleugh! I saw Joe Cleugh down by that refreshment-room place when we first came on to the course. I suppose he drove those two beauties here in the car. I can't lie here any longer doing nothing. I'm going to take a hand in the game."

Bud looked round the room. Nobody was paying any attention to him at the moment. He put his legs over the side of the bed, and slipped quietly out of the place.

He was rather sore and shaken, but he was feeling cheerful enough, and could walk quite well. At the door he found Pincher waiting for him, the broken lead dangling from his collar.

"That was a close go, wasn't it, Pincher, old son?" said Bud. "Glad you weren't with me in the car. We'll have a look at that car. It's funny an axle should break itself like that!"

He soon found McTaggart's repair-shop by the name over it. The sliding doors were nearly closed. He went in quietly.

McTaggart was there with Cyril and a police-sergeant. They did not notice Bud's entry. They were busy over the wrecked Bugatti, the front of which was a wreck.

The car had its forepart hoisted right off the ground by pulleys and tackles from the roof. The steel front axle was snapped right through, and the smashed-up front wheels were nearly meeting. If the axle was flayed and apt to break, it might have gone at any time, but was most likely to part when the car was at its greatest speed and strain.

They were all three staring hard at the broken axle.

"Of course, it was an accident," said Cyril. "There was a flaw in the steel."

"Man, I say it was foul play!" retorted McTaggart, who was purple in the face. "Look at the place where she's snapped! I tell ye the axle has been cut three-parts of the way through with a tool! What do you say, sergeant?" he added, turning to the policeman.

The police-sergeant examined the break and shook his head in doubt.

"I'm not engineer enough to tell you that," said he. "The surface is all burred. It might be a cut or a break."

"But the car's been locked up in my garage for days," said Cyril.

"I dinna care a boot about that!" returned McTaggart. "A scoundrel can get into a

locked garage if he sets his mind to it. You axle was sound when I handed ye over the car."

"But why should anybody try to do such a thing?" exclaimed the bewildered Cyril.

"Why, to put you car out o' the race, which she'd have won easy!" retorted McTaggart. "For spite!"

"Or for murder!" said Bud quietly.

They started and turned round.

"Hallo, Bud!" gasped Cyril. "What the

—"

Bud, taking no notice of him, walked up to the axle and looked at it.

"Mr. McTaggart's right," said he. "It doesn't show much. But the axle's been cut; and there's only one hand-tool could do it—a little American gadget called the Lavilette saw. It will cut through the toughest milled Harvey steel. A pal of mine showed me one last year. I believe some fellow got under our car and cut the axle enough to weaken it. He could do it in half an hour."

"Good heavens!" gasped Cyril.

The policeman nodded gloomily.

"It may be so," he said. "But who is he? There isn't a jot of proof. Without proof you can do nothing. Do you suspect anyone?"

"No," said Cyril. "I never dreamed of such a thing."

Bud turned to the policeman.

"Are you investigating this case?" he asked.

"Yes," said the sergeant, with a smile at Bud. "But there's nothing here except suspicion. There's no case."

"I'm afraid that's right," sighed Bud. "Might as well look for a needle in a haystack."

He bent close over the axle and took a good look at it. Then he gave a start, went down on his knees, and looked closer still.

"Great Jupiter!" murmured Bud. "Here mister, lend me that glass of yours for a moment!"

The policeman handed Bud a small magnifying-glass with which he had been examining the break in the axle. Bud did not look at the break, but at the axle on either side of it, where there were two or three oily marks on the bright surface of the steel. He focused the glass and looked long and carefully.

"What is it?" exclaimed Cyril.

"Just pipe these marks off, mister," said Bud quietly, handing back the glass. "See 'em?"

"Yes," said the policeman.

"I name no names," said Bud grimly. "but give me ten minutes, mister, and I think I can lay hands on the stiff who cut that axle through!"

#### The Thumb-mark.

CYRIL RABBIT dropped the eyeglass out of his eye.

"What are you driving at, Bud?" he exclaimed.

"Those greasy marks on the steel are hand-





"I was never near the car!" shouted Cleugh. "When I——" "You can tell all that to the magistrate," interrupted the sergeant; and as the arrested chauffeur passed out of the shed, he shook his fist at Bud.

marks, aren't they?" Bud replied. "They're what some fellow has made gripping hold of the axle."

"That's right!" said McTaggart.

"And they're near as plain as if they'd been made in sealing-wax. If you wanted to cut that steel through, you'd hold on to it with one hand, while you used a tool with the other. Now has anybody touched the axle or gripped right hold of it since the car was brought in here?"

"No."

"Well, the guy with the greasy hands who took hold of that axle is the one we want."

