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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College, to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Secret Society, the Fu Chang Tong, whose hatred they have incurred. Although living in the great school in the characters of master and pupil, Nelson Lee and Nipper nevertheless find many opportunities to utilise their unique detective ability in various mysterious and adventurous cases.

CHAPTER I.

(The narrative related throughout by Nipper.)

EXCITEMENT BREWING—JUST A FEW DETAILS—
IN SEARCH OF HUNTER.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST adjusted his pince-nez.

"I don't approve of such hurried dressin' as a rule, dear old boy, but this is a special occasion, an' there are excuses," he said, with an air of kindly tolerance. "But, really, you haven't been more than ten minutes altogether. It's shockin', Benny!"

"The guv'nor told me to look sharp, and I didn't mean to keep him waiting," I said, glancing at my watch. "I've been eleven minutes, Montie—which isn't so dusty, considering that I was soaked to the skin and had to change everything."

"I don't know how you did it, old man—I don't really," said Tregellis-West. "But I feel compelled to compliment you, although my feelin's are all against such haste. Dressin' is a serious matter."

"To you I daresay it is," I said cheerfully. "But I'm not so particular, thank goodness. I wonder how long we shall have to wait? I'm jolly anxious to be off, I can tell you."

The time, exactly, was twenty-five minutes past eleven. I was standing on the steps of the Ancient House at St. Frank's with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, my chums of Study C.

We were waiting for Mr. Alvington—in other words, my guv'nor, Nelson Lee. The moon was shining quite brilliantly, and the shadows were dense beneath the leafy elms and chestnuts.

It wasn't usual for Remove juniors to be lounging on the Ancient House steps at such a disgracefully late hour as this. But to-night was a special night. Matters had reached a climax in connection with Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., the man who had made himself the tyrant of St. Frank's during the last week or two.

Since Mr. Hunter's arrival—since he had become Housemaster of the Ancient House—there had been continual ferment. Mr. Kennedy Hunter was a criminal, but if he had been this alone his success would have been far greater.

But his position at St. Frank's had caused his head to swell. And it was this unfortunate condition which was mainly responsible for his downfall. Had he kept his wits about him he would have given Nelson Lee no opportunity for obtaining the evidence so vital before any arrest could be made.

Mr. Hunter had attempted to ride the high horse at St. Frank's. Dr. Stafford being away, Hunter had calmly stepped into his shoes, taking advantage of the fact that the Ancient House was the premier House of the school.

The Remove had come in for the major portion of Mr. Hunter's venom. And Tregellis-West and Watson and I had been singled out for extra harsh treatment. This was because we had probed into matters which were highly dangerous.

There had been a great barring-out and many other excitements. But, at last, Mr. Hunter was beaten. In desperation he had attempted to kidnap the Headmaster, who had returned unexpectedly. The failure of this enterprise brought matters to a head, and Hunter had been faced by arrest.

Even now I was still greatly in the dark with regard to the inner facts of the case. But I knew that Hunter had accomplices in

the district—there seemed to be a whole gang of them

There was also a mysterious underground cavern, with two or three subterranean tunnels leading to it. Only an hour before Sir Montie and Tommy and I took up our stand on the Ancient House steps a particularly exciting episode had occurred.

In danger of arrest, Mr. Hunter had fled. He had taken refuge in the cavern, reaching it by means of a tunnel, the exit of which was situated upon a small island in the middle of the River Stowe. There was a steel door in this tunnel, and Hunter had just managed to scrape past it in time.

Nelson Lee and I had been hot on the track, but owing to the activities of a certain Mr. Smiles—one of Hunter's associates—we found ourselves trapped in the tunnel. The latter had become flooded on account of an explosion. Smiles was still unconscious, but the guv'nor and I had managed to escape with nothing more formidable than a severe drenching.

The situation now was somewhat acute.

"It's no good blinking at the facts, my sons," I said seriously. "Hunter's slipped away, and we're completely dished for the time being. I've got a horrible feeling that we sha'n't be able to collar him."

"But old Alvy said that we should capture Hunter before dawn," remarked Tommy Watson. "He ought to know, I suppose?"

"The guv'nor must have more confidence than I have, that's all," I said, shaking my head. "I can't see how the thing's going to be done. There are two or three other exits out of that cavern, and Hunter may be twenty miles away by this time."

Sir Montie looked somewhat uneasy.

"I've been wonderin'," he said reflectively. "I've been wonderin' quite a lot, you know. Do you think it's all right, Benny? We ought to be in bed, begad! Do you think we shall be allowed to help in the chase?"

I grinned.

"Do you think we're going to be left out of it?" I asked sarcastically. "My dear, innocent old Montie, I wouldn't go to bed for fifty quids! And you chaps are going to see the thing out with me. Bless your little lives! We've done such a lot that we're entitled to help right to the finish."

"We may think so, but what about old Alvy and the Head?" asked Watson. "It's a sad fact, Benny, but our respected masters occasionally hold views different from ours. You know that as well as I do."

"They won't hold different views this time," I declared. "If they do, they'll have to hold 'em, that's all. We're going to stick out for our rights—see? The very thought of going to bed makes me grin."

"I wonder what the other chaps are thinkin'?" said Sir Montie.

"They're dreaming, probably," I remarked. "And it doesn't worry me in the least. The whole truth will be out to-morrow, and then we can explain things. The chaps will be green with envy when they hear what we've been doing."

There was a sound in the lobby behind us. Nelson Lee and Dr. Stafford appeared.

"Ah! You are ready, young 'un?" asked the guv'nor briskly.

"Ages ago, sir!"

"We must be off without a moment's delay," said Lee, regarding us thoughtfully. "I'm not at all sure that I ought to take you with me, but I suppose there will be a dire commotion if I don't?"

"Dire's not the word for it, sir," I said grimly.

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"In that case, I will not stand the risk of arousing the storm," he said good-humouredly. "Upon the whole, there is no reason why you should not stay out an hour or two later. If you went to bed you would not sleep, so there will be no actual difference."

I glared.

"No actual difference?" I retorted warmly. "There'll be the actual difference that we shall be on hand to help you, sir. Supposing we allowed you to go alone? Where the dickens would you get to then?"

"Goodness alone knows!" exclaimed the guv'nor. "I tremble to think of the possibility, Nipper."

"Oh, don't rot, guv'nor——"

"And you lost sight of the fact that you are in the presence of your Headmaster," went on Nelson Lee severely. "It is distinctly possible that Dr. Stafford will pack you off to bed without further delay."

Dr. Stafford smiled.

"Mr. Alvington is chaffing you, boys," he said kindly. "I have not the slightest objection to your accompanying him, for I know that you could not be in safer hands. I raise no objection."

It will thus be seen that Montie and Tommy and I were very privileged persons. My chums, of course, knew my little secret—and the guv'nor's—and the Head was also a member of the select circle. We understood one another perfectly.

In addition to this, we had rescued the Head from Hunter's clutches earlier in the evening, and he couldn't possibly object to our setting off on this night expedition—although the whole thing was violently opposed to school rules. There are exceptions to every rule, however.

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"Begad! Rather!" put in Sir Montie. "Thank you awfully, sir!"

Watson mumbled his thanks also, being a somewhat shy individual in the presence of the Head. And immediately afterwards we started out.

"You don't seem to be in any hurry, guv'nor," I said curiously, as we set off up the dusty road. "How's that?"

"Haste, my dear Nipper, is always ill-advised," replied Nelson Lee. "We hastened after Mr. Hunter some little time ago, and only succeeded in getting ourselves nearly drowned."

"But Hunter's escaping all this time," I protested. "There are other exits to that cavern, and it's quite probable that the

rotter is twenty or thirty miles away by this time."

"On the other hand, it is just as possible that he is still within the cavern," said the gov'nor smoothly. "I am not saying that he prefers to remain there, but he doubtless finds it more beneficial to his health."

I looked up at Nelson Lee quickly.

"You know something, gov'nor!" I declared.

"Do I, Nipper?" he chuckled.

"Look here, you're trying to be funny!" I protested indignantly. "It's too bad, gov'nor!"

"Perhaps it is, young 'un," said Lee. "I won't keep you on tenterhooks any longer. I am not hurrying myself because certain plans were made several hours ago. There are two other exits to the cavern. One is situated upon Bannington Moor, and the other, as you are aware, opens into the old quarry. Both these exits are closely guarded."

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

"An' what about the exit on the island, sir?" asked Sir Montie.

"If you will cast your mind back, Montie, you will remember that I was close to the spot when you appeared with Dr. Stafford, after having rescued him," replied Nelson Lee. "I was guarding that exit myself. Now, however, a guardian is unnecessary. Even while I was chasing Hunter I was aware that he was running into a trap, but it is not unnatural that I was anxious to lay hands upon him myself and get the thing over quickly. Well, he slipped away, but he is in a tight corner, nevertheless."

"So he can't get out at all?" I asked eagerly.

"Exactly, Nipper—he can't get out at all," said the gov'nor.

"And we were making all sorts of guesses," I said. "This is heaps better, sir. If Hunter's trapped in the cavern it's all plain sailing. Is there anybody else with him?"

"He has three companions in misfortune, I believe."

"And who's guarding the other exits, sir?" asked Sir Montie.

"In the quarry—towards which we are now walking—we shall find our old friend Detective-Inspector Lennard," replied Nelson Lee. "He has three men with him, and I don't think they will allow—"

"Old Lennard!" I interrupted, with a whistle. "Great Scott! I didn't know that the affair was so big as all that, gov'nor! The whole district is swarming with Scotland Yard detectives."

"Your powers of exaggeration, Nipper, have been in no way modified during your sojourn at St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee severely. "So far, I have mentioned four Scotland Yard men, and you immediately describe them as a swarm! True, there are four others at the moor exit, but that is all. Detective-Sergeant Smith is in charge on the moor."

I felt more comfortable.

"No wonder you didn't hurry yourself over changing your clothes, sir," I answered. "And I was tearing my wet things off and

dodging into dry ones like a maniac. You might have given me the tip beforehand!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"There was scarcely time, my boy," he replied. "And I don't suppose the haste affected you seriously. But you must not imagine that everything will be smooth. I anticipate no hitch, but one is always possible."

"Shall we go into the cavern, sir?" asked Watson eagerly.

"It all depends, Watson," was the gov'nor's reply. "We may find Hunter already in Mr. Lennard's hands. I sincerely hope so."

"I don't!" I exclaimed. "There'd be no fun if—"

"I am afraid you regard this whole affair too lightly," interrupted Nelson Lee. "There is no question of fun, Nipper. I must impress upon you the fact that Hunter is an extremely dangerous man. He is capable of any violence—especially at such a time as this. And I shall hesitate before permitting you to enter these underground tunnels. I have every reason to know that Hunter would not stop at murder itself."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"I don't wish to startle you, boys," went on Lee quietly, "but I must destroy the impression that we have embarked upon a pleasure trip. And I wish to prepare you for a possible disappointment. Under no circumstances shall I allow you to enter this underground cavern."

"Oh, I say!" I protested.

"Yes, you can say all sorts of things, Nipper, but it will make no difference," went on the gov'nor firmly. "However, we will not anticipate matters. The first thing is to see Lennard and hear his report."

But, although we didn't know it at the time, certain exciting things were happening to Detective-Inspector Lennard and his three men. Nelson Lee's plans and everything else were to be considerably altered on account of these happenings.

I wasn't there at the time, of course, but I learned all about it afterwards. So I'll set down the events exactly as they occurred—and get busy straight away.

CHAPTER II.

MR. HUNTER'S TRICKERY—WE ARRIVE UPON THE SCENE—CAUGHT BY CUNNING.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD was irritable.

"It's a fool's game, Bruce," he growled in a low voice. "Patience is a great virtue, I've no doubt, but I'm fed up to the neck with this waiting game. There's nothing doing at all."

"There might be something before long, sir," said Bruce, of Scotland Yard, hopefully.

"That's what I have been thinking for an hour past," grunted the inspector. "We've been stuck here for nearly three hours, and we haven't seen a sign of anything or anybody."

The fact of the matter was, Mr. Lennard was quite disgusted. An active man naturally, he hated hanging about and idling. The three Yard detectives with him were in a similar mental condition. They felt, somehow, that they were being left out in the cold.

"Of course those other fellows are getting all the luck," went on the inspector, pessimistically. "We shall have one of them round before long, saying that Hunter and his gang are caught, and that we've missed the whole caboodle. That's just my luck, confound it!"

"There's no telling, sir," Bruce remarked. "We might catch something yet."

He wasn't aware of it, but they would shortly catch something they hadn't bargained for! These hard-headed men had no particular relish for dangerous enterprises, but they certainly chafed under a long spell of inactivity.

"I was expecting Mr. Kent along before this, too," went on Lennard reflectively. "I hope nothing has happened—nothing to upset our plans, I mean."

He fell into a thoughtful mood. "Mr. Kent" was merely another name for Nelson Lee. The inspector grinned slightly as he thought of it. Under the circumstances it was not wise for Lee to go by his own name neither could he be known as "Mr. Alvington," of St. Frank's. Whatever name he adopted, however, he was Nelson Lee—and that was all that really mattered.

Lennard and his three men were standing in the old moor quarry. It was a deserted spot in broad daylight, and at night one could imagine oneself a hundred miles from civilisation.

The place was bleak and bare. Rocks were strewn loosely in every direction. The only green things visible were the tops of some trees right in the distance, where a portion of Belton Wood jutted out beyond the quarry.

The black mouth of a cave yawned close to Lennard. It was fairly wide once the low entrance was passed, but it almost immediately narrowed into a confined tunnel. There were no other cave entrances; there was no prospect of a surprise attack from the rear.

"If nothing happens within the next ten minutes—"

Detective-Inspector Lennard paused. He stared intently into the cave's mouth, and then clicked his teeth—a little habit of his when he knew that action was at hand. Bruce and the other men became intently alert.

