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THE ISLAND STRONGHOLD!

Another Episode in NELSON LEE'S Great Campaign against "THE CIRCLE OF TERROR." Prepared expressly for Publication in "The Nelson Lee Library" by the Author of "The Circle's Great Coup," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CIRCLE'S DEMAND—NOTHING DOING—
THE GUV'NOR'S DECISION.

CAPTAIN RICHARD MAXWELL sighed.

"Your words are cheering, Mr. Lee," he said, "but I can't help being anxious. I'm pessimistic, too, I suppose. For, to tell you the truth, I don't expect to see that submarine of mine again."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That won't do, captain," he protested. "It will be a stupendous task to recover the vessel, I admit, but I don't despair. The Circle of Terror is victorious for the moment; their victory, however, was not complete."

Captain Maxwell made no answer for a moment. He and Nelson Lee were sitting in chairs, facing one another, in the great detective's consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road. I was lounging by the window, listening interestedly.

Both the gov'nor and our visitor were looking very serious—at least, the visitor was. Nelson Lee smiled occasionally.

"Not complete?" repeated the captain bitterly. "I suppose you mean the Circle didn't keep me a prisoner for more than a few hours? I'm not altogether sure, Mr. Lee, that I wouldn't rather be a prisoner still!"

"Come, come, that's not the way to talk——"

"I mean it," interrupted Maxwell gravely. "I should have been in my submarine if I'd been a prisoner—and I should, at least, have felt that she was still in my possession. But now? What

is my position now? The boat has vanished completely, and I know nothing."

I could easily understand Maxwell's feelings, and I sympathised with him. He was a youngish-looking man, with a clean-shaven face and a square jaw. A skipper in the merchant service, he had invented a new and novel type of submarine. The fact that the Government had commissioned him to build his vessel proved that it was of extreme value. As soon as he had finished it, however, the Circle of Terror had managed to make off with it.

Nelson Lee and I—Nipper—had done our very utmost to save the situation. Some people said that the great criminologist had failed. But had he? The whole affair wasn't over yet.

This submarine of Maxwell's was an amazing little craft, I know, because I'd made a trip in her—had actually been aboard when she was captured by the agents of the Circle of Terror. Professor Cyrus Zingrave, the High Lord of the Circle—the ruling brain of the whole stupendous organisation—had planned a great coup. For the moment the Circle was successful, for the submarine remained in their hands.

"Your argument is sound in some respects," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But have you considered everything, captain? You would have been used as the Circle's tool, to do their bidding under pain of instant death. I honestly believe that you would have rebelled against their orders, and that would have meant only one thing. Just as soon as the Circle's engineers learned the full details of control, so you would have

been dismissed. And dismissal, under those circumstances, would have been death."

"I dare say you're right, Mr. Lee," admitted Maxwell gloomily. "But, so far as I can see, there's no hope——"

"Tut—tut! There is plenty of hope," put in the gov'nor. "Mind you, I don't want to minimise the perilous nature of this undertaking. The Circle of Terror is a powerful concern, and it is utterly ruthless in its methods. The fight will be a strenuous one. I assure you that I will do the utmost in my power to recover your submarine. I can't say more than that, Maxwell."

"But can't I do something to help?" asked the captain eagerly.

The great detective shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "You see, I am awaiting the course of events, and it is impossible for me to settle upon any definite plan of action. If I find it necessary to act suddenly, I shall certainly acquaint you with my intention beforehand. All I say is—don't worry yourself unduly."

But Captain Maxwell refused to be cheered, and he took his departure soon afterwards in a depressed frame of mind.

"The poor chap's properly cut up, sir," I remarked sympathetically.

"Can you wonder at it, Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee, selecting a cigar from his case and lighting it. "He has been working for years past on this submarine of his, and now it is in the possession of the great criminal society in the world. It is hard luck, my boy, and we can't expect Maxwell to be cheerful."

"But he's got all the plans," I said. "He can make another one."

"My dear Nipper, that's not the question," observed the gov'nor, strolling to the window, and looking out. "Of course he can build another one. But that will take time, and, meanwhile, the Circle will probably do great damage with the vessel now in their hands. It is even possible that Zingrave will sell the submarine to the enemy. The professor is capable of any villainy, as you are aware. And such an event as that would be a sheer disaster. Maxwell has the welfare of his motherland at heart."

"I wonder where the boat is now, sir?"

"There's no telling, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "So far as I can judge, we must wait until the Circle acts before we

can get busy. I don't suppose we shall have to wait long. You remember that affair of the White Planet Line?" Lee glanced at the clock. "That reminds me," he added. "Sir Joseph Pagett will be calling upon me within a few minutes."

The chairman of the White Planet Steamship Company had made an appointment by 'phone earlier in the day.

"It's a difficult position, gov'nor," I remarked, shaking my head solemnly. "The last we saw of the submarine was at that little cove on the Norfolk coast—and then we didn't see it actually, did we? We rescued poor old Maxwell, though, and the submarine escaped to sea. I wonder if she foundered, sir?"

"That's not likely," said the detective. "Maxwell's submarine is simple to control, and thoroughly seaworthy. No, my boy, the Circle is holding the vessel in hand for a big coup later on. Don't forget that demand received by Sir Joseph Pagett."

The gov'nor needn't have reminded me, for it was only a few days since the Circle had made the demand. It had been curt and brief, stating that the White Planet Line must hand over the insignificant sum of £50,000, or suffer the consequences. The Circle had given about six days' grace; and the money—or a decision—had to be given on the morrow.

"Sir Joseph is now arriving," remarked the gov'nor, leaving the window, and sitting down at his desk. "Don't go, Nipper. Mrs. Jones had instructions to show the visitor up without delay."

A minute later Sir Joseph Pagett was ushered into the consulting-room. He was a stoutish old fellow, with a breezy manner. But as he shook hands with the gov'nor I noticed that his eyes were expressive of grave concern.

"I have come, Mr. Lee," he said. "because I think it right that you should know the decision of the directors. I am referring, of course, to the infernal demand from the Circle of Terror. Personally, I feel inclined to pay the money, and have done with it."

"It is galling to have to give such advice, Sir Joseph, but I agree with that decision heartily," said Nelson Lee. "Other great business concerns have run their heads against the Circle wall. They have invariably suffered far more seriously than they would have done had

they complied with the original demand."

"That is exactly how I argue, Mr. Lee," nodded the visitor. "And I am more strongly convinced now that I know of this submarine affair. Why did the Circle of Terror gain possession of that vessel? Simply because they intend to use it as a weapon of offence against the shipping owned by firms which defy them. I am all for paying over the money."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"From your words, Sir Joseph, I judge that the directors of your firm are not all in accordance with your own views."

"That is the case, Mr. Lee," replied the baronet gravely. "The directors, in fact, have decided to utterly ignore the Circle."

"That is bad—very bad," the gov'nor declared. "The Circle of Terror is too powerful to be ignored, Sir Joseph. It is all very well to talk of the protection of the police, and such like, but this organisation is a secret one, and its tentacles are far-reaching and of appalling strength. A menace like the Circle of Terror cannot be overcome in a day."

"I used the same arguments myself, Mr. Lee," said our visitor. "But it was of no avail. The directors decided against paying the demanded sum almost unanimously. The White Planet Line, in fact, will take no notice of the Circle. I fear that there will be some fatal development."

"And why have the directors taken up this attitude?"

"They seem to have the idea that our boats are immune from attack," replied Sir Joseph testily. "It's the wrong view to take, Mr. Lee—a preposterous view! It is argued that our liners are all supplied with guns—powerful guns—fore and aft. One shot would be quite sufficient to blow Maxwell's little submarine out of the water. So there is nothing to worry over. The White Planet ships have defeated the German pirates for months—we have been singularly lucky in that respect—and the directors seem to imagine that there is nothing whatever to fear. Certainly, this tiny experimental submarine is only worthy of contempt."

Sir Joseph brought his fist down on the desk.

"It's madness!" he declared fiercely—

"madness, Mr. Lee! The submarine is just as capable of torpedoing a liner as any German U-boat. But, again, the directors declare that the Circle would never stoop to the depths of sinking the ship."

"The Circle is ruthless—it cares not how many lives are sacrificed so long as its ends are gained," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Am I to understand that this decision is final, Sir Joseph?"

"Quite final, Mr. Lee. I have done my best, and I now simply await developments. The Circle of Terror has been defied," said the shipowner. "The result, I fear, will be disastrous. I am anxious, however, to retain your services, Mr. Lee. I want you to accept my commission to work your hardest in my cause. Even if you do nothing, I shall not be disappointed. But please keep your eyes open for any sign of treachery against any of the White Planet boats."

The gov'nor gave Sir Joseph his assurance that he would not relax his efforts for a moment. He declined to accept the baronet's commission—for the simple reason that, while working in Captain Maxwell's cause, he would be indirectly working in Sir Joseph's. It was the submarine that mattered; and Nelson Lee would confine his attentions to recapturing the vessel.

"So the White Planet Line is going to ignore the Circle, eh?" I remarked, when our visitor had gone. "There is trouble brewing, gov'nor—heap big trouble, if I know anything of the Circle of Terror."

Nelson Lee looked grim.

"The galling part of the whole business is our helplessness, Nipper," he said, pacing up and down. "We know nothing—nothing whatever. The Circle may be acting at this very moment."

The gov'nor didn't say any more. He threw himself into a chair and smoked. His brow was black, and I crept about fearfully. It's a rotten business when Nelson Lee's in one of his moody fits. Thank goodness they're few and far between.

All the rest of that day he was the same.

If I spoke to him I was snapped up in a flash; if I happened to kick my foot against a chair, or something, he turned on me with a curt order to get out of the room. It was awful. I simply couldn't breathe.

During the evening I went out, moodily, and stewed for a couple of hours in the Holborn Cinema. And when I got back, hoping for the best, matters were worse. I opened the door of the consulting-room gingerly, and looked in.

The guv'nor was pacing up and down the room, attired in a ragged, old dressing-room, and a pair of down-at-heel slippers. His ancient briar was clenched between his teeth, and the air was as thick as a November fog.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" I said nervously.

"Don't bother me now, boy!" snapped Nelson Lee, glaring at me. "Get out!"

I didn't continue the conversation.

Horribly miserable, I went to bed, and had nightmares. I dreamt that the guv'nor had gone dotty, and was chasing me with a briar pipe about a yard long, and flourishing it in the air as a weapon. We had a terrific chase. I rushed down the stairs—and they seemed appallingly steep—and out into Gray's Inn Road. But, somehow, the Holborn Cinema had shifted itself, and was now opposite our own abode. I dashed in, the guv'nor after me, uttering fiendish yells. Down the gangway I pelted towards the screen. There was a picture of the Wild West showing, and the prairie stretching out.

In some miraculous fashion I jumped right into the picture, and Nelson Lee came roaring behind. He was overtaking me by leaps and bounds, but never managed to reach me. Oh, it was hair-raising.

We traversed about a hundred miles of prairie in a minute, and then scaled the Rocky Mountains. On the edge of a dizzy canyon I turned at bay. Nelson Lee, waving the great briar pipe, threw himself at me, and we fell over the edge.

Down we went, whirling from crag to crag. The guv'nor was ordering me to be quiet all the time, and then I saw a terrible chasm below me. I plunged into it, and landed with a crash.

I really landed on the floor, having tumbled out of bed—and that woke me up. I was immensely relieved to find that I'd only been dreaming; and, finding that it was eight o'clock, I dressed myself.

Nelson Lee was in the dining-room at breakfast.

He wasn't reading the morning papers; he was glaring at his plate as though he

were a German looking at his week's rations. I saw, in a moment, that there had been no change.

"I had a dream, guv'nor," I ventured, sitting down.

Stony silence.

Nelson Lee didn't even know I was there. He poured out some more coffee for himself and added a spoonful of salt to it, instead of sugar. Sublimely unconscious of this, he sipped his coffee—and never noticed anything wrong! It was more than I dare do to tell him.

All the coffee went, anyhow, and I don't suppose it did him any harm.

After breakfast the guv'nor—still morose and silent—jammed his hat on, and strode to the door. I couldn't help grinning, in spite of my miserable feeling. I started up.

"Guv'nor!" I said urgently.

He went out on to the landing, and I rushed after him and grabbed his arm. He turned then, and scowled at me angrily.

"What is the matter, Nipper?" he snapped.

"I—I thought——"

"Don't bother me, young 'un!"

"I didn't want to bother you, sir." I ventured, "but you're going out, ain't you?"

"Well?" he rapped out.

"You—you've only got your slippers on, guv'nor," I gasped. "I—I thought——"

Nelson Lee started, and gazed down at his feet. Then, with an impatient exclamation, he strode into the consulting-room and donned his boots. Not a word of thanks! If I hadn't told him, he would have got half across London before discovering the fact. When the guv'nor is in one of these moods he is appallingly absent-minded.

He went out without saying a word to me, and I spotted him from the window, striding along with his head down, and with a cloud of smoke trailing behind him.

"Oh, lor'!" I groaned. "He's getting worse! He hasn't been like this for months! And all because of that rotten Circle! There's no telling when he'll be back; it might be this evening, or next week, or next month!"

I'd been left nothing to do, so I moped about.

'At about one o'clock—just before lunch—I heard Nelson Lee's step on the stairs. I was rather surprised, and I jumped up. I had been reading, and I threw the book down and prepared myself for squalls.

The guv'nor entered the room briskly. A cigarette was between his lips, a dreamy light shone in his eyes, and he was smiling—actually smiling!

"Hallo, young 'un!" he said genially. "Nearly lunch-time, eh? What's the matter? You have a surprised look on your face."

I gasped.

"Surprised look!" I ejaculated. "What's—what's happened, sir? You were like a bear with a sore head all last night and this morning——"

"Was I, Nipper?"