Babbit gazed at him.

"He'll have washed his hands by this time," he said rather stolidly.

"Of course he has!"

"And there are about six million loose in London with a pair o' hands apiece!" objected McTaggart.

The police-sergeant said nothing. He was scanning the marks through his magnifying-glass. Fincher was sniffing inquiringly all round the car.

"Now, then, my lad," said the sergeant, turning abruptly to Bud, "let's have it! If you've got any notion who did this job, make an accusation against him, and I'll run him in!"

"Thank you!" said Bud. "But I don't like

makin' accusations against people unless I'm sure of a win. Nor the police don't like 'em, either. It's awkward for the police. And in this case it might be a bit awkward for Mr. Babbit. I'd rather tackle it on my own, and then I won't be lettin' anybody else into the soup. If you think it good enough, mister, you can make your arrest afterwards. May I speak to you on the quiet for a minute?"

"Very well," said the sergeant, and he retired a little way with Bud. The other two looked on with some surprise, and they saw the sergeant listening to Bud with a look of grim amusement on his face.

"This kid has got a head on him, sir," said the sergeant to Cyril. "And his idea is a good one. I'll let him run this show on his own. You go ahead, young 'un."

Bud went to the steering-gear of the car, which was badly buckled, and took hold of one of the nuts on the shaft, which was nearly sheered through. He broke the nut off with a spanner, smeared some oil over it, and put it in his pocket. Then he whistled to Fincher and left the shed.

He made for the refreshment-rooms and walked up to the buffet. And there he found a friend of his, Mr. Joseph Cleugh, looking very clean and neat in his dark green livery, eating a sandwich and drinking at the bar. He called out to Bud.

"Hallo, young Injy-Rubber!" he exclaimed, apparently delighted to see Bud. "I'm glad you came out o' that all right. I was afraid you might have hurt yourself. You're one o' the lucky ones!"

Bad smiled.

"Oh, just a bit of a toss!" said he. "Lucky it wasn't my governor, eh? He mightn't have fallen so soft."

Pincher took a thoughtful sniff at Cleugh's legs, and sat down.

"Just what I was thinking," said Joe Cleugh. "I'd be sorry to see you or Mr. Babbet come to any harm. Will you have a drink?"

"Don't mind a stone-ginger!"

"Stone-ginger?" said Joe with disgust. He ordered the ginger-beer with a shudder and some spirits for himself. "Who'd he thought of your car going phut like that! What are they sayin' about it in the sheds?"

"It seems a bit of a mystery," replied Bud, sipping his ginger-beer. "What d'you think went wrong?"

"Search me!" said Mr. Cleugh, shaking his head.

"Seems to be something wrong with the axle."

"Don't believe it," said Cleugh. "Axle might ha' gone after you crashed her. But my idea is you're not strong enough to control her at that speed—a kid like you—and when she bucked on the swerve, the steering got away with you."

"That might be," said Bud thoughtfully. "Though I think I can keep a car going as straight as you can, Mr. Cleugh. But, of course, she's all smashed up—and there is a nut or two abraded through on the steering-arm. You've more experience than me. What d'you think of that?"

He took the oily, broken nut out of his pocket and gave it to Cleugh, who looked at it wisely and felt it between his finger and thumb.

"That's it," he said; "that's the cause o' the accident. Plain as the nose on your face! Narrow shave for a broken neck, my lad. Well," he added with a leer, "here's to better luck next time."

Joe Cleugh took a drink and set down his glass. Bud, behind his back, beckoned gently to the sergeant, who had just appeared in the doorway, and pointed to the glass.

The sergeant came up, took the glass off the counter, and looked casually at a greasy thumb-print, with a tiny scar on one side, clearly marked on the side of the tumbler.

"Here!" said Cleugh. "What you doing with my drink?"

"Would you like another?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes, if you pay for it."

"I think," said the sergeant, "that the Government will pay for all the drinks you get for a long time to come, Mr. Cleugh."

The sergeant gripped Cleugh's wrist and shoulder.

The chauffeur turned ashy white. For a moment Cleugh seemed to be paralyzed.

"You were quite right, young 'un," said

the sergeant to Bud; "and very neatly done it was. Bring that glass, will you? We'll just go along back and put things ship-shape."

"What are you playing at?" gasped Cleugh. "What's all this?"

"You come quiet," the sergeant warned him.

A couple of minutes later they arrived in McTaggart's shed. Cyril stared in consternation at Cleugh.

"Why," he gasped, "that's my Uncle Hotham's man!"