"Anything doing, sir?" asked one.

"Looks like it," said Lennard shortly. "Hold yourselves ready, my dear fellows. And don't forget that Hunter is an infernal trickster."

There was every reason for the inspector's change of attitude. Far down the tunnel a dim glow had appeared. This now became a positive glare, and it was evident that two or three men were approaching with flaming torches.

The lights flickered in the confined space of the underground passage and revealed the figures of four men. Lennard counted four after some little difficulty. He stepped into the cave and casually drew his revolver.

"You'd better come inside," he said, turning his head. "This is Hunter's lot, I believe. Either they don't know we're here, or they mean to get busy. They'll find us quite ready," he added grimly.

It was "Hunter's lot."

The foremost man was Mr. Kennedy Hunter himself. He held a flaming torch above his head, and as he approached Lennard could see that his expression was one of gloomy resignation.

"I advise you to stop just where you are," shouted the inspector abruptly.

Hunter halted, and the others followed his example. A distance of perhaps fifty feet separated the two parties. Mr. Hunter carefully withdrew his handkerchief and waved it.

"You'd better try no tricks," began Lennard.

"My dear sir, it is past the time for trickery—although I am honoured by the compliment," called Mr. Hunter. "Will you please recognise this handkerchief as a white flag of surrender?"

"Just stay where you are for the present," said Detective-Inspector Lennard. "I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Hunter, but I am well acquainted with your personal appearance and attributes. I don't accept that white-flag business, and will remind you that you are at present covered quite accurately by my revolver."

Mr. Hunter smiled.

"Quite a melodrama—eh?" he suggested.

"I daresay you'll find it melodramatic enough," agreed the inspector grimly. "This game doesn't quite suit me, Mr. Hunter. If you wish to surrender, you'll have to do exactly as I order you. I don't intend to give you an inch of rope. Is that quite clear?"

"Painfully so," replied Mr. Hunter. "It is a matter for regret that you fail to trust me. I am, however, fully prepared to carry out any instructions you care to mention. I have considered the whole position, and realise that there is no possible way of escape for me. A fight would be foolish, not to say perilous. I am, accordingly, resigned to the inevitable."

"Down and out!" murmured Bruce contentedly.

"Don't you make too sure of that!" said Lennard in a low voice. "The chap's too mealy-mouthed for my liking. But he's not going to trick me with his sweet words. I'll have the whole quartette handcuffed before I trust them!"

There was a moment's silence, and then Mr. Hunter spoke again.

"Well?" he asked wearily.

"To begin with, I want you to take out any weapons you possess and throw them down on the ground," said the inspector grimly. "And please remember that you

provide a most excellent mark in that torch-light. If it comes to a matter of shooting, we have all the advantage—and we can shoot quite straight!”

Hunter did not reply, but he took out a revolver and tossed it upon the ground in front of him. His companions followed his example, and Detective-Inspector Lennard nodded.

“Any more?” he asked curtly.

“No,” was Hunter’s smooth reply. “What would you expect? We don’t happen to be walking arsenals.”

Even Lennard was convinced that Hunter and his companions were “down and out”—that is to say, completely at the end of their tether and ready for surrender. The fellows would never be mad enough to attempt resistance. Lennard was quite sure upon that point.

He had dealt with criminals for many years past and knew the signs well. Smart as the inspector was, however, he did not quite allow for the cunning treachery of Mr. Hunter.

“That’s all right,” he said comfortably. “Bruce, you’d better go along and handcuff them—in pairs. No, string the whole bunch up together; it will be safer upon the whole.”

“Right, sir!” said Bruce.

“And if there’s any foolery,” added Lennard, with a hard note in his voice, “there’ll be the very blazes to pay. I’m not pocketing my revolver until this business is over. Bear that in mind, Mr. Hunter.”

“I am not quite a fool,” said Hunter sourly.

Certainly the inspector took every possible precaution. The criminals were disarmed, and they would be covered by three revolvers whilst Bruce handcuffed them. Nothing could be more satisfactory. Lennard only overlooked the fact that these men were so desperate that they were quite willing to risk their lives if there was the slightest prospect of escape.

Bruce went forward confidently, jingling his handcuffs with pleasant anticipation. He faced Mr. Hunter with a quiet grin of triumph upon his face. He had every reason to feel satisfied.

“Now, sir!” he said briskly.

Hunter held out his hands meekly. But the next second the act of treachery occurred which Lennard had feared, but had dismissed. Hunter suddenly seized Bruce by the shoulders and spun him round.

“Don’t fire!” he shouted. “This man will receive every bullet if you do!”

Detective-Inspector Lennard rapped out a short swear word.

Just for a moment he didn’t know what to do. Hunter was immediately behind the startled Bruce, and the other three men had fallen into single file. Thus there was nothing to take aim at except the Yard detective himself.

Crack!

It was not Lennard’s revolver which spoke, but Hunter’s. He and his men were still

well armed, regardless of the empty weapons they had flung down. And they were not waiting to be attacked, but opened the battle themselves.

One of Lennard’s men uttered a sharp cry and tumbled down. The inspector was simply mad with fury. He couldn’t fire without hitting Bruce, but this appalling state of affairs must not continue.

“Charge!” he shouted hoarsely.

He and his remaining man rushed forward with great courage. Each knew that that moment would probably be his last. There was another spurt of flame, but the bullet went wide.

Bruce, by this time, had acted, although he, too, knew that his danger was considerable. He twisted sharply and attempted to kick Hunter’s feet from under him. But as he was in the act of doing so one of the men in the rear brought a revolver-butt down upon his head with terrific force. He collapsed, senseless.

“No more firing!” snapped Mr. Hunter sharply.

The odds were all in his favour now. They were four against two, and plucky though Detective-Inspector Lennard was, he couldn’t fight against such numbers with any prospect of success.

He flung himself at Hunter. For perhaps three minutes there was a terrific melee, but the end was inevitable. Lennard’s companion went down first. A lighted torch had been thrust at his face, but he turned his head in the nick of time, and only received a severe burn on the side of his head. But he went down, and he was held helpless in a second.

Lennard collapsed a moment later, attacked in front and at the rear. But he managed to inflict severe punishment upon Mr. Hunter before falling. With a bleeding mouth and a gashed cheek, Hunter rapped out his orders.

“String them up!” he snarled. “Where’s that rope? String them up so that they can’t move an inch—and gag them, too!”

This work was accomplished rapidly. Lennard and the man with a burnt head were conscious, but Bruce was still senseless. The other man, who had been out of the fight at the very start, was suffering from a bullet wound in the thigh—not very serious, but he was quite helpless. He, too, was callously strung up without receiving the slightest attention.

It can scarcely be said that Lennard was to blame for what had occurred. He had experienced bad luck, but his superiors would probably take a different view. Certainly he had been in charge and was responsible.

“Take them to that cave further along,” ordered Hunter grimly. “We don’t want to leave any sign.”

The four helpless men were roughly dragged out of the cave, and taken to a small opening about thirty feet further along the quarry. Here they found themselves pitched into a kind of crevice in the rocks. It was narrow and low, but quite deep. The place was an excellent prison.

Hunter and his men stood in the darkness

just outside the tunnel. Their torches had been extinguished, and they were feeling pleased with themselves.

"We have been lucky," declared Hunter. "A few scratches is the only damage, I believe. Those infernal detectives were armed, and it was touch and go for a moment or two."

"You saved the situation splendidly, sir," declared one of the other men. "It would have been all up but for you."

Hunter nodded.

"I'd like to find the man who is mainly responsible for this disaster," he said in a hard voice. "By heaven! I'd kill him like a dog! These Scotland Yard fellows are merely carrying out orders. But somebody planned it all—somebody started the whole business. We're simply beaten, and it's no use denying the fact."

"Hadden't we better be getting away——"

"Quiet—quiet!" snapped Hunter.

He was looking towards the end of the quarry. Two or three figures had appeared against the night sky. They were approaching. As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee was just appearing on the scene with Sir Montie and Tommy and me.

"By George!" muttered one of Hunter's men. "We must run——"

"Fool!" hissed Hunter. "Unless I am not mistaken, the newcomers are the very people I wish to see the man I was just referring to and those accursed schoolboys. We must trick them too."

"But it's too risky, isn't it?"

"The odds are all in our favour, man," breathed Hunter softly. "Do just as I tell you, and everything will be all right. This is splendid! I had not hoped for such a glorious opportunity as this."

Meanwhile the governor and I were approaching full of confidence, with Tregellish and Watson just behind—for the rocky path was narrow. The silence of the place pointed to the fact that nothing startling had happened. If we had only arrived ten minutes earlier, we should have thought very differently!

"I expect Lennard will be just within the cave or lounging near the mouth of it," remarked Nelson Lee. "I can just picture him, young 'un. Lennard is an intensely active fellow, and he hates idleness. I have no doubt that he is quite sick of waiting about this desolate spot."

"Oh, well, there'll be something doing before long," I remarked comfortably. "I wish you'd let us take part in the excitement, gov'nor."

"It's quite impossible, my boy."

I didn't say any more, for I knew that once Nelson Lee's mind was made up, nothing would alter it. We were already within sight of our destination. We could even see the dark figures of Lennard and his men in the deep shadows near the cave.

At least, that is what we supposed. And why on earth should we have thought anything else? We were expecting to meet four men on guard at the tunnel-mouth. Well,

there were four men there. How was it humanly possible for us to know, or even suspect, that these men had been changed?

I'm not a fellow to make excuses when I've blundered, but in this particular matter it would be rank injustice to accuse the gov'nor of being careless. He wasn't careless. He simply placed faith in Detective-Inspector Lennard—and it was the latter who had failed. Although, goodness knows, poor old Lennard couldn't be blamed much. The whole business was sheer bad luck.

"All quiet, Lennard?" asked the gov'nor softly, as we halted in front of the cave.

"That you, Kent?" came a faint whisper, impossible to recognise.

"Yes."

"I'm glad you've come just now," went on the supposed Lennard. "I thought I heard something in the tunnel a moment ago."

It seemed to me rather curious that Lennard and his men kept back amongst the shadows, but I didn't think that anything was wrong. Nelson Lee took a step forward, and then paused. He had begun vaguely to suspect.

"What's the matter with you, Lennard?" he asked sharply. "Why can't you come out here, into the moonlight——"

The four men moved quickly and in a rather startling manner. They placed themselves in such positions that we stood between them and the cave entrance. And at the same second four electric torches blazed out, revealing us in brilliant, sharp relief.

"Don't move a finger—don't attempt to escape!" came the sharp, well-known voice of Mr. Kennedy Hunter. "You are all covered accurately, and if you show the slightest resistance we shall fire!"

CHAPTER III.

FORCED INTO THE CAVERN—THE EXPLOSION—NO ESCAPE.

NELSON LEE remained perfectly calm in spite of the appalling truth, which hit us like something solid. We had been trapped—trapped! And we had walked into it blindly.

"Oh, hegad!" murmured Sir Montie, with a quick breath.

"Don't move, boys," said Nelson Lee warningly. "You must obey Mr. Hunter's command without question. Don't move an inch."

"I am delighted to find that you are taking a sensible view of the affair," came Mr. Hunter's voice from behind one of the lights. "You have every reason to know that I am desperate. I shall not hesitate to act drastically if you force me. You were tricked neatly—eh?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Rather too neatly," he agreed. "But I am concerning myself with regard to Detective-Inspector Lennard. I will not deny

that I blundered into this trap of yours very clumsily; but Mr. Lennard was left in charge of this particular post, and the blame—if any exists—is mainly his."

"You are doing poor Lennard a gross injustice," said Mr. Hunter calmly. "He fought gamely, and his men were really splendid. Oh, yes, it was quite an exciting little fight. But they are quite harmless now."

I went cold all over.

"Have you—have you killed them?" I gasped. "Oh, you demon—"

"You need not be afraid, Master Bennett," interjected Hunter. "There has been no bloodshed—at least, nothing of any consequence. I intend to deal with you later, my fine schoolboy. You will all enter the tunnel at once."

"Begad! Let's fight for it—"

"No, Montie—no!" snapped Nelson Lee curtly.

His tone was unusually sharp, and he backed into the tunnel. We followed him, and in the confined space of those rocks the sense of being in Hunter's power was far more acute.

I knew why the gov'nor was so firm. If he had been alone he would probably have made a fight for it before entering the tunnel. But he wasn't alone, and he was responsible for the safety of us boys. If it came to a matter of revolver shooting we should simply be mown down.

And Nelson Lee was left with only one course to pursue. He was compelled to admit defeat and to obey Hunter's orders in every detail. There was nothing else for it, unless we wanted to start these scoundrels off in the shooting line.

But we were boiling. Our first feeling of amazement and dismay had vanished. We couldn't take Hunter's word about Detective-Inspector Lennard, of course. What had happened to the inspector? Was he dead? Were his three men dead, too? Or were they merely hidden away somewhere?

Honestly, I believed that Hunter was capable of any act of violence. There was a look in his eye which meant danger. It wasn't merely an expression of hatred, but something worse. He was determined, and absolutely callous.

I wondered what our fate was to be. Hunter had got us into his clutches now, and I wasn't foolish enough to suppose that he would allow us to go without exacting full revenge for what we had done in the past.

There was the gov'nor, too. Hunter only knew him as "Mr. Kent," a Secret Service agent. But he knew that "Mr. Kent" was responsible for his undoing. And the prospect before us was the reverse of cheerful.

"I may as well inform you that my plans are made to the last detail," said Mr. Hunter, from behind us. "I had feared that I should be compelled to make a very hasty departure, but things are now easier. I may even pay another visit to St. Frank's. There is a certain duty for me to perform there."

