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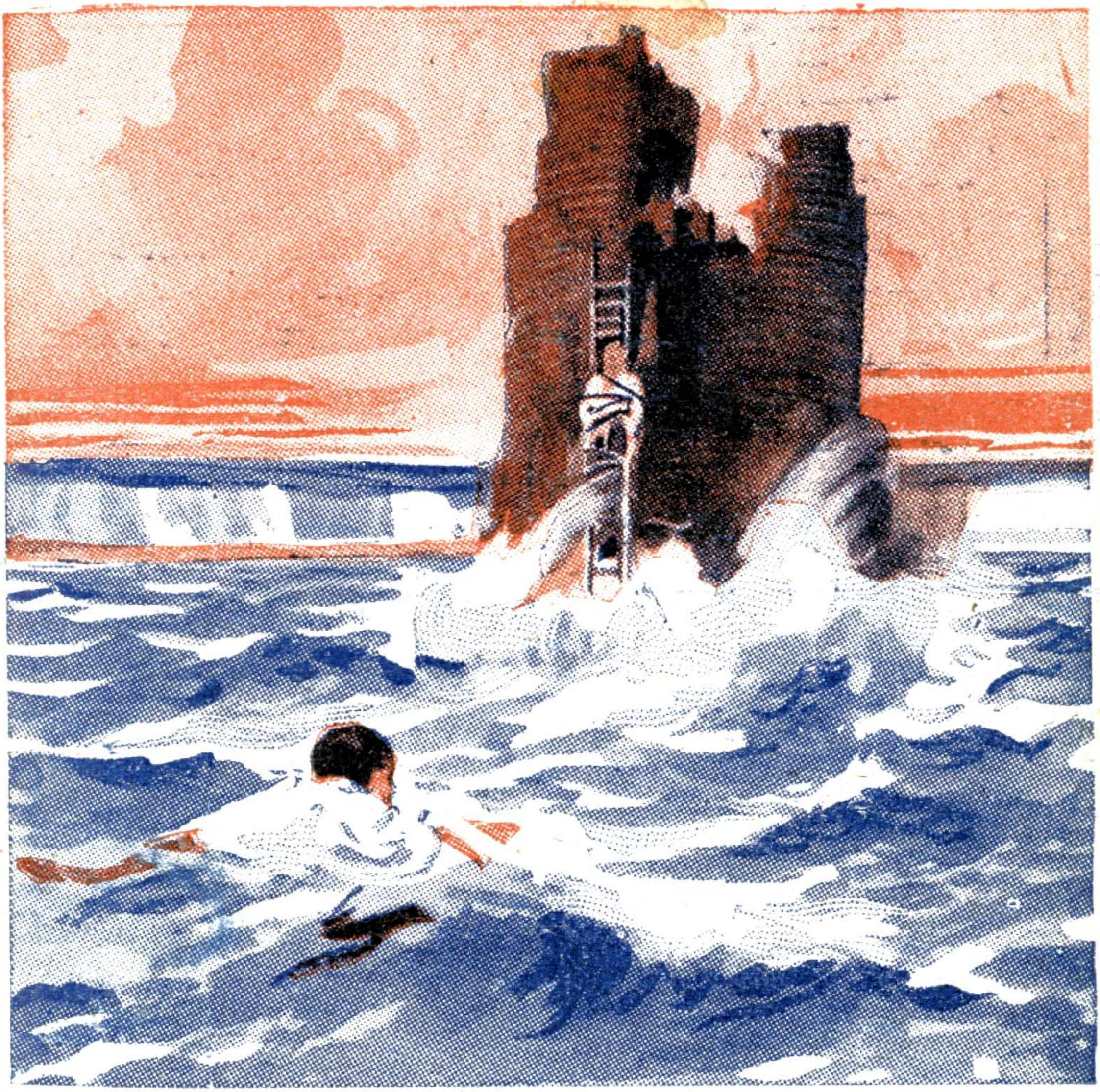

EACH STROKE BROUGHT LEE NEARER THE HELPLESS, BOUND FIGURE.

THE RUINED LIGHTHOUSE

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Secret of the North Tower," "Missing from School," "The Clue of the Oil Trail," and many other exciting yarns.

October 16, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HANDS OF ROGUES.

SLOWLY and cautiously the big, hooded motor car picked its way down Bramley Gap. The surface was atrocious, being smothered liberally with large stones, deep holes and formidable ruts. Upon either side frowned the rugged cliffs, and straight ahead, and downwards, lay the shingle of the beach, with the waves of the English Channel beating unceasingly.

It was dark—pitchy dark—and the hour was between two and three o'clock in the morning. Everything was still and quiet—the whole countryside was asleep. Only the restless sea made any sound.

At length the motor car came to a halt.

It was now nearly upon the beach, and the gap had widened out considerably, providing plenty of space for the car to turn round, if it wished to make the journey back.

A man stepped out of the rear part of the car. He stamped his feet a trifle, and then walked round to the driver.

"Well, we've got here at last, Ratsby," said the man to the driver. "That infernal puncture delayed us a good bit, but it doesn't matter much. Perhaps it is just as well that we have arrived now—when everybody is in bed and asleep."

"Oh, it doesn't matter much," said the driver. "Whether it was one o'clock or two o'clock or three o'clock—it's all the same in this part of the country, Naggs. Nobody will ever know that the car has been here and that some unusual events have been taking place. How's the boy?"

"Sullen," replied Mr. Naggs. "He hasn't said a word the whole time. The kid is sulky—and that's only to be expected. But we'll make him speak before long—don't you fear. The experience he is passing through now will teach him a lesson—it will show him that it doesn't pay to be obstinate."

Another man came out of the back of the car, and he stood there, just by the door.

"What's the plan now, Naggs?" he enquired.

"Bring the boy out," said Mr. Naggs. "We've finished with the car now, Williss Ratsby is going straight back with it, and we sha'n't see him any more. He is taking the car direct to London, and he'll await us there—I expect we shall arrive some time to-morrow, after we have compelled Goodwin to speak."

Mr. Naggs went to the back of the car, and looked keenly at the boy who was sitting there among the cushions.

"Come along, my lad," said Mr. Naggs. "You've got to get out here."

Dick Goodwin, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, made no reply. But he got up from the seat, and quietly stepped out of the car. He knew well enough

that it was no good resisting—and, in any case, he was quite pleased to be able to stretch his legs. He had been sitting in the car for nearly two hours, and he was rather stiff. The junior was not sullen and sulky, as Mr. Naggs imagined; he was only determined. He was strong, and he had no intention whatever of obeying the orders which these men gave to him—orders, which concerned the secret. Dick Goodwin had grimly determined not to give that away. Under no circumstances would he be forced into speaking.

Goodwin had been kidnapped from the vicinity of St. Frank's during the hours of the previous evening. He had been taken away by Naggs and his confederates. And these men required something of Goodwin which he positively refused to give up—and that something was the secret of a certain invention.

Ever since Goodwin's arrival at St. Frank's, at the beginning of term, he had been a somewhat curious junior. Practically all the juniors in the Remove knew that the new fellow was engaged upon some special kind of work in his own study—which was always kept locked and bolted.

But the other fellows did not know what work this was. They could only guess at it. Apparently, however, Mr. Naggs and Co. knew the absolute truth—and their object was to compel Goodwin to deliver up the secret. This the Lancashire boy refused to do. Therefore, he was taken prisoner—and he was being kept in captivity until he agreed to open his mouth.

"Now, my lad, we don't want to be harsh with you," said Mr. Naggs smoothly. "If you'll only do what you're told, you won't come to any harm. In the first place, you've got to walk along the beach with us. And if you make any attempt to get away—if you make a sudden dash along the beach—you'll be recaptured. Then your hands will be bound, and your feet tied together so that you can only hobble. That's just a warning."

"I understand!" said Goodwin quietly.

"That's all right then," said Mr. Naggs. "Well, we'll be going, Ratsby. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said the car driver.

A moment or two later he had turned the big automobile round, and it was slowly crawling its way up the gap towards the main road. Once there, it went speeding along in the direction of London.

Back on the beach, Mr. Naggs and Willis were stumbling along over the the rough shingle, with Dick Goodwin between them. The junior bitterly realised how farcical it was for Naggs to warn him not to make any attempt to escape. How was such a thing possible when he was walking between these two men?

The wind was cold, and now and again the air would be filled with soft spray. Goodwin was hungry—more hungry that he would have cared to admit. He had tasted nothing since the dinner time of the previous day—although he had been certainly offered a number of sandwiches by Mr. Naggs. But those sandwiches were only to be eaten on condition that Goodwin "opened his mouth." Having declined to do this, the sandwiches had been withdrawn.

And now Goodwin was quite famished. But he would never ask these men for food. He was their prisoner, and they required him to give up his secret. This he would never do—even if they starved him.

"It's rather fortunate, this beach being shingle instead of sand," remarked Mr. Naggs, as they walked along. "It makes all the difference."

"How?" enquired the other man.

"Why, my dear Williss, it must be quite obvious to you that the shingle can leave no tell-tale foot prints," said Mr. Naggs. "Sand, however, would be very different—every mark we made would be clear and distinct—and those marks would remain for hours—for days. We could be followed, and other people on the beach would be able to see that we had been here. But this shingle is blank—it leaves no marks."

Williss nodded.

"Yes, that's quite right," he agreed. "Shingle is much better than sand in that way, Naggs. By the way, how far along the beach do we have to go?"

"Not far," said Mr. Naggs. "I think I can see a cave already."

Goodwin knew the truth then. It was quite clear that these men were determined to place him in one of the caves which were plentiful in this part of the coast. The cliffs, in fact, were honeycombed with caverns and caves of every description, and, apparently, the boy was

to be kept a prisoner in one of these dark, natural prisons.

After walking for a short distance further, Mr. Naggs led the way up the beach towards the cliff's face. And now Goodwin could see a small, low opening. It was narrow, too, and might easily have been passed by, had he not been looking for such a thing. But there it was—the entrance to the cave.

"I'll go first," said Mr. Naggs. "The boy will come after me and you will bring up the rear, Willis. I have got an electric torch, so we shall be quite all right. See that the boy doesn't try any tricks. If he once gets away here we might not be able to find him in the darkness."

"Leave it to me," said Williss grimly. "The kid won't get away, believe me!"

Mr. Naggs bent down and entered the cave. And Dick Goodwin was forced in after him, Williss bringing up the rear. For some few yards they were compelled to walk in a doubled-up position—for the roof of the rock tunnel was low. However, it soon widened out, and became higher. And, presently, the trio were standing quite upright in a fairly large cavern. Mr. Naggs was flashing an electric torch about. And it was obvious that this was not his first visit to the place. For, upon the side of the cave stood a small boat. And there were two or three other articles—a small box, a leather attache case, and a few odds and ends.