"Don't you know it?" I yelled. "Great Scott! Didn't you shove salt in your coffee? Didn't you start out in your giddy slippers? Didn't you snap at me like a rat-trap if I happened to venture a remark?"

Nelson Lee grinned good-naturedly.

"I have a dim recollection of the slipper incident, but I certainly don't call to mind the affair of the salted coffee," he chuckled. "Never mind, Nipper. I'm all right now. Perhaps I treated you somewhat snappily."

"Somewhat!" I gasped, immensely relieved to find that he was himself again. "Guv'nor, if you could see yourself in a blue fit you'd sit down and cry. I've had an awful time! I'll bet something's happened to bring about the change—something big, too."

"No, Nipper, nothing big has happened," he disagreed. "But, unless I am very much at fault, something big will happen. This evening the White Planet Liner Angonia leaves the Liverpool docks for New York."

"Well, suppose it does?" I asked, puzzled.

"I have every reason to believe, Nipper, that the Circle of Terror means to intercept that boat," said the guv'nor smoothly. "I have also reason to believe that there are Circle spies aboard—two, to be exact."

"Something doing at last!" I said eagerly. "Where do we come in, sir?"

Nelson Lee tossed his cigarette-end away.

"We leave Liverpool this evening, young 'un," he replied crisply—"we

leave on board the Angonia for New York—but I don't suppose we shall get any further than Queenstown. Of one thing you may be certain, however. There will be work for us both—grim work, in all probability."

— —

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE ANGONIA—THE LURKING FIGURES—THERE IS MUCH EXCITEMENT.

THE ss. Angonia was slipping quietly down the Mersey.

It was evening, and the last rays of the sunset were visible in the west. A good many people were on the saloon deck, lounging about leisurely. Amongst them were Nelson Lee and myself. But we were both carefully disguised. The guv'nor merely wore a small false moustache and a wig. He affected a monocle, and was dressed in the very height of fashion. Anybody who saw him would put him down at once as a bit of a fool.

The Angonia was not one of the White Planet Line's best boats, but she was a fair-sized ship for all that. Her displacement was twelve thousand tons, I believe, and she was considered to be very lucky. Only once had she been attacked by a U-boat, and then unsuccessfully.

On this trip she was carrying a nearly full complement of passengers—saloon passengers, at all events. There were any amount of titled people and millionaires aboard. We brushed shoulders with them, so to speak.

It had been a bit of a rush for Nelson Lee and I to get to Liverpool in time. We had snatched a mouthful of lunch, and had then disguised ourselves. The guv'nor had arranged everything, and when we got to the docks we just stepped on board, without the least difficulty.

In the train, I may as well mention, we hadn't been able to exchange any confidences, for there were several other people in our compartment. So I was still in the dark regarding the source of the guv'nor's information.

But now that we were on the boat, and the rush was over, we had a spare half-hour before descending to dinner. There was nothing much to look at, except the usual sights one sees on a liner just after leaving dock.

There were a good few pretty girls on

board, I had noticed, but these didn't interest me in the least—just now. I rather admired them for their pluck in braving the dangers of the deep in war-time.

"Well, sir, I want to hear all about it," I remarked, as Nelson Lee and I lounged against the rail. "Why are we on this boat? Why have we rushed off so abruptly. How did you get your information? How did you know that—"

"My dear lad, you don't expect me to answer all these questions at once, do you?" smiled the gov'nor. "And I don't intend to go into very full details regarding my movements of this morning. According to what you have told me, Nipper, I left home in a somewhat black mood—"

"Black?" I interrupted, grinning. "That's putting it mildly, sir!"

"I was worried, Nipper—I was worried intensely," said Lee. "I knew that the Circle was planning some big action, but I couldn't get on the track of it. To feel helpless is to despair. I walked as far as Holborn, and then became aware that an Italian looking individual was following me."

"Phew! A Circle spy!" I ejaculated.

"I gathered so, at all events, and I once boarded a 'bus for the purpose of putting the matter to the test," went on Lee. "The Italian boarded it also, and actually had the audacity to climb up to the top—where I was—and take a seat beside me. Almost at once he slipped something into my coat pocket, and I grabbed his wrist."

"Good!" I said heartily.

"The fellow didn't turn his head, but he muttered:

"'It's all right, Mr. Lee. I'm Todd. Just a little item in your pocket.' Then he rose to his feet, hurried down the steps, and jumped off the 'bus."

"Montague Todd!" I exclaimed. "Who'd have thought it, sir?"

"Obviously, Nipper, Todd was on his way to the Grays' Inn Road when he spotted me; and he thought it wiser to follow me," said the gov'nor. "I immediately took the 'item' out of my pocket, and found a few shorthand notes on a piece of paper."

I nodded interestedly.

Just to make things clear, I'd better shove in here a word about Montague Todd. He was a member of the Circle of Terror, but I'd saved his life on a

certain memorable occasion, and he had been grateful. Todd was not a scoundrel at heart. He hated the Circle and all its work. But he had been tricked into joining, and now it was too late to back out.

And so Todd remained in the Circle, and he used his position for Nelson Lee's benefit. Whenever it was possible for Todd to give the gov'nor a tip, he would do so. And, being in a responsible position, he often handed us valuable information concerning the movements of Circle agents.

The shorthand Lee had referred to was a secret system of phonography invented by Professor Zingrave himself. It consisted of a kind of scrollwork, and Nelson Lee and I were well acquainted with it. We had learned it months back, during one of our tussles with the Circle.

"What was on the paper, gov'nor?" I asked.

"A few shorthand notes, as I said, Nipper," answered Nelson Lee. "I destroyed it at once, of course, but I memorised the message. It was quite brief, my boy, but interesting. It ran something like this: 'Two Circle men on board Angonia—Americans. Both unknown in England. Mischief brewing. Liner to be intercepted by submarine, probably in Irish Sea. Don't know details. But one man will be taken off liner by submarine—probably with loot. Hope this will be useful.' That was the message, young 'un—and my gloom was dispersed."

I looked at the gov'nor seriously.

"It's a good tip," I remarked. "But there's not enough of it. It's too jolly scrappy, sir. Two American spies, eh? I didn't know the Circle had members in America. And who are they?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "We are here to find out. But it is pretty certain that they are members of the crew. Every passenger who boarded this ship has passports and credentials. And as for the Circle having members in America, I have long suspected it. The reason for these two Americans doing the job is obviously to avoid all suspicion. We can do nothing but watch and wait. The Angonia may be torpedoed, for all we know," added Nelson Lee quietly. "If so we shall stand as much chance as any of the other passengers. It is a risk which we must take cheerfully."

I should have felt more satisfied if we had had more definite information. But, as the gov'nor pointed out, we should be able to learn things for ourselves before long. And then, of course, it would be a case of acting as occasion demanded.

The Circle knew quite well that the White Planet Line meant to ignore their demand—the Circle spy system was unique—and Zingrave's gentle intention was to strike a blow swiftly and suddenly. But the nature of that blow was rather hazy as yet.

Nelson Lee and I went down to dinner after a while, and enjoyed a good meal. When we strolled on deck again the Angonia was well out of the mouth of the river, and heading for the open sea.

The darkness had descended in earnest now, and the night was very gloomy. The sea, however, lay calm, with only a leaden motion upon its surface. Nelson Lee and I paced the promenade deck for quite a while. There was nothing particular to do, except conjecture.

Away, for'ard, we saw two men chatting together against the port rail. They were both in uniform, and, I judged, members of the crew. But it wasn't likely they were the fellows the gov'nor and I were anxious to spot.

We remained on deck until very late—until the liner had got well out into the Irish Sea. By then practically every passenger was below. Nothing was thought of our being up, and Nelson Lee chatted with the captain towards midnight. The skipper knew all about it—at least, he knew our real identities, and had been told to be particularly careful.

"We'll turn in about one o'clock, Nipper," observed Nelson Lee. "It is highly improbable that any attack will be made at night. If the Circle is employing Maxwell's submarine on this job, the attack will occur, I judge, soon after dawn; in daylight, at all events. So there is really no necessity for us to sacrifice our beauty sleep!"

Just before one o'clock, however, a rather startling incident was destined to occur. The unexpectedness of it was disconcerting. We were walking the deck, chatting in low tones, when Nelson Lee suddenly came to an abrupt halt.

He whipped a pair of night glasses out of his pocket, and rapidly focussed them.

He was looking straight for'ard, towards the forepeak of the ship.

"Young 'un!" muttered the gov'nor

sharply. "There are two dim figures on the fo'c'sle, close against the for'ard gun. It is so dark that I cannot distinguish their movements accurately. But there's something tricky going on, I'll swear. By James! Those two spies are aboard for the purpose of monkeying with the guns—they mean to render the ship helpless!"

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

Nelson Lee ran forward quickly, without making a sound, and I followed behind him. We dodged all sorts of obstacles, and how the gov'nor found his way for'ard was a wonder. Quite suddenly, however, he gave a quick gasp, and then a yell.

I saw that he was attacking two men, and I joined in the scrap with a will. The very fact that the fellows showed fight proved, beyond question, that they had been up to something shady.

They lashed out at us in desperation. In the darkness we couldn't see who or what they were very well; but it was obvious that they were powerful fellows. I received two blows that made me feel giddy. But I yelled like fury, and hit out for all I was worth.

As I had anticipated, the commotion was heard, and some members of the crew, on watch, came tumbling towards us. They arrived just as I was on the point of being knocked out. Nelson Lee was going strong, but he hadn't any time to lend me a hand.

The chap I was tackling had stepped back, and I could see him getting ready to hurl himself forward again. I was dizzy and half dazed by the blow he had delivered a second before; and I honestly believe that I should have been laid out for good and all if help hadn't come at that second.

As I attempted to dodge, my assailant was grabbed by two hefty sailors, and dragged down. He hit the deck with a lovely smack, and did his best to drive a bolt right through the planking with the back of his head. It didn't do the bolt any harm but his head seemed to suffer quite a lot. At all events, he lay quite still.

"Phew! Thank goodness!" I gasped. "Just come in the nick of time!"

Something shot past me and crashed down solidly. It was the second man, and he had been propelled by the gov'nor's fist. It was a fair knock-out, and

Nelson Lee was breathing a bit heavily, but almost untouched.

"I was thinking of you, young'un," he panted. "You're all right?"

"I shouldn't have been if these chaps hadn't come up, sir," I said dazedly. "My hat, what a scrap! I wonder if we've nailed the right fellows?"

"There's no doubt about that," replied Lee. "We'll take them below at once, and examine them."

The detective turned to an officer who had hurried along, and explained the situation. The officer promised to have the guns examined as soon as possible—although it was fairly obvious that this one, at least, hadn't been tampered with, for its covering was still on, and intact. The guv'nor had spotted the blighters just in time.

By the time the two prisoners had been taken below, I had recovered myself somewhat. The disturbance had caused no alarm, for most of the passengers were in their bunks, and those who weren't had heard nothing.

The two men, an officer had told us, were stewards, and had been engaged in New York; the previous trip to this had been their first one. They were capable men, with excellent references. The chief steward regarded them as two of his most trustworthy assistants. Their names were Clark and Goodall. Both were considerably dazed when they found themselves under arrest.

The third officer, a keen-faced young fellow named Payne, was with us in the spare cabin to which the men had been taken.

"Now, men, what's the meaning of this?" asked the officer sternly. "At this hour you both ought to be in your bunks. You were about to tamper with that for'ard gun——"

"I guess that's not the truth, sir!" growled one of the prisoners sullenly. "This interfering guy standing right here don't know what he's foolin' with! Say, can't me and my mate have a breath of fresh air——"

"On the fo'c'sle?" rapped out the officer sharply. "That won't wash, Goodall. You neither of you had any right in that part of the ship—and you know it. In any case, you'll be detained in custody until the matter is put before the skipper. And you'll have to be searched."

The captives made no reply, and

another steward, who was present, went forward to empty their pockets. Nelson Lee assisted him, and in a few minutes we had quite a collection of miscellaneous articles on the table before us. There was nothing of any particular account. Each man possessed a little pocket-book, but there was nothing written in these except a few jottings in pencil concerning private matters which couldn't possibly interest anyone except themselves.

In fact, there was nothing whatever on them of an incriminating nature; there was nothing to connect them with the Circle of Terror. Somehow, both men were looking smugly satisfied with themselves, now that they had got over those stunning blows.

They were marched off, in charge of Mr. Payne, to be imprisoned lower down in the ship. Nelson Lee and I were left alone in the cabin, and I looked at the guv'nor inquiringly, rubbing with gentle care one of my ears.

"Have we made a bloomer, sir?" I asked.

"I don't think so, Nipper," replied Lee thoughtfully. "Those two men were Americans—and they were significantly near the for'ard gun. As the third officer remarked, they ought to have been in their bunks. I confess I'm rather disappointed at the lack of information in these pocket-books—— Hallo, hallo! What's this?"

"What's what, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee whistled.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Dear me, Nipper! This is a most welcome discovery. A cute dodge, too—one of the cutest I've ever seen."

The guv'nor had been about to close one of the pocket-books, and had carelessly glanced at the ornamental paper which secured the book to the cover. It was quite a pretty design, and I couldn't see anything to shout about.

"Blessed if I can twig anything cute, sir!" I exclaimed.

"Have a closer look, young'un."

I did so—and I almost uttered a yell. For the paper stuck on the inside of the cover—often, in this class of book, of an artistic nature—was nothing out of the common, at first glance. The wide border consisted of festoons of roses, or something like that. And, outside this, was another design of scrolls. It was when I looked at these scrolls that I uttered a gasp.

For, in a flash, I recognised the secret shorthand of the Circle of Terror! This was proof, indeed! As Nelson Lee had said, it was an extraordinarily dodge. In the hands of the police those books would have meant nothing whatever. Yet they were, actually, used as identification records for the members of the Circle.