It wasn't so much what he said, but the way he said it. There was something in his voice which sent a cold shiver through me. Mr. Hunter was grim. His object in going to St. Frank's was a villainous one, I felt sure.

But at the moment I was far more interested in what was going to happen in these old tunnels.

Just when everything had been going right this disaster had befallen us. There was no sense in blinding our eyes to the fact that the disaster was of the first magnitude. Hunter had been driven out of his mysterious cavern by Nelson Lee's activity. Therefore Nelson Lee would have to pay the price. For a long time past my chums and I had harassed Hunter in the most determined manner at every opportunity. Therefore, also, we should have to pay the price.

And the price was likely to be very heavy.

"This is a fine thing, Benny boy," murmured Sir Montie, as he walked beside me. "I feel boiling, you know—fairly bubblin' over. Can't we do somethin' Can't we really?"

"It's no good, my dear chap," I replied. "Mr. Kent's right, it would be madness on our part to show fight. Pluck's one thing, but foolishness is another. And it would be sheer foolishness to resist at present."

"But it's so rotten, old boy," protested Montie. "Still, it's a frightfully rotten thing to grumble. I bar grumblin'. And, after all, we're only gettin' what we wanted. Begad! This is excitin', ain't it?"

I grunted.

"It's not the kind of excitement I wanted," I said. "The whole thing's the wrong way about, Montie. Hunter's top-dog, and it's no good denying it. There's something awful in store for us."

"You always were a cheerin' chap," remarked Montie placidly.

I admired his coolness. I didn't feel a bit cool myself; I wanted to turn round and hurl myself at Hunter like a young tornado. I wanted to do so many things and couldn't do one! It's a rotten feeling, and no mistake.

Tommy Watson was walking with the gov'nor in front. He was very quiet; he hadn't said a word the whole time. But although his nerves were shaken, he kept a stiff upper lip. If Hunter had expected us to be shivering with fright he was greatly disappointed.

"There is one point I overlooked," came Hunter's voice from the rear. "You carry a weapon, no doubt, Mr. Kent. Please do not be so foolish as to attempt to use it. My own revolver is still in my hand, and any trickery on your part might cause my finger to slip, and it would be most unfortunate if Tregellis-West were to cease his worldly existence"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Unfortunate ain't the word! It would be a shockin' pity, it would, really. What should I do without any existence?"

"My hat!" I murmured. "You've got a nerve, old son!"

Nelson Lee came to a halt. He looked at Mr. Hunter squarely. Montie and I stood between them, and waited.

"What are your intentions—exactly?" asked the guv'nor steadily. "You needn't think that I am contemplating sudden activity. As you say, I should not be so foolish. But why are you forcing us along this tunnel?"

Mr. Hunter laughed softly.

"You will find out for yourselves soon—very soon," he replied.

"You refuse to explain?"

"Exactly."

Nelson Lee turned and continued walking onwards. I knew that he was consumed with anxiety and worry. He was thinking of us far more than of himself. And how he managed to remain so calm was a mystery to me.

I knew well enough, however, that this passive policy was a sensible one. If Hunter escaped altogether it wouldn't matter so much—not so much as if Montie or Tommy fell a victim to insane revolver shooting. I'm not referring to myself, although I should probably have been the first to fall in a fight. Hunter hated me with a very particular brand of venom.

The tunnel dipped slightly, and then I became aware of a glow ahead. We turned a corner, and the passage widened. Small electric lamps were dotted at intervals along the roof, showing that we had entered the zone of the cavern.

The place was still a mystery to me. Elaborate machinery was there, I knew—printing presses, and all sorts of other things. It was quite possible, I reflected, that we should soon find ourselves among a host of other enemies. I made a remark to this effect to Sir Montie.

"It's quite possible, dear old boy," he observed. "That will be frightfully exciting, won't it? It's like bein' prisoners in the hands of the Prussians, begad!"

Nelson Lee turned his head.

"I don't think we shall meet any more of these gentry, Montie," he said quietly. "They only numbered five, all told. The fifth, as you know, is Mr. Smiles, and he is still recovering from the effects of being blown out of that hollow tree on the island. The enemy force is quite a small one."

"Big enough for me!" I grunted.

"You must not be impatient, Bennett," murmured the guv'nor. "We can do nothing at present, but the position may not remain

"The position, my dear sir, will become far more acute—so far as you are concerned," said Mr. Hunter pleasantly. "You have correct information, I observe. Poor Smiles is done for, but that is his own fault—the fool! But I am not done for, as you doubtless realise."

"Don't you speak too soon, you rotter!" growled Tommy Watson, driven to speak. "You'll come a cropper before long!"

"Hush, Watson—hush!" said the guv'nor quietly.

He didn't disapprove of Watson's remark, but he was afraid that too much would be said. And Hunter was in such a mood that he would make things jolly warm for us if we got "fresh."

I took a glance behind me, and saw that Hunter was wearing a mocking kind of a smile. The other three men followed in the rear. They all carried revolvers, although, somehow, these weapons looked singularly out of place in their hands.

They weren't criminals of the type which is usually accepted. To all appearances, indeed, they were respectable persons. Two of them wore glasses, and had obviously been brought up as gentlemen. The other was dark, and without doubt a foreigner. I couldn't help feeling that the whole adventure was unreal.

Here was a learned man—an M.A.—hustling us before him at the point of a revolver—a man who had recently occupied the responsible position of Housemaster at one of the biggest public schools in England!

It was wildly absurd—but it happened to be true! And it also happened that Mr. Kennedy Hunter, M.A., was in very deadly earnest. His threats were not idle ones, and I had an uncomfortable idea in the back of my mind that something of a particularly unpalatable nature was in store for us.

I came to this conclusion mainly because of Nelson Lee's attitude. I had hardly ever seen him so thoughtful before. For himself he didn't care a jot just now. He knew that he had led us into this hole, and the responsibility weighed upon his shoulders enormously.

He couldn't for the life of him see how the tables were to be turned. Hunter had got us at his mercy at the very outset, and we hadn't the ghost of a chance since. You can't attack a man who is pointing a fully-loaded revolver at you. Or, at least, if you do, you simply ask for trouble.

Quite suddenly we entered a huge black cavity. The electric lamps I mentioned a minute or two ago were not burning, and, except for the torches of our captors, the place was in total darkness.

And it seemed as though we stepped into a blackness which was solid. The rays of the torches behind did not penetrate any distance. The guv'nor walked forward blindly, and we followed him. And something throbbed inside me.

In this black place we should have more chance—we might be able to dodge round, or something like that. In the narrow confines of the tunnel, with the lights full upon us, we had been helpless. But now—well, I could imagine all sorts of possibilities.

I was hasty, however—we weren't allowed any rope!

Hunter rapped out a sharp order, and I turned curiously. The three other men were retreating with great haste, and Hunter himself had just pulled a cord which projected from a crevice in the rock wall. Then he, too, beat a rapid retreat.

"What the dickens——" I began.

"Back, boys—back!" roared Nelson Lee frantically.

Something in his tone caused me to dodge away with such rapidity that I blundered headlong into Sir Montie. We tumbled over in a heap.

"Begad! You're chokin' me, old boy——" Crash!

Montie was interrupted in a dramatic manner. A thunderous roar sounded. It didn't seem so much like an explosion as an immense fall of rock. Splinters flew through the air in dozens. At any rate, I caught two of them, and one caused quite a nasty gash on my left cheek.

Everything was confusion.

Choking volumes of dust filled our throats and eyes. Nelson Lee and Watson were flung down, and Montie and I would have been flung down, too, if we hadn't been sprawling already.

But, curiously enough, we weren't injured except for a few scratches. The explosion, or whatever it was, had been quite a local affair. Just for a horrible second I had believed that the whole cavern was tumbling down upon us. But now the silence was perfectly deadly.

"Begad!" came a gasp from Sir Montie. "What was it, dear fellows?"

"I should call it an air-raid, if we weren't miles under the ground!" I spluttered. "Are you all right, guv'nor?"

"Yes, lad," came Nelson Lee's reply. "Where is Watson?"

"Oh, my only aunt!" choked Watson. "I—I'm still alive, I believe, sir. But I'm blinded, or something—I can't see a thing!"

"What the dickens did you expect to see, in this darkness?" I panted, scrambling to my feet. "Where's my torch? Where the merry dickens——"

I paused. A sudden blaze of light had hit me in the face. Nelson Lee had found his torch first. I caught a glimpse of Sir Montie and Tommy. They were sitting up dazedly, and they presented such an extraordinary appearance that I couldn't possibly help grinning—in spite of the deadly nature of our position. They were both grey with dust from head to foot. Several jagged tears showed in Tregellis-West's elegant clothing.

"Can you see now, Watson?" asked the guv'nor anxiously.

"Yes sir, I—I think so!" gasped Tommy.

It was quite evident that poor old Watson had caught the bulk of the dust and chips. He had several painful grazes, and he was half smothered with blinding dust. Before even attempting to find out what had occurred, Nelson Lee satisfied himself that none of us was particularly injured. He breathed more freely when Tommy and Montie stood up, and announced themselves whole.

"We must congratulate ourselves, boys," he exclaimed. "We are at least uninjured, and that is something to be very thankful for."

"But what happened, sir?" I asked.

"An explosion happened, Nipper—as you must certainly understand for yourself,"

replied the guv'nor grimly. "I guessed that Hunter had something of this nature in store. Confound the brute! We could do nothing against him!"

Nelson Lee walked over to the mouth of the tunnel—or, to be more exact, to where the mouth of the tunnel had been. It wasn't there now. A mass of tumbled rocks filled the space, and a mouse couldn't have got through. One flash of the torch was quite sufficient to convince us that a steam shovel, working at five hundred horse-power, would be needed to clear the place.

"The tunnel's collapsed!" remarked Sir Montie soberly.

"It is easy to see that this dodge was prepared beforehand," said Nelson Lee. "The rock walls were loosened at this point, and a small charge of explosive was placed ready. Having forced us into the cavern, Hunter merely pulled the string, and retreated."

"But it was risky, wasn't it, sir?" I asked. "For Hunter, I mean?"

"Not at all, Nipper. The explosion itself was a very small business," was Nelson Lee's reply. "Had it been greater we should not be alive at this moment. It was of just sufficient strength to bring the loose rocks tumbling down. Once started, the tunnel caved in completely. It was the fall of rock which caused the most noise. The actual explosion was merely a subdued puff."

"Begad! Those sort of puffs ain't at all nice," observed Sir Montie. "But I'm shockin'ly bewildered. An' I'm frightened, too—I am, really. I may not look it, but I'm simply quakin' an' shiverin'!"

"I am very pleased with you, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Far from quaking, you have displayed wonderful courage and presence of mind. What a pity—what an infernal pity! I am afraid our position is extremely grave."

"We're in the cavern, ain't we, sir?" asked Watson.

"Yes, my boy."

"Then what about the other exits, sir? Can't we get out——"

"If you will take the trouble to think, Watson, you will surely realise that Mr. Hunter would not block this exit alone," said Nelson Lee gently. "There are two other exits. One, as we know, is as hopeless as this one we see before us. The tunnel beyond the steel door is flooded to the roof with water. The other exit, we may be sure, has also been dealt with."

"Let's have a look at it," I said eagerly.

Nelson Lee led the way across the cavern. We followed behind him, quivering with excitement and shaking from the effects of the explosion. And presently the guv'nor came to a halt. His electric torch was shining upon a jagged heap of rocks—exactly similar to the one we had just left.

"You see, boys?" he asked steadily.

"This exit's blocked too!" I said, with a husky catch of my breath. "It—it means that we're imprisoned?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"My dear lads, the truth is only too terrible," he agreed, his eyes shining with

anxiety and concern. "We are imprisoned completely and utterly, and I am doing you a kindness by stating that our chances of escape appear to be extremely remote. It is just as well that we should realise that at once."

We stared at one another dazedly.

It was true—we were trapped—trapped in the bowels of the earth!

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTER'S EVIL JOY—A VISIT TO ST. FRANK'S— THE ACT OF A MAD FANATIC.

MR. KENNEDY HUNTER was feeling immensely pleased with himself. He simply gloated with evil triumph.

"They are imprisoned—buried alive!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together in a manner which caused his companions to feel uneasy. "They may burrow for hours—for days—but they will never see the light of day again!"

"By heavens," muttered one of the other men, "it is drastic, Hunter!"

"Drastic!" snapped Hunter. "How would you have it, then? Those four in the cavern are chiefly responsible for all our troubles. They have been paid for their folly—paid in full. Bah! You are a coward, Slater!"

Slater, who was a somewhat elderly man, with thin, sharp features, frowned at the taunt.

"I won't argue with you, Hunter," he said. "Our best policy is to get away from this district as soon as we possibly can. It is too hot to hold us—hotter now than ever before. You may like these excitements, but I am a man of quiet habits myself. The whole thing is distasteful to me."

"But you raise no objection to setting other people to do violent deeds—eh?" said Hunter sourly. "Splendid, Slater! You feel that your brain is of more value than your muscle—eh?"

Slater made no reply, and the four men walked along the tunnel. Hunter had been surveying the result of the minor explosion, and he was perfectly satisfied. He knew quite well that the obstruction was immovable. Any determined attack to clear away the debris would only result in a further fall of rock.

"I am particularly pleased about the boys," continued Hunter, as he walked ahead of his companions. "Indeed, I am inclined to congratulate myself most heartily. Those boys are young demons, and it gives me astounding pleasure to know that they will never see another day."

"Oh, don't harp on it!" growled Slater.

"My dear fellow, I shall harp on it until I am tired of doing so," said Mr. Hunter evenly. "We have tricked our enemies in the most delicious manner, and why should we not express satisfaction? Complete liberty is before us; but I have not finished yet. Oh, no!"

"What do you mean?" asked one of the others.

"Exactly what I say."

"But we are leaving the district at once, surely?" asked Slater sharply.