"You can sit down on that box, young man," said Mr. Naggs. "I don't suppose you'll be kept here for long—the dawn can't be far off now. This isn't going to be a prison for you—not at all. I have a much better plan in mind. But if you will only speak now, it will save any further trouble. Why can't you be reasonable, Goodwin? Why can't you tell us what we want to know, and then——"

"I'm not saying anything," interrupted Goodwin coldly. "You can keep me for a month—but it will make no difference."

"I thought as much," said Mr. Naggs. "Still obstinate, eh? We'll take it out of you—we'll make you alter your tone. There's not the slightest chance of your escaping—of your being rescued. Not a soul knows that you have been brought here, and the police can search from now until Doomsday—but they won't find you!"

Dick Goodwin made no reply. He was, in fact, thinking deeply. Right down in his heart, he was wondering whether it would be possible for him to get away from these men. Would any help come from the outside?

Goodwin remembered a little incident which had happened an hour or two since—when he had been placed in the motor car on the main road between Bannington and Helmford. For some little time the boy had been kept a prisoner in an old house; but his captors had taken alarm, and they had removed him to the sea shore.

Goodwin, seizing an opportunity, had scribbled a few words on a piece of paper—indicating that he was being taken to Bramley Gap. Would that scrap of paper be found—and would any help come to him?

Goodwin was quite unaware of the fact—and Mr. Naggs was in ignorance, too—that no less a person than Mr. Nelson Lee himself had visited Bramley Gap only twenty minutes before Mr. Naggs's own car had arrived. For, to tell the truth, that piece of paper had been found—found by Nelson Lee. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I had been investigating Dick Goodwin's disappearance, and we had tracked him to the old house on the Helmford Road. But, by the time we had brought Nelson Lee and the police on the scene, Goodwin had gone—he had been taken away.

But that scrap of paper had been found—giving us a direct clue to the lad's destination. Nelson Lee had lost no time. In his car he had gone straight to Bramley Gap, and we had accompanied him. But, on arrival, we had seen nothing—we had heard nothing. The beach had been deserted and absolutely bare.

The explanation was simple.

Naggs and his confederates had taken a different route, they had met with a slight mishap—one of the tyres had punctured. It was while this repair was being effected that Nelson Lee had arrived at Bramley Gap—taking the other road. Thus, we knew nothing of what had happened, and Naggs and his party were also in the dark. Nelson Lee had gone straight back to St. Frank's, telling us that he intended making full investigations on the morrow.

It seemed, therefore, that Dick Goodwin's hopes would not be absolutely in

vain. For, if Nelson Lee arrived upon the scene, it was almost certain that the famous detective would achieve some result.

Happily, Naggs was in total ignorance of the actual truth, and he did not worry himself. He assumed that he was safe—that not a soul in the world knew of this journey to Bramley Gap.

Goodwin was left quite to himself. Hour after hour passed, and Naggs and Williss spent the time in playing cards, by the light of a candle. But, at length, they put the cards away, and Mr. Naggs opened the attache case. From this he produced some food, and he and Williss partook of it heartily. Goodwin was quite ignored—he was not even offered a crumb. And yet the lad was feeling rather faint. He set his teeth, however, and did not utter a sound. Never would he ask these men for a scrap to eat.

At length the dawn came.

It crept in cold and grey, at the cave entrance. And, as the minutes went slowly by, the light increased. And Naggs and Williss became active. The small boat was hauled down through the narrow entrance of the cave, and out into the open. Mr. Naggs went first, and he seemed quite pleased with himself.

"Not a soul about, and there's quite a mist over the sea," he remarked. "We shall be able to do the trick, and nobody will see us, Williss. It's just as I planned. By making a move now—at dawn— we shall be all right."

Williss nodded.

"It doesn't particularly matter if we are seen," he observed. "There is nothing suspicious in a boat putting out from the shore—there are plenty of people go fishing, Naggs. This idea of yours is quite a safe one, and I don't see how anything can occur. I think we'd better have the boy with us—there's no telling what he'll get up to, if we leave him alone in that cave."

"He can't escape—that's one thing," said Mr. Naggs. "There's no other exit to that cavern and we can easily stop him if he comes out. But I think I'll do as you say—he might as well be with us. We'll go straight off!"

Mr. Naggs went into the cave and found Goodwin still sitting on the box.

"Come along, my lad," said Naggs briskly. "You have asked for trouble, and you'll get it. You could save yourself all this bother, if you'd only be reasonable. But I'm not going to argue any more—it's entirely in your hands now. When you choose to speak, I shall be ready to listen."

Goodwin did not choose to speak. He said nothing, and he rose to his feet, and accompanied his captor outside into the open. The boy was quite glad, for he was stiff and cold—and the exercise made him feel better. He wondered what Naggs was about to do now. And he looked about him with interest.

The beach was drab and quite deserted. It was impossible to see far in any direction, owing to the mist which hung low over the land and water. Bramley village was round the headland, quite concealed from view.

Out at sea, just half a mile from the shore, projected a curious-looking object from the water. It was rather dim and hazy in the mist—but Dick Goodwin recognised it.

That object was the ruin of an old lighthouse.

At one time of day it had been a strong, stone structure, towering high above the sea. It was built upon a jagged rock, which projected out from the sea bottom, where it's cruel fangs were a death trap for any unwary vessel which happened to come too close inshore.

Dick Goodwin was too young to remember the story of the Bramley Lighthouse. Over ten years earlier a fearful storm had raged, and the lighthouse had been destroyed. During the violence of the storm the entire upper portion of the stone building had been washed down, leaving only the base, as it were. This still stood there, impregnable, defying the sea to do its worst.

And, a mile further out to sea on a much larger rock, there had been built a new lighthouse—a larger and stronger one. And the old ruin still stood there.

At low tide the rocks were uncovered, but when the tide was high, the sea came right up to the stonework of the building, surging furiously and impotently against the stonework.

Was it possible that Mr. Naggs intended to take Dick Goodwin to this old ruin? At least, it seemed like it, for the boat was launched in the fairly calm sea, and Williss commenced rowing straight in the direction of the rocks. The tide was low now, and the sea was not very heavy. Dick Goodwin sat in

the centre of the boat, rather interested, and decidedly cold.

All hope was now dying within his breast. For, once he was landed on that old ruin of a lighthouse, he knew very well that it would be quite impossible for him to make any bid for liberty.

He would never be able to escape—he would never be able to get ashore He must remain a prisoner until his captors decided to let him free.

And so, in the cold light of dawn, with the mist surrounding the whole sea, the little boat went straight for the rocks and, at last, it was near enough for Williss to jump ashore. The rocks were treacherous, for they were covered with slimy seaweed. However, Williss managed to keep his feet, and he held the boat in position while Dick Goodwin climbed ashore. Mr. Naggs came last, then the boat was hauled up on the rocks into safety.

"Now, then, my lad," said Mr. Naggs, "I suppose you know what the plan is, eh? You are going to be kept in this very desirable residence. It is not half so dismal as you might think, from the exterior. In fact, you will be quite comfortable once you get inside."

Dick Goodwin nodded.

"I don't know why you are going to all this trouble," he said. "It doesn't make any difference to me Mr. Naggs. I'll never say a word about that invention, ay, and I'll——"

"That's all right," interrupted Mr. Naggs. "We'll see about that later, my boy. You won't say a word, oh? We'll see about that—I don't think you'll be able to keep up this obstinate spirit for very long. I mean to teach you a lesson that you won't forget!"

They went over the rocks, sliding and slithering now and again, but keeping their feet fairly well, on the whole. And at length they arrived at the foot of the stone lighthouse. From the shore it had not seemed very large, but now it towered above massively.

For some little distance the stonework was covered with green slimy seaweed. And a rusty, iron ladder, fairly narrow, was affixed to the stonework. It led straight upwards to a doorway, which was quite a long distance from the ground. The doorway, of course was above high water mark.

Mr. Naggs grasped the ladder, in order to climb up.

"The boy will come next," he said. "You will bring up the rear, Williss."

"Right," said the other man. "Go ahead!"

They climbed up the ladder—a rather tricky business, for the rungs were slippery and treacherous. But, at length, Mr. Naggs arrived at the doorway. It was made of thick iron, and it was some few moments before he got it open.

But at last he succeeded, and he stepped into the dark opening. Dick Goodwin followed him, and then came Williss.

The iron door closed, and it seemed to the Lancashire lad that all hopes of rescue was cut off. He was indeed a prisoner now—marooned on this old ruin of a lighthouse, where help could not possibly come to him.

CHAPTER II.

MUCH EXCITEMENT.

TOMMY WATSON yawned.

"Well, I'm not feeling particularly bright this morning," he remarked. "We had only a few hours' sleep you know—and we had a pretty tiring time of it last night."

"It won't hurt you, for once in a way, Tommy," I remarked. "We all feel rather heavy this morning, and that is not to be wondered at. Considering that we didn't get to sleep until four o'clock, and that we got up with the rising bell, as usual, it's a wonder we're not dozing all the time! How do you feel, Montie?"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Dear old boy, I don't feel quite up to the mark—I don't, really," he replied. "At the same time, as you say, it won't do us any harm, for once. And I am worryin' about Goodwin. I am worryin' frightfully, dear boy. What has happened to him? Where is he now?"

"That's what we all want to know," I said. "We know that he was taken to Bramley Gap by Mr. Naggs and those other two men. But beyond that we are in a bit of a fog. We don't know what happened to Dick Goodwin after he was taken down to the beach. But the

guv'nor will see to the matter—don't you worry!"

Breakfast was already over, and it would soon be time for morning lessons. We had had very little sleep and we did not feel at all brilliant that morning. However, it would have been impossible for us to stay in bed longer than the other fellows, for this would have led to much discussion, and we should have been chipped tremendously by the other juniors.

The whole school, of course, was busily discussing the mystery of Dick Goodwin. It was the one topic of conversation throughout St. Frank's—from the Sixth Form down to the smallest fags.

The fact that the absentee had not returned during the night was regarded as significant. All sorts of wild rumours were floating round, carried from mouth to mouth by juniors who had nothing better to do.

For example, one rumour had it that Dick Goodwin had been murdered, and that his remains had been found in the middle of Bannington Moor. This story caused quite a sensation, and a good many fellows believed it at the time. But, of course it was soon knocked on the head. Other rumours were nearly as wild, and it was only to be expected that these stories would get about, in the absence of anything definitely true.

The police, of course, had been informed, and they were doing their utmost. But they had drawn a blank, as we already knew.

Goodwin's father had been telegraphed for, and it was fairly certain that he would arrive at St. Frank's that day. Meanwhile, everybody was talking, and making suggestions and telling everybody else how Goodwin ought to be searched for.