The second little pocket-book was just the same; only it was of a different design and make. It would, of course, have been a bad mistake to have them exactly the same. That shorthand, although merely a scroll to outsiders, was intelligible writing to Circle members—and, incidentally, to the gov'nor and I. The possession of a note-book like that was practically a passport.

"I nearly overlooked it, Nipper," smiled the gov'nor. "Indeed, I should have done so if I had not been very much on the alert. It is fortunate that we nipped the game in the bud at the outset."

"What is that shorthand?" I asked eagerly. "Let's have a look, sir?"

"Listen, my boy. We'll take Goodall's first," said Nelson Lee. "The scroll, as you see, is designed in four or five little bunches. Each bunch corresponds to a line, and the whole serves as a means of identification. The information here, in fact, is most instructive. The top bunch reads like this: 'Louis Eugene Bainbridge, Number A52.' That, Nipper, is the man's real name. Goodall is merely assumed."

I took the book myself, and could easily read the rest. I can't reproduce the scroll itself, so I'll set down its deciphered version. In plain English it read this way:

"Louis Eugene Bainbridge, Number A52.

Service in Circle—Since Formation.
Rating: First-Class Secret Agent.

Base: New York, Western Section.
Under Command of: Chief-Agent Radford.

Speciality: Electrical and Marine Engineer."

The other note-book contained precisely the same information, except for the name, number, and the man's speciality. These were as follows:

"Milne Clay Zeeke, Number A88.
Speciality: Expert Cracksman."

"Those are valuable, if you like," I

exclaimed enthusiastically. "That second chap's got a rummy name, gov'nor, and I don't wonder he changed it to Clark for this trip. Sounds German to me."

"It doesn't matter what the name sounds like, Nipper," replied the gov'nor. "Both these men are members of the New York branch of the Circle of Terror. Upon my soul, in spite of my intimate knowledge of the Circle of Terror, I never quite realised how complete was its organisation. These men are ticketed like bundles of goods in a store. Just with these few words we know their names, their numbers, the base from which they work, the name of their superior officer, and the nature of their calling. It was quite amazing, Nipper."

"Well, they're done for, that's certain," I remarked. "These books prove that they're the men we're after. And we've nipped their game in the bud——"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the gov'nor, starting up.

For, at that very second, a dull kind of explosion sounded right away in the fore part of the ship. In the cabin it sounded like a boom, and we felt the deck quiver beneath us—but only slightly.

"Torpedoed!" I gasped.

"You'd have felt a greater shock than that if we'd been torpedoed!" rapped out the gov'nor. "Come, Nipper!"

Lee stuffed the two books into his pocket, tore open the door, and dashed along the corridor. In two seconds we were mounting the companion three steps at a time. All was dark on the upper deck, but from for'ard we heard a confusion of shouts.

"The gun!" I breathed huskily.

We both started running at the same second. But then, before we could take three steps, a loud shattering explosion shook the deck perceptibly. This report came from aft, and was followed by a dull crashing and splintering.

Dead silence followed for about two seconds; the Angonia continued on her way serenely, the gentle throb of her engines as steady as ever. Nelson Lee and I stood undecided for just a moment.

We saw a figure pelting along the deck, and recognised it as that of Mr. Payne, the third officer.

"Was that the other gun?" he panted, as he sighted us.

"Why, what has happened?" demanded Nelson Lee.

"What's happened? The forward gun has been bombed into scrap-iron—that's what's happened!" said the third officer frantically. "The gunner was examining the weapon when the explosion occurred. He just managed to stagger back, and he's only knocked silly, by the look of it. Good lord, What a mess up!"

And Mr. Payne hurried aft with all speed. Nelson Lee stood facing me, his teeth clenched, and with a grim look in his eyes.

"I think you said, Nipper, that we'd nipped the game in the bud?" he asked evenly. "We didn't! Both guns have been wrecked—and the Angonia is now utterly unable to defend herself against any possible attack! She is at the mercy of any raider who cares to bar her path!"

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GREY DAWN WELD UP THE GUV'NOR'S AMAZING DECISION.

NELSON LEE'S startled statement was true enough.

It was really impossible to find out much in the first few minutes. A number of startled passengers rushed on deck in all stages of dress and undress, quite positive that the Angonia had been torpedoed in two different places, and that she was sinking like a stone.

The Angonia, however, steamed on as majestically as ever, and the officers and stewards soon quelled the excitement, and reassured the passengers that there had merely been a slight mishap.

While this was going on Nelson Lee and I went on to the fore-castle and had a look at the gun for ourselves. It was completely ruined—torn from its seating, and damaged beyond repair. The after gun was in a precisely similar state.

"The explanation is quite simple," Nelson Lee told me, with a hard note in his voice. "We fondly imagined we had forestalled the plotters, Nipper. Instead of that we attacked them—after they had completed their work!"

"But the explosion didn't happen till a quarter-of-an-hour after the capture——"

"My dear lad, there are such things

as internal machines, timed to go off at a set second," replied the gov'nor quietly. "I'm undoubtedly that is what occurred in this case. A specially-made time-bomb was placed under each gun—placed in such a position, no doubt, that its presence was difficult to detect. The gunner was a shade too slow in his examination, or this disaster may have been averted. It's clever, Nipper—deucedly clever."

"But why was it done?" I asked blankly.

"Young 'un, you're getting dull," said Lee. "Perhaps that fight deadened your wits somewhat. Can't you understand that the Angonia is now unable to fire a shot? If a submarine chooses to hold her up, she will have to obey every order the raider's commander cares to give. And you may take it from me, Nipper, the Angonia will be held up!"

"By gum! There's some excitement coming, then?" I exclaimed. "What are you going to do, sir?"

"With regard to saving the Angonia from attack, I can't do anything. It is quite possible that the Circle's submarine is gliding along within a quarter-of-a-mile of us at this very minute—waiting for the dawn. I can't blame myself for what has happened, Nipper. Bainbridge and Zecke went to work so stealthily that I had no opportunity of detecting their movements until too late. We must congratulate ourselves upon having exposed them. That, at all events, is something accomplished."

"One of the spies was to have been taken off by the submarine, wasn't he?" I asked. "At least, that's what Todd told you. And a lot of loot, too. My hat! We shall have to dub up our watches!"

"I am afraid the whole affair is taking on a very serious aspect, my boy. Knowing what we do, we can be fairly certain that an open attack will be made upon the liner. She can't possibly escape it, for daylight will be here very shortly. There is a certain amount of bullion aboard, and that will, of course, be confiscated."

Lee paced up and down for a few moments, and then continued.

"With regard to the man who is to be taken aboard the submarine," he said, "it seems that he will have to be released. The captain will be forced to

give him up—under some dire threat, probably."

"Of course, we can't know which of the two that will be——"

"On the contrary, Nipper, we can be fairly certain," interjected the gov'nor. "Bainbridge is described as being expert at electrical and marine engineering, while his companion is merely a cracksmen. Bainbridge is the man. He is evidently wanted for service on the submarine. Zecke, of course, would have remained passive, had everything gone right with their plans."

"This chap Bainbridge is a stranger to England, isn't he?"

"Todd's information is certainly reliable," replied Lee. "He told me in that note that both men were strangers to England—and therefore, presumably, strangers to the crew and commanders of the submarine. But Bainbridge's note-book would have been ample proof of his——"

Nelson Lee paused, and looked at me fixedly.

"What's the matter, gov'nor?" I asked.

"Wait, Nipper—wait!" he murmured tensely. "A rather staggering idea has just entered my head, and it needs very careful consideration. I believe it could be done," he went on musingly. "There will be dangers, of course, but the possibilities are enormous. By James! It's worth trying!"

"What's worth trying?" I asked impatiently.

Nelson Lee took me to the rail, and unfolded a scheme to me which fairly made my hair stand on end. At first sight it seemed to be sheer and absolute madness. But then, when the gov'nor pointed out the curious circumstances, I realised the full value of the idea.

"It's ripping, gov'nor," I declared. "But it's—it's rotten as well!"

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, think of the danger——"

"That's what we mustn't think about, young 'un," interposed the detective quietly. "In a case such as this we have got to act drastically and boldly. Audacity is an amazingly valuable asset. I pride myself that I am sufficiently audacious to carry the thing through successfully. It all depends upon circumstances, Nipper."

"What about me?" I asked miserably.

"You will have to play a minor part

in this business, Nipper," Lee replied. "Personally, I am quite prepared to undertake the risk. Think of the possibilities! It is not too much to hope that I may be able to recover Maxwell's submarine, and deal the Circle of Terror a stunning blow at the same time. Too dangerous, you say? I am ready to take my chance."

We talked for quite a while, and then Nelson Lee went below and interviewed the captain. I didn't see him again for a full hour, and then he was very differently attired, and his disguise had been altered.

The dawn was just breaking, and I looked at Nelson Lee in the grey light with strange misgivings. The scheme he had outlined was simply splendid except for one thing. I wasn't to take part in it! And, somehow, the dangers of that scheme appalled me. Yet I shouldn't have been appalled if I could have taken my share of the dangers.

"Don't look so glum, Nipper," smiled the gov'nor. "We've made our plans, but events may not fit in with them—so don't alarm yourself needlessly. The whole thing depends upon chance, more or less. The next hour will decide."

"It's rotten, gov'nor," I growled. "I hope you don't do it!"

He merely smiled, and we passed over to the rail, and gazed out across the smooth water. Land was quite out of sight by now, of course, and there was no other sail in sight. We seemed to have the whole surface of the grey sea to ourselves.

The sky was lightening quickly, and scarcely a cloud was to be seen. The day promised to be splendidly fine and calm, and presently the sun made its appearance. Several officers were keenly on the watch, and they were all in a state of nervousness. I don't mean that they were at all afraid; but there were the passengers to consider, and they knew that the Angonia was prey for any submarine that cared to show itself.

Personally, I don't allow U-boats to enter into my consideration. I was on the look-out for the Circle vessel, and none other. And, as Nelson Lee had surmised, the climax came in a very short while.

I noticed that two of the officers were gazing intently through glasses at a point somewhere away to starboard. I

immediately swept my own glasses round, and searched the surface of the sea.

"She's coming, guv'nor!" I exclaimed suddenly.

"So I observe, Nipper," replied Lee, with perfect composure. "Yes, it's Maxwell's submarine right enough. Todd was reliable, you see. This promises to be lively."

About half-a-mile away we could both see a little grey speck moving along the surface. It was travelling at a much faster pace than we were, and overhauled us rapidly. The speck resolved itself into a curiously-designed conning-tower. After a while, the submarine rose fully to the surface, and we could see her decks plainly. One or two figures were moving about, and there was a small gun mounted just forward of the hatchway.

We saw a little puff of smoke, and then a sharp report came booming across the water. Something seemed to scream overhead, and I didn't need telling that it was a shell.

"That's a signal to stop!" I exclaimed tensely. "By jingo, look at that! Of all the utter check!"

A flag had fluttered out from the submarine's stumpy mast. It was a flag that had never been seen on any other ship. For it merely consisted of a white background with a broad purple circle in the centre of it. This, as everybody knew, was the sign of the Circle of Terror.

We could distinctly hear the captain swearing. I couldn't blame him. It was absolutely a case of dignity and impudence. That insignificant little boat was calmly ordering the stately liner to heave-to. For I observed that some flag wagging was proceeding.

The captain came to a decision quickly, and the liner reversed her engines, and slackened her speed, until at last she stood almost stationary. It would have been absurd to defy this raider, insignificant as she seemed.

"It's absolutely the limit," I heard one of the officers fuming. "We've tricked the U-boats for months past, and now we get held up by a measly little tin can like this! And it's British—British, mind you!"

It was undoubtedly galling in the extreme. It was adding insult to injury. And it hurt the pride of every man and woman on board the *Angonia*. To be

stopped in this way by Britishers! Somehow, it didn't seem natural.

The liner having slowed down, the submarine slid quite close to us, and we observed that four men were standing on the deck, all with rifles. A tall man in uniform held a megaphone in his hand. He was smoking a cigarette, and appeared to be quite at his ease. It was quite obvious that the pirates meant business.

"*Angonia*, ahoy!"

The hail came clearly, in a refined voice. I saw the first officer lean over the bridge-rail, and he, also, had a megaphone.

"Submarine, ahoy!" he shouted. "What's the meaning of this infernal nonsense, and what do you want?"

"First of all, I had better warn you that we shall sink you at the first sign of trickery," replied the man on the submarine. "That's not an idle threat. We have two torpedoes ready to be loosed off at a second's notice. So don't try any dodges. Your guns are silenced, but you may have rifles or revolvers. If so, don't use them. You'll regret it if you do!"

The tone of the man was quite pleasant, but there was something grim about it at the same time.

"What are you going to do?" rapped out the first officer.

"Loot your ship—thoroughly!"

"You confounded pirate——"

"Exactly. That's just what this boat is," agreed the submarine's commander. "A pirate of a new kind. But we are just as ruthless as any of the old-fashioned variety. We are going to loot the *Angonia*, and I am now going to give you my instructions."

"I don't promise that they will be carried out——"

"Then let me further impress upon you the futility of any attempted resistance," cut in the pirate, his voice now harsh and cold. "Refusal to obey my orders will result in needless bloodshed. We have a machine-gun mounted here, and it will rake your decks from end to end. If any passenger or member of the ship's company gets killed, it will be your own fault. You've got to do exactly as you are told. It won't be pleasant, but that's not my business. The skipper must give me his word; now, that no resistance will be offered."

Nelson Lee snapped his fingers.

"The captain can only give one answer," he exclaimed in a low voice. "It will be madness to resist this raider. Don't stand near to me, Nipper. Just stroll along the deck a little way."

I did so, looking glum and miserable. You see, I knew what the gov'nor had in mind, and it wasn't calculated to make me happy.

"You have our assurance that your orders will be obeyed!" called the first officer, with obvious difficulty; he hated giving voice to the words.