Mr. Hunter shook his head.

"Not quite at once, my friend," he replied. "I intend to pay another visit to that noble seat of learning, St. Frank's College. The Headmaster will probably be most delighted to see me; and there are other reasons."

"But it is madness!" exclaimed Slater huskily. "Don't be so insanely rash, Hunter. Escape while you have the chance——"

"That's enough!" said Hunter coldly.

"Good heavens, man, cannot you see that you will endanger your own position—and ours?" demanded Slater angrily. "An hour ago we believed that capture would be our fate. And now that we have a splendid chance of escaping, you suggest this mad idea! It is suicidal!"

Mr. Hunter smiled.

"Selfishness—eh?" he said pleasantly.

"You are thinking of your own skin, Slater. But have no fear. I shall not endanger your liberty in the slightest degree. The delay will be but brief, and I shall accomplish much."

"What are your intentions?"

"I will tell you that later on," was Hunter's brief reply.

And the party proceeded in silence to the exit. They arrived, and found the moon still shining placidly and serenely. The night was perfect, and the world seemed a sweet place to live in.

"Yes, I think that will do splendidly," exclaimed Hunter, as though speaking his thoughts aloud. "Let me see, what is the time?"

"Twenty minutes to one," said Slater, consulting his watch.

"We have no time to waste," continued Hunter. "These June nights are absurdly short, and we must be away long before dawn. But it can be done—easily. I have formulated my plans to the last detail. You three will leave me here, and you will go at once to the secret boathouse."

"Are you not coming with us?" asked Slater.

"Not yet. I want you to get the motor-boat out in readiness," said Hunter. "Have it near the river bank, just at the foot of the school playing-fields. I dare say I shall be there even before you are ready."

"But I do not see——"

"And I do not intend you to see," was Hunter's cold interjection. "You have your orders, and that is sufficient. Make no blunders, Slater. I leave you in charge, and you are responsible. Have the boat at the spot I mentioned as quickly as possible. Trust me, and everything will be all right."

And Mr. Hunter, without another word, nodded and walked away. His companions found it necessary to walk in the same direction, but Hunter evidently preferred to be alone. He paced on in front briskly and with a buoyant step. Although his chief plans and schemes had been completely wrecked, the prospect of a bitter revenge caused him to be almost cheerful once more.

But he was now in a very dangerous condition. His success in the tunnel had a curious effect; he felt that he could go to any dastardly length in perfect safety. In a certain way Mr. Hunter was suffering from a kind of madness. It was a madness brought on by intensely bitter hatred.

By the time he arrived at the school his plans were quite clear. He was positive that Dr. Stafford would still be in his study, and in this supposition he was not wrong. A light glowed behind the thick curtain in the Head's study. But the remainder of the school was in total darkness.

Just as Mr. Hunter was about to cross the Triangle a dim form came out from behind a clump of bushes. Hunter paused abruptly. The form came nearer.

"Is—is that you, sir?" came a hoarse whisper.

Mr. Hunter smiled.

"Why, Bates, I wondered where you had got to," he exclaimed softly. "You are just the very fellow I want."

Bates, the page-boy, breathed with relief.

"I have been mortal afraid that something 'ad 'appened to you, sir," he explained huskily. "You want me, sir? I'm ready to do anything you like—but it's risky, ain't it? Oughtn't we to escape —"

"Now, Bates, I don't want any grumbles from you," said Mr. Hunter. "I am about to visit the worthy Dr. Stafford, and your assistance will probably be of use. No, no questions. Follow me!"

Bates did so without saying anything further. He was not merely a page-boy, although he had held that position in the Ancient House under Mr. Hunter's rule. He was really the Housemaster's confidant in many matters—a trustworthy messenger. And Hunter deemed it singularly fortunate that he had turned up just now.

The pair entered the Ancient House boldly, the side door being unlocked. Of course it wasn't usually unlocked at night, but the Headmaster was still in his study, and he was expecting the return of Nelson Lee at any minute.

Dr. Stafford had been setting his study into something like order for the past hour, in order to pass the time. He had been away from St. Frank's for some little time, and had returned to find many changes wrought by Mr. Hunter.

He was sitting at his desk when he heard the door open at the end of the wide corridor. Brisk footsteps sounded, and the Head adjusted his glasses expectantly. He was quite sure that Nelson Lee was about to enter.

The door opened.

"You are back sooner than I—— Good gracious me!" gasped the Head, starting back in his chair.

There was every reason for his dismay. It was not Nelson Lee who entered, but Hunter himself! And, to make matters worse, Hunter was holding a revolver in a perfectly steady grip. Behind him stood Bates.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Dr. Stafford," said Hunter smoothly. "You will allow me

to point out that your position is quite hopeless. If you attempt to cry for help, you will be shot at once. Please understand that."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Head, aghast. "You—you scoundrel!"

"Very possibly!" agreed Hunter calmly. "From your point of view, Dr. Stafford, I am certainly a scoundrel. And, for that reason, I urge you to remain calm. An absurd series of cries on your part would only end in disaster!"

The Head sat forward, his eyes gleaming.

"What do you mean, sir?" he asked, his voice quivering. "How dare you come here in this fashion? I understood that you were trapped——"

"I am quite a slippery customer," interrupted Hunter, with a genial smile. "If it will give you any consolation, I may as well inform you that your excellent friend Mr. Kent is trapped himself. The boys with him—Bennett, Tregellis-West, and Watson—are in a similar unfortunate plight."

"I don't understand you," panted the Head furiously.

"Then let me make myself clear," was Hunter's reply. "The four persons I just mentioned will never see St. Frank's again. I am painfully blunt, you will observe. They are buried alive—there is no escape for them!"

Dr. Stafford turned deathly pale.

"You are mad, sir!" he gasped.

"That, too, is quite possible," agreed Hunter, with a coldness which caused even Bates to shiver. "I am mad with hatred—hatred for this school, and for every living individual within its walls!"

"Upon my soul!" stammered Dr. Stafford.

"Before I leave I intend to show you to what lengths my hatred will take me," continued Hunter. "But I have no wish to be hampered in my movements, and it will be as well, Dr. Stafford, if you submit quietly to the treatment you will now undergo. Believe me, resistance will be quite foolish."

Hunter moved a step nearer, and pointed his revolver at the Head's face.

"Bates, you will find some stout cord in my left coat pocket," he said. "Take it out, and bind this worthy gentleman to his chair."

Hunter could have got the cord himself, but he meant to give Dr. Stafford no opportunity of making a sudden break. Hunter's whole attention was needed to the task, and he looked deadly grim.

"You—you ruffian!" said the Head helplessly.

He knew well enough that he could do nothing. A hot-headed man would probably have acted foolishly. But, fortunately for himself, Dr. Stafford remained sufficiently calm to realise that resistance would have been dangerous. He read the evil glint in Hunter's eyes.

And, unable to resist, he was securely bound to the chair by the energetic Bates. The cords were drawn so tightly, indeed, that the Head was in considerable pain. He made no

mention of this fact, knowing full well that the knowledge would only give pleasure to his tormentors.

Finally Mr. Hunter ordered Bates to bind a thick scarf round the prisoner's mouth. This was done, and then the revolver was stowed away.

"A certain waste of time, no doubt," said Mr. Hunter pleasantly. "But I feel more comfortable now—although possibly you will not echo my words. My intention, Dr. Stafford, is to obtain certain papers from this apartment—papers which are of vital importance to me. And, since it has been necessary for me to plan this visit, I do not intend to leave without gaining some further satisfaction."

The Head made no reply; talking through several folds of a scarf was somewhat difficult, if not quite impossible.

"Now, Bates, help me," added Hunter briskly.

The pair proceeded to ransack the study. They worked with speed, and several bundles of papers were procured from the safe, which had been locked—the key being in Hunter's possession.

The carpet was turned back and a secret receptacle laid bare. Here there was another bundle of papers, and Hunter pocketed them calmly.

"I think that is all," he exclaimed. "But there is just one other thing. Bates, take this revolver and remain on guard here for a few minutes. I shall not be long. I rely upon you."

Bates took the weapon rather gingerly, and Mr. Hunter at once left the apartment and made his way down the corridor. He left the building, but returned at the end of five minutes.

There was a very curious glint in his eyes as he laid a square metal box, which was of considerable weight, on the desk.

"This little contrivance was kept near at hand—in full preparation for this emergency," he explained. "You may go now," Bates.

"Where to, sir?"

"Oh, you may as well wait for me at the bottom of the playing fields," replied Hunter. "Go at once, boy."

Bates went, and Hunter glanced at his watch.

"Yes, everything is quite in order," he explained. "I have already told you, Dr. Stafford, that certain individuals are buried alive. My activities do not cease there. I leave St. Frank's hunted and hounded. And I intend to take my revenge. Do you understand that?"

There was something wild in the man's expression now, and the Headmaster was filled with grave uneasiness.

"Within twenty minutes from now this noble school will be a pile of ruins!" was Mr. Hunter's next amazing statement. "There will be hundreds killed. Oh, yes, it will be a very tragic occurrence. The press will have something of an unusual nature to talk about."

He bent over the curious metal box, and when he looked up again there was a madly fanatical light in his evil eyes. The Head felt almost sick as he regarded him. And his own helplessness was well-nigh unbearable.

"A heap of ruins!" repeated Hunter softly. "But what do I care—it will fill me with superb delight. This establishment is British—its inmates are British. And I hate them—do you hear? I hate everything that is connected with this accursed country."

The Head listened with amazement. This outburst was unexpected and terrible. And another was to follow at once.

"There are boys in this establishment—healthy, growing boys, who will soon be young men," continued Hunter, his voice quivering. "They will make good soldiers—they will be trained as officers to lead armies into the field. By heaven! Every boy destroyed now will be a soldier less later on—every death will reduce the man-power of the nation! Can you understand, you slow-witted old man? The boys of St. Frank's represent a proportion of Britain's coming manhood. I mean to destroy them—to destroy them as though they were so many vermin!"

Hunter's voice had risen in his wild excitement; he stood before the Head, his face glowing, his eyes glittering with madness. Dr. Stafford, appalled, sat listening with a choking feeling in his throat.

Without a doubt the man's brain was turned! He was mad—mad! And the Head knew his own helplessness and suffered torture. Hunter was a scoundrel—a criminal—but this side of his character was new.

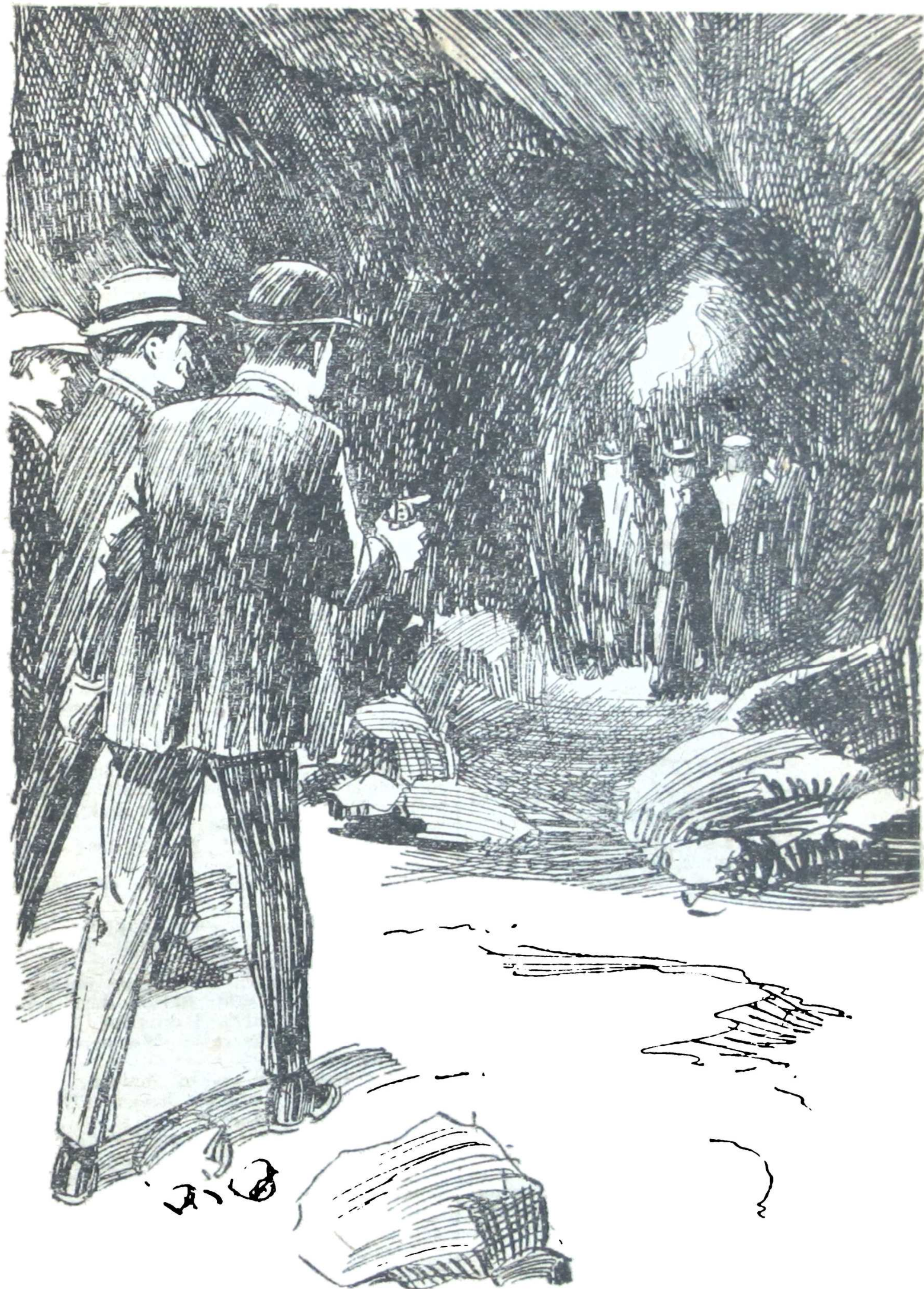
"If it were possible, I would exterminate the whole vile race!" he exclaimed intensely. "I am British—and so were my parents—but I hate the country; I detest the whole nation. Before many years the proud spirit of these islanders will be cast into the dust. A change will come—oh, yes! It will be a glorious change, my friend. The greatest nation under the glowing sun will rule in the British Isles. Need I say more? Germany—Germany! Do you hear me, you do it? Germany will control the British Islands and the British Empire. You will be crushed—crushed to powder beneath the heel of the conquering Prussian!"