Handforth, of course, was to the fore. He considered that this was an opportunity for him—an opportunity where he could display his own remarkable powers of detection.

These remarkable powers were purely imaginary, of course, for Handforth was one of the biggest blunderers under the face of the sun. He was the only junior in St. Frank's who was not aware of this fact.

"It's all rot to go on like this!" he declared, as he addressed an audience in the Triangle. "What we want to do is to organise—organise, and to get up search parties by the dozen. Then we'll get out and investigate matters. That's my idea, and if anybody here likes to disagree I'll punch his nose."

Nobody disagreed.

This was not very surprising, considering that Handforth's audience consisted solely of Church and McClure. There had been one or two others originally, but they had drifted away, leaving Handforth with nobody but his own chums to listen to what he had to say.

Handforth appeared to be unaware of the fact until he looked round. He had been so engrossed in his speech that he had taken very little notice of his surroundings.

"Oh, it's no good talking, Handy," said McClure. "Talking won't do any good. The best thing to do in this case is to leave it to the police, and to Mr. Lee. You can bet your boots that Mr. Lee is hot on the track. Anyhow, he left St. Frank's about ten minutes ago, and I understand that he won't be back during the morning. It's pretty certain that he has gone off somewhere in connection with Goodwin's disappearance."

Handforth glared.

"Where are all the other chaps?" he demanded warmly. "I thought I was addressing a crowd—not you two asses! All you can do is to disagree with everything I say!"

"My dear chap, we're not disagreeing," said Church soothingly. "But what on earth is the good of you worrying your head about Goodwin? He'll be found—you needn't be afraid of that. And, what's more, he'll be found before the day's out. You mark my words."

Handforth sniffed.

"A case like this is just where I can prove my ability," he declared. "As a matter of fact, I am thinking about going to the Head and asking him to let me have the morning off."

"What?" yelled Church and McClure.

"Oh, you can stare—you can shout," said Handforth grimly. "I mean it! It's almost certain that the Head will agree——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiots!" roared Handforth. "There's nothing funny in what I said——"

"Isn't there?" grinned Church. "I think there is! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's screamingly funny!" chuckled the other junior.

"Of course, I knew you'd sneer!" said Handforth, bitterly. "That's what you usually do—when I make a good suggestion. I'm going to the Head before long, and I'm going to ask him to let me have the morning off—and then I shall be able to investigate this case thoroughly. And I'll warrant that by dinner-time I'll bring Dick Goodwin back with me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Handy, you'll be the death of us!" grinned Church. "What's the use of asking for trouble? If you go to the Head, you'll only come away sore, or with four or five hundred lines to do. Besides, why do you want to worry yourself over a petty little case like this?" he added, with a wink at McClure.

"Petty little case?" repeated Handforth.

"Of course," said Church. "That's all it is. I'm surprised at you bothering about it, Handy. When you go on the scent—when you take up the trail, you want something big, something startling and difficult. There's nothing in this. There's nothing for you to bring your wonderful detective ability into operation. It's beneath your notice, it's too small altogether for you to worry about!"

Handforth nodded.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is rather insignificant!" he admitted. "I'm more at home in dealing with a big case. That's only natural. When a chap has a lot of detective genius, he needs something particularly mysterious to engross his attention. At the same time, I rather like Goodwin, and I think I shall take a hand in the case. I think I shall go out on the trail this morning, and investigate the whole mystery!"

Church and McClure did their very best to remain serious. But it was utterly impossible, and the next moment they were yelling with laughter. They really couldn't help it. Handforth was altogether too funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly lunatics!" howled Handforth. "I'll show you whether you can laugh at me or not! Take that!"

Biff!

Church took something which made him cease laughing in a very short space of time. He sat down on the ground, and howled.

"And there's one for you, too!" roared Handforth, lunging out at McClure.

But the latter junior was rather too quick. He had seen the fate which had befallen Church. And he dodged, and ran for it. And just at that moment Reginald Pitt and Grey, and one or two others came up. They stood looking on with interest as Church picked himself up, tenderly holding his nose.

"You—you dangerous idiot!" he shouted. "You're too jolly handy with your fists——"

"Well, I'm not going to take any insults!" said Handforth grimly. "I'm going straight to the Head, and I'm going to ask him to give me the morning off."

"Funeral, or something?" inquired Pitt politely.

"Or a football match?" asked De Valerie.

"No; I'm going to do some detective work," replied Handforth, with dignity.

"Eh?"

"Some which?"

"Some detective work!" repeated Handforth. "The Head will give me the morning off, of course—that's natural. He knows what I am, and he knows what I'm capable of. And as soon as I tell him that I mean to investigate the mystery of Dick Goodwin, he'll ——"

"Give you a good whopping, five hundred lines, and detention for a fortnight!" said Pitt. "That's what the Head will give you, my son, if you have the nerve to go to his study and ask for the morning off!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We'll see about that. I'm not going to stand here and remain idle. I'm not going to waste my time in the class-room this morning, when I can do something a lot better. That's not my way."

And Handforth marched off, followed by the yells of laughter from the other juniors.

And, true to his word, he went straight to the Headmaster's study. Dr. Stafford was in, and he listened patiently to Handforth for a moment or two. After that several things happened, and when Handforth emerged from the Head's study, he was holding his hands rather tightly, his face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming with inward rage.

The knowledge that he had to write five hundred lines did not add to his

enjoyment. And it galled him to think that his own chums had been quite right in their predictions. Handforth did not care to go into the Triangle again—and he did not find it necessary. For when he got into the lobby, he found quite a number of juniors waiting there, in order to hear the verdict.

"Hush!" said Pitt, as Handforth appeared. "The great detective approaches!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh at him!" went on Pitt severely. "He's probably deep in thought. He's thinking how he can get on the track of Goodwin. He's a marvellous chap for getting on the track, you know. He'd beat Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes and Nelson Lee—all rolled into one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When are you going to start, Handy?" inquired Grey politely. "When do you get on the trail?"

Handforth was not the kind of junior to stand chaff without retaliating. And the next moment he charged forward, with whirling fists. He was determined to do some damage—if only for the sole purpose of relieving his feelings. The juniors dodged wildly.

"Look out," shouted Pitt, "he is dangerous! Collar him!"

Before Handforth could land out any blows, he was seized by many hands, and then he was flung on the floor, flat on his back. All the wind was knocked out of him, and by the time he rose to his feet he did not feel particularly like fighting.

"Take it easy, Handy—that's the best way!" advised Pitt. "It's no good getting excited. Besides, it doesn't look well for a famous detective to go about punching noses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm disgusted!" he said heavily. "I'm absolutely disgusted!"

"Not with us, I hope, dear old boy?" inquired Sir Montie, rather shocked.

"I'm disgusted with everybody, and particularly with the Head!" said Handforth. "I think the Head is old enough to know better! I go to him, and I offer to spend all the morning in looking for Dick Goodwin, and all he can do is to cane me and give me lines! Is that what you call gratitude?"

"Well, hardly!" said De Valerie. "I should be inclined to call it a necessary duty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, anyhow, I'm fed up!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to offer my services any more—I'm done with it! Dick Goodwin can keep away from St. Frank's until he's ninety-five years old, for all I care! I'm not going to look for him—I can tell you chaps that much!"

"Then it's quite probable that he'll be found!" said Pitt sweetly.

"I'm not going to look for him!" repeated Handforth, glaring round. "This afternoon is a half-holiday, but I sha'n't spend a single moment of my time in doing any detective work. I shall go over to Caistowe, and I shall take a boat out for a row, or something of that kind. Perhaps the Head will feel a bit sorry for himself afterwards!"

And Handforth marched off, highly indignant, and the other fellows were highly amused. They could not see things in exactly the same way as Handforth saw them; but it was certainly a relief to know that Handforth was not going to occupy his great brain by doing any detective work.

Handforth marched out into the Triangle, and he went with such force that when he got to the bottom of the Ancient House steps he collided rather violently with somebody who was just coming up. He was a rather curious-looking individual with extremely bowed legs. His face wore an expression of perpetual gloom, and he possessed ruddy side-whiskers and staring red hair. This melancholy person was no less a person than Mr. Josh Cuttle, who was employed on the household staff of the Ancient House.

"By hokey!" said Mr. Cuttle, as Handforth bumped into him.

"Sorry!" growled Handforth. "I didn't see you, Mr. Cuttle!"

"There was boys with eyes, and there was boys without eyes!" said Mr. Cuttle heavily. "I was no wision—I was solid; therefore it was easy for you to see me, Master Handforth. Why didn't you see me? Ask me! Because it was your nature!"

Handforth paused, and glared at Mr. Cuttle.

"No, you're not a vision!" he said. "You're a nightmare!"

"Which was an insulting remark!"

said Mr. Cuttle gloomily. "But, talking about nightmares, this was one which we was living in. Times was terrible, Master Handforth. Everything was bad!"

"Oh, I know that all by heart!" said Handforth. "We ought to have more murders, and earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, and floods, and all the rest of it! I shouldn't particularly mind if a flood did come up just now—and it could wash the Head out of his study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better not let any of the masters hear you talk like that, Handy!" grinned Pitt. "You'll soon be in a different kind of flood if you do—in a flood of hot water!"

"Where was Master Goodwin?" exclaimed Cuttle. "That was something which was worriting everybody to-day. Master Goodwin wasn't at St. Frank's no more. And why not? Ask me! Because he was took away by willains—he was kidnapped, and he was lying dead now!"

"Oh, so you've heard that rumour, have you?" asked Somerton.

"Rumours wasn't no good, young gent!" said Mr. Cuttle. "Rumours was only made to cause alarm. But it wasn't no rumour that Master Goodwin was took away by force—that was true, by hokey! Likewise it was bad!"

"But you ought to be cheerful!" put in Tommy Watson. "You're only gloomy when everything is going right, Mr. Cuttle. Now that Dick Goodwin has vanished, I should think you'd be going about chuckling and smiling all over your face!"

Mr. Cuttle shook his head.

"It was no time for smiling, Master Watson," he said. "It was a time for gloom. Master Goodwin has been kidnapped, and it was bad. It would be different if some other boy had been took away—wery different. For example, Master Handforth!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, turning round.

"There was boys that was useful, and there was boys that was the opposite!" said Mr. Cuttle. "If Master Handforth was took away, it would be a relief to the school. And why would it be a relief? Ask me! Because there would be peace—because there would be plenty of noses which wasn't sore. If Master Handforth was kidnapped, I should smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But that's impossible!" said Pitt. "I don't believe you could smile, Mr. Cuttle!"

"He'll smile the wrong way about, if he's not careful!" said Handforth darkly. "Of all the nerve! He'd smile if I was kidnapped, eh?"

"Which was not meant to be personal, Master Handforth!" said Cuttle, turning his melancholy eyes towards the leader of Study D. "It was just my nature. But with Master Goodwin it was different."