"That is sensible," came the reply. "To begin with, you must fetch up the £20,000 in bullion which now reposes in your strong-room. Every first-class passenger's cabin will be systematically looted as well, and one of the Circle's agents will superintend this task."

"Are you going to send a man aboard?"

"That is not necessary," replied the man on the submarine. "Our agent is already upon the Angonia, and should be facing me at this moment."

I saw Nelson Lee smile tightly—and I understood. Those words had given him the very tip he required. He was standing against the rail, looking straight at the submarine. Yet the commander of that vessel was not certain whether the Circle's agent was there or not; thus proving that the two spies we had captured were strangers to the submarine's crew.

"Number A52!" shouted the commander sharply.

Without a second's hesitation Nelson Lee leaned against the rail and saluted.

"Here, sir!" he replied calmly.

"Ah, I thought you would be somewhere handy," said the man on the submarine, which was now near enough to make ordinary shouting audible. The megaphones were dispensed with.

"What are my orders, sir?" went on the gov'nor, producing a revolver from his pocket, and leaning leisurely against the rail. "I guess if any fool comes near me with the intention of playing monkey tricks, he'll drop in his tracks real slick!"

Lee had addressed his last remark to the officers and men of the Angonia herself. The officers, of course, knew all about the wheeze, but the men were frankly astonished. Fortunately there were no passengers on deck at present.

The die was cast.

"Your orders, Number A52, are quite simple," shouted the man on the submarine below—which looked a mere cockleshell compared to the liner. "You are to superintend the looting of every saloon, stateroom and cabin. You must see that all valuables are taken possession of. The Angonia's stewards will perform the actual work, but you overlook it, and see that no tricks are played."

"Right, sir!" replied Nelson Lee.

I took a deep breath.

Nelson Lee was acting his part amazingly well, but I was simply bubbling over with anxiety. The gov'nor was attired in the steward's uniform which had belonged to Louis Eugene Bainbridge—Number A52. Exactly as Nelson Lee had surmised, this was the man who was destined to be taken off the liner by the submarine.

The detective's idea was to take Bainbridge's place!

But it wasn't a case of impersonation; that would have been altogether too foolhardy. Indeed, this affair struck me as being sheer and utter madness. But the gov'nor had pointed out to me that it wasn't anything of the sort.

Both these American agents had never been in England, and the crew of the submarine had never met them. Therefore, if Nelson Lee possessed the sufficient amount of audacity, it was quite possible that he would carry the trick through successfully.

He had boldly declared himself to be "A52"—and the submarine's commander had accepted him. We could see this at the first glance. For the commander was smiling with great satisfaction, and eyed the gov'nor through a pair of binoculars. This made no difference; he fully believed that Lee was Bainbridge. It was possible, indeed, that he did not know the agent's name: he was simply Number A52, and would have to produce his credentials in due course. Well, Nelson Lee had those credentials all ready for presentation.

You see, the gov'nor had not blindly entered upon this affair in the hope that it might succeed. If Bainbridge had been known to those on the submarine, the commander would have shown instantly, by his attitude, that something was wrong, and that he suspected a trick.

As it was, things were going smoothly.

"Let me repeat that I will deal dras-

tically with you if any sign of treachery is shown," called the submarine's commander smoothly. "This submarine may be small, but it is capable of sending you to the bottom in five minutes. If any harm comes to me, or to the agent on board, my men have strict orders to act drastically."

Nelson Lee moved off and descended the companion. It was now necessary for him to act exactly as though he were the real Bainbridge. The state-rooms had to be robbed—there was no getting out of that.

The gov'nor had conceived the idea of taking Bainbridge's place while he and I had been discussing the events of the night, some little time before. It had seemed madness to me. But, after all, was it madness?

He wasn't going to impersonate anybody; he wasn't going to attempt anything impossible. And, having passed the test, it seemed as though everything might turn out all right.

The test had been simple.

Nelson Lee had not disguised himself so as to resemble Bainbridge; his disguise was clever enough, but he had made no effort to convert himself into Bainbridge's "double." A wheeze of that sort might have worked for an hour's job, but not for this kind of affair.

And the gov'nor had purposely made his appearance totally at variance with that of "Number A52" so as to test Todd's information that the American spy was unknown on this side.

If the submarine's skipper had seen Bainbridge before, he would have shown his surprise as soon as Lee had proclaimed himself to be the man. But Lee had been accepted at once, which proved that Bainbridge's appearance was unknown. So, upon the whole, things looked promising.

But I was intensely worried.

As I stood upon the deck, listening dimly to the excited commotion below—the passengers were awake now!—I pictured to myself the gov'nor's position. He would go upon the submarine shortly, and then—?

What would happen to him after that?

He would go away, and I should be left in dreadful suspense. All sorts of things might happen to him! But I was a silly young ass, I suppose. I ought to have known that the good old gov'nor could be trusted to see a job through

successfully. It if had been possible for me to go with him, I should have been happy.

Almost before I knew it, the looting work was completed. I had been lost in thought, but now I awoke. Nelson Lee was on deck, looking quite self-possessed and arrogant. He was acting his part superbly. He seemed to be gloating over the helplessness of the liner's officers. Yet those worthy men, although worried, were hopeful. Things weren't so bad as they might have been.

The "job" had been done smartly. Every rich passenger had been robbed of all valuables, and the bullion was already stowed into one of the lifeboats.

There was tremendous indignation aboard, but the captain had personally interviewed a good proportion of the passengers, and had put the situation to them as gently as possible.

It was simply a case of highway robbery—only this happened to be an ocean highway. Many of the passengers—especially the ladies—became wildly excited and hysterical, and only parted with their jewels when they fully understood that any refusal would be met with disaster.

The gov'nor himself was forced to pinch everything literally; otherwise, when he got on board the submarine with his haul, the commander would suspect things. He probably had fairly accurate information as to the extent of the more costly valuables aboard the liner. Two titled ladies, for instance, carried their diamond necklaces with them—and these alone were worth fifteen thousand pounds.

But the skipper was a clever man, and he had managed the passengers well. Consequently, the gov'nor was now ready to leave with the booty.

If he hadn't done this, the real Bainbridge would have been released, of course; the captain would have had no choice in the matter. And, in that case, there would have been scarcely any hope of recovering the pirated valuables.

Nelson Lee didn't even look at me as he went overside; we were being watched the whole time, and although I should have liked him to catch my eye, in a last farewell, this wasn't policy.

This stratagem of the gov'nor's was pretty daring, but he was out to defeat the Circle—and the Circle couldn't be

defeated by sitting down and talking. It was action that was needed.

The Circle's orders had been carried out to the letter, and Bainbridge—A52—was proceeding to the submarine with the spoils. I watched him climb aboard the little vessel with strange misgivings in my heart.

By this time the decks were simply lined with infuriated passengers. This wasn't a U-boat outrage, so there was no "frightfulness." This pirate on the other hand, was quite a gentleman in comparison to the Huns. He was ready enough to blow us up, if necessary, but there was no wanton destruction of life.

It seemed as though everything had passed off according to programme. But it hadn't. It was Nelson Lee who was boarding the submarine instead of the genuine Circle agent. That, of course, made all the difference.

Anyhow, it made a lot of difference to me. I wondered if I should ever see the gov'nor again. I should land at Queens-town, naturally, and would buzz back home as quickly as possible. But what of Nelson Lee? He was booked now for a pretty warm time, by the look of it.

And I dare say you're wondering how the dickens I'm going to describe what happened to him on board that submarine, when I wasn't there? Well, I'm not going to describe it at all.

As a special concession, I'm allowing the gov'nor to write the rest of this particular adventure. He's much more fit to it than I am, because he went through it all, and I didn't. Besides, he's perfectly agreeable to taking up my pen at this point.

So I leave the rest of the yarn in Nelson Lee's able hands.

CHAPTER IV.

(Nelson Lee takes up the thread, and tells of his own adventures.)

I FIND MYSELF EN ROUTE FOR CATHREY ISLAND—AN ACCIDENT OCCURS TO MR. HALES, AND I SEIZE AN OPPORTUNITY—PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE COMPLIMENTS ME!

NIPPER, the young rascal, has persuaded me to set down the details of the events which took place immediately following the holding up of the Angonia in the Irish Sea.

It appears that Nipper is including this affair in his Note-Book Series, and it certainly will not be complete unless I describe my own adventures.

He tells me that he had many misgivings as he saw me clambering aboard Captain Maxwell's stolen submarine. To be quite frank, I had misgivings of my own. I wasn't altogether sure that I had acted wisely in taking such a drastic step as this.

Discovery would mean almost certain death. I couldn't hope to escape from the Circle of Terror with my life. But I embarked upon the adventure fairly confident of my own powers to see me through. Unless something particularly audacious was done, there was very little hope of recapturing the submarine, and I had pledged my word to Maxwell that I would do my utmost.

As I climbed aboard the commander smiled at me, but said nothing. That smile was reassuring. I was, of course, making no attempt to occupy Bainbridge's shoes. If there was anybody on board who knew Bainbridge, I should be done. But I felt fairly safe, and I hoped for the best.

"We've done well out of this," remarked a uniformed member of the crew, who was standing on deck with a rifle in his hand. "You're not one of us, are you?"

"Sure," I agreed at once. "I guess we're all one concern."

"That's true enough," replied the other. "Just look at Hales—he's simply bubbling over with delight. This'll mean high praise from the Chief all round—if we get away safely."

So far I had been accepted without question. The commander's name, then, was Hales. I hadn't heard of it, but he was evidently a capable man. He gave his orders crisply and cheerfully.

The lifeboat was unloaded, and her crew were then informed that they had better get back to the Angonia. Almost at once the stolen property was slung down the hatchway smartly, one man passing it down to the other.

"Look sharp, men," ordered Hales, briskly. "There's a smudge of smoke on the horizon, and there may be trouble over there. We got the job finished in nice time. We can snap our fingers at anything that floats!"

I stood by, awaiting orders, and after a minute I was told to get below. The

Interior of the submarine was not new to me, for I had been on board the vessel when she was stolen. The Circle had brought off a very astute coup, and I was now doing my best to nullify it.

The conning tower was immediately over a small apartment which Maxwell had described as the control-room. The submarine was most ingeniously designed, and incorporated many new and astonishing devices. But it is not my intention to go into such details as these.

The loot was deposited in this chamber, and then the members of the crew who had been on deck were sent to their various stations. There were eight men on board—nine with myself—and they were all highly skilled.

I appeared to take no interest in anything, but stood by respectfully while the submarine submerged and set off in a northerly direction at a moderately high speed. Ten minutes passed, and then the commander gave up the wheel to another man, and turned to me. The electric lights were brilliant, and everything was ablaze.

I had been realising how hopelessly cooped up I was in this vessel. One hint of suspicion, and my game would be ruined.

"Well, Number A52, we've done excellently," said Hales, looking at me with a smile. "Let me see, your fellow-agent is Number A88, isn't he?"

"That's right, sir," I replied readily. "Zeeke and I were told off for this trip, an' I guess we've made good. I'm Bainbridge, sir."

"Ah, yes, I remember; that was the name in my instructions," replied the commander. "You're a stranger on this side, Bainbridge, and it is necessary to take great precautions—even though they seem futile. What is your rating?"

"First-class agent, sir."

"Your base?"

"Western section, N'York City."

"Under whose command are you?"

"One of the best men out on the other side, I guess," I replied easily. "Chief Agent Radford's sure a bright boy!"

Hales smiled.

"I have heard that Mr. Radford is responsible for many successes in the States," he remarked. "Well, Bainbridge, just let me see your identification-book, and then we will feel quite comfortable. You know why you're wanted?"

"Sure," I replied at once, although I

didn't know at all. "It ain't my way to boast, commander, but I'll allow I'm a wise guy when it comes to these blamed submarine stunts!"

"Judging by what you have already done, Bainbridge, you've a chance of earning considerable promotion," said Hales approvingly. "You'll have to tell me how you managed those pop-guns later on."

I passed over the little pocket-book, and the commander glanced at it casually, and then handed it back. The whole thing was so obviously open that not a single suspicion was directed against me. The most difficult part of my ordeal was over, and it had proved extremely simple.

Hales turned his attention to the collection of valuables which represented our spoils. For some minutes the commander examined the various articles of jewellery. The bullion, of course, was packed in small, but amazingly heavy, cases.

"A splendid haul," chuckled Hales. "Between forty and fifty thousand, or I'm no judge. Of course, you know the reason for this? The White Planet Line were pleased to ignore our polite demand for a very moderate sum. We didn't want to take any lives unless absolutely necessary. And I fancy this lesson will be sufficiently instructive. The White Planet people cannot afford another loss of this sort. They'll pay up now, I'll be bound."

"Say, I'd smile," I replied. "Why, boss, the hull crowd of ships'll be rottin' in dock ef this kinder thing goes on. Passengers don't hanker after havin' their fixin's removed on the high seas. Ef the company sticks out—waal, folks will go by the other lines, sure."

Hales was in high good humour. Undoubtedly the success of the enterprise had been very complete. The Angonia had been held up for the express purpose of intimidating the company.

The directors would feel extremely sorry that they had not taken the advice of their chairman. Sir Joseph Pagett had warned them, and they had ignored that warning. Somehow, I couldn't exactly sympathise with them. The White Planet people had practically asked for this disaster. Indeed, they were lucky to be let off so lightly. For, personally, I had anticipated something far more drastic.

Hales treated me in a very friendly spirit, and was kind enough to take me



"I guess if any fool comes near me with the intention of playing monkey tricks, he'll drop in his tracks, real slick!"—(See page 13.)

all over the submarine, and explain the working of it. As I had been conducted over the vessel by the inventor himself, this tour was somewhat unnecessary—but I couldn't explain that.