Hunter laughed madly, and jerked a lever in the side of the metal box.

"I have done it!" he exclaimed exultantly. "Do you know what this is, Dr. Stafford? Is your puny mind of sufficient depth to grasp the significance of my action? I have released the safety-catch, and at the expiration of fifteen minutes, to the second, St. Frank's will cease to exist! This is the moment I have been waiting for, and it has come—it has come!"

The Head was dazed with horror.

"This box contains explosive," said Hunter softly. "Oh, it is not dynamite. It is something a thousand times more powerful. You will be blown to dust, Dr. Stafford;



"I advise you to stop exactly where you are," shouted Inspector Lennard abruptly, covering the men with his revolver.—(See page 4.)

you will vanish in a second. St. Frank's will crumble to ruins, and the boys will die by hundreds."

He glanced at his watch.

"At half past one, precisely, the disaster will occur," he went on. "Your clock is right, Dr. Stafford. Watch it, and count the seconds. Perhaps you wonder why I do not explode the machine now? I must have time to get clear, for there is other work for me to do in this country—other work of a similar nature. I will leave you, my friend, and I trust you will avail yourself of your last minutes to think of the glorious future."

The Head watched this fanatic—this insane dreamer—as he crossed to the door. He was not the same man as he had been an hour since. A cunning, crafty, horrible expression had come into his face. And this, coupled with his genial smile, made him ghastly to look upon. He was unnatural—uncanny.

The door opened, and Hunter passed through. The Head heard his footsteps in the flagged corridor outside. Then the outer door softly closed.

Dr. Stafford was alone with the appalling thing on the table.

And he could do nothing to avert the terrible disaster which threatened. The chair was heavy, and the Head was bound to it in such a way that he could not move an inch.

He was forced to sit there, with Death staring at him, and the clock ticked slowly and steadily.

CHAPTER V.

TRAPPED IN THE CAVERN A DISCOVERY—IN THE RICK OF TIME.

I CLUNG my fists desperately.

"But there must be a way out, gov'nor!" I declared. "There must be! Oh, why can't we think of something?"

Nelson Lee patted my shoulder gently.

"My dear lad, what is there to think of?" he asked. "There are three exits to this cavern and they are all hopelessly blocked. We can do nothing but wait for deliverance from outside. It will come, I have no doubt. But we may have to wait for hours—perhaps days."

"Begad! What about feedin'?" murmured Mr. Montie. "It'll be frightfully awkward. It'll be worse than our troubles over the barrin' out—it will, really."

"The barrin' out, Montie, was a picnic compared with this," I said gloomily. "And how do we know that we shall be dug out of here? When they try to clear all that rubbish away the whole place might collapse."

"Cheerful, ain't you?" growled Watson.

"Well, this place is enough to give anybody the grumps," I replied. "When I think of Hunter escaping it makes me bubble over. Oh, it's rotten! Just when we'd got him, too!"

"In a straightforward fight Hunter would have been easily beaten," remarked Nelson Lee quietly. "He owes his success to black treachery. And in the end, boys, treachery does not pay. Our position is serious, but we must not give up hope. Indeed, we will have a look round once more."

I knew very well that the gov'nor had no idea that we should be able to escape. But he wanted to keep us busy; he wanted to prevent us brooding over the disaster which had occurred. Inactivity was not to be encouraged, and sleep was impossible. We were too worried to think of sleep.

We commenced the examination without enthusiasm. What was the good? We had gone over the place before—every inch of it. And then we had stood together in a group at the side of the cavern.

There were printing-machines there—beautiful articles, of the most modern type. But now they were wrecked and ruined. Hunter had done it deliberately, of course. There were other machines, too, but I didn't trouble to find out what they were. I had no interest in the matter whatever.

We searched about, trying to find another opening. We knew we shouldn't find it, but we searched, all the same. A gallery ran round a portion of the cavern, but it led nowhere. A tunnel had been there at one time, but this, too, was blocked up. The place was a prison.

The only exit was that leading towards the hollow tree on the island. This tunnel was quite all right for a distance of fifty or sixty yards. But then we were faced by a solid steel door. Beyond that the tunnel was flooded to the roof.

I suddenly thought of something, and considered it carefully before making any remark. Then I called a halt, and began to get just a little excited.

"I say, gov'nor," I said. "I—I was wondering—"

"Begad! Have you thought of somethin', old boy?"

"Well, it is something, I suppose," I admitted. "I was thinking about that steel door down the tunnel."

"My dear Nipper, we can do nothing in that direction," said Nelson Lee gently. "You know as well as I do that the tunnel is completely submerged. We cannot even open the door."

"Why not, sir?" asked Watson. "Suppose we pulled the bolts back? The flood would rush in then—"

"On the contrary, Watson, the flood would remain as it is," interposed Lee. "The door opens the other way—which is perhaps fortunate. The bolts would never have held against such pressure, and the whole cavern would have been flooded out. If we drew the bolts it would make no difference whatever."

"That's what I was wondering, sir," I said. "Suppose we all pushed against the door—against the pressure of water? Do you think we should be able to let the water through gradually? It would reduce the level."

and then we might be able to wade through — Oh, but it's no good, of course!"

The expression on Nelson Lee's face had taken the enthusiasm out of me. I could plainly see that my idea was an impossible one.

"We should never be able to push against such pressure, Nipper," he said, shaking his head. "We might try, of course. If it will give you any satisfaction we will make the attempt at once."

It was something to do, at all events. And we all marched down the tunnel, Nelson Lee leading the way with his torch. We had been down there before, but had done nothing. The tunnel dipped just before the door was reached, and we splashed our way through a foot of water, which had leaked through.

"By James!" exclaimed Nelson Lee abruptly.

There was something in his tone which set my heart jumping.

"What's up, sir?" I asked.

"I don't know—I don't know, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "But it is very strange—don't you notice anything?"

We crowded round him and gazed at the dull steel door.

"It's just the same as it was, sir," I said at last.

"The door is, yes—but look again, young 'un."

"Begad! There's somethin' in this," declared Sir Montie, nodding his head. "I don't know what it is, but it must be somethin' big. Mr. Alvin-ton wouldn't say a thing like that unless he had a frightfully good cause."

"Oh, rats!" I exclaimed impatiently. "I can't see anything!"

"It's not what you can see, but what you can't see!" was the gov'nor's exasperating reply. "Think, boys—think!"

"I say, this is too bad!" I roared. "How the dickens can we think when we're in this state. The door's just the same—the water's just the same—and the walls are just the same!"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"And yet you must remember that there was a distinct jet of water flowing through a crevice a foot from the top of the door," he said keenly. "It was quite an aggressive jet, proving that the pressure was very considerable. The crevice is still there, but the water is no longer flowing."

We all stared. The gov'nor was quite right. The little hole was just at the side of the door pillar. The light showed that it was quite clear—nothing was blocking it up. And I gave a yell.

"The level of the water's gone down!" I shouted.

"Without doubt, Nipper," replied Lee.

"I suspect that there is still an enormous amount in the tunnel, but the very fact that the level has been reduced proves that the inflow from the river has ceased or is greatly lessened. Something has happened which we did not reckon upon, and which is

outside Mr. Hunter's calculations. This development deserves careful investigation."

"Shall we try to open the door, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"It will be as well, my boy."

Nelson Lee reached up and pulled back the top bolt. It slipped easily enough, for the pressure on the other side of the door made it go freely. The door itself was like the front of a strong room—solid, massive steel plates. It had been built especially to guard against a possible flood.

The gov'nor reached down and plunged his hand into the water near the floor. We heard the lower bolt shoot back, but, of course, nothing happened. It was as though dozens of men were pressing on the door from the other side.

"Let's push for all we're worth," I suggested.

Nelson Lee tried alone first; but, although he exerted all his strength, he could not budge the door an inch. And suddenly a horrible thought struck me.

"Great Scott!" I gasped. "Supposing—the bolts are shot on the other side? There are bolts there, you know. What if they're fastened?"

"They're not, Nipper," said the gov'nor calmly.

"Oh! How do you know?"

"Because I felt the door move perceptibly just now," was the reply. "It was only a very slight movement, but I could not have caused it had those bolts been in position. Come, help me with your youthful strength."

We helped with a will.

At the very first heave the door opened about two inches. A terrific rush of water burst through, swamping us, and then the pressure caused the door to crash back into its position with a hard, metallic thud.

"Oh, begad! I'm soakin'!" gasped Sir Montie.

"Blow that!" I panted. "We can do it—we can do it!"

"Don't be too sure, Nipper," warned the gov'nor. "It will be quite impossible for us to hold the door open for longer than a few seconds. Therefore we must have a wedge handy, and jam it in at the right moment."

I stared round excitedly.

"There's nothing here, sir—"

"But there are several chunks of wood in the cavern—small beams, in fact," said Nelson Lee. "Take this torch and fetch two or three of them at once. Upon my soul! I believe we shall be able to defeat Hunter yet!"

We were all filled with wild enthusiasm. Tommy and I dashed off to the cavern to get the wood. We found several chunks, and rushed back with them.

"They will do admirably," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "We will place one in position and then exert every ounce of strength of which we are capable. And look out for the rush of water—it will be quite enormous."

The end of the piece of wood was placed against the edge of the door, at the point where it would open. Nelson Lee held it in position with one hand, and pressed against the door with his shoulder.

"Now, all together!" he panted.

We simply pushed with desperation. With a terrific heave the door opened about four inches. The flood came shooting through in the most alarming manner. The piece of wood was nearly swept away. How the guv'nor got it through the opening was a mystery.

But I felt a thud, and released the pressure. And the fact that the water was still rushing through proved that the wedge was in position. The door could not close, and the water was therefore surging into our section of the tunnel like a young edition of Niagara Falls.

It was simply terrific.

The pressure behind the door was considerable, but not nearly so great as we had supposed. If it had been greater we couldn't have moved the door in the slightest degree.

Hiss-ss!

The cascade came pouring through in a solid spurt, shooting a couple of yards out direct. The whole tunnel was smothered in spray and volumes of water. I needn't add that we were soaked to the skin in less than thirty seconds.

And we were not only soaked, but half-drowned as well. We staggered back blindly, deafened by the tremendous roar of the torrent. Having retreated about twenty yards, we came to a stop.

"Great pip!" spluttered Watson. "We've—we've done it!"

"It now remains to be seen whether we have made our position better or worse," said Nelson Lee. "If the water continues at this rate for very long, we shall be in a pretty fix indeed. But I am confident that the reverse will be the case. The inflow of water from the river must be greatly reduced."

"It's shockin'!" complained Sir Montie. "I wouldn't mind if it was only wet, begad! But it's so frightfully muddy, you know! I'm simply in a fearful state. An' you look disgraceful, Benny!"

I snorted.

"I don't care how I look!" I replied, shaking the water out of my hair. "The main thing is to get out of this beastly prison. Great Scott! What a cascade!"

We found it necessary to shout in order to make ourselves heard. There was one satisfactory thing; the door couldn't possibly close again, neither could the wedge get out of position.

The flood of water continued, and it rose rapidly in the tunnel, swirling round our legs fiercely. But I noticed something of a very satisfactory nature after five minutes had elapsed.

"The force is lessening, sir," I said. "That spurt of water isn't half so fierce now. I wonder how long we shall have to wait?"

"You mustn't be impatient, my boy," said the guv'nor. "I am trying to imagine how this state of affairs came about. According to all reckoning, the tunnel on the other side of the door ought to have been flooded to the very roof."

There could be only one explanation, of course. The inrush from the river had been stopped—the hole had probably got clogged up with mud and reeds; or there had been a further collapse, blocking up the hole entirely. At all events, there was no more water coming down.

And, once we had released the huge body which had collected in the tunnel, the level was reduced astonishingly. Before long, in fact, the rush had ceased altogether and had changed to a moderate flow.

"Come, boys," said Nelson Lee briskly.

We waded forward, and soon found that a heave sent the door open completely. A big wave hit us, but the rush was over. And then, excited and eager, we pushed forward towards the shaft which led upwards to the outer air—and freedom.

When a fellow's in a tight hole he imagines all sorts of nasty things. And for some time past, I had been troubled with an ugly suspicion that the shaft was blocked up. I soon found that my fears were groundless.

The shaft was free and the iron ladder intact, although twisted somewhat at the foot. Nelson Lee smiled at us comfortably.

"My boys, I did not expect to escape so easily as this," he said. "We have much to be thankful for. In spite of Hunter's brutal plans, the way to freedom is open to us."

"Let's get out, for goodness' sake," I said impatiently.

"That's my idea, old man," agreed Sir Montie. "I sha'n't feel happy until I see the giddy daylight again—but it's moonlight, ain't it? It seems as though we've been down here for a frightful time."

"It's just ten past one now," said the guv'nor. "Our imprisonment was only of short duration, after all. But I mustn't speak too soon, must I? We don't know what awaits us at the top of the shaft."

"Oh, don't put a damper on us, for goodness' sake!" I protested.