"Stand there," said the sergeant, guiding Cleugh to one side; and, taking the tumbler from Bud, he compared it with three greasy thumb-marks on the polished steel of the broken axle. The four were exactly alike, and the tiny scar showing on each of them.

As everybody knows, a thumb-print is the one thing that cannot fail to betray its owner, and there are not two alike in the world.

"That's all right," said the sergeant, rising. "See that nobody touches those marks on any account, Mr. McTaggart. The axle'll have to be dismantled, and I'll send a couple of constables to take charge of it. That's the evidence."

"I'll keep it for them," said McTaggart grimly.

Joe Cleugh had pulled himself together and made a last bluff.

"Are you all gone mad?" he cried. "I'm a respectable man! My gov'nor—here, what am I supposed to have done?"

The sergeant looked at him.

"Don't you really know what it's about, Mr. Cleugh?" he asked.

"Search me!" retorted Joe Cleugh.

The next moment he flushed red to the roots of his hair. He realised that he had used that pet phrase of his once too often. It was not the right thing to say.

Bud grinned.

"That ain't a bad idea, mister," said he to the sergeant.

"I didn't need him to tell me that," the sergeant replied. "Might just as well search him here as at the station."

He took hold of Cleugh and ran a deft hand over his clothes. In a few moments he found a little leather case, which he opened.

It contained a delicately-made tool, like a tiny hack-saw, with three spare blades.

"That's it!" said Bud. "The Layletts saw. The only hand-tool a man could cut a mild steel axle with."

"Enough to be going on with," said the sergeant, pocketing the case. "Still want to know what you're charged with, Cleugh? Breaking into the garage where this car was stored; cutting the axle part way through so that she would break when driven at high speed. You're charged with attempting to commit a felony—if not a murder."

"Prove it!" said Cleugh furiously. "It's all a lie! I was never near the car! When I—"

"You can tell all that to the magistrate," said the sergeant, marching him out. "And the less you say now the better, for it may

be used against you. Mr. Babbit, you and your young driver will bear about it when the case comes on, and we shall want your evidence."

Cleugh shook his fist and darted one sidelong, venomous look at Bud as he passed through the doorway under the sergeant's charge, before the two disappeared. Cyril and McTaggart were left staring at the boy.

"Losh!" said McTaggart dazedly. "You nipper o' yours is a bit of a marvel, sir!"

"How on earth did you get wind of this, Bud?" cried Cyril, who had turned rather pale.

"Why, sir," said Bud honestly, "it seemed to me there was dirty work at the cross-roads somewhere. It was partly luck. I never saw Mr. Joe Cleugh before yesterday, when he was hangin' about the Royal Oak at Wellstead. And I happened to notice him wink at Flash Ted."

"If you come across a wrong 'un, it's just as well to keep your eyes skinned, sir. Any chap that's on winking terms with Flash Ted isn't likely to belong to a Sunday-school class. And when Cleugh turned up at your house last night, I didn't much like the look of it."

"He had a talk with me in your library, making a bit free with the refreshments. I didn't like his talk, and I didn't like his dirty hands, which he hadn't washed since coming up from the garage. It was just chance that he left his thumb-marks all over the glass he'd been drinkin' out of, and while I was looking at the glass after he'd gone, I saw that he'd got a bit of a cut on his thumb."

"Well, I'd never have thought any more about that. But I've got a good memory, and when I was lookin' at that broken axle after the crash I saw marks very like what I'd seen on the glass."

"And putting two an' two together, over some mighty queer things I heard at your house last night, Mr. Babbit," added Bud quietly, "I began to feel pretty sure that the chap who'd had his fists on that axle was Cleugh and no one else. It was a bit awkward to accuse him and run him in, on suspicion, as he came from your place and was employed by your friends. So I took a nut with some oil on it to show him, and let him grease his fingers—knowing I'd find him in the refreshment-bar, because he's never far away from the drinks—and the cop called in and did the rest. He knows a thing or two, sir, that sergeant."

"And if I've had a close shave, so have you, Mr. Babbit!" concluded Bud. "Of course, if you'd been in that car when she bust you might have had the luck to get off as cheap as I did—or you might not! I should say it'll be a year or two before Joe Cleugh is free again, and a good thing, too!"

"Great Caesar!" gasped Cyril. "Who'd have thought this of Cleugh? Why, he's my Uncle Hotham's chauffeur! And young Barney—"

"Me and Mr. Barney Finch had a bit of an argument just before the race, sir," interrupted Bud grimly. "I suppose it wasn't my

place to knock him down—it isn't what I'm paid for. But—"

The door swung open at that moment, and to the surprise of Bud, Mr. Hotham Finch and Barney came into the shed together.