I was quite surprised to find that Hales was fully acquainted with almost every detail. I easily guessed the reason. Poor Maxwell's private secretary had been a Circle spy, and he had been able to obtain complete inside information. Thus, when the Circle obtained possession of the submarine, Hales had been well primed for his work. He was undoubtedly a very clever scoundrel.

"We are now bound for our base," he explained to me, when we ascended to the control-room again. "The High Lord himself is stationed at Cathrey Island for the moment, and you'll probably see him there."

"Say, that's bully!" I exclaimed heartily.

So the excellent Zingrave would face me once again! I had not anticipated this, but I was quite pleased. This base Hales referred to was evidently situated upon a deserted islet off the west coast of Scotland. It needed little imagination on my part to arrive at this conclusion.

We reckoned to arrive at about mid-day, and nothing could have pleased me better. I should have the opportunity of stepping upon the island stronghold in full daylight. The adventure was panning out well, I told myself.

We moved evenly and swiftly, hour after hour, travelling beneath the surface the whole time. When we were still three hours' run from our destination, Hales went below in response to a call from the engine-room. A slight defect had developed, and needed attention.

I was left in the control-room—for, until I received my orders from the High Lord, I was merely a passenger.

And then, quite unexpectedly, a startling incident occurred.

There was a sudden sharp cry from the interior of the ship—a cry of intense agony. I stepped to the hatchway and looked down. A confusion of excited voices came up to me, and then the engine came to a stop.

"A mishap of some sort," I thought.

And then a man rushed to the foot of the iron ladder below me, and commenced mounting.

"Say, what's amiss?" I asked sharply.

The man paused with his head and shoulders through the hatchway. There was blood on one of his hands, and his face wore a frightened look.

"It's the skipper!" he gasped. "He's—he's met with an accident—got mixed up with the machinery!"

"Good heavens!" cried the man who had been at the wheel, striding across. "Dead, do you mean? There's not another man aboard who can navigate——"

"No, not dead!" panted the other. "He sent me up for Bainbridge. You stick at the wheel, Belmore!"

I went below quickly, wondering what could have actually happened. Hales had sent for me because I—or rather Bainbridge—was an expert marine engineer. I don't profess to be an expert myself, but I'd had a good bit of experience, one way and another. Moreover, Maxwell had explained all the mechanism of his submarine to me in a most detailed manner. So I didn't anticipate making a slip.

The submarine was now almost stationary, merely gliding through the water with the engine stopped. She lay just below the surface.

Down in the engine-room I found Hales. He was lying on the floor with three or four men round him, each getting in the other's way. There were sinews of blood upon the plates of the flooring.

"I'm done, Bainbridge!" gasped out the commander. "Something's gone wrong with the engine, and my arm is just about chewed up. Do you know anything about first-aid? Do you think you'll be able to navigate the boat——"

"Say, we'll see about mending you first," I exclaimed briskly. "Now, you fellars, clear a space there. I'm sure curious to know what's happened, but that'll do afterwards. Say! This looks almighty bad!"

I took care to act up to my character. But, as Nipper has sometimes remarked, I'm a bit of a doctor in my own way. Indeed, Nipper has gone so far as to say that I am far more capable than any qualified man. That, of course, is a gross exaggeration on the young bouncer's part. But I know how to attend a wound, slight or serious.

And one glance at Captain Hales told me that he was in a pretty bad way. His left arm was dripping with blood,

and was badly smashed. It was not merely an ordinary fracture, but a serious wound. His arm had been caught in a part of the machinery, and had been literally crushed before the machinery could be brought to a standstill.

I felt pity for the man. He was suffering intense agony, and he had lost a great deal of blood. It rather surprised me, in fact, that he had not lost consciousness. And it is only fair for me to add that he was courageous.

"I'm not worrying about myself," he said, three or four times. "How's the boat to be got to our base? I shall be dozing off before long, as sure as fate. Belmore might be able to navigate us, but he's not reliable—he hasn't had enough experience. And what about the engines? There's something wrong——"

"Say, skipper, just you lie back and think of sweet things," I interjected. "A feller in your state don't need to worry any. Guess it don't do no good. I'll take the boat over myself, and I'll guarantee to get safely into harbour. Belmore, I dare say, has the chart?"

"Yes, of course," said Hales hoarsely. "Belmore knows everything, but there are some tricky rocks to negotiate, and I'm afraid he'll run us on to them. And the engines——"

"Glory! Why will you talk, boss?" I struck in sharply. "Leave everything to me. Guess I ain't no baby at these games—— Say, that's stopped all the argument!"

I made the last remark as Hales sank back in a dead faint. The pain had been too great for him, and he had lost consciousness. I patched up his arm to the best of my ability, and I think I made a neat job of it.

Belmore—who was addressed as "Lieutenant"—had come down, leaving another man in the control-room. He was looking rather anxious, and when he learned that the commander was quite useless, his face expressed alarm.

"I'll do my best with the boat, of course," he said, "but this is my first trip, and I'm not quite sure——"

"Say, lieutenant, the skipper has given me sole command," I interjected. "That's the straight goods, eh?" I added, addressing the engine room staff.

The men all nodded, and I don't think

Belmore was very pleased. He didn't like being overridden by a newcomer; but he was relieved in mind, I could see, for the ordeal of being left in sole charge of the submarine did not appeal to him.

"Why should you be given command?" he asked gruffly.

"Guess you'll see before long, Mr. Belmore," I replied. "I didn't hanker after getting busy so quickly as this. But the skipper's down an' out. Just tote him along to his own bunk and leave him there. We can't do anything more to him at present. Guess the engines need fixin'."

Somehow, Belmore accepted the position without a grumble. Perhaps my attitude gave him confidence. At all events, everybody worked their utmost, and obeyed my orders without question. I was an expert from America—so they believed—and they willingly placed the reins in my hand.

A quick examination of the engines was all that was necessary. I located the defect in less than five minutes. A tiny valve in one of the most intricate portions of the mechanism had seized, throwing the whole engine out of gear. It was only a trivial thing, but one which might have caused complete stoppage. Belmore, I am sure, could never have found the seat of the trouble.

It was necessary to take down a certain portion of the engine, and I did this swiftly and carefully, the other men looking on with full realisation of my skill; for, without boasting, I may say that I am fairly useful when dealing with anything mechanical.

In less than half-an-hour the engine was in full working order again; in fact, the submarine was running far more sweetly than before. I took one more glance at Hales, and then ascended to the control-room.

We now progressed at a good speed, and I took the wheel myself. Belmore stood by and told me our exact latitude, and the latitude of our destination. By what I could see we should arrive at Cathrey Island soon after one o'clock.

The journey was a good one, with no further mishaps, and the island was sighted at one o'clock exactly. It was a tiny rock-bound islet, far from the mainland, and out of the track of shipping. It was supposed to be merely a barren rock, totally deserted and bare.

Upon approaching it there seemed to

be no landing place of any description. I soon discovered, however, that a narrow cove, with high rocks on either side, twisted and turned until a perfect natural harbour was revealed. This harbour was hidden from the sea, and its presence was not even suspected.

It was a ticklish business navigating the submarine up that rocky inlet. A false turn of the wheel, and her under-plates would have been ripped open. Belmore stood by, anxious and nervous. But I was quite confident, and the trip was accomplished without the slightest mishap.

We were, of course, totally submerged—and that made the danger all the greater. Once within the harbour, however, the jutting rocks concealed everything, and so I ordered the boat to be brought to the surface.

There was an auxiliary wheel in the little conning tower, and I took this, and brought the submarine neatly up against a rough landing stage. The hatch was now open, and the sunlight was streaming in upon us.

Several men ashore made the submarine fast, and I breathed with satisfaction. The first part of my adventure had passed off well. I had, indeed, given evidence of my capabilities, and I knew that my position was even more sound than before.

The first thing was to have another look at Hules. He was still unconscious, but in no danger. He was carried ashore under my directions, and taken straight to a small building which stood at the foot of a rocky cliff.

I had been somewhat astonished to find a small steam yacht within the harbour. I recognised it at once, for it was the vessel which had been used for the purpose of capturing the submarine. Zingrave, apparently, lived on board.

I came to the conclusion that it would be better to act boldly. I therefore wrote a dispatch—in the secret shorthand—and sent it over to the yacht by one of the men. It was a brief report of what had occurred. Within five minutes the dispatch had been delivered, and soon after that I saw a boat put off and come towards the shore. I was now standing on the landing-stage with Belmore beside me.

"It's the Chief," said my companion. "You've never met the High Lord, have you?"

"Say, I'm just longing to see that great man," I replied heartily. "It'll surely be an honor if I'm allowed to have a few words with him."

"I shall, of course, explain what has happened, and will give you a good word, Bainbridge," said Belmore condescendingly. "You've done well, my man. You have shown that you are fully capable of taking command of the submarine—and that's a great thing."

I waited quite calmly.

When I had embarked upon this adventure I little thought that I should find myself, only a few hours later, upon an island stronghold such as this. Already my brain was beginning to formulate various schemes for getting away with the submarine. That was my main objective—to recover Maxwell's vessel. If I could discover a few interesting facts at the same time, all the better.

I was already certain that this island was a strongly "fortified" base; used by the Circle of Terror for the purpose of piracy. This one submarine was probably but one of dozens—although the others were to follow later. At present this boat was the sole "fleet."

If I could only get away from the island, and take the submarine with me, Zingrave's plans would be completely upset. There was only one terrible drawback. I couldn't manage the boat alone, and it was quite impossible to use force. I was alone—alone, with foes surrounding me. My only chance was to resort to some stratagem.

I watched Professor Zingrave land. He was wearing the same disguise as I had seen upon him when we last met. I suspected that his beard was genuine—he had allowed it to grow. To all the members of the Circle the professor was merely "The High Lord." Only a very few knew his real identity.

He came towards us, and "Lieutenant" Belmore left me. For several minutes he and Zingrave talked together. Then the professor beckoned to me, smiling reassuringly. Apparently he expected me to be somewhat over-awed—and I obliged him by appearing so.

"You have done excellently, Bainbridge," said Zingrave, in his smooth, silky voice. "When a man has performed useful service I believe in commending him. In addition, you will receive one hundred pounds extra pay."

"Say, it's real good of you, my lord," I said nervously. "Guess I only did my duty—to the Circle."

He smiled, and I felt like doing so. I had always known that Zingrave paid his workers amazingly well, but for him to grant me one hundred pounds "extra pay" was somewhat surprising. I looked duly impressed.

"I shall, of course, get a report from Captain Hales regarding the Angonia hold-up," went on Zingrave. "Apparently, the whole affair was a big success, and is only marred by this unfortunate accident to Hales. You seem to be a bit of a doctor, Bainbridge."

"I've knocked about a heap," I replied. "I reckon the skipper will be conscious again by this evenin', my lord. But, say, he'll be real bad for weeks. Guess that arm of his is a dandy sight."

"I will go and see Hales before long," said the professor. "Now, Bainbridge, you understand why you are here, don't you? This submarine is to be the pattern for many others, and I need you urgently in the workshops. You have already proved yourself to be a very capable man, and I shall appoint you to a very responsible post."

"I'm real flattered, my lord," I said.

"No, I am not flattering you," put in Zingrave sharply. "I never flatter my servants, Bainbridge. What I say I mean. To-night I shall require you to come to me on the yacht, and give me a full account of what happened on the Angonia. I shall also want you to tell me of the mishap to the submarine. For the present, you had better get some sleep. Moreover, I am very busy just now."

Zingrave turned away, and walked briskly towards the submarine. He was apparently going aboard to examine the spoils—and to gloat over them. It was a rich haul, and the High Lord made no attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

I smiled grimly.

"Perhaps you wouldn't be so easy in mind if you knew the truth, my dear professor," I mused. "My success is greater than I had anticipated. Let's hope the luck lasts."

I had been told to get some sleep. But where? Aboard the submarine? I wasn't quite sure, and I took a few paces along the landing-stage. As I did so I saw Zingrave talking to one of the submarine's crew. This man, a little shifty-eyed fellow, approached me, and saluted.

"This way, sir," he said.

So I was being called "sir" already! The professor had evidently given orders that I should be treated with respect.

"Say, not so fast," I exclaimed. "What's the idea, anyway?"

"The High Lord's orders, sir," said the man. "You are to get some sleep, and report aboard the yacht at nine o'clock this evening. If you will follow me, I will lead you to your quarters."

"Good business," I replied. "But, say, pard, I'm needin' something else besides sleep. I guess that I haven't touched food since last night."

The man assured me that I should find plenty of food presently, and I went with him along a rocky path, mounting higher and higher as we progressed. I was thinking. I had my time to myself until nine o'clock. It would be dark by seven-thirty, I reckoned.

I aroused no suspicions in my companion by taking a great interest in my surroundings. He, too, was good enough to give me some details which I welcomed. There was a ring of pride in his voice as he spoke.

"You don't know where you are, sir," he exclaimed with a smile in his dark little eyes. "This place seems to be just a barren rock, don't it? Well, it ain't. It's a fortress—that's what it is! You'll find out all about it before long. You've come here on important work, haven't you, sir?"

"You bet your sweet life," I replied lightly. "Things are going to move real slick just directly. You'll see, sonny. A fortress, eh? Guess I'd like to see a sign of it."

My guide grinned knowingly.

"That's just what there ain't," he replied. "Not a sign, Mr. Bainbridge. You'd be surprised if I told you that there were any amount of machine-guns all concealed amongst these rocks, wouldn't you?"

"I guess it'll take a whole heap to surprise me," I replied. "The High Lord's a cute man—he is, sure. Machine-guns? Say, that makes a feller feel more comfortable."

"If any attack came we should be able to hold the island for days if necessary," went on the other. "A bombardment wouldn't hurt us a mite. And these rocks ain't what they seem. There's workshops underneath—huge

places, with all sorts of machinery in them. It's been a rare job smuggling it up here, I can tell you. You'd think there was only about ten people on the island—but we've got well over a hundred men here. They're all in the workshops."