And, without explaining further, Mr. Cuttle walked into the Ancient House. The juniors looked after him rather curiously, and Handforth stalked away towards the gymnasium.

"Somehow I believe that Cuttle takes a particular interest in Goodwin," I said to my chums. "I can't quite get the hang of it, you know! I believe that he's even been guarding Goodwin, somehow. Don't you remember how we found him prowling about one night, and Goodwin was in his own study at the same time? I can't help believing that Mr. Cuttle is at St. Frank's for some special purpose—not merely one of the ordinary employees."

"That would account for his being gloomy now," said Watson. "I expected him to go about with a cherubic smile on his face—I expected him to chuckle at every corner, so to speak. He's always been longing for something dreadful to happen—for something of a critical nature, and now that Goodwin has been kidnapped, he seems to be more gloomy than ever. He's a queer old fish!"

"Dear old boy, you are quite right!" said Sir Montie. "At the same time, begad, I rather like Mr. Cuttle—I do, really! There is something about him which is so delightfully refreshing, you know! It is frightfully amusin' to hear him talk!"

Very soon after then the bell rang for morning lessons, and we were compelled to go into the Remove class-room. Mr. Crowell had some little difficulty with the Remove that morning, for the juniors were unusually excited, and did not settle down to work as they ought to have done. But the Remove-master was a reasonable man, and he did not take much notice of the subdued air of excitement which pervaded the Remove.

And when at last lessons were over, all

the juniors were only too glad to escape from the class-room. They were eager and anxious to find out if any fresh news had turned up concerning Dick Goodwin.

There was nothing fresh, however. No news had come in, and the boy from Lancashire was still missing. I was rather impatient for dinner to be over, for Tregellis-West and Watson and myself had already planned out what we should do during the afternoon, which was a half-holiday.

Ordinarily we should have gone on to Littleside, and we should have practised football, but there was something far more important to do on this particular afternoon. We knew that Dick Goodwin had been taken to Bramley Gap during the early hours of the morning, and it was our intention to go there as soon as possible on our bicycles.

"The guv'nor went hours ago," I said. "By this time he has probably found out all sorts of things. Well, we're going now, and we're going to see what we can do. Quite possibly the journey will be for nothing—there's no telling."

And so, as soon as dinner was over, we got on our bicycles, and we pedalled along towards Bramley. It was only a small fishing village, and it was situated along the coast, some twelve or fifteen miles away.

At the same time, Handforth and Church and McClure went on their bicycles to Caistowe. Church and McClure only went because Handforth insisted upon them going. They had no particular wish to be in Caistowe. But it was better and easier to agree at once to the proposal. If they objected, it would only mean trouble, and Church and McClure had long since learned that it was far better to give Handforth his head, particularly when he was in a grumpy mood.

But that visit to Caistowe was to lead to quite unexpected things!

CHAPTER III.

MR. NAGGS ADOPTS A PLAN.

NELSON LEE was in a somewhat precarious position.

He lay full length on the grass, and his head projected over the edge of the cliff. Right below him lay the beach, deserted and dreary, with the waves breaking noisily on the shingle. There was not a soul to be seen—not a house, and not a vessel. Only a few gulls hovered about, and the wind blew sharply and keenly from off the sea.

Nelson Lee had been in his present position for some little time. He was watching the beach carefully and closely. Away to his right lay Bramley Gap. But Lee had not thought it advisable to venture down upon the beach yet; he had decided that it would be better to scrutinise the foreshore carefully from the top of the cliff. He was completely concealed there, for only his head projected over the edge, and the long grass, which grew high, practically concealed his face.

Lee did not exactly know how to commence his operations. He was quite sure that Dick Goodwin had been brought to the beach at about this spot, and Lee was very interested in the old ruined lighthouse, which lay only half a mile from the shore. Somehow he naturally connected that old ruin with the fact that Goodwin had been brought here in the dead of the night.

"I'm quite convinced that the lad is somewhere in this vicinity," he told himself. "He may be in one of two places—either in a cave along this cliff, or out in that old ruined lighthouse. I am quite sure that one suggestion or the other is correct. It simply remains for me to discover which is the actual truth. I am rather inclined to believe that the boy was taken on to the old ruined lighthouse; it would certainly make a very fine prison."

It was just after noon now, and Lee was rather worried because he had not arrived earlier. But he had been delayed in Bannington, the police requiring his presence in connection with another criminal affair which had recently taken place.

At last, however, Lee had managed to get away, and he was now taking a few preliminary observations before getting to work.

It was extremely lucky that he did so, for, only a few minutes later, two men suddenly came within sight, almost immediately beneath the spot where Nelson Lee was crouching. The two men had appeared from a hidden cave mouth, and they were, of course, Mr. Naggs and Williss.

The watching detective knew at once that these were the men who had kid-

napped Dick Goodwin—he knew it positively.

He could see them distinctly down on the shingle. They were not local fishermen or inhabitants of the district—Lee could see that at once. These men were attired in ordinary lounge suits and bowler hats. They were, in fact, quite out of place on that lonely beach, and their actions, as it happened, fully coincided with Nelson Lee's own convictions.

After looking up and down the beach in a keen way, Mr. Naggs and his companion re-entered the cave, and presently appeared with a boat. It was not a large boat, and it was quite easy for the two men to push it down the shingle to the water. The very fact that this boat had been concealed in the cave told Nelson Lee at once that there was something sinister about the movements of these men on the beach. Had they been local fishermen, or local residents even, they would never have gone to the trouble of concealing the boat in a cave.

Very soon the little craft was bobbing about on the rather choppy sea, and Mr. Naggs was rowing vigorously. And the boat was being steered in a straight line for the old ruined lighthouse. Nelson Lee nodded grimly to himself.

"As I thought!" he murmured. "Goodwin is there—I'm quite certain of that. These rascals have placed him on the lighthouse, and have left him there, alone. Well, they will not have everything their own way much longer, for I intend to take a hand at once. To begin with, I shall get in this little cave. It is quite possible that I shall find something of interest."

But Nelson Lee did not make a move at once.

He knew that if he stood up his figure would be seen, and the men in the boat would probably become suspicious. Lee did not want them to have the slightest indication that anybody was on the track, and so the schoolmaster-detective waited there patiently.

The boat, as he had anticipated, went right round the rocks, until at last it disappeared from view. Lee had already gathered that the entrance to the lighthouse was on the other side—the seaward side.

And now, free from observation, he rose to his feet and walked quickly towards Bramley Gap. His walk presently broke into a trot, and he arrived on the beach within a very few minutes. Then, after assuring himself that the boat was still out of sight, he walked quickly across the shingle, near the cliff face. He could see no cave opening whatever; but he judged that this was concealed. And he was right in this respect, for, quite suddenly, he came upon the cave entrance tucked away in a little depression in the cliff face.

Nelson Lee bent down and walked straight into the cave. He quite realised that a third man might be there; but he was prepared for this, and, with a revolver in his grip, he went boldly into the cave. In his other hand he held an electric torch.

After passing through the narrow entry—which could only have been just big enough to allow the passage of the boat—he found himself in a fairly large cavern, with a high roof. And it did not take Nelson Lee long to discover that the cavern was completely deserted; there was no third man there. In all probability he was on the lighthouse, Lee told himself.

He looked round with interest, and for some little time he was busily engaged in examining the few objects which Mr. Naggs had left behind. It was therefore obvious to Nelson Lee that the men had every intention of returning to the cave—and Nelson Lee, without much hesitation, decided upon a plan of action.

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Meanwhile, Mr. Naggs and his companion had arrived at the lighthouse. The boat was drawn up on the slippery rocks, and both the men mounted the ladder, and entered the old ruin by means of the iron door.

They found themselves in a stone passage; but it was not dark, even with the iron door closed, for plenty of light came from the other end of the passage. Moving along, the two men presently came into what had once been one of the living-rooms of the lighthouse. It was now a ruin.

Overhead there was the dull sky, with masses of broken stonework lying everywhere. The jagged edges of the old wall projected upwards, forming a kind of pit. Everything was moist and damp with the spray of recent rough weather.

They did not remain here for long. Over in one part of the floor a flight of stone steps led downwards, and all was

darkness below. Mr. Naggs produced an electric torch, and, with this switched on, he passed down the steps, with Williss at his heels.

The stairs were circular, and presently the two men came upon a stout door. It was bolted on the outside, and these bolts were soon shot back.

Passing through the doorway, the two men found themselves in a large, cold apartment. It had been at one time a store-room. And now, seated on a large coil of old rope, was Dick Goodwin. The lad was looking rather pale and worn out; but, if his body had lost some of its strength, his will was as determined and as strong as ever.

"Well, my lad, how do you like solitary confinement?" inquired Mr. Naggs smoothly. "It is now nearly one o'clock—midday—and you have been here since dawn. How are you feeling?"

Dick Goodwin's eyes blazed.

"Ay, but you're a champion brute!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet, and clenching his fists. "If you think you can starve me into submission—if you think you can compel me to say something that I don't intend to say, you have made a mistake. Ay, you have that!"

"Still obstinate, I take it!" said Mr. Naggs. "Very well, young man—I will teach you a lesson which you will be likely to remember for many a long day. I have decided that there must be an end to this nonsense. I don't feel inclined to wait for you any longer. I shall give you just ten minutes now—ten minutes in which to decide. If you will speak up, all well and good. But if you don't speak up—it will be bad for you!"

"I shall not say a word!" said Goodwin quietly.

"Not if you are liable to lose your life?" asked Mr. Naggs.

Dick Goodwin started.

"By Gum! You'd never try to kill me!" he exclaimed. "You wouldn't——"

"We shall see about that!" interrupted Mr. Naggs. "In any case, you have got ten minutes now. I shall come back, and I shall expect you to surrender."

He nodded to Williss, and the pair of them moved out of the store room, and closed the door behind them, rebolting it. Then they mounted the stairs until they were in the ruined chamber above, with the dull, cloudy sky overhead. Mr. Naggs uttered a curse, and lit a cigarette.

"The obstinate young fool!" he said. "I thought he'd be submissive this time—after remaining here since dawn. But nothing seems to break his spirit!"

"Well, we must do something!" said Williss. "The idea of starving him won't do—he'll stand out for days and days—perhaps over a week. We can't afford to remain here all that time, Naggs. The police are looking for the boy, remember, and they might be able to trace him here——"

"There's no need to tell me that, you fool!" muttered Naggs. "I know as well as you do that we must get this job finished at once—without any further delay. And I mean to make that boy speak—By George! I'll make him tell us the secret this time!"