"My dear Cyril!" panted Hotham in agitated tones, "we have been looking for you everywhere! Oh, my dear boy, I can't tell you how thankful we are that no harm is done! This lad of yours is not hurt, is he?"

"No, sir. I ain't the one that got hurt," said Bud dryly, looking with a fixed expression at Barney's swollen jaw. Barney seemed quite as upset as his father. He said nothing; neither did Cyril, who was going with a bewildered expression at his uncle and cousin.

"It was a miraculous escape—miraculous!" declared Mr. Finch. He put his hands on Cyril's shoulders, and looked as though he were going to burst into tears. "Oh, my dear lad, why did you not let yourself be guided by me? Promise me you will never be so foolish and headstrong again!"

"Yes, think what we'd be feeling now if anything had happened to you, Cyril, old chap!" groaned Barney. "It was too bad of you!"

"But my dear old Barney," stammered Cyril, "what the blazes have I done? It seems to me—"

"I was never so pleased in my life as when I heard that your wrist was hurt," exclaimed Mr. Finch; "and so—"

"That's jolly kind of you—"

"So that you couldn't drive! Why didn't you take our advice?"

"I don't quite get this," said Cyril. "Why has dear old Barney been scrapping with young Bud here? I hope my kid hasn't been rude! Or that Barney wasn't rude, either, because, if so, Bud would be pretty sure to do him one. I remember Barney was harping something about that before the race, but I was too busy to attend. What's all this about advice?"

"Didn't I beg and implore you not to let the Bugatti go out—not to let your lad drive her at all?" said Mr. Finch reproachfully. "And you wouldn't listen to me, or to Barney, either?"

"By gosh, yes, so you did!" exclaimed Cyril. "I wish I'd listened to you, uncle. But what the—"

"I was very anxious about it," said Mr. Finch. "A man came up to me, just when the car was going out, and warned me—"

"A man! Who?" ejaculated McTaggart.

"I don't know who he was! He came up behind and nudged me. He said, 'Governor, don't you let young Mr. Babbit send that Bugatti car out!' I looked at him, and said, 'What do you mean?' 'Mum's the word,' said the man. 'If that car runs there might be a hospital case. I'm giving you the straight tip!'—"

And he dodged away through the crowd before I could stop him."

*(Don't miss the startling developments in next Wednesday's gripping instalment of this popular serial. Order your copy early.)*

## THE PRAIRIE SHOWMEN!

(Continued from page 33.)

Bandy, the bear, granted his pleasure at seeing the pals again, and his displeasure at sight of the bronchos. Two minutes after freeing Bandy, the procession hit the trail again for Broken Gulch, the bear ambling behind at the end of his chain, the bronchos walking to let him keep pace. There was a yell of surprise from the crowd of punchers and loafers outside the Dead Eagle Hotel as the triumphant pals rode up.

"You got that darned pizen skunk, Black Carter!" yelled Loko Bolt in delighted amazement, as they told the yarn. "Waal, carry me home to da! Say, you dandy boxers, there's a five-hundred-dollars round out for them rustling gabooks. Fetch the darned sheriff, some o' you 'uns!"

"Five hundred dollars!" gasped Buck, taken aback for ever. "Waal, I swow! I guess that reward's a cinch for us, pard!"

But it wasn't. Five minutes later Sheriff Tobin, with his deputies, was galloping out of Broken Gulch to fetch in Black Carter and his men. Half an hour later they came back dusty, savage and disappointed—and empty-handed.

"I reckon Black Carter ain't so easy caught as that," grunted the sheriff as the pals and punchers surrounded the posse. "Us found the ropes as had held the darned coyotes, but that was all. They'd bin cut through, strangers. An' of you youngers'll take my advice, you'll light outta this section pronto—and keep your eyes peeled for them skunks

while you're doin' it. Yep! Black Carter's a pizen snake, and ef he once gets the drop on you agin—"

The sheriff rode off to his office, leaving the rest to the imagination of the Betting Bees. But the warning was wasted on those cheery chums, nor did the loss of the five-hundred-dollar reward disappoint them. They had another breakfast at the Dead Eagle, and then they hit the trail again with Bandy, seeking adventures anew, careless whether they met Black Carter or Gomez, the greaser, again. And somehow both Buck and Billy had a feeling that they would.

"Not as I'm honing to meet up with Black agin, pard," said Buck, voicing the feelings of both. "But I sorter fancy there's some darned mystery atween them fire-bags an' th' greaser—these shore is, and I've gotter hunch it's summat to do with us or the blamed bear. I shore does wonder why th' greaser wanted old Bandy!"

And Billy Baxter wondered that, too. But quite a lot was to happen before they found that out!

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