I was certainly greatly surprised, and I couldn't doubt my companion's word. He had no reason for lying to me. We had now reached an hidden opening among the rocks. We plunged into a dark cavity, and then turned sharply to the left.

I saw before me a long tunnel, with small glow lamps fixed in the roof at intervals. Somehow, it didn't surprise me to see that the light was electric. This island was evidently honey-combed, caverns and caves extending in all directions. It formed an ideal stronghold.

After walking along this tunnel for a little distance I was ushered into a small apartment which had evidently been prepared for me. Electric lights glowed upon the roof, and the place was plainly, but comfortably furnished—with chair, table and bed. Yet the apartment was really a small cavern.

"Your quarters, sir," said my guide. You'll find everything ready, and I'll tell one of the stewards to come to you for orders. I dare say you'd like a meal before snatching some sleep."

I was left to myself, my late companion having closed the door behind him. Needless to say, I was very astonished by what I had already seen. The island had probably been in the course of preparation for months past, and there was no telling what secrets it contained.

If possible I meant to have a look round as soon as darkness had fallen. My quarters were comfortable and airy, and the bed looked quite inviting, with its new blankets and snowy white sheets.

In less than five minutes a knock came at my door, and a neatly-dressed man entered, and brought with him a tray containing a plate of cold meat, pickles, hot vegetables, and some pastry. He laid the table with care, and then discreetly retired. To quench my thirst a bottle of light beer had been provided.

"The Carlton up-to-date," I thought as I heartily tackled the food. "Upon my soul, the place is a veritable hive. The catering department, at all events,

is excellent. I wonder what further surprises I shall discover? Lee, old man, you've butted into a big thing this trip!"

It was, indeed, the biggest "thing" I had yet encountered in my campaign against the Circle of Terror. I felt that I was getting to nearer grips with my enemies. And I badly wanted to go on a tour of exploration.

But this, of course, was impossible. Moreover, I was feeling decidedly worn out, for I had obtained no sleep whatever the previous night; I had been on the go continuously, without a second's respite.

So, having cleared all the dishes, I lay upon the bed and went off to sleep within a couple of minutes. I didn't allow any thoughts to worry me, but went off into a sound sleep, having mentally made up my mind to awaken at seven o'clock.

Nothing disturbed my repose; I was feeling quite refreshed, and I decided upon a plan of action immediately.

To start with I stretched myself, lit a cigarette, and wished that there had been material for washing handy. As there were not, I was compelled to emerge from my "apartment" in a somewhat grimy state. This, however, was no great drawback.

My intention was to boldly stroll to the entrance of the tunnel, and look across the rocks to the harbour. I wanted to get a thorough idea of my bearings. If I met anybody it wouldn't matter a toss—I wasn't a prisoner. I had merely been instructed to report on board the yacht at nine o'clock. Until then my time was my own.

I couldn't think of any feasible scheme for leaving the island with the submarine. That vessel was to be used as a pattern for the other boats, and if I could get her away it would be a sheer disaster for the Circle.

My success had ceased to surprise me. Unless I made some drastic slip of my own accord I was safe. I had been accepted as "Number A52" without a suspicion. Even the astute Zingrave had not suspected that he had been talking to his greatest enemy. Why should there have been any doubt? Nothing had occurred to cause the slightest alarm. My plans had worked evenly and smoothly from the start.

As it happened, I didn't meet a soul as I walked along the tunnel to the exit. Dim sounds came to my ears, but I could not determine their course. And

when I emerged into the open air, I found that dusk was deep, and that everything lay enshrouded in gloom. The yacht herself carried no lights.

Turning, I saw that a rough path led past the tunnel entrance, and ascended upwards towards the summit of the towering rocks. So far as I could see, there was practically no vegetation on the island. It was just a mass of jagged rock from shore to shore. It was little wonder that the place was barren.

I walked along this path thoughtfully, still wrestling vainly for a solution to the problem which troubled me. I had got upon the island easily enough—but how was I to leave? Above all, how could I recapture the submarine?

I cared little whether I met anybody or not—and, as is generally the case, I seemed to have the whole place to myself. I was quite sure that if I had been on a deliberate prowl, seeking to avoid detection, I should have been spotted almost at once. This, as Nipper would put it, is just the “cussedness” of things.

I arrived at the summit of the rocks. It was the highest point on the island, I imagined. For I could see the sea in every direction, black and vast. No lights were showing anywhere, and I deemed it wise to stamp out my own cigarette.

But I was just a little wrong in saying there were no lights. For, upon gazing to my left, I observed a dim glow among the rocks. Approaching, I was surprised to find that there was a kind of basin, almost like a crater, with the rocks rising on every side. And, right in the centre of this basin stood a tiny wooden building. One glance was sufficient for me to recognise its purpose.

I was gazing at a wireless station!

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH I SPEND A VERY INTERESTING HALF-HOUR—AND MANAGE TO DO A GREAT DEAL IN THAT SHORT SPACE OF TIME—THE HIGH LORD SENDS FOR ME!

THE wireless building was cunningly concealed.

From the sea it was quite invisible. Being erected at the foot of the crater it lay quite to itself, and only observable from the open sky. And it had even been prepared against

aerial observation, for the roof was so painted and designed that from above it absolutely resembled the surrounding rocks.

The aerials were swung between two thin masts—which, I presumed, were capable of being taken down at a moment's notice. They were probably telescopic, and were only raised when the sea on every hand was devoid of a sail. I should judge that these conditions prevailed twenty hours out of the twenty-four.

The dim glow of light—invisible at a distance of two hundred yards—was coming from a tiny window, which almost faced me. For just a minute I stood and considered. Then I felt my revolver at my hip, and silently crept towards the hut.

The ground was rough and uneven, and I walked with great care. If I was discovered prowling in this vicinity I should be suspected of treachery at once; and I had no wish to endanger my position.

Darkness had descended by this time. Over towards the west a dim glow still remained in the autumn sky, but the island lay hidden in blackness. I simply could not turn my back on this place without having a closer look.

The wireless building was even smaller than I had first thought.

It was just a small wooden hut, with one door and a tiny window. This window faced inland, and was covered by a pair of wooden shutters—which, when closed, blotted out every atom of light.

At the present moment, however, they were partially open, and I could see within fairly easily. The wireless operator, doubtless, had strict orders to have the shutters closed after darkness had fallen. But night had only just descended, and the operator had not thought it necessary to be in a hurry. The evening was mild, and I noticed that the window stood a trifle ajar:

“My luck doesn't desert me!” I murmured, as I edged to the window.

My precautions had been very necessary, I saw. The interior of the hut was quite comfortable, and the operating table stood opposite to me, with its maze of instruments. They were by no means a “maze” to me, however.

To the left of the window a man sat in a cosy easy chair. His back was towards me, and towards the door—which

stood alongside the window. A blue curl of smoke arose over the chair back, and the rustle of paper told me that the fellow was reading. A heavily shaded lamp stood upon the edge of the table, casting a subdued glow upon the chair, and leaving the rest of the room in gloom.

I smiled grimly.

If I could only have used the wireless! I would have given worlds to have been able to send out a certain message. I could have done so, of course, by overpowering the operator—but that would have been useless. I should show my hand by acting in such a way.

"Not this time, old man," I told myself. "It's too risky."

I stood by the window, looking into the hut. It would be wise, I reflected, to get away from the spot. But something kept me there, and I didn't budge. Perhaps a suspicion of what might happen had subconsciously entered my head.

A man in a comfortable chair—reading and smoking. I'd been in that position some hundreds of times—and I had generally dozed off in the end. But this man wouldn't doze, of course. He was on duty.

Still I waited, and I suppose I remained there for fully twenty minutes. During this time the only sounds were those of an occasional cough, or the turning of a page. The cigarette which the man had been smoking lay on the floor beside him, finished except for a half-inch.

The time was now just after seven, and so there was no particular hurry. At last, however, I determined to make a move. There was really no sense in remaining here when I had no object in view. It was simply taking a needless risk.

I had done no harm, however; it was something to know that the wireless station was there, and that—

My thoughts were abruptly broken at this point. For I noticed that the magazine which the operator had been reading lay upon his knees; I could just see the edge of it. At the same second I became aware of a slow, regular breathing.

Could it be possible that the man had actually dozed?

The thought startled me. For the most astounding possibilities arose. Previously I had only considered these

possibilities as remote and unpracticable. Now, quite abruptly, I became tense and alert.

I bent closer to the window, gripped the sill, and raised myself slowly and silently. In this way I could just see the face of the man in the chair. He was lying back, and his eyes, so far as I could see, were closed. If not asleep, he was certainly very near it.

A certain plan of action had suggested itself to me during the period of waiting, but I had not considered it carefully. Now, however, I was rather glad that I had taken the trouble to work out the idea.

For three minutes I waited—three tense, silent minutes.

And then, as the operator gave no sign, I made up my mind promptly. A chance such as this might not occur once in a month. From the moment I had stepped upon the submarine I had experienced astonishingly good fortune. Surely my luck wouldn't desert me now.

It was a moment for a steady head and nimble wits.

If I succeeded in my object, undreamed of success lay before me; if I failed, I should probably pay for this episode with my life. The chances were about even, and so I wasted no time in idle speculation.

Everything depended upon the door of the building. If it was locked, I should be foiled.

From an inner pocket I produced a small medicine case. Don't imagine I had been careless in carrying this upon me. It bore no marks of identification, and could just as well have been Bainbridge's as my own.

From one of the little compartments I drew a tiny phial, and dabbed some of its contents upon my pocket-handkerchief. No, it wasn't chloroform. That particular drug would have been clumsy in an affair such as this—for chloroform has a most distinctive odour—and that odour has a habit of hanging about.

The drug I was using was just as powerful—perhaps more so—but it had the advantage of being completely odourless. Moreover, a patient experienced no unpleasant effect after the drug had been used.

Now for the test. I placed my hand upon the door knob and turned it gently. I wasn't surprised when the door opened freely. Why should it have been locked?

This was not a secret place—it was part of the island's equipment.

The door being on this side of the hut helped me a lot. For I was at the rear of the dozing man. In the event of his suddenly awakening I should have ample time to slip out without being recognised.

Stealthily I crept forward, bent over the chair, and then brought the handkerchief from behind my back—where I had been holding it to avoid catching any of the deadening fumes myself.

With a steady hand I held the handkerchief about two inches beneath the fellow's nose. And there I remained, in that fixed position, for one minute exactly. So far, so good. I moved slightly, and tapped the man on the head. He gave no sign, but breathed evenly.

"By James! This is almost too good to last!" I told myself grimly. "But I've embarked upon the adventure now, and I'm not going to back out!"

The operator was settled with for at least half an hour. He would then awaken, without knowing that anything unusual had occurred.

I now turned my attention to the operating table, switching the light round slightly, so that I could see everything. I now noticed that a telephone stood upon the table. The hut, then, was connected with other parts of the island. If the operator was rung up, I should have to abandon my plan without delay; for when no answer was given an investigation would instantly follow.

As regards the wireless, everything was in perfect order. Just in front of me I saw a block of paper, and on the top sheet I noticed the words: "This Week's Code." Beneath this was the code itself.

It was worth my while to study this carefully, and I did so for three full minutes before touching any of the instruments. When I set to work in earnest, my eyes were gleaming, and I felt sure that only one thing could upset me—and that was an interruption.

This had to be risked, however.

I sent out a message quickly—but not in the Circle code. I used a special code which had been arranged between myself and the Admiralty officials only a week back. Every naval station had by this time received instructions.

Almost at once I got a reply.

"Who—are—you?" clicked the instrument.

"Nelson—Lee—who—are—you?" I replied, in the same code.

"Naval—station—Sutherland—coast."

I drew a deep breath. I had got a reply from the very station which suited me best. This wasn't so very extraordinary, for the Sutherland coast was comparatively near, and my message had been easily picked up.

Without a second's delay, I clicked off a long and elaborate message, giving detailed instructions to the naval operator. This one message of mine took fifteen minutes to send, and then I waited.

"All—right," came the reply. "Reply—instructions—obeyed."

I left the instruments exactly as they had been, and turned the lamp about again. At one period I had made use of the Circle code, but I had not disturbed the writing block.

The operator was still sleeping, and nothing whatever had happened. But it was quite possible that I should be defeated at the last second. So, without wasting any time, I crept from the building, closed the door, and took up my position against the window.

Outside, under the stars, I breathed freely. Already I could see the whole sequence of after events—provided my friend on the Sutherland coast acted according to my instructions. There was no reason to suppose that he would not.

Having left the hut, I was in no particular danger. For the blackness of the evening was now dense. A mist was stealing up, and I knew that I could slip away into the gloom at the first sign of peril.

And so I waited.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes—fifteen.

And then the wireless operator within the hut shifted his position. I saw him stretch himself, and then he bent forward. A sudden exclamation told me that the fellow had glanced at his watch.

I stepped further back, and dimly saw my late victim rise to his feet, and come towards the window.

"Infernal fool!" I heard him muttering. "If the sub-chief had come along I should have been fired from this job—window open, too!"

The fellow was evidently thoroughly disgusted with himself. He assumed, of

course, that he had merely fallen into a deep doze, and was now rather relieved to find that his lapse hadn't been detected by those in authority above him.

The shutters closed with a slight snap, and everything was black. The man, although he had been drugged, knew nothing of it. Thus he was in total ignorance of the fact that his instruments had been made use of.

As I crept out of the rocky crater I reviewed the situation with keen enjoyment. That half hour had made all the difference in the world. My dodge, I fully believed, would pan out satisfactorily.

Without losing a minute, I located the path again, sped down it swiftly, and soon arrived at the narrow tunnel entrance. Just before coming upon it I put a cigarette in my mouth, and then walked forward.