"Begad! We're damp enough already—we are, really!"—said Tregellis-West. "Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm goin' to take a swim in the river. It's really necessary. This shockin' mud is clingin' to me fearfully."

We mounted the ladder quickly, Nelson Lee leading the way, as before. And at last he found himself at the exit, with the moon shining down through the leaves of the clustered trees.

"Wait, boys—wait!" he whispered sharply.

This was just about the limit, but we were forced to wait. I managed to squeeze myself up beside the guv'nor, and found him staring down the river intently.

"What's up, sir?" I breathed.

"Watch, Nipper!" he whispered.

I was too glad at the sight of the moon to think of much else. But as I clung there and felt Sir Montie grabbing at my leg below, I heard a faint throbbing upon the air.

And a few seconds later I saw something moving upon the surface of the river. A motor-boat was coming along; it had moved out from a little creek a half-mile lower down.

"By jingo!" I murmured. "That's Hunter's boat, isn't it?"

"Yes, young 'un, and it seems to be coming up the river towards us," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "We must be careful. They may be coming to this very island."

"Then we shall be taken at a disadvantage——"

"Not at all," broke in the gov'nor. "Tell your chums to follow at once. We will get out of this tree and creep among the bushes."

It sounded queer for the gov'nor to say that, but it was quite true. The iron ladder projected right upwards through the centre of a hollow tree. Nobody would have supposed that the gaunt old thing was an exit from an underground tunnel.

As silently as possible we jumped down one by one and took cover in the bushes. Two minutes later the motor-boat came speeding past—it didn't stop until it reached the lower end of the school playing-fields, some distance up.

"That's queer, sir!" I breathed.

"It looks to me, Nipper, as though Hunter has paid another visit to the school," said Nelson Lee shrewdly. "He wasn't in that boat, and it has obviously come here in order to meet Hunter. By James! If we are sharp we may—— But, come!"

Without another word the gov'nor plunged into the water silently and swam towards the opposite bank. It was June, and the water was by no means icy. Added to which we were already soaked to the skin, so it made no difference. And we weren't likely to catch cold if we kept moving.

We arrived in a bunch—with most of the mud washed off,

"Now, boys—run!" said Nelson Lee crisply.

We didn't need any further telling. He led the way across the meadow, and we pelted after him, leaving a watery trail behind. And we made for the lower corner of Little Side, breaking through the hedge without ceremony.

St. Frank's was in view—dark and silent in the midsummer night. It seemed impossible that all this villainy could be going on. It was all so unreal—so unnatural.

But we had every reason to know that the thing was stern reality. And if there was the slightest chance of collaring Hunter, we were on to it with both hands, so to speak.

We cut across Little Side and entered the Triangle. There was not a soul in sight, but a light gleamed from behind the blinds in Dr. Stafford's study. Nelson Lee ran across to the private door, opened it, and dashed along the corridor. I believe he had

a sort of suspicion that something was terribly wrong.

Sir Montie and Tommy and I crowded after him, and we all entered the study in a breathless, excited group. If Dr. Stafford was surprised to see us—and I daresay we looked a pretty set of scarecrows—we were simply astounded to see him.

For the reverend Head of St. Frank's was sitting in his chair, gagged and bound! But he was making the most extraordinary contortions with his face, and I saw him glance at the clock.

The time was twenty-seven minutes past one, but there seemed nothing very alarming in that. Nelson Lee tore round the desk and removed the thick scarf from the Head's face. For just a moment Dr. Stafford choked.

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven!" he gasped in a husky whisper. "That—that box!"

"Well—well?"

"For the love of mercy remove it!" shouted the Head, finding his voice, and speaking with mad desperation. "It is an infernal machine—a bomb! Hunter was here—it will go off at half-past—great Heaven above, it is too late——"

The Head choked again, and his face was as pale as chalk. I stood dazed and confused, and Sir Montie and Tommy were in a similar condition. But Nelson Lee kept his head the whole time.

"Out of the way, boys!" he roared.

He seized the curious metal box which stood on the desk and dashed to the door with it. And then, at that second, I realised the appalling truth. The thing was timed to go off within a minute practically! And the gov'nor had got it in his hands and was——

My thoughts simply muddled themselves up. Supposing the time-fuse, or whatever it was, went wrong? Supposing the thing exploded in Nelson Lee's hands? I felt sick and faint. And where was he going, anyhow?

"He will be killed!" gasped the Head weakly.

My wits returned and I dashed to the door. Nelson Lee was rushing across the Triangle—and I understood. He reached the fountain, and thrust the infernal machine into the water. It sank at once.

Then the gov'nor came hurrying back. He had done all that was possible, and now we could only wait.

Those minutes were terrible ones.

CHAPTER VI.

HOT ON THE SCENT—AT CAISTOWE—THE DEFEAT OF KENNEDY HUNTER.

DR. STAFFORD grasped Nelson Lee's hand feverishly.

"It was brave of you, Mr. Lee," he muttered. "By heaven! It was amazingly brave! That thing might have gone off——"

"Nonsense!" said the gov'nor smilingly.

"If there had been any real danger of it exploding I should have suffered just the same."

"That's all very well, sir," I said. "You were in terrible danger—and you jolly well know it, too. Oh, the Hun—the frightful Prussian!"

"He is mad, Bennett," exclaimed the Head wearily. "I am quite convinced that the man is out of his mind. It is twenty minutes to two now, so I suppose that infernal machine will not go off."

Ten minutes had passed, and during that time the gov'nor had obtained the brief facts from the Head. Nelson Lee was looking very grim. Our arrival had been most opportune, for we had just saved St. Frank's from an appalling disaster.

"I cannot explain what has happened to us," said Lee. "We must be off at once—at least, I must. The boys had better go off to bed—"

"Oh," we exclaimed, in dismay.

Nelson Lee regarded us critically.

"Well, perhaps I'll take you with me," he said. "You may as well make a night of it. But there is not a second to lose. Hunter and his men have made off in the motor-boat, and they are dropping down the river to the sea."

"How do you know that, sir?" I asked quickly.

"There are locks higher up the river, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "The boat would find itself blocked within a mile. Moreover, it is only natural that the scoundrels should make for the sea: it offers them a wider field."

"Then what are we to do, sir?" I asked quickly. "We haven't got a motor-boat, and we can't follow. Oh, my hat! And Hunter must have got a good start by this time, too. Do you think he'll come back because the explosion hasn't happened? He must know that the bomb hasn't acted."

"He is well aware of that by this time, my boy. But he will probably realise that something of this nature has occurred—that that machine had been rendered harmless," replied Lee. "In that case he will have all the more reason to hasten his flight. We must not lose a moment."

"But—but how —"

"There are two motor-cars in the garage," went on the gov'nor. "We must rush to Caistowe immediately. The river winds somewhat, and we can arrive at the coast long before Hunter. It is just a chance—but the only course we can safely pursue. I intend to head the fugitives off."

"Begad! That'll be rather rippin'," commented Montie. "I shouldn't mind a bit if I was dressed decently, you know. But I'm frightfully wet an' untidy—"

"You can go to bed if you like," I struck in.

"Dear old boy, I wouldn't miss this for worlds!" replied Montie placidly. "Not for whole bunches of worlds, begad!"

Nelson Lee was all ready. He did not explain matters to Dr. Stafford, and the latter, I believe, was relieved. After his terribly

trying ordeal he needed rest, and had no wish to be bewildered by further details.

This was a night, indeed!

The next thing was to get out the motor-car, and this was done promptly. The tanks were already filled, and everything was prepared for immediate departure. We started off straight away.

Nelson Lee took the wheel, of course. I daresay we were extremely foolish, judging from a doctor's standpoint. He would have ordered us to bed. But we didn't care a lot for such matters just then. And, after all, it was a mild night, and we were not likely to take much harm.

But I had suggested something at the last moment—a really ripping idea. Tommy and I had dashed up into a box-room and had seized bundles of clothing—anybody's. This was tumbled into the rear of the car, and then we started.

So during the journey we rapidly stripped our wet things off and donned the dry ones. Shirts and collars were missing, but these didn't matter much. It was fortunate that the worthy country-folk were all asleep, otherwise the spectacle of a travelling dressing-room might have caused a scandal.

Tommy and Montie were jolly pleased, for the dry things were quite comfortable. I had brought some for Nelson Lee—they were Mr. Crowell's, I believe—but he was unable to don them. I offered to take the wheel whilst the gov'nor changed, but he didn't avail himself of the opportunity.

He was concentrating all his efforts upon reaching Caistowe in double-quick time. And I must say that we covered the ground at an alarming speed. I've travelled quickly in motor-cars many a time, but this trip was hair-raising. It's a wonder how we changed our things at all.

We didn't pass any other vehicle on the way and didn't see a soul. And at last we arrived in the little town of Caistowe. During the present season it was full of select visitors, but everything was quiet and still.

I didn't quite know how the gov'nor was going to get to work now. The mouth of the Stowe was fairly wide, and we couldn't put a rope across it. But as we tumbled out of the car on the sea front we saw a sailing-ship riding at anchor in the bay. It was a schooner, and looked a very trim craft in the moonlight.

"There's only one thing to be done," said Nelson Lee sharply. "We must row out to that ship and interview the captain. There are probably guns on board, and I mean to take drastic action if necessary."

"But you wouldn't fire on 'em, sir?" gasped Watson.

"You don't seem to realise, my boy, that these men are far more dangerous than a ship-load of Germans!" said Nelson Lee. "Such an action on my part would be fully upheld by the authorities—make no mistake about that. If Hunter escapes it will be a disaster."

We ran down the jetty, and found plenty of boats lying there to select from. And

In two minutes we were rowing out vigorously towards the anchored schooner. Her decks commanded the mouth of the Stowe perfectly, and Hunter's motor-boat could easily be spotted in the moonlight once it came into view.

Our boat scraped against the schooner's side, and we tumbled over the bulwarks helter-skelter. A man came forward quickly, and with every evidence of astonishment. He paused in an uncertain manner.

"I want to see the captain—at once!" said Nelson Lee. "There is nothing to be afraid of, my good man. Is the captain on board?"

"Who in thunder are you?" asked the man suspiciously.

"I want to see the skipper——"

"There's somebody coming up the companion now," I broke in. "It may be the captain himself. We shall lose precious time if we mess about like this."

A big man, only partially dressed, appeared on deck. He seemed to be familiar, somehow, and the next moment I let out a yell.

"Captain Burton!" I roared delightedly.

"Well, upon my soul! This is most fortunate," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "How are you, Captain Burton? I'm afraid——"

"Why, it's Mr. Alvington!" said the skipper, striding forward and seizing the gov'nor's hand. "And the boys, too! What in the name of thunder does it mean? There's something wrong, isn't there?"

Nelson Lee took the captain aside and talked to him swiftly. Montie and Tommy and I hardly knew what to think. To find Captain Burton on board was extraordinary, to our minds. He was the father of Tom Burton, of the Remove, known in the Ancient House as the Bo'sun.

We had met Captain Burton before, and liked him immensely. That he should be on hand at such an opportune moment was rather astounding. And yet, as we afterwards found out, the thing was perfectly natural.

"By ginger!" the skipper ejaculated. "I don't pretend to understand the whole game, but I know that there's no time to lose. Yes, I've got guns, and you can use them. But, my dear man, you'll wake the whole neighbourhood! Wouldn't it be better to use the motor-boat?"

"You've got one, then?" asked Lee quickly.

"She's hitched on astern at this very minute," said Captain Burton. "If you'd care to use her——"

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed the gov'nor exultantly. "By Jove! You are the right man in the right place, Captain Burton. It is amazingly lucky that you should be able to help us at such a vital moment as this."

It was all a tremendous rush. Full explanations would come afterwards. But the most important thing now was to get after Hunter.

The motor-boat, we found, was a brand-new craft—a powerful vessel capable of high speed. Hunter's boat was insignificant by comparison. And in less than five minutes

we had started, Captain Burton himself at the wheel.

We shot away towards the river mouth, and cut through the water in a manner which filled me with glee.

"This is something like, my sons!" I exclaimed joyfully.

"Dear boy, it's rippin'!" declared Sir Montie. "I do believe that we shall win the game, after all. There's only one thing troublin' me."

"What's that?"

"I'm quite sure that you meant well, Benny boy, but these clothes are simply shockin'," said Tregellis West, who was ultra-sensitive on questions of attire. "I feel horrid, you know. An' I'm ashamed to be seen without a collar——"

"Oh, dry up!" I roared. "Ye gods and little fishes! Fancy talking of clothes at such a time as this! If you ain't careful, Montie, we'll pitch you overboard, neck and crop!"

"Begad!"

Sir Montie subsided—not because he was afraid of being pitched overboard, but because he realised that we displayed a sad lack of sympathy in his sore complaint. Sir Montie would have talked about his clothes in the most appalling troubles and trials.

"I was coming up to the school tomorrow," I heard Captain Burton say to the gov'nor. "By the Lord Harry! There's something exciting doing, isn't there? You don't usually do these sort of things, Mr. Alvington?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"It is certainly not a part of a schoolmaster's duty," he replied. "I shall explain the whole matter to you when we are at leisure, Captain Burton. I shall even go to the length of taking you into my confidence in a certain little matter."

"That sounds mysterious," said the skipper. "By jingo! You're making me curious, my dear sir. And how's my son? How's the Bo'sun?"

"Oh, he's getting on splendidly——"

"I don't want to be rude, Mr. Alvington," said the Captain suddenly. "When you came on board the schooner I knew your voice in a moment. But, darn me, you look different, somehow. I'm hanged if I can quite get the hang of it. Your voice gave me the tip, and the youngsters finished it. I knew you were Mr. Alvington all right. But what have you done to your face, sir? I don't want to be personal, but, by Cæsar, it's queer!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"That's all connected with the little secret," he explained. "I'm not denying your suggestion, Captain Burton. I do look different. If I were to attempt to explain matters here, you could not grasp it all without sadly neglecting the more important matter of controlling the boat."