Williss looked at his chief curiously.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"I will tell you!" said Naggs. "If Goodwin is still obstinate—as I expect he will be—we'll teach him a lesson. This is my scheme. We'll bring him up, and we'll bind him to that iron ladder, on the outside of the lighthouse. We'll bind him to it, hand and foot, so that he can't move a yard."

"But the tide comes over that ladder, Naggs!" said Williss startled.

"Yes—I know that!"

"But, you don't mean to say——"

"Wait till I've finished," said Mr. Naggs. "We'll bind the boy to that iron ladder. The tide is fairly low just now—although it is coming in. In about two hours from now the tide will be fully up—and that ladder will be nearly submerged. My scheme is to bind Goodwin to that ladder, and leave him there. We'll row away in the boat, and vanish completely from his sight."

"But somebody else might spot him——"

"That's very improbable," interrupted Mr. Naggs. "The ladder faces seawards, and the other lighthouse is a good distance away. Even if the people on the lighthouse saw what was happening, they couldn't do much. And it is quite impossible to see that iron ladder from the shore. There are no fishing boats about this district, and so we are quite safe. Anyhow, I mean to adopt this plan."

"But what is the good of it?" asked Williss.

"Every good," replied Mr. Naggs.

"It will frighten the boy—it will make him think that we mean to kill him. Because, when we come back, when the tide is nearly up, I shall ask Goodwin to speak. If he still refuses, I shall tell him that he is to be left there to drown."

"Well, that ought to shift him!" said Williss. "If he thinks he's going to peg out, he'll probably tell us the truth at once. It's not a bad scheme, Naggs, but we must be careful. The sea's rather rough, you know."

"Oh, that's nothing!" interrupted Mr. Naggs. "The sea may be rough, but that's all the better. When the tide comes up over these rocks, it will dash about, and the waves will break with a tremendous noise—scaring the kid out of his wits. When we come back and ask him to speak up, he will be only too willing. Anyhow, I'm going to try this dodge. It's the only way. We can't afford to waste any further time."

He glanced at his watch.

"Only another two minutes," he said. "We might as well be getting down."

They passed down the stone stairs once more, and re-entered the store room. Goodwin had apparently been walking about, for he faced his persecutors almost as soon as they entered the door.

"Well? What have you got to say now, Master Goodwin?" asked Mr. Naggs. "Are you willing to speak, or——"

"It's a waste of time!" interrupted the boy. "I'm not going to say anything—not a word. You'll never force me to tell you the truth of my secret."

Mr. Naggs frowned.

"Very well," he said grimly. "We'll see what we can do with you, my obstinate young man. I'm inclined to think that you will alter your tone very shortly. Take hold of him, Williss. We may as well rope him up here!"

"By Gum! Don't you touch me!" said Goodwin fiercely. "What do you mean to do——"

"You will find out very soon!" interrupted Naggs. "And don't struggle—it won't do any good!"

Goodwin soon found that out for himself.

In a very short space of time, Goodwin was bound helplessly. His wrists were tied behind his back, and his ankles were securely tethered. And, in this condition, he was taken up from the old store room to the semi-demolished chamber. And from there he was taken along the passage to the iron door. This was flung wide open, and Mr. Naggs looked out carefully.

"All clear!" he exclaimed. "Not a boat in sight, and it's quite hazy over towards the lighthouse. They can't see what's happening here—even through a telescope. We're safe enough, Williss. Bring the boy out!"

Mr. Naggs was speaking in a very harsh, callous tone. He was adopting it purposely. By nature, Naggs was a scheming rascal, but he was certainly not a brute. He was not a brute in the sense that he would willingly injure his young prisoner. But, for the purposes of his present scheme, it was necessary for him to act the part.

Never for a moment did Mr. Naggs really think of harming the Lancashire boy. It was only to frighten him that this plan was being adopted. But the plan itself was cruel—though Mr. Naggs could not quite see this. He wanted Goodwin to give up his secret—and he was ready to go to almost any length in order to force the junior.

Goodwin himself was rather startled.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked huskily.

"You will see soon enough, you obstinate brat!" said Mr. Naggs harshly.

It was not long before Dick Goodwin found out the truth. For, after he had been forced through the iron doorway, he was held in position some little distance down the iron ladder. And there, while Williss held him in position from above, Mr. Naggs securely bound the boy to the iron rungs of the ladder. The job was done thoroughly, too—so thoroughly that it was impossible for Goodwin to even move. He was bound tightly to the ladder, unable to help himself in any way.

"Now, my lad, I'll explain the position," said Mr. Naggs grimly. "You have been bound here, and before long the tide will be coming up. The waves will come right over this ladder—right over your head! It rests with you whether you live, or whether you perish in this miserable way!"

Goodwin's eyes flashed.

"Are you going to murder me?" he demanded hotly.

"No—but it is left with you whether you live, or whether you commit suicide!" replied Mr. Naggs. "If you care to speak, everything will be all right—you will be released on the in-

stant. If you give me your word now that you will tell me the secret of your invention, I will cut those ropes. If you don't tell me, you will be left there."

"I will not tell you," said Goodwin firmly.

Mr. Naggs nodded.

"Very well," he said. "You will remain there—until the tide comes up. We are going away now, and we shall not return until you are nearly submerged. Then we shall ask you for the last time. Remember that, my lad—for the last time! If you still remain obstinate, the tide will come up, and you will be drowned. But it rests entirely in your hands. If you die, it will be suicide—since it is in your own power to live!"

"If you let me drown here, it will be murder!" said Goodwin, panting heavily.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Naggs. "It cannot be murder when you, yourself, can prevent everything by simply giving your word. Don't be a fool, boy—speak up now, and save yourself the trouble of——"

"By Gum!" shouted Goodwin, his eyes blazing. "I will never speak—not if you kill me!"

Mr. Naggs said no more. He intended that the sea should bring Goodwin into a different frame of mind. And Mr. Naggs was quite certain that, later on, when the tide was up, Goodwin would be of a very different frame of mind.

Two minutes later the boat was in the water, and Naggs and Willis were rowing away from the old ruined lighthouse. Dick Goodwin was left there, bound helplessly—and the tide was coming in rapidly.

The Lancashire lad's predicament was a terrible one!

CHAPTER IV.

HANDFORTH AND CO. IN TROUBLE.

"RIPPING!" said Church enthusiastically.

"Oh, rather!" agreed McClure. "I didn't know there was anything like this in Caistowe this afternoon. It starts at 3.30, too—we shall be able to manage it nicely.

The juniors were standing on the promenade in Caistowe—the little seaside resort only three miles from St. Frank's. Handforth had walked on in advance, but Church and McClure were now looking at a rather gaudy bill, which was displayed on a large board.

Handforth turned.

"Come on, you asses!" he shouted. "What are you lagging behind for?"

"Hold on, Handy, come and have a look at this!" said Church. "There's a circus here this afternoon—over on the Railway Station Meadow. A jolly ripping circus, too, by the look of it."

Handforth walked back, and he looked at the bill ferociously.

"Rats!" he growled. "We don't want to go and see that!"

"But it's a good show!" said McClure. "I've heard of this circus—it's one of the best on the road. We've got plenty of time to get to the Railway Station by half past three. And it'll fill up the afternoon nicely. It's pretty cold, and we sha'n't find any enjoyment here, or on the beach——"

"We're not going to that circus!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "Rats to the circus! Bother the circus! I expect it'll be a rotten show, anyhow!"

Church and McClure glared at their leader.

"Well, there's no need to go about like a bear with a sore head, Handy!" protested Church. "Ever since we left St. Frank's you've been miserable—you've been grumbling and growling at everything. Just because you decided not to investigate Goodwin's disappearance it doesn't mean to say that you ought to snap everybody up, and——"

"Oh, ring off!" said Handforth sharply. "I don't feel like a circus this afternoon—and I'm not going."

"Oh, all right—stay behind!" said McClure. "We'll go alone——"

"Oh, will you?" roared Handforth. "You won't, my sons! You're not going to that circus by yourselves—you're coming with me. I need you!"

"You need us?"

"Yes, I do," said Handforth. "You don't suppose I can manage a sailing boat alone, do you?"

"You can't manage a sailing boat, anyhow—alone, or with us," said Church frankly. "Don't be such an ass, Handy. You know jolly well that it's not the afternoon for taking out a boat—much less a sailing boat. We should only be capsized——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Handforth. "It's just the very kind of weather that's ideal for sailing. There's a splendid breeze, and the sea isn't at all rough."

The three chums of Study D glared at one another rather angrily.

"Well, we're not going," said Church frankly. "We're not going out on a sailing boat in a choppy sea like this. We're going to that circus!"

"Yes, rather!" agreed McClure.

Handforth waved his hand.

"All right—go!" he said, with exaggerated indifference. "Do you think I care? And if you discover when you come out of the circus that I've been drowned—you'll only have youselves to blame!"

"Been drowned!" gasped Church. "You—you ass! You—you ain't going to commit suicide——"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" snapped Handforth. "If I go out in a sailing boat by myself, I may not be able to manage it properly. Of course, I can handle a sailing boat, anywhere—single handed, or with anybody else!" he added hastily. "At the same time, if a sudden gust came along, it might be awkward. But if you chaps were there, you could lend a hand. Anyhow, I'm going to take a boat out—and you can do what you like!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"Listen to reason, Handy——"

"I'm not going to listen to anything!" interrupted Handforth. "I've made up my mind—and there's an end of it!"

Church and McClure breathed hard. They felt like taking hold of Handforth, and knocking him about until he appealed for mercy. They knew well enough that he was in earnest—he had made up his mind. And, if they did not go with him, he would probably drown himself, or get blown out to sea, or drive his boat on to the rocks. He was capable of anything—for he was about the worst sailor one would possibly imagine.

And to allow him to take a boat out on his own was quite impossible. Church and McClure knew well enough that they would be compelled to go with him—if only to look after him. They certainly couldn't go to the circus if Handforth was bent upon taking a sailing boat out into the bay. It was no good arguing—not a bit. The only thing was to accept the inevitable.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Church. "I suppose we shall have to go with him, Clury!"

"There's nothing else for it!" said McClure. "It's rotten—and it's silly! Taking a boat out a cold afternon like this—you must be dotty, Handy!"

Handforth smiled triumphantly.

"Well, I'm glad to find out that you've got a little sense left," he said. "I'm glad to find that you mean to come with me. I knew I should get you round to my way of thinking in the end. It will be simply glorious out on the boat this afternoon, with this breeze blowing. There's a boat down there on the beach already—I spotted it as soon as we came on the front."

It did not take them long to fix up matters with the old boatman who was in charge. He knew the St. Frank's juniors well, for they were often taking boats out into the bay; but the old fellow shook his head rather doubtfully as he glanced up into the sky, and he removed the stump of a clay pipe from between his teeth.

"I shouldn't advise you to go out far this afternoon, young gents," he said. "The weather don't look like improving, to my mind. There's some dirty storms coming up!"