Two men were coming along as I entered the tunnel, but they passed me with scarcely a glance, and went out. I lit my cigarette, strolled down the passage, and entered my luxurious apartment.

Everything was as I had left it. I had been absent for just about an hour and a quarter, and the time, therefore, was close upon eight. It wasn't necessary for me to start for the yacht until another hour had expired. But I fancied that I should be sent for before then.

I lounged upon the bed, and waited, smoking leisurely.

At twenty-five minutes to nine a tap sounded upon the door, and then my friend with the shifty eyes—a member of the submarine's crew—shoved his face.

"Awake, then?" he asked cheerily. "You're wanted, sir."

"Nine o'clock was the time——"

"The chief sent me up especially to fetch you, Mr. Bainbridge," interjected the other. "I don't know what's afoot, but it's something big, I believe. Anyhow, the submarine's bein' got ready for sea."

"Gee! That sounds like more work, sonny," I exclaimed, rising and stretching myself. "I'm ready, I guess."

We left the little cavern, and I couldn't help smiling inwardly. This order was the first intimation that my plans were working. I don't deny that I felt a keen sense of satisfaction. I had

come to this island without the vestige of a plan, but now a complete scheme was cut and dried. Simply by seizing an opportunity, I had achieved unthought-of success. Opportunity is a wonderful thing.

At last the landing-stage was reached, and a boat was waiting to carry me across to the yacht. The trip was swiftly accomplished, and I mounted the ladder full of confidence. It was quite evident that events were moving, for there was an air of subdued activity on every hand.

A uniformed officer stood upon the deck, and he curtly told me to follow him. In less than a minute I was ushered into a sumptuous cabin. Professor Zingrave was there, pacing up and down with short strides. Between his fingers he held a flimsy sheet of paper.

"Ah, Bainbridge," he exclaimed crisply. "You have been prompt. Shut the door, and listen to me. A most important wireless message has just come through, and I must arrive at a decision without a second's loss of time."

"Guess I'm jest dyin' to get busy, my lord," I said humbly.

A smile flitted across Zingrave's face. He rather liked being called "My lord," and approved of my deferential attitude. I had judged him to a nicety, and knew that he favoured me.

This message was sent from one of my wireless stations upon the mainland," said the professor. "A ship named the Argyll Star is now upon the open sea, and will reach a certain latitude at midnight exactly. That latitude, Bainbridge, is barely a hundred miles from this island."

"Gee! Another hold-up?" I burst out eagerly.

"Exactly! The Argyll Star is carrying bullion to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds, and both her guns have been silenced—in exactly the same manner as you silenced the guns of the Angonia. I want that bullion, Bainbridge."

"It surely sounds enticin'," I agreed.

Zingrave paced up and down in silence for a moment or two, and I stood respectfully by.

Within me, however, I was surging with elation. I knew now that my scheme had not misfired. The whole plan was so delightfully simple that no

hitch had occurred. A more elaborate trick would probably have failed.

I had merely sent the Sutherland wireless station instructions to send out a short message, which I had given them in the Circle's code, half an hour after our exchange of confidences. This message was purely a faked one, and was simply a ruse.

The result will be easily apparent.

The naval station had sent that message out, tap for tap, as I had given it. It was quite unintelligible to anybody except the Circle operators. My sleepy friend in the hut had picked up the words—as I intended he should—and had been hugely satisfied. He could not possibly guess that an Admiralty station had despatched it. It purported to come from a Circle man upon the mainland.

The words had been 'phoned through to Zingrave at once—and Zingrave had fallen into the trap very promptly. What reason had he to suspect?

A message had been picked up, in the Circle code, to the effect that a steamer named the Argyll Star would be at a certain latitude at a certain time. Zingrave assumed that some of his agents had been busy, and had sent the information.

He little guessed that there would be no ship, and no gold! But my plans were not fully carried out yet. Much would depend upon the next few minutes.

The professor halted before me frowningly.

"I cannot understand why I was not informed of this coup earlier," he exclaimed, tapping his heel impatiently upon the deck. "The message may have been delayed, or some hitch might have occurred which made it impossible to let me know earlier. I shall receive complete details to-morrow, no doubt. The fact remains, Bainbridge, that we must act at once."

"It would be a blamed pity to let them dollars slip by, my lord!" I exclaimed, shaking my head. "Say, it's a real dandy chance. We jest can't let it slide, boss."

"There is a difficulty, Bainbridge. Hales is still unconscious," replied Zingrave, stroking his beard nervously. "Hales is the only man who thoroughly understands this submarine——"

"Say, that's dead off the track," I interrupted quickly. "Ef you'll allow

me to make a suggestion, my lord, I'd like to say, right here, that I'm ready to take that tin-can out as soon as ever you like. Say, boss, give me a try-out!" I added eagerly. "I guess I'll make good. Sure, I will!"

Zingrave snapped his fingers.

"You're a man I like, Bainbridge," he said briskly. "You don't hesitate to speak what is in your mind. Yes, I will let you take the submarine out. In view of your earlier performance, I think you are the only man for the job now that poor Hales is placed hors de combat. I appoint you temporary commander."

I drew myself up proudly.

"You're the real goods, boss!" I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Listen to my instructions!" said Zingrave.

He talked to me swiftly and clearly. I heard all he said, but I was filled with inward glee. The last link had been forged! My scheme has succeeded in every detail. Knowing that Hales was helpless, I had fully reckoned upon this task being entrusted to me. I had not reckoned in vain.

So far my bluff had met with no hitch. For the whole thing was, of course, a gigantic game of bluff—with the object of regaining possession of the submarine.

I left the yacht full of confidence.

CHAPTER VI.

SUCCESS CROWNS MY EFFORTS—AND THE CIRCLE OF TERROR IS FOILED.

THE submarine moved over the water swiftly and in total darkness.

We were travelling upon the surface, for there was no necessity to submerge the boat during the hours of darkness. Belmore was at the wheel, and I stood just upon deck—watching.

The start had been made without the slightest trouble. It was a tricky business negotiating the passage from the harbour to the open sea. But we were now far out, with gloom on every hand.

I was feeling intensely pleased. One fact which caused me satisfaction was that the entire loot from the Angonia was on board. It had been packed in special cases, and was stowed away below. I had received no information concerning it, but I could easily guess why it was still on the submarine.

The stuff was destined for another of the Circle's bases—for I was quite convinced that Cathrey Island was merely one of many. The others, no doubt, were quite small, but they were constantly used. The gold and jewellery, I imagined, were to have been sent to an agent, who would deal with it in the usual manner.

Zingrave had given me sole command of the submarine, and my crew treated me very differently this trip. My orders were obeyed instantly, and even Belmore was quite polite.

He seemed to realise that I knew what I was doing—that I was no novice. And before so very long he would learn the reason why!

The time was now close upon eleven, and we were within fifteen minutes' run of our stopping place. For the High Lord's orders were that we should proceed to a given latitude, and await there for the Argyll Star.

There wasn't much hope of sighting that vessel! But I had made certain arrangements, and I anticipated complete victory.

I descended to the control-room at this point, and worked out our exact position on the chart. And, before long, I brought the submarine to a standstill, and we lay there waiting.

"Now, Belmore," I exclaimed crisply. "I guess you'd best stay right here. I'm goin' on deck again with the glasses, an' we'll have to git busy as soon as that blamed boat shows her nose along. It's goin' to be a hot trip, sonny, an' we'll need all our nerve."

"She'll be dark, I suppose?" asked Belmore. "I say, Bainbridge, I don't quite like this business, you know. We held the Angonia up in daylight, but there's no telling what'll happen when we get monkeying in the darkness!"

"We're carrying out orders!" I cut in sharply. "I guess you'd best tote down to the engine-room an' warm your feet! They're cold. Cold feet don't suit me, son, an' you'd please me if you'd pull your nerves together!"

Belmore scowled, but offered no reply. I ran lightly up the ladder, and stood upon the deck. The blackness was intense on every hand, and the submarine lay rocking gently upon the surface.

With my night-glasses, I searched the sea in all directions; and at last, after twenty minutes had passed, my patience

was rewarded. A dull patch appeared above the horizon, and I knew what it was. A destroyer of the older class had been detailed to attend to this affair, and the supreme moment was rapidly drawing near.

I closed my glasses, slipped them into my pocket, and descended. Belmore was still in the control-room, and I sent him on an errand down into the engine-room. Then I swiftly removed a small brass lever from one of the controls. Without that, a certain vital part of the mechanism was unusable.

It was a simple operation, and I ascended to the deck again without waiting further. And now I held my automatic in my fist. Trouble would probably arrive before many minutes had elapsed.

The dark patch had now resolved itself into a definite shape, and by the speed of its approach I knew that the ship could be nothing but a destroyer. I quickly flashed a small electric torch, and gave a series of signals.

While I was doing so, Belmore came up from below.

"What's the idea, Bainbridge?" he asked sharply, and with a note of suspicion in his voice. "Man alive, you're not——"

He had broken off, and was staring at the approaching vessel.

"That's a destroyer!" he gasped hoarsely.

I took two swift strides across the deck and jammed my revolver close against his neck.

"Down with you!" I rapped out. "You'd best obey me, Belmore!"

"You're mad—mad!"

"Not just yet," I cut in grimly. "This is a trap, my friend! If you try any monkey tricks below, you'll regret it—that's all! If you've got a grain of horse-sense in you, you'll jest sit tight and wait! Now, shift!"

The cold muzzle of my revolver pressed against his neck, and he literally fell down the ladder. I heard him shouting wildly, and there was soon a terrific din going on.

The odds were all in my favour, however. Only one man could ascend the ladder at a time, and I could easily hold the whole crowd at bay. With that vital lever removed, the submarine lay like a log. She could submerge, of course; but with the hatchway open this would have been rather an unwise proceeding. The

trapped men, I was sure, preferred capture to suicide.

The destroyer was now within a cable's length, and her searchlight suddenly blazed out in a terrific glare. The submarine was lit up from stem to stern, and I waved my hand.

Just then two of the engineers appeared below me, and one of them, I saw, was carrying a rifle.

Crack!

My revolver spat noisily, and a howl came from below. I hadn't hurt the man, but his rifle clattered to the steel plates.

"The first man who attempts any trick will regret it!" I rapped out. "You fools! Don't you understand that you're helpless? And don't try to ascend this ladder! I'm a good shot!"

I saw several faces looking up. They were pale with alarm and fury. But the men seemed to realise that my words were true enough. They stood no chance whatever of overpowering me. There was no other hatchway, and they couldn't possibly storm this one.

"Submarine ahoy!"

Out of the corner of my eye I saw that the destroyer was now wallowing in the sea about six fathoms away, and the hail came clearly.

"Send a boat across!" I called out, without lifting my eyes. "I've got a little bunch down here who need attending to."

Five minutes later the boat arrived. An officer and half-a-dozen bluejackets stepped aboard, and I grinned with unalloyed delight.

My triumph was complete. Captain Maxwell's submarine had been recovered. Not only that, but the loot from the Angonia was also in my hands. This was certainly a red-letter day in my campaign against the Circle of Terror.

The submarine's crew acted sensibly. They submitted to capture with a good grace. There was nothing else for it. Each man was allowed to come up, and he then received plenty of evidence that resistance would have been madness.

The whole crowd were transferred to the destroyer and placed in irons. A prize crew—to speak in terms of war—was sent aboard, and I, of course, remained in command. I had a short and interesting conversation with the destroyer's skipper,

and he was fairly flabbergasted with my story.

There is no necessity for me to go into the rest of that night's adventures. We reached a certain port, and the submarine was at once taken into a naval dock and concealed there.

There was an excellent reason for concealing it.

My first consideration, upon going ashore, was to despatch a long wire to Nipper. The lad, I knew, would be simply bubbling over with anxiety. By this time, of course, he had reached London again, having taken the first boat back from Queenstown. This was in the early morning.

By late afternoon I was in London myself, happy to be freed from all disguise. Nipper met me at the terminus, and with him was Captain Richard Maxwell. They were both looking eager and expectant.

"Good old guv'nor!" panted Nipper, grabbing my hand, and shaking it violently.

"Steady on, young 'un!" I laughed. "Give Captain Maxwell a chance!"

"Mr. Lee, I don't know what to say," exclaimed Maxwell, as we strode along the platform. "Have you actually got my submarine back?"

"She's in dock now, and with her is the complete booty from the Angonia. Not so bad, eh, Nipper? You were rather chary about letting me go, weren't you?"

"I can't believe it, guv'nor," said Nipper flatly. "How the dickens did you do it?"

I told them all about it when we were sitting comfortably in my own consulting-room at Gray's Inn Road. They listened with great interest to my story, and when I had finished Nipper was fairly bubbling.

"It's the biggest blow you've ever dealt the rotten Circle," he declared; "and, by what I can see of it, guv'nor, there's some more excitement to follow."

I nodded.

"In the very near future," I replied quietly. "Now, Maxwell, you realise why no word of this coup has been breathed? The Circle people must assume that the submarine has foundered in mid-ocean."

"Why?"

"Well, because, if they learn of the capture, this island stronghold will be abandoned at once," I replied. "That doesn't suit me, captain. Until I've carried out certain plans, we must maintain

absolute secrecy. I shall, of course, inform Sir Joseph Pagett that the stolen property has been recovered, but he can make no announcement of that fact until I give him permission."

"And what's going to happen in the near future, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"I don't know yet," I replied. "But it will be something big, Nipper."

Later on, Nipper and I had a private little talk. Zingrave, of course, believed that it was Bainbridge who had been on board the submarine. I had not appeared in the affair at all.

"But how are you going to make Zingrave believe that the submarine foundered?" asked Nipper curiously.

"By a very simple little expedient," I replied. "The news has already been circulated, Nipper—circulated broadcast—that the bodies of several men were picked up in a certain latitude off the coast of Scotland. One of these bodies was apparently that of the man Bainbridge, who had left the Angonia to board the Circle submarine. Certain

papers on him seemed to prove this. The other bodies were undoubtedly those of the submarine's crew."