The skipper nodded.

"I'll wait," he said in his blunt, bluff way. "But I'm a curious old sort, Mr. Alvington. I'll give you fair warning that I don't want to wait long. And there's come—"

thing I've got to say to you, too. I daresay you remember a certain little conversation we had some months ago——"

"I remember every detail of it," smiled Nelson Lee. "I am by no means in the dark regarding your presence at Caistowe, Captain Burtain."

"By jingo! That's first class!" roared Captain Burtain heartily.

"But we will discuss that affair later, too," went on Nelson Lee. "Steer right up the river, please. I am beginning to become slightly anxious. Hunter's boat ought to have been in sight before this."

We were shooting along rapidly in the moonlight, the waves curling from the motor-boat's prow with a hissing roar which was most pleasant to the ear. The river was narrowing.

"I say," said Tommy Watson softly.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" I asked, turning my head.

"What were they talking about just now?" asked Tommy. "Why is Captain Burton at Caistowe?"

"I've got a pretty keen idea," I replied. "You were with us when he made a certain proposal months ago. Don't you remember?"

"No, I'm jiggered if I do——" Tommy Watson paused. "You—you don't mean that wheeze about a trip to the Pacific?" he asked hoarsely.

"That and nothing else, my bonnie boy!"

"Great pip!" gasped Watson excitedly.

"We can't jaw about that now—— Hallo!"

I paused abruptly, for Nelson Lee had stood up in his seat. I stood up, too. And there, coming swiftly down the river, was another motor-boat. The gov'nor had not miscalculated—Hunter and Co. were upon the scene!

"Now for the pantomime!" I exclaimed, with shining eyes. "You'd better duck, my sons. There might be some fancy shooting——"

"Rats! I'm not going to duck for a set of rotten Huns!" snapped Watson disdainfully. "'Taint likely!"

"Begad! It's decidedly unlikely, dear fellows!" said Sir Montie.

We were all standing up, in fact. But our resolve to face the contemptible enemy boldly was firmly knocked on the head by Nelson Lee.

"Now, boys, keep down!" he said sharply. "If possible, remain under cover. I don't want to take you back to St. Frank's on stretchers!"

"Cheerin', ain't it?" murmured Sir Montie placidly.

We didn't quite like it, but we knew better than to question the gov'nor's order. He spoke quickly to Captain Burton, and our boat turned a point or two to starboard. We were now heading straight for the enemy.

It was quite evident that Mr. Hunter was aware of his danger. Until that moment, probably, he had been congratulating himself that he had made his "get away" in a masterly style.

It must have given him a shock to see

our powerful motor-boat; and an even greater shock when it altered its course in a most unmistakable fashion. Hunter and those with him positively knew that their retreat had been cut off.

Hunter was at the wheel himself—and in that fateful moment he lost his head. The sudden shock rendered him nervous, and he scarcely knew what he was doing. It all happened with astounding quickness.

Our course would have taken us sweeping past with twenty feet to spare. The gov'nor's idea was to demand a surrender, and if this was refused we would turn and give chase. There was no chance of the enemy getting away, for our boat could travel at double the speed of the other.

But matters never reached this point.

Quite abruptly the other motor-boat altered its course and veered off at an angle across the stream.

"By ginger!" shouted Captain Burton.

He twisted the wheel round, and we heeled over giddily. We should have slipped past safely even then, but Hunter, in his confusion, altered his course for a second time, and it was then too late.

"Look out!" I roared. "Hold tight, for goodness' sake!"

A collision was inevitable. The two boats were upon one another, and it was clear that we should ram the other forcibly. Captain Burton's skill was great, and he did all he could. We swerved again, but there was not sufficient time to allow for clearance.

Crash!

The sharp prow of our craft tore into the stern of the other. It was an absolutely direct blow. Hunter's motor-boat simply turned turtle, hurling its occupants out in wild confusion. And we swept past giddily.

As it was afterwards discovered, the damage to our own boat was slight. Collisions often result in this way. There wasn't even a hole stove in our sides. The main damage was to paintwork.

"It's all right!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Round, skipper! We're hardly touched, so far as I can see."

The captain was simply boiling.

"The infernal scum!" he roared. "They've damaged my boat, hang them! By the Lord Harry, somebody's got to suffer!"

We turned as quickly as possible, and heard sundry cries for help. The other motor-boat had sunk like a stone, and its late occupants were struggling desperately in the water. Not one of them had been injured by the collision, but they were terrified and weakened.

And as for putting up a fight—well, there was nothing doing. Even Mr. Kennedy Hunter himself was at his last gasp. I believe our appearance upset him more than anything else. He knew that he was beaten, and that knowledge took every atom of fight out of him.

The others were easy to handle.

They were all taken on board and bundled into the stern. Their weapons were taken

away from them, and the whole shivering crowd was roped together.

In this ignominious fashion the tyrant of St. Frank's met his final downfall. Half an hour later he was safely lodged in the little police-station at Caistowe, with his companions for company. On the morrow they would be transferred to London.

And so the night's excitement finished.

CHAPTER VII.

EXPLANATIONS—CAPTAIN BURTON'S REMINDER—GOOD TIMES IN STORE.

FOUR o'clock was just striking when a very select party settled themselves down in Dr. Stafford's study at St. Frank's. It was four o'clock a.m., and the school was fast asleep. The fellows were sublimely ignorant of the stirring happenings which had been taking place.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I, instead of being packed off to bed, were allowed to remain. We fully appreciated the big favour, for we had certainly expected to be sent upstairs at once.

As the Head kindly explained, however, we could easily make up for lost time by remaining in bed until midday. We didn't raise any objection. We should certainly need a good rest after such strenuous times.

The party consisted of Nelson Lee, the Head, we boys, Captain Burton, and Detective-inspector Lennard. The latter unfortunate gentleman had been rescued, with his companions, on our way back to St. Frank's. We had been supplied with the information by Mr. Slater, who had done his utmost to make himself appear an ill-used man.

Detective-inspector Lennard was subdued. He felt that he had failed miserably, but Nelson Lee managed to buck him up in a manner which only the guv'nor can accomplish.

"That's all very well, Lee," said the inspector. "I made a mess of it, and it's no good saying anything else. I'm jolly thankful you managed to collar the beggar in the end. He's a slippery brute!"

Lennard's men were by this time being cared for at the George Tavern in the village. And Detective-sergeant Smith, who had been keeping guard on the moor, with three other Yard men, was at the George also. He had expressed himself as being thoroughly disgusted with the whole business—and little wonder. He had seen no action whatever, and went to bed in a fed-up condition.

And now we had collected to hear the truth about the matter. On the way home Nelson Lee had confided the secret of his identity, and mine, to the amazed Captain Burton. When he fully realised the truth, the skipper was not only delighted, but he understood matters far better than he had done before.

"Why, by jingo! You've been deceiving

me all along!" he declared. "'Pon my soul! And to think that you are Mr. Nelson Lee! I'm honoured, sir, and I look forward to that little holiday with all the greater delight."

The meeting in the Head's study was an important one, for Nelson Lee was intent upon explaining the mystery of Mr. Hunter. I knew a certain amount, and I guessed a lot. But I was eager to hear the actual truth.

The gentlemen were all smoking cigars. Even the Headmaster himself condescended to partake of one in order to keep the others company, although he smoked only on rare occasions.

"The whole matter is rather complex," began Nelson Lee, leaning back in his chair. "To tell you the truth, I scarcely know where to begin."

I forgot to mention that the guv'nor had changed his clothes, and now looked easy and comfortable in his dressing-gown and slippers. It reminded me of our old days at Gray's Inn Road.

"Who was this Hunter, anyhow?" asked Captain Burton.

"Mr. Kennedy Hunter is, fortunately, an orphan," explained Nelson Lee. "Had his parents been alive they would have been overcome with shame and disgust, for they were good people. Hunter comes from a splendid family, and he was educated at Eton and Cambridge. Ultimately he became a schoolmaster, but was never very successful, owing to his harsh methods of dealing with boys.

"A year or two ago he developed the most extraordinary ideas. It was generally known that Hunter was pro-German in his views, but nobody actually realised the extent of his madness. He was not only pro-German, but violently anti-British. In unguarded moments he revealed his true feelings in an unmistakable fashion. It was for this reason that he lost three excellent appointments in rapid succession."

"But when did he start this spying business?" asked Lennard.

"His activities in that connection have been going on, I believe, almost since the commencement of the war," replied Nelson Lee. "The man was a fanatic—a dreamer and an idealist. His theories were wild in the extreme, and could never be anything more than theories. But he was one of the most dangerous men in this country, and it is extremely fortunate that he is laid by the heels. There is no doubt whatever that he will be tried for espionage in its worst form, and will meet the deserved fate of a traitor."

"Will he be shot, sir?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "Candidly, I shall breathe a sigh of relief when I learn of his execution. I did not suspect, until quite recently, that he was capable of such brutal violence. But I must tell you how I first became acquainted with the whole case.

"Details would not interest you, I am sure. A certain gentleman, holding a high

position in the Secret Service told me the main facts. Hunter was suspected by the police and by the Government of being a spy. It was believed that he had been accepting German gold for months on end. But although our Secret Service agents were constantly upon the alert they could not possibly bring home a scrap of evidence against the wily Mr. Hunter. He was too slippery for them. He safeguarded himself at every turn.

"For months before I left St. Frank's to take up this work a large amount of treasonable literature of the most dangerous type was being secretly printed and distributed amongst munition workers of all classes. These pamphlets were violently anti-British and highly detrimental to the country's interests.

"This literature was printed with great rapidity, and the authorities were quite unable to trace it to its source. They believed that the actual writing was performed by Mr. Hunter, then in charge of a small school near London.

"As the result of further investigations they suspected that the printing was done in this very neighbourhood. But although our Secret Service men were fully upon the alert they could not get to the bottom of the thing. They constantly found themselves up against a blank wall."

"That was infernally aggravating!" remarked Detective-Inspector Lennard. "This is practically all new to me," he added, for the benefit of the general company. "I only came down to this spot yesterday in order to take part in the final bust-up. Good lor! I took part in it all right!"

"You are inclined to be bitter," smiled the gov'nor. "To judge from your own remarks one would imagine that you had blundered as badly as a rustic constable. But your men told me the actual truth, and I know full well that you put up a most determined fight and did everything possible under the circumstances. But to continue my story.

"The position was quite simple. Hunter was suspected, but nothing could be brought against him. And the treasonable literature was supposed to find its origin in his brain and to be printed in this district.

"These two facts led me to suggest a certain trick. I was curious to discover if Mr. Hunter would fall into a trap. Actually he did so, and all this excitement has been the result. My original plans were quite modest, and I certainly had no idea that the matter would develop to such great proportions. Had I suspected it, I might have hesitated before bringing such trouble upon St. Frank's."

"We've had a fearful time, sir," I remarked feelingly.

"I can quite believe you, young 'un," replied the gov'nor. "Well, the trick was quite a simple one. I left St. Frank's, and caused an advertisement to be put in the papers, inquiring for a Housemaster. Hunter fell promptly. You see, for him to obtain an honourable position in such a famous

school as St. Frank's was, in itself, a safeguard against suspicion. That is what he thought, and he applied for the appointment.

"His record was against him, of course, and his scholastic attainments were not up to the St. Frank's standard, and in the ordinary course of things he would have stood no chance whatever. But, acting upon my advice, a certain Government official waited upon the school governors and urged them to appoint Mr. Hunter in the interests of the nation—since it was imperative that he should be tripped up in the shortest amount of time possible.

"In order to make him feel more at home—that is to say, in order to give him a freer hand, Dr. Stafford left the school. Mr. Hunter was then under no restrictions, and it was only natural that he should take advantage of the fact. The more he took advantage of it, the better the chance of obtaining evidence against him. At that time, of course, I had not the slightest idea that Hunter would engage upon a war with the boys themselves—that he would interfere with their liberties. But once started, the affair had to go on. The Remove Form, I am afraid, suffered severely, but they have survived."

"Begad! It's a wonder—it is, really!" murmured Sir Montie.

"You see, boys, there was no backing out," smiled Nelson Lee. "Mr. Hunter's downfall is partially due to the fact that he suffered from what is commonly known as 'swelled head.' He had enormous ideas of his own importance, and ultimately became careless. But it was a much longer job than I had reckoned upon at the outset. It was a case of sticking to it, however, and I had to go on.

"Upon Hunter's arrival at St. Frank's I took up my quarters in the neighbourhood and set myself the task of watching Hunter at every opportunity. It was not long before I made certain interesting discoveries. For example, I found out that this secret printing press was situated in the deserted workings of the old moor quarry. As you will understand, Hunter's position in this school suited him to perfection. He was quite near his colleagues, and was enabled to meet them frequently—a privilege which had been denied him hitherto. He felt that he could do practically as he liked in this quiet country district. His high position at St. Frank's gave him a feeling of the utmost confidence.

"All this was highly satisfactory—it was exactly what I wanted. Amid such surroundings, and feeling so secure, Hunter provided opportunities for investigation which had been impossible beforehand."

Detective-Inspector Lennard nodded.

"A smart scheme, Lee—a deucedly smart scheme!" he said admiringly. "But you always were a deep beggar. You just laid your plans and waited. You allowed Hunter to get deeper and deeper. Everybody else was wondering what the thunder was the matter, but you just kept quiet and waited."

"It was really the only course to pursue, Lennard. I was able to watch Hunter at my leisure, and I meant to strike promptly when the iron was hot. It took a long time to heat—that's all. And there were other diversions to attract my attention.