"Oh, they won't interfere with us!" said Handforth. "The bay is quite sheltered, anyhow, and there's plenty of room for us to sail about in here without getting out into the open sea."

"It's all right as long as you keep in the bay, young gents," said the boatman; "no harm won't be done to yo at all. But don't go out into the open water, past the headland. You take my advice, and you won't come to no harm; but if one of them squalls happens to come down, and you're a good bit out from the shore, you'll have a difficulty in getting back."

"That's all right," said Church. "We won't go out too far, you leave it to us."

The boat was soon launched, and Church sat in the stern, holding the tiller. Handforth and the other juniors busied themselves with the sail, and before long it was up, and the wind filled it at once.

The little boat went bowling across the bay at a smart pace, and it was certainly rather enjoyable—or it would have been if the air had been slightly warmer.

"This is glorious!" said Handforth, taking in a deep breath. "Nothing better than sailing, and with a little breeze like this there's no danger of ——"

"Whoa! What the dickens——"

"Look out!" yelled McClure. "Mind the sail, you ass! Look out!"

Handforth pulled fiercely upon the rope, and the next second the little boat nearly capsized. She heeled right over until one gunwale was almost in the water; then, as quickly, she righted herself, and went bowling along once more.

"My only hat!" gasped Church. "I thought we were going over that time."

"Going over?" repeated Handforth. "What rot! It was your fault, anyhow, Churchey!"

"My fault!"

"Yes, of course! What's the idea of steering round in circles like this?" said Handforth. "Steer straight, you ass—straight out into the open! We're not going to stick in this bay all the time!"

"But the boatman said——"

"Never mind what the boatman said!" interrupted Handforth. "He was thinking about his boat, that's all. There's no danger in going out into the open for a bit. Where's the fun of sticking in this bay?"

"It's better, and it's just as enjoyable," said Church. "I'm not going to steer out into the open, Handy. Not likely! We should be capsized in no time if a squall happened to come down, as it might. It looks pretty stormy this afternoon, and the sea appears to be getting rougher."

Handforth glared at Church heavily.

"Either you'll steer out into the open or I'll give you a punch on the nose!" he said grimly. "You've got just five seconds to decide. Are you going to do as I say, or will you take the punch on the nose?"

"Look here, Handy, have some sense!"

"Time's up!" interrupted Handforth. "One—two——"

"Oh, all right!" gasped Church hurriedly. "We may as well go out, I suppose."

Church was in a position of considerable disadvantage, and it was hardly possible for him to engage in any fistic encounter with Handforth. Being the steersman, he would find it quite impossible to retaliate, and, therefore, he would be obliged to accept the punch. This would never do, and so Church capitulated with great promptitude.

"Don't blame me if anything happens!" he said darkly. "I'm steering the boat out of the bay under protest!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You're simply obeying my orders. I'm the skipper of this craft, and I don't allow any insubordination. If I give an order, that order has got to be carried out. I'm not going to put up with mutiny from my crew!"

Handforth always took great pleasure in assuming a position of authority. It pleased him to picture himself as the captain of the boat, and it pleased him still more to picture Church and McClure as the crew, ready to obey his orders without question.

"Well, I'm rather inclined to agree with Church," said McClure. "I think it's a dotty idea to go out of the bay, Handy. The sea's rather choppy, and this boat isn't very big. If we happen to get capsized, or anything of that sort, we shall be in a pretty pickle. It would not matter so much if you knew how to handle a sail."

"What I don't know about sailing a boat isn't worth learning!" said Handforth grimly. "As long as you chaps are with me, you'll be safe enough. That's the style! Now we're bowling right out to sea, and I reckon we'll go out for about a couple of miles and then come back."

"But the wind will be against us!" said Church.

"That doesn't matter! We can do a bit of hammering!" said Handforth. "That's what they call it, I think."

"Hammering?" repeated McClure, staring.

"You know—when a boat has to go from side to side."

"You mean tacking, you ass!" grinned McClure.

"Oh, well, it's the same! I knew it had something to do with tacks or nails," said Handforth. "You leave it to me—everything will be all serene!"

"And you say that you can handle a sailing-boat!" sniffed Church. "My only hat! Dick Goodwin is missing from St. Frank's, but I fancy that three other fellows will be missing this afternoon!"

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "There won't be any other chaps kidnapped!"

Crack! Boom! Crack!
The canvas literally went to shreds before the juniors could lift a finger.

"No, these three will be drowned at sea!" said Church gloomily.

Handforth sniffed.

"Oh, so that's what you're getting at!" he said. "Haven't you any more trust in your skipper than that? My dear chap, I'll bring you safely back to port, don't you fear. There's no danger at all. Why, what—— Whoa! Look out, there!"

A sudden gust of wind came along and nearly tore the rope out of Handforth's grasp. The sail lashed wildly, and the little boat shivered from stem to stern. Then, catching the wind full, she raced away at a spanking pace.

"We were nearly capsized that time!" grunted McClure, looking rather nervous. "I—I say, Handy, we'd better be getting back, I think!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We've hardly started, you ass!"

He proceeded to tie the rope securely, so that the sail was set, and his chums regarded him in a somewhat doubtful manner.

"That's a potty thing to do!" said Church. "The first gust that comes along will tear the sail to ribbons, Handy. In a wind of this sort the only thing you can do is to hold that rope, so that you can control the sail properly. If it's fixed and a big gust comes along, there'll be no telling what'll happen."

"Three people can't sail this boat!" snapped Handforth. "I'm the skipper, and I'm doing it. You chaps had better not interfere. If we do have an accident it'll be your fault for butting in!"

Church and McClure thought it would be advisable to say nothing, and to leave the control of the boat entirely in their leader's hands. Then if a mishap did occur he could only blame himself. And, in any case, it was useless arguing. It was only a waste of breath, and Handforth took no notice whatever of advice, whether it was good or bad.

"Now we're all right," said Handforth, looking pleased with himself. "We're going along splendidly now, and it will be fine sport coming back. Steer a little to the left, Church—that is, to port."

"Back to Caistowe, do you mean?" asked Church.

"No, you ass; port your helm!"

"Then we shall go to starboard," said Church. "It's no good messing about——"

"If you port your helm, we shall go several points to port," said Handforth. "Why can't you obey my orders, instead of acting the goat?"

"Oh, all right!" grunted Church.

He pressed on the tiller, and the result was rather startling. The little sailing-boat answered at once to the helm, and it swung round. The next second the sail ballooned wildly, and Handforth, who was sitting near, received the full force of the canvas. It struck him in the chest and face, and he rolled over with a wild yell. At the same second the boat heeled right over, and Handforth nearly toppled over into the sea. He just managed to save himself in the nick of time, but he was drenched almost to the skin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Church and McClure.

"You—you—— I'm soaked!" howled Handforth. "I'm drenched to the skin!"

"Well, I was only obeying orders!" said Church.

"You—you babbling lunatic!" hooted Handforth. "What did you want to do that for? I didn't tell you to turn the boat right round, did I?"

Handforth shook as much water from himself as possible; then he attempted to dry himself with a handkerchief. While he was doing this McClure felt several spots of rain, and the sky overhead was black and threatening. A dense cloud was rapidly coming up.

"Looks like a storm!" said McClure. "I say, Handy, we'd better be getting back."

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "We're going out further yet. A few drops of rain won't hurt us."

"They won't hurt you—you're soaked already!" growled Church.

Further conversation was impossible.

For at that moment the squall burst. It burst with an abruptness and with a fury which took Handforth and Co. completely by surprise. A roaring gust of wind came up from behind. It caught the sail, made it flap wildly for a second, and then there were several deafening reports.

Crack! Boom! Crack!

The canvas literally went to shreds before the juniors could lift a finger. It simply vanished within a few seconds, leaving only some wildly waving shreds clinging to the mast which, by some miracle or other, had not snapped.

The little sailing-boat, quite helpless, heeled over, and it really seemed that it was about to turn turtle. The water poured in in volumes, and all three juniors felt that their last moment had come. But then the boat righted itself and lay broadside on to the wind, swaying and rocking in rather a terrifying manner.

"Look out!" shouted Church hoarsely. "The oars—they are floating out!"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped McClure.

He made a valiant attempt to save the oars. There were two of them, and they had been lying loose against one of the seats. But the water in the boat had floated the oars out, and before the juniors could do anything to save them they had gone, and were beyond reach. With the sail torn to shreds and with the oars missing, it was absolutely impossible to control the boat. The chums of Study D were in a predicament, indeed.

"You—you silly asses!" grunted Handforth. "Look what you've done now!"

"What—what we've done?" panted Church.

"Yes. Why couldn't you have saved those oars?" demanded Handforth. "A fine crew you are, I don't think!"

"What price you as a skipper?" demanded Church angrily.

It was really impossible to quarrel there, for the boat was rocking so fiercely that the juniors could only cling to it wildly. Rain was now descending fiercely, and the wind was simply tremendous. It came along over the sea in great billowing gusts; and the waves rose higher, and the spray came splashing over the juniors in constant cascades.

And the boat was now drifting—drifting helplessly. The disaster was, of course, Handforth's fault entirely, for if he had not been so obstinate he would have taken the advice of the old boatman and not have ventured out of the bay. As it was, the little craft was now in the open sea, nearly a mile from the shore, and drifting along quite out of control. There were rocks to be seen along the coast—grim, treacherous rocks, over which the sea was breaking with deafening roars and with terrific power. If the little boat happened to drift ashore near those rocks, it would be smashed to atoms like a cockle-shell, and its occupants would probably be drowned before they could haul themselves into safety. Either that, or the waves would dash them to death on the rocks. The prospect was not at all cheerful.

And Edward Oswald Handforth, as he realised the truth, became subdued. He knew, in his own heart, that this mishap was his own fault. But he would never have admitted it openly. And Handforth felt rather bad as he wondered what the end of this adventure would be.

The sudden storm, if anything, was increasing in violence, and Handforth, Church and McClure clung desperately to their frail craft.

The situation was full of deadly peril.

CHAPTER V.

THE LANCASHIRE LAD'S ORDEAL.

MR. NAGGS chuckled as he straightened up after passing through the narrow entrance of the cave. Behind him was Williss, and the two men had only just finished hauling up their boat from the sea.

"That'll teach the young brat a lesson!" said Mr. Naggs presently. "By thunder, he'll speak after this, I'll warrant! When we go back to him in half an hour's time, he'll be ready to babble out the whole truth!"

Williss shook his head.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said. "The kid's obstinate, and it's my belief he'll remain pigheaded until the end."

"But think of the fright he'll get, man!" said Mr. Naggs, lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, he'll get a fright all right, I'm not questioning that!" said the other man. "At the same time, when he finds out that we don't mean anything serious he'll shut up like a mousetrap."

"But he won't find it out, you idiot!" said Mr. Naggs impatiently. "When we go back to him we shall make him believe that we shall leave him there to die unless he speaks. As soon as he's given his promise, he won't be able to back out. And when we haul him up into the lighthouse we shall hear the whole truth. We shall get all the details of that invention, and that's what we're after!"

Williss stirred up the powdery sand with the toe of his boot.

"Well, I don't quite like the whole thing, Naggs," he declared. "It's a bit too risky, to my mind."

"Risky?"

"Yes, that's what I said," repeated Williss. "The sea is fairly rough this afternoon, and it will get rougher, I believe. The tide's coming in fast, and when it covers those rocks out there the waves will dash up against that ladder with terrific force. Anyhow, they will if the sea gets much rougher than it is just now."

"It won't get rougher! Don't you be a nervous fool!" said Mr. Naggs pettely. "And it won't do any harm if the sea is a bit rough; it'll scare the kid all the more. He is bound to that iron ladder, helpless, and the tide will rise. Imagine what his feelings will be, stuck there, unable to move a finger! He'll go nearly dotty with fright, and when we go back he'll be ready to tell us anything. I'm absolutely sick of his obstinacy, and that's why I'm teaching him this lesson!"

Williss shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's your idea, Naggs, so if anything goes wrong, don't blame me!" he said.

"You needn't get the wind up, I sha'n't blame you!" said Naggs shortly.

The two stood there, waiting. Dick Goodwin was on the lighthouse, bound to the iron ladder, helpless. He could do nothing, and his late captors had now come ashore, and they intended waiting in the cave until at least half an hour had elapsed. Then they would return, fully expecting that Dick Goodwin would prove submissive. Mr. Naggs, in fact, intended waiting until one solid hour had passed—until the tide was fairly high.

But neither of the men had the slightest suspicion that they were not alone in the cave.

They did not examine the place thoroughly, of course, since the idea never entered their heads that there might be a third person hidden somewhere among the shadows, in one of the deep crevices.

But there was somebody there, and that somebody was Nelson Lee.

The famous detective had waited there deliberately—for he had seen the two men coming ashore in the boat. It was impossible for him to leave the beach without being seen, and so he had deemed it wiser to remain where he was. He had found plenty of hiding places in that cave, among the rocks. And he thought it would be just as well if he remained, for he would probably be able to hear something of importance.

And he had!

He knew now, that Dick Goodwin had been bound hand and foot to the iron ladder which led up from the rocks to the doorway of the wrecked lighthouse. The lad was there now, suffering mental torture. For, he had been led to believe that these men intended taking his life unless he spoke.

But Nelson Lee knew, by the conversation he had just heard, that these men had no murderous intentions. It was merely a trick—a cruel trick in order to force Goodwin to speak. Before any real danger could overtake the lad, he would be released.

Lee was crouching in a concealed corner, behind a big rock. It was some little distance from the ground level, and the detective was quite certain that he would not be discovered. He was, in fact, in a very favourable position. And he wondered what he should do. He wondered what would be the best course for him to take.

Should he spring out, and face these two men now?

Or should he wait—until they returned to the rock and rescued Goodwin? Upon due thought, Nelson Lee decided upon the latter course. He thought that it would be better. Goodwin was in no immediate danger, and it would be a mistake to act now. Lee came to this decision after very careful thought.

If he sprang out at once, and faced the two men, there would be a fight. That, of course, was obvious. Mr. Naggs and his confederate would not knuckle under willingly. And they were both strong, powerful men. Lee was certain in his own mind that he would be able to overpower them in a fair scrap. But it was quite likely that they would not act fairly—and if they succeeded in bowling Lee over, they would probably flee—they would certainly not go out in the boat to the lighthouse, to be captured when they returned to the shore. And, in that event, Goodwin would be left out there to his fate. Thinking all this over, Lee concluded that his better course would be to remain still until these men had released Goodwin, according to their programme. Then would be his time to act—after the pair had gone. Lee already had a scheme in his mind which would deal effectively with the rascals.

But fate—in the shape of the weather—took a hand in the game.

Twenty minutes or more had elapsed, and then Williss crouched down, and passed out through the cave entrance. He stood there for some minutes, with the wind blowing furiously in his face, carrying with it many drops of cold rain. The sea was now much rougher—much more violent. Splashes of spray were dashing up on the lighthouse. Williss could see them distinctly. But he could not see Goodwin—since the ladder was fixed to the seaward side of the old lighthouse.

A squall had come down suddenly—a fierce, roaring storm, with a wind which attained the force of a gale.

Williss watched the waves as they burst thunderously on the shingle, and there was an uneasy feeling within him. Their boat was not a very small one, and, with the tide coming in, it would be rather difficult to launch the little craft. Those waves were formidable. It was really astonishing how much larger and forceful they had become during the last fifteen minutes.

He turned, and re-entered the cave.

"Look here, Naggs, I think we'd better go back at once!" he said quickly.

"Nonsense," said Naggs. "Why, I've no intention of going back until another half hour has elapsed—at least!"

"But, man alive, that boy will be dead by then," said Williss. "The sea's terrifically rough—the waves are breaking on the shore with enormous power! We shall never be able to launch the boat!"

"You always were a bit of a coward, Williss!" said Mr. Naggs. "Don't show the white feather, man! We shall get out all right—and we shall be able to launch the boat. There's no need for you to——"

"I tell you it's serious!" interrupted Williss fiercely. "I agreed to help you in this affair, Naggs, because you told me that you didn't mean to harm the boy at all. But this will be murder—it will be black murder!"

Mr. Naggs swore.

"Confound you, Williss, you're absolutely one mass of nerves!" he snapped. "There's no danger at all—not the slightest bit! The sea is a bit fresh, I'll admit, but I can handle a boat, and——"

"Come and look for yourself, if you don't believe me!" interjected Williss. "A squall has come down—and the wind is simply howling. The waves are double as big as they were twenty minutes ago! You haven't seen, Naggs—you don't know!"

Naggs flung his cigarette end down.

"I'll come and have a look—but I'm not going out yet!" he said. "That boy must have a proper lesson—not half a one—not half a one. As for your talk of murder, that is rank drivel!"

Williss did not reply, and the two men bent down, and passed out through the low entrance until they were standing in the open air. The wind almost took Mr. Naggs' breath away as he stood upright, and rain beat furiously into his face. He was certainly surprised—unpleasantly surprised. And, within him, he was more than a little alarmed. He had not expected such a change in the weather conditions in so short a space of time. The waves were breaking on the shingle with a roar which filled his ears.

"By thunder!" said Mr. Naggs, between his teeth.

"Well," demanded Williss. "What about it? Don't you think we'd better go at once, Naggs? Unless we hurry we shall never be able to get the boat out at all—and that kid will die there—he'll be dashed to death by these waves——"

"It's worse than I thought," said Naggs quickly. "All right—we'll go out now, Williss. But there's no need for you to be alarmed—we shall do it all right."

They hurried down the shingle, to the spot where they had left the boat. Then, with some difficulty, they pushed it down to the waves. It was a tricky business, launching the little craft, but, at last, they succeeded, and then, bobbing up and down in what seemed a very dangerous manner, the boat pulled out towards the lighthouse.

The sea was far rougher than Mr. Naggs had imagined—now that he was on the water he knew this. It was very difficult to row, and the boat was tossed hither and thither helplessly.

Meantime, Dick Goodwin was in a terrible position.

At first, things had not seemed so bad. He was roped to the ladder, it was true, but the waves were a good way off, and he only received a burst of spray now and again. The waves, although fairly rough, did not seem dangerous.

But then that squall had come down—suddenly, terrifying.

It burst with great force, and the waves were larger and more dangerous. The wind cut like ice, and Dick Goodwin was soon drenched from head to foot by the splashes of spray which came whirling up from the breakers. The tide was coming in, and so the waves were much stronger than they would have been otherwise. And, as minute after minute passed, the sea crept up—the waves grew larger. Until, at last, Dick Goodwin was drenched again and again during every minute that passed. He felt, instinctively, that his captors did not mean to kill him. He believed that they had gone off, leaving him bound there with the full intention of returning before it was too late. But the weather had changed so abruptly that Goodwin began to despair—would Naggs and Williss be able to get near the rocks—would they be able to land?

What if they failed?

The Lancashire boy hardly cared to think of what would happen then. The tide would come up, and the waves would grow heavier and bigger, until, in a very short time, he would be drowned where he clung. He would be dashed to death by the enormous power of the waves.

Chilled with cold, half dazed by the spray, Goodwin could do nothing. He could not even protect his face, for his hands were bound behind his back. The ordeal he was passing through was an awful one.

He was desperate now, and he at last commenced wriggling and struggling—attempting to get free from his bonds. But this was a hopeless task. Those ropes had been tied strongly, and they were now wet and hard. It was impossible to shift them, even a fraction of an inch.

Surely this was his last hour?

Goodwin could hardly think anything else, and, brave though he was, he was filled with a sickly sense of terror. The waves were appalling in their fierceness. They broke with thunderous crashes, and the water all round the rocks was thick and creamy with foam.

It was impossible for Goodwin to know whether rescue was coming or not—for he could not see the shore. His only vista was one of rough sea, drenching spray, and—now and again—a fleeting glimpse of the great new lighthouse. But it seemed to be miles off; and, in any case, the boy knew that no rescue could come from that direction. No boat could be launched from those treacherous rocks out there.

After a while the rain ceased, but the wind was as strong as ever. And the waves grew bigger and heavier.

Crash! Boom! Crash!

In a dull kind of way, Dick noticed that the big waves came in a series. There would be a period of comparative quietness—and then a series of gigantic seas would come, breaking with terrible fury and power.

The minutes sped by—although, to the helpless boy, they seemed to be hours. The tide crept up, and the rocks all round were becoming covered. Dick vaguely wondered how long it would be before the water would submerge him entirely.

He was not feeling cold now. His limbs were numb, and without feeling at all. And he was not terrified; he seemed to realise that it was useless for him to struggle and to shout for help. He could do nothing—except wait. And, dimly and uncertainly, the boy told himself that no rescue would come.

He was surprised to find that, with the rising of the tide, the waves were not so terrible. They broke with roaring crashes, but the spray did not drench him so much. The reason for this was obvious. The rocks were now nearly submerged—and, therefore, the waves had nothing to break against. They rolled on sullenly and angrily, swirling with a kind of helpless fury round the smooth walls of the half-wrecked lighthouse. Already the water was level with Dick's feet.

The lad had given up looking for assistance which never came. It was a strain for his eyes. The salt spray smarted, and it was almost impossible to see. Only at infrequent intervals did he gaze round him.

During a quiet spell, Dick looked up. Then he started, and a little gasp came into his throat. His eyes opened wide, and there was infinite relief in their expression. He swallowed something with difficulty.

"By Gum!" he muttered.

For there, rounding the edge of the foam-encircled rocks, was a small boat!

Dick recognised its occupants at once. They were Mr. Naggs and Mr. Williss: His captors had come to rescue him.

The boy knew that he would be still kept a prisoner, but this was of little consequence at the moment. He was about to be saved from a terrible death—and all else was insignificant.

However, a firm resolve came into Dick's heart. He would never give up the secret which Mr. Naggs was so anxious to obtain. This experience had not weakened his resolve.

He watched the boat with eager interest. It was coming round, and it would probably draw in close against the rocks, while one of the men jumped for it. The boat was tossing up and down on the waves like a cockle-shell, and it was only with extreme difficulty that Mr. Naggs succeeded in controlling it.

Williss, with nervous eyes, was watching the rocks.

"Not so near, you fool!" he shouted hoarsely. "If once we touch we shall be smashed to atoms! We could never live in this sea—and the shore is almost a mile away! We can't get on to these rocks in this sea——"

"We might draw in close, and you can grab the ladder," said Naggs. "I'll wait until the sea quiets a bit, then we'll have a try——"

"No, no!" yelled Williss frantically. "We shall be killed!"

"But we must——"

"The rocks—the rocks!" gasped the other man. "We can't get near, Naggs—we can't do it, I tell you! The boat will be smashed like an egg-shell! The sea's too rough, man! I told you what it would be—I knew all along that it was a mad idea! We can't get near the boy—he'll be drowned before our eyes! Oh, you fool—you madman! I knew all along——"

"Stop that, you cowardly hound!" snapped Naggs. "We didn't know the sea would get so rough. There's one place where we can draw near—just to the left. The sea is quieter there, and we can try——"

"We can't! We can't!" screamed Williss. "It'll be suicide! We've murdered the boy, but there's no need to kill ourselves. We can't do it, Naggs—I tell you we can't do it!"

Boom! Crash!

The waves broke with deafening crashes against the rocks, just where Mr. Naggs had suggested drawing in. The man was pale, and his face was drawn. He was beginning to realise that Williss was right.

It was, indeed, impossible to get near the ladder.

Before either of the men could grasp the rusty ironwork, the boat would be lifted up and sent crashing to destruction against the walls of the lighthouse, or against the seaweed-covered fangs, which raised their ugly tips above water here and there.

Mr. Naggs was scared—for probably the first time in his life.

If Goodwin died, it would be murder! He had been placed there by Naggs, and he would be held responsible. He would be tracked down, arrested, and committed for trial on the charge of wilfully murdering the boy!

Mr. Naggs was seized with a sudden panic, and this was rather foreign to his nature. He was generally a cool rogue. But he had never intended any real harm to Goodwin, and to suddenly realise that he would be held responsible for the boy's death came as an awful shock.

He was awakened to the reality of the moment by Williss.

"Not so close, you fool!" shouted the man. "We shall be smashed! Look out! That wave—— Oh, good heavens!"

The little boat was lifted up on the crest of a wave, and it was only by skilful oarsmanship that Mr. Naggs succeeded in averting disaster. That same wave—an extra heavy one—smothered Dick Goodwin completely, and he was left dripping with water and gasping.

"Help!" he shouted huskily. "Be quick——"

The rest of his words were drowned in the roar of the surf.

"We can't do it, Naggs!" gasped Williss. "Let's get back. It's madness to stop here! We shall have to get right away, before the police can discover anything!"

Naggs nodded grimly.

And, a moment later, the boat was heading for the shore as rapidly as Mr. Naggs could propel it.

Dick Goodwin, tied helplessly to that iron ladder, had been left to his fate!

CHAPTER VI.

A SWIM FOR LIFE.

"YOU fool! You madman! You infernal fool!"

Williss was nearly frantic with alarm and terror. He and Mr. Naggs had just got into the cave, and Williss was chilled with cold, nearly choked, and the terror of the Law was in his heart.

"I knew what it would be!" he went on, almost sobbing with fright. "That boy will be killed! He will die out there, bound to that ladder! Well, it wasn't my fault. I warned you all along. You are responsible, Naggs! You'll have to answer for the murder of the kid!"

"Shut up, hang you!" snarled Naggs, who was in no mood to listen to the wailings of his companion. "Shut up! There's no sense in talking like that! How was I to know that the sea would get so rough? The boy will die, and there's an end of it. It's an infernal shame, and we shall have to clear right out."

"Can't we do anything to rescue him?" asked Williss desperately.

"Nothing—unless you care to swim out," replied Naggs grimly. "That might be successful. A strong swimmer could do the trick, I dare say. But we're not great on swimming, Williss. I'm upset about this. I didn't mean to hurt the boy—not a hair of his head. And now he'll be drowned out there!"

Williss turned suddenly, with a gasp.

"I—I—I heard something!" he stammered.

"Don't be a nervous fool!" snapped Naggs. "There's nothing—— By thunder!"

A dim, gloomy form loomed up from the dense shadows at the rear of the cave.

"Hands up—the pair of you!" exclaimed a cold, grim voice.

Naggs uttered a furious, startled oath.

"Lee!" he hissed. "Nelson Lee!"

The men were right; it was Nelson Lee.

Nelson Lee, filled with horror and alarm and fury. He had been waiting for these men to come back with Dick Goodwin. He had been waiting until they rescued the boy from his perilous position. And now the great detective understood, by the few words he had already overheard, that the Lancashire lad had been left out there, bound to that old lighthouse, in a position of deadly peril. Goodwin, in fact, had been left to die!

And Nelson Lee, knowing that every second was of value, had emerged from his hiding-place. It was the only course, since it was necessary to take action immediately. Even the delay of one minute might mean the loss of Dick Goodwin's life.

"Hands up!" repeated Nelson Lee curtly. "Understand, I will take no nonsense from you, you murderous rogues! You are both covered, and at the first sign of treachery I shall fire!"

"Hang you!" snarled Naggs desperately.

He acted with the rapidity of lightning. The man was desperate. He knew very well that this would be the end if he allowed himself to be captured and for a second he "saw red." He hardly knew what he was doing, and he certainly did not care a rap for the revolver which Nelson Lee held in his grasp.

Whiz!

The electric-torch which Naggs had held in his hand went shooting through the air. Nelson Lee had not been prepared for this rapid act on Naggs's part; but the detective dodged, for he caught a momentary glimpse of the torch as it came speeding towards him.

Crash!

Nelson Lee had been just too late, and the hard corner of the torch caught him on the temple. If he had not dodged, the torch would have landed fully in his face; as it was, it struck him a glancing blow. But it came with tremendous violence, and Nelson Lee staggered back, half dazed, and bowled completely off his feet.

He fell down, and lay perfectly still.

"Good heavens!" gasped Williss. "You've killed him, Naggs! You've killed him!"

Mr. Naggs was panting hoarsely.

"Don't be a fool!" he snarled. "The man's not dead—only stunned. We'll get out. We'll bolt for it while we can!"

They were both in a state of mad panic, and they doubled up and passed swiftly out through the rock entrance. Then, arriving on the shingle, they dashed away along the beach—but not

in the direction of Bramley Gap. They went the other way, following the base of the cliff, and they soon disappeared round one of the jutting points.

Nelson Lee had been left in the cave, lying still and silent upon the floor, but the great detective was only momentarily bowled out. He sat up almost before the sound of the two rascals had disappeared. Except for a slight dizziness and a large bump on his head, Nelson Lee was quite all right.

He struggled to his feet, breathing hard, and he did not give a thought to the two men who had just escaped. In one way, he was rather glad that they had gone and that no further delay would be caused.

Lee could have run after Naggs and Williss easily, and he could probably have overtaken them, but the schoolmaster detective was not anxious to do this. His one thought, his sole anxiety, was for Dick Goodwin.

Somehow or other, Lee had got to get out to the lighthouse, and not one second was to be wasted. He knew that the tide was coming in, and that Goodwin was bound helplessly to the iron ladder. Even the slightest delay might cost the lad his life.

And so, on the whole, he was quite glad that Naggs and Williss had gone, for now there could be no delay. There could be no fight, in which many precious minutes would be wasted.

Lee flung his revolver down, and then he bent low and went out through the cave exit at the double. He went dashing down the shingle, tearing off his coat and waistcoat as he did so. Arriving at the water's edge, he bent down and rapidly divested himself of his boots, and he was just about to plunge in the water when he heard a shout—or, rather, two or three shouts.

Nelson Lee turned his face, and he saw three figures running awkwardly over the rough, loose shingle. Those three figures belonged to Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself. We had only just come down the Gap, and, upon arriving on the beach, we had seen Nelson Lee at once.

"Guv'nor!" I yelled, waving my hand.

"Hold on, sir!" shouted Tommy Watson.

We could see that something unusual was afoot. We could see, in fact, that Nelson Lee was intent upon plunging into that rough, treacherous sea, and we were rather staggered.

Nelson Lee just gave us one glance, and then he waved his hand, and plunged into the sea without wasting a moment. A great wave broke over him, but he emerged amid the foam, and we could see him striking out powerfully and rapidly towards the old, wrecked lighthouse.

"Well, I'm hanged!" I exclaimed breathlessly, coming to a halt.

"He must be mad—stark, raving mad!" gasped Watson.

"Really, dear old boy——"

"But it's suicide—absolute suicide—to swim out in that sea!" went on Watson, horrified. "And what does it mean, anyhow? Why has Mr. Lee dived in like this? He—he must have gone off his rocker, you know, and has——"

"Don't you believe it," I interrupted. "The guv'nor isn't the kind of man to go off his rocker. He has a very good reason for swimming out like this; you can be absolutely certain of that. I wouldn't mind betting all I've got he's gone out after Goodwin, to rescue the chap."

"My only hat!"

We stood on the shingle, excited and rather agitated. For a moment I wondered whether I should plunge in after Nelson Lee, and follow him. I was a powerful swimmer, and I felt that I could fight against these big waves. But, on second thoughts, I decided to remain where I was. Although I could swim well, Nelson Lee could swim far better than I.

We watched him as he struck out against the incoming tide. It was a wonderful exhibition, and even I was surprised, for the guv'nor was fighting his way through the water as though his very life depended upon it. It was a grim, desperate swim, a fight against the elements, a fight against the overpowering force of the sea.

We were fascinated as we watched, and, after a while, we could only see the Guvnor's head now and again, for the waves were big, and he was concealed for the most part of the time, and at last he disappeared altogether. Search as we would, we could see no sign of him.

Watson's face was rather pale as he turned to me.

"He—he's disappeared!" muttered Tommy. "Do—do you think——"

"That he's gone under?" I said. "Rather not! He's vanished behind those rocks, Tommy, and