Nipper stared.

"But—but that's a frightful whopper, guv'nor," he protested. "Those bodies weren't picked up."

"The report does not add, Nipper, that all the bodies which had been picked up were very much alive," I added drily. "Where is your 'whopper'? The report is true in every detail."

Nipper roared.

"By gum! What a cute dodge!" he chuckled. "Zingrave, of course, will assume that the submarine went down. He can't do anything else. And so he won't suspect that there's a movement afoot to storm the island. I say, guv'nor, when are you going to get busy again?"

I stretched myself and yawned.

"At once, Nipper, I replied. "Just as soon as I can prepare my plans. The immediate future promises to be very interesting. Shove over that cigar-box, and don't look so excited! There's nothing to be excited about yet."

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY will be entitled :

"THE COMPACT OF THREE!"

Being Another Mysterious Episode from the pages of "NIPPER'S NOTE-BOOK." Set down by NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "Nipper at St. Frank's" "The Ivory Seekers," "The Riddle of Yew Hollow," "The City of Burnished Bronze," etc., etc.

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BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.**By ARTHUR S. HARDY.***Read this first!*

TOM CRAWLEY, light-weight boxer and stoker on board *H.M.S. Flyer*, is ordered out to sea, and helps to rescue the wounded on board a torpedoed hospital ship. He also rescues a German sailor. His great friend,

BOB RANDLE, has been sent out to France with his regiment after an affecting scene with

MARY THWAITES, daughter of Fisherman Thwaites, of whom Tom is very fond; and her brother Fred is one of those rescued by the *Flyer*. Tom's father has been captured by the commander of a German submarine, and the sailor whom Tom rescued tells him that he is alive and has been taken to a German port. Tom has a few day's leave ashore and visits Fred, who is gradually recovering. Then he is ordered to sea again in the *Flyer*, and they are told a fight is coming off. Soon they sight a destroyer, and there is a fight, the *Flyer* being unhurt and the destroyer sunk. They then chase another Hun vessel, but this time their luck is out, and they are hit. The *Flyer* slowly sinks to its last resting place, and Tom is captured and taken on board the German boat.

(Now read on).

THE RETURN OF THE SAVED.

MARY was among the first to hear of the loss of the *Flyer*. Her father brought her the news. He had heard it soon after he'd returned to harbour from a perilous sweeping of mines.

His face was very grave when he reached the little cottage, and he hung up his heavy coat and sou' wester with a weariness and dejection he seldom showed.

Mary who ran out to meet him knew in a flash that there was something wrong.

"What is it, dad? What has happened?" she asked.

He took her solemnly in his arms, and kissed her sadly.

"The *Flyer* is lost, my lass!"

"The *Flyer*—lost—father!" and Mary's face was very white—"What do you mean? How lost? Tell me, tell me?"

"She engaged the enemy, sunk some of 'em, but was outnumbered, and went down. They're bringing the survivors back to port."

Mary, in all her imagining had never prepared herself for such an hour as this, when she would be called upon to mourn the loss of one of the swiftest and most famous ships of all the destroyer flotillas, with most of the gallant hearts aboard her.

She had heard before that Tom Crawley had been lost, but then she had hoped, for the gallant *Flyer* had come back safe, if not wholly sound, and Tom had returned. Now the gallant vessel was lying on the ocean's bed in her last sleep, and who should say how many of her gallant crew were lying there with her?

White-faced and big-eyed the beautiful fisher-girl stood staring—staring at her father, her hands twitching nervously.

"And—Tom—Tom——" she blurted at last.

"I don't know, my lass. They say there aren't many saved. Don't despair just yet. We shall soon know the worst, Mary. Let us pray that it will not be so bad."

Later, they went down to the harbour together. The news was not taken to Mrs. Crawley, it being deemed wiser to keep her in ignorance of what had happened until they had made sure whether or no Tom Crawley was among those who were being brought home to Weathersea.

When they arrived at the harbour, they found a big crowd of fisherfolk.

officials, and naval seamen standing about.

Police and military kept the crowd of eager civilians away.

A stiffish breeze was blowing, bearing with it a drizzle from the clouds above and spindrift from the sea. Beyond the harbour's mouth the white caps were dancing. There was a chilliness in the air exactly attuned to the spirits of the patient watchers. Had there been sun, or any sign of gaiety, it would have seemed sadly out of keeping with the hour.

For long they waited. A fishing smack came into port, bearing with her a cargo of fish. Two motor patrol-boats sped outward, leaping high as they passed the bar.

At last a sailor came running.

"Some of the patrols are comin' back," he shouted. "We shall soon know the truth."

Twenty minutes later, they could see the grey snake-like hulls of the fleet war-craft moving steadily towards the harbour.

Three of them entered, the Tortoise, the Butterfly, and the Falcon. Slowly they moved to their moorings. And as a knot of seamen aboard one of the vessels saw the waiting crowd, they waved their arms and hands, and cheered at the full stretch of their lungs.

"Hurray! Hurray! Are we down-hearted?" And then came the answering roar of "NO!"

The Flyer had gone, but other Flyers were on the slips, and what did a wetting or a measure of bad luck matter to them? They were ready to take the same risk again, that very day. This was war, and they had to take their chance. They took it, all the time, knowing that in every respect, they were superior to the Hun, whom they had got to beat.

As soon as it was known that the survivors were leaving the ship that had brought them in a rush was made to meet them, and as the few struggled through the press, some of them making happy their womenfolk, Mary's keen eyes searched in vain for Tom.

At last she saw a pal of Tom's, young Frank Lawless, and she went up to him. Frank was pale, and seemed very ill. He had been struck by a flying fragment of shell, and was bound for hospital.

"Frank!" she cried, "what about—Tom?"

She read the answer in his eyes even before he spoke.

"Tom—he's gone, Miss Thwaites. I saw him swept overboard, before the Flyer sunk. Poor old Tom."

Mary fell back with a groan, and her father caught her in his arms.

"Steady, my lass," he muttered, though his own voice shook, "we must take it calmly, and try to make it easier—for—others."

Mary knew what he meant—Mrs. Crawley—and with a sobbing cry she flung herself into her father's arms.

"Oh, dad, dad!" she sobbed. "It seems so cruel, so hard. Will this horrible war never end?"

"Yes," the fisherman replied. "When we've got the enemy beat, and that happy time's not yet come."

IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS.

CAPTURED! A prisoner of war!" The thought ran through Tom Crawley's brain like liquid fire, burning deep.

For quite a while after he had been taken down into the hold of the German destroyer he lay still, marvelling to find himself still alive.

Why hadn't they killed him? Because the officer had intervened? Most assuredly. For these begrimed men in seamen's kit who passed him by, scowling at him, and uttering their harsh, guttural taunts, would have shown him no mercy.

After a while, a long while it seemed, one of the seamen brought him a blanket, or rug, and threw it over him, while presently another handed him a basinful of steaming hot soup.

This Tom swallowed with avidity, for he was famished, and cold, and it warmed him nicely.

And then he lay quiet, while the hull of the destroyer throbbed and vibrated from the straining of the ship's engines.

The sea buffeted her badly, but she cut her way along at a fair average rate of speed. As far as he could tell everything was well conducted aboard, and the seamen seemed to know their business.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

After a while Tom's head nodded and drooped, and lulled by the mechanical echo from the engine-rooms, and the warmth lent him by the blanket, he went to sleep.

When he awoke it was to the sound of loud shouting, and to find the daylight filtering down into the artificially lit hold.

A seaman passing by spurned him with his foot.

"Wake up, you English dog," he growled, "learn that Germany is your master. Britannia no longer rules the waves. The Kaiser will soon be the great sea-lord. Our submarines have reduced your country to the brink of starvation. All your ships are being sent to the bottom. And when our Navy comes out of harbour she'll blow all that remain of your warships clean off the seas."

The kick had hurt. Tom Crawley wasn't the sort of lad to stand that. He was on his feet in a flash.

"Britannia does rule the waves, and always will," he replied. "And if you use your feet on me, I'll show you what a British fist can do, too!"

The Hun grinned from ear to ear. He could not bring himself to believe that such a midget as Tom Crawley could possibly be effective in a fight with a man twice his size. He towered over Tom, was twice his breadth, and, besides, he could ill-treat a prisoner without much fear of punishment.

So he raised his boot, and kicked Tom again.

It was an unwarrantable and savage act, and Tom with a howl of pain shrank back. Only for a moment. The next he had hurled himself at the German, and showed him what a British boxer could do, in fair fight, even though he happened to be a little 'un.

Tom rapped the Hun on each side of the jaw, punched him in the wind, hit him on the nose, half-closed one eye, and finally knocked him down.

Up the fellow got shouting murder. He rushed at Tom, only to find the nimble little boxing sailor darting this way and that with wonderful elusiveness, paying no heed to the confined space in which he was obliged to operate.

A hit on the mark, and a left and right on the chin, sent the Hun down once more.

This time he bellowed aloud for help, and rising kicked savagely at Tom's jaw.

Tom Crawley half-expected the move, and was ready for it. Side stepping with his usual cleverness he seized the rising ankle, and pulled it up.

For the third time the Hun went down. And then up rushed some of his shipmates, bellowing like mad. They were armed, and they threatened Tom's life.

They seized him. One of them prodded him with the end of a cutlass. Tom's life might have ended there and then, if a petty officer who had been an eye-witness the whole affair had not run up, and ordered the men away.

"He attacked our mate," they protested. "We've a right to kill him."

"Seaman Offerich got what he deserved," was the petty officer's stern reply. "He had no right to kick an helpless prisoner. Go to your quarters, the lot of you, and let us hear no more of this."

They scattered in sullen silence and Tom turned to thank his friend.

"Bah! No thanks, Britisher," said the German petty officer with a shrug. "I hate your country and your race!" and he turned away.

A few minutes later there was a cry in German of "Land ho!" and some signs of excitement aboard. An hour later the destroyer passed into the safe harbourage of the naval base at Zeebrugge, so often bombarded and wrecked by our naval and air-raiding squadrons.

Tom Crawley was there taken ashore, examined, his name, rating, and ship entered, and then taken under escort to the prison where he was placed under safe lock and key and given some coarse food to eat and brackish water to drink.

The place of his confinement was a cell bare and cheerless, but airy enough, with a grating or window set up high near the ceiling, which it was impossible to reach.

Tom hammered upon the door. It was as solid as stone. He walked up and down, and peered about him. It wasn't so much unlike clink at home.

"And so," he mused. "Here I am, a prisoner of war—and there's no way of escape. I wonder what they'll do to me? Try me, and shoot me? Shouldn't wonder. Well, I've done my bit, and now that the old Flyer's gone, I don't seem to care."

(Continued overleaf.)

So musing, he sat upon the edge of his hard bed, and burying his face in his hands sunk into a profound and depressing reverie.

TOM CRAWLEY FINDS HIS FATHER.

THE morning after his arrival at Zeebrugge, Tom Crawley was taken from his prison, under escort, and brought before the naval officer in command of the base. By him he was severely and even roughly questioned, and threatened with torture and death if he failed to tell all he knew as to the strength and disposition of our British naval forces, and the measures which were being adopted to fight the U-boats.

Tom Crawley smiled grimly. "And do you think I'd tell you that—that I'd sell my country?" he demanded. "Not likely."

"You had better speak. We have means of making you."

"I don't think you have, sir, with all due respects to you," flashed Tom.

"You can brand me with hot irons, put out my eyes, tear me limb from limb, but you'll never make me say one word. I don't intend to speak. I have only one life, and you're welcome to that if you're brute enough to take it."

The admiral—such was the Hun's rank—stormed and fumed, raged and threatened, but to no purpose.

"You're wasting your breath, old chap," said Tom, with a grim smile, risking reprisals, and with a thundering shout the officer ordered the guard to remove the prisoner.

"Take him back to the gaol," he said. "And I'll think over what we can do with him."

So Tom was taken back to his cell, and fed on black bread, wholesome no doubt, but to him utterly loathsome, and water.

Later a ration of coarse Dutch cheese was brought him, and he made the best of the meal.

In the afternoon, he was led out into a yard hemmed in with stone walls, with heavy iron spikes set in the brickwork at

the top, which hung aslant over the ground below, rendering any attempt at escape out of the question. Armed guards overlooked the exercise ground, and kept the prisoners constantly on the move. Talking was prohibited. Only now and then did the unfortunate prisoners manage to exchange a word.

Tom Crawley eyed his fellow prisoners with interest. He found to his surprise, that they consisted of one or two seamen, like himself, two British fishermen, and two Belgians, who might have followed the same profession. There were three naval airmen of ours, and several khaki-clad prisoners, one a Flight-Lieutenant of the R.F.C.

Tom had not expected to find such a mixed lot present, but the mere sight of their cheery faces, and the philosophical resignation with which they accepted their fate, strengthened him to bear the very worst that might befall him.

The Belgians alone seemed to take their imprisonment with a bad grace, grumbled as they walked round the squares, and bickered with the German guards.

Tom Crawley was sorry when, after an hour's exercise, he was driven back to his cell.

He expected to be further examined by the German admiral, whom he mentally christened 'old Tirpitz,' for he was an elderly man, with flowing whiskers like the original, and anticipated the worst, for he intended to continue his open defiance of the man, but to his surprise he was not called upon a second time, but left to languish in his cell, with occasional exercise in the yard.

Here he remained for several days, after which he and his fellow-prisoners were removed under heavy armed escort, to the railway station, and put aboard a train bound they knew not whither.

On the night before their removal, they heard the sound of guns at sea, and for half an hour or longer, a series of ear-splitting crashes deafened the air. They could smell the burning chemicals with which the shells were filled, and knew from the sounds that Zeebrugge was getting it hot and strong.

(To be continued.)