"Hunter was carried away by the importance of his position," went on the gov'nor. "You must not lose sight of the fact that he had previously held the most minor positions in fourth-rate schools. When he became a Housemaster at St. Frank's he swelled to such an extent that he could not keep himself within bounds. As these youngsters have excellent reason to know, he attempted to introduce sheer Prussianism into the junior school. The Remove, being high-spirited boys, refused to stand it, and serious trouble resulted. I think it may be safely said, however, that the Remove won the day.

"During all this time I found it necessary to indulge in certain operations which Nipper found most mysterious. For example, I succeeded in capturing one of Hunter's associates—an escaped German officer—and I palmed myself off as this man. During that brief spell I obtained a great deal of evidence, but decided not to strike until I could produce such proof that Hunter's conviction would be an absolute certainty.

"The whole thing was prolonged by the fact that Hunter was at war with the boys. This aspect of the matter worried me a great deal, for I knew that the school was being brought into disrepute. The publication of the facts, however, will soon set matters right—although my name, of course, will not be mentioned. For the present I am merely 'Mr. Kent,' of the Secret Service."

"But you're not going to remain Mr. Kent for much longer, are you, sir?" I asked anxiously.

"A few hours longer—that's all," replied Nelson Lee. "Before the school awakens I shall have left. But during the evening Mr. Alvington will return to take up his old duties."

"Begad! How rippin'!" exclaimed Sir Montie impulsively.

"To refer to Hunter again, I had all my plans cut and dried for his capture," said Nelson Lee. "These were completely upset by a totally unexpected occurrence. Hunter was mad enough to kidnap Dr. Stafford. It was an act of desperation, but it was frustrated by these enterprising boys. Nipper, I am convinced, was the ringleader, and he acted splendidly. But that incident led to others, and my whole plan was upset. As a result, the exciting adventures of to-night came about. The matter has ended satisfactorily, however, and I think we have every reason to congratulate ourselves."

The Head began to chat with Detective-inspector Lennard, and Sir Montie and Tommy and I found ourselves listening to a very interesting statement of the skipper's.

"My presence in Caistowe Bay was not exactly remarkable, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed. "I was there for a definite purpose. Some months ago, as you are aware, my boy Tom was in danger from a rascal named Jelks. It was you who set that matter right, and I have been grateful ever since."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"It was only a trivial affair, captain—" he began.

"Not to me, sir—not to me!" interrupted the skipper promptly. "By jingo! There was nothing trivial about it, I can give you my word. Jelks was anxious to obtain possession of a map."

"That's it," I put in eagerly. "The map of some island in the Pacific, where there's a lot of treasure hidden. That's what you told us at the time, Captain Burton. And you said that you were going to make a trip to the island during the summer holidays."

"The school breaks up in ten days from now," remarked Nelson Lee thoughtfully.

"I can see that you've tumbled to my little game," chuckled the captain. "Yes, I'm going to carry you off to the Pacific—we're going to have a really splendid holiday. You'll come, Mr. Lee, won't you? I can promise you some excitement and adventure, and the holiday will do you a world of good. The boys, I understand, have already arranged the matter with their people?"

"Well, it's been talked of, certainly," smiled Nelson Lee.

"That's good enough," was Captain Burton's reply. "By ginger! There are some good times in store, lads! And there's my boy upstairs, peacefully unconscious of the fact that his old father is keeping the most unearthly hours in the same building! But he'll know to-morrow, and then we shall begin preparations in earnest."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"And these youngsters must begin preparations in earnest, too—for getting up to bed," he said grimly. "Good gracious! It is broad daylight, and the clock tells us that the time is after five!"

Well, after that Montie and Tommy and I slipped off to the Remove dormitory. All the other fellows were fast asleep, and I grinned to myself as I pictured the excitement on the morrow.

Our adventures with Mr. Kennedy Hunter were at an end. He had passed out of the St. Frank's firmament completely. The whole affair had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and "Mr. Alvington" would return to the school immediately.

It wouldn't be long before we discovered that many further excitements were to take place. The new adventure—the pleasure trip to the Pacific—was to be filled with perils and stirring happenings which would make the Kennedy-Hunter affair look small by comparison!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By CLEMENT HALE.

NOTE.—As the title "In the Hands of the Huns" has already been used, we have altered the name of our Serial to the above.

The First Chapters.

GEORGE GRAY, his brother JACK, and WILSON, are three members of the Berlin Rovers, a football Club in Germany. When war breaks out they are interned in a camp at Oberhemmel, but one night they manage to escape. They contrive to reach Berlin, but are again captured and sent to a camp at Ruhleben. When there they enjoy a game of football.

(Now read on.)

THE OUP FAVOURITES.

THE game was reckoned a certainty for the Rovers. But, then, George Gray strengthened the Hornets at centre-half, his brother Jack was at inside right, and Wilson played at back.

The presence of three such redoubtable players added obvious strength to the side, but still very few of those present thought them capable of turning the tables on their clever opponents.

And for a while it seemed as if they would not make even that difference Bert Thomas, their captain, had counted on.

The Rovers won the toss, elected to play with a strong wind at their backs, and going off with a rush, assailed the Hornets' goal.

For five minutes or more they bombarded it, when Wilson relieved with a flying kick.

The Hornets' forwards then broke away, and three of them, careering after the ball, looked to have a chance.

But no; the Rovers' back, nipping in with a clever run, cleared, and the Rovers were soon attacking again.

This time they scored, the ball being shot home during a melee.

For a time the Hornets were all abroad, in spite of the heroic efforts of Wilson at left-back, George at centre-half, Thomas at right-back, and Sturgess in goal.

Twenty-five minutes after the start the Rovers scored a second goal, and the game seemed over.

Yet it seemed that this second misfortune was just the filip required to put the Hornets on their mettle. They rallied, steadied down, and gave up their wild rushing tactics for cool, concerted play.

For the first time they passed the ball in methodical fashion, keeping it down. A grand bout of passing sent George away, and he, tracking to the left side of the field, drew the defence on him, and while on the run back-heeled to Jack, who had followed his brother up at a sign, and who expected the move.

Jack was left with only the goalkeeper to beat.

He ran swiftly in, took several short strides, and slammed the ball into the corner of the net before the opposition had recovered from their surprise. The cheer that rewarded this effort lasted for minutes, and the heartened team kept the Rovers from scoring any more goals till the half-time bell rang.

In the second half the Hornets had the wind behind them, and making the most of it, scored within three minutes.

It was then the turn of the Rovers to get flurried, to lose their nerve, to go all awry in their efforts to combine, and George Gray, bursting through like a hurricane forty minutes from the re-start, scored a goal after running two-thirds the length of the field.

That settled it.

The Rovers had shot their bolt. They were tired, for the food the Germans gave them did not admit of their getting into their best condition. Their efforts died away, and the Hornets, rallying for a last effort, scored close on time, to win the match by four goals to two.

It had been a magnificent match, and the crowd cheered and cheered again. The victors were hoisted shoulder-high and carried from the field.

The play of the new men had been much admired. The Rovers were out of the cup, and the Hornets were now first favourites.

And don't forget there was a bit of betting on the result, too.

AN OLD FRIEND.

IT must not be supposed that it was all play in the internment camp at Ruhleben. Far from it. In spite of the efforts the prisoners made to throw off the lethargy and inertia which threatened

to creep over them in spite of all they did to avoid it, there were times when despair gripped hard at the hearts of the bravest among them, when they abandoned all hope, and felt that they would never see their native land or the faces of those they loved again.

There were many instances of brutality on the part of the officers and soldiers who kept watch over them.

If the officer happened to be a brute, as a great many of them were, some hapless prisoner was bound to suffer.

On one occasion, when there had been some justifiable grumbling about the wretched food sent into the camp by the authorities, one of the prisoners, who had gone farther than the rest and thrown his unappetising soup upon the ground, was seized and marched away.

George, who protested against his removal, did not see him for some weeks, and when at last the poor fellow returned, he looked like a ghost.

His cheeks were sunken, his eyes were deep-set in holes, his skin was like parchment, and he had almost wasted away.

He had been stripped and beaten about the head and body with heavy sticks, he declared, and afterwards had been removed to hospital, where he had hovered between life and death for a long while.

And now that he had come back he was hardly fit to walk.

Yet he had to take his chance with the others.

The prisoners did not let the matter rest. They made bitter complaints about it, and an inquiry was supposed to have been made. They were curtly informed that the officer responsible for the act of cruelty had been degraded and otherwise punished, but had no proof of the statement. A week after this unfortunate prisoner was punished there was another loud outcry about the food, and upon an officer arriving to hear their complaint, the prisoners gathered, clamouring, about him. He learnt more about British opinion of the Hun during the half hour that followed than ever he had bargained for.

His ears fairly tingled under the shower of contemptuous reproaches and denunciations of the Fatherland hurled at him, and, being a poor sort of fellow at the best, told the prisoners that they would be shot down if they did not instantly return to their quarters and remain there until further notice.

The guard was doubled for the next twenty-four hours, but the little mutiny had one good effect; the food improved during the next few days.

During these trying times the Grays and Wilson discovered that money was of the greatest use in the camp.

Most of the German guards were open to bribery, and if a prisoner could only pay for it, he managed to buy an easier time than fell to the lot of his poorer brethren.

Parcels and letters arrived regularly from home now, and Jack and George were more than thankful for them.

Most of the letters contained money, and as they had taken steps since their arrival in Ruhleben Camp to secure regular drafts from their banks at home—for both lads had an account—they were able to purchase such necessities in the way of boots, clothes, and food as they required.

And they helped the less fortunate, that being an obligation they regarded as a paramount duty.

Meanwhile the Hornets drew with the Londoners, a team composed of London footballers—a hot side—in the cup, and beat them on the replay by 1 goal to 0.

It was while they were in training for their match with the Hotspurs that an old friend arrived in the camp, with permission to visit the Grays.

A surly looking German guard brought them the news. Jack and George had just finished "dinner"—if the midday meal may be glorified by such a name.

"There's a friend to see you!" growled the sullen Hun, whose rifle was sloped on his shoulder.

"A friend!" cried George, springing to his feet and driving the plug of tobacco with which he had filled his pipe well home. "A friend! Can it be possible? Who is he? What's his name?"

"He's a Prussian officer," answered the guard, scowling. "He hasn't given his name."

And then—into the stables in which the brothers sat, with their usual stable companions, strode the figure of an upstanding, bronzed and handsome officer, clad in the hated uniform of the Fatherland.

"Jorge!" he cried, stretching out his sound right hand, for his left arm was supported in a sling and the hand encased in thick woollen bandages. "Jorge! Ah, it is you, my friend! Ah, I am glad to see you!"

George leapt to seize the outstretched hand with a glad cry of recognition.

"It's Carl—Carl Hoffmann!" he exclaimed. "Back from the war! How are you, Carl? Indeed I am glad to see you too. Jack, shake hands with Carl. He's the last man I expected to see. And you're wounded too, old chap! Tell us all about it!"

The British prisoners regarded the German officer with mixed feelings.

The majority of them had suffered too many trials, humiliations, and cruelties at the hands of the Huns to like any of them, even this man who was apparently so friendly to the Grays. They suspected treachery and deceit behind the smile, which served as a mask, in their eyes, to the true character of his friendly officer.

Carl was aware of the mixed feelings his coming aroused, but smilingly ignored them.

"Just wait a minute," he said, with a friendly nod. "I have brought something for you."

(Continued overleaf.)

He walked to the entrance of the stables, gave an order, and beckoned to someone outside. In response two German soldiers staggered into the stables, bearing a huge hamper, with them.

"It is a gift in remembrance of the old, happy days," he said. "And I hope you and your brother will accept it at my hands, even though fate has made us enemies. It contains some foodstuffs and some wine and cigars. Perhaps you can make some of your friends a little happy by sharing them."

Should George refuse? First of all he was inclined to do so. Then it occurred to him that it would be a poor reward for a generous thought.

And so he thanked his old friend.

Then Carl sat down, and, lighting a cigar, told the tale of his experiences during the war.

He had been through the fighting from Liege onward, and had fought in many a battle. He told of the mighty onrush of the German armies, how by sheer weight of numbers and munitions they had borne down all opposition. How their military chiefs had derided the efforts of the British Army, and how heroically the latter had fought at the battle of the Marne. He told of the unexpected advance of a French Army, who saved the situation when the Huns appeared to have Paris at their mercy. And of the subsequent onrush to the coast, when General French had moved his army into Belgium and stopped the advance on the Channel ports.

All this and much more he spoke of, thrilling his hearers by his simple narration of the progress of the titanic struggle.

And when he came to speak of his own wound, there was an utter absence of braggadocio that almost clouded an act of personal bravery which earned their respect.

He had been shot down while leading an attack on the British positions near Ypres, and had lain for over twenty-four hours in the open, when a search-party found him and brought him safely back to his own lines.

"And how did you come to discover that we were in Ruhleben?" asked George, with a smile of curiosity.

Carl shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, by accident, really," he answered. "Though I set about finding you the moment I was free to do so. I got to know that you had been interned in Oberhemmel Camp, heard of your escape from there, and then met Wilhelm Beckmann——"

"Ah! He was kind to us," said George. "He would have got us out of the country if he could. They arrested him at the time we were captured. I am glad to hear that he's all right."

Carl Hoffman smiled grimly.

"They fined him two thousand marks for that exploit," said he, "but gave him his liberty. And now he is under a cloud and suspected of sympathising with the Allies. But he is a brave and fearless man. He is bearing up."

"And he told you we were here?"

"Yes. And so I obtained permission to visit you and to bring you the hamper. My friends I am glad indeed to see you all again."

"And we're glad to see you, Carl. It's a pity we are enemies."

"It is fate."

Here the German officer frowned, and looked heavily away.

Jack turned eagerly towards him.

"Tell me one thing," he cried, "do you think Germany will win the war?"

(To be continued.)

A SPLENDID NEW SERIES

Will Commence Next Week! The
First Story, under the Title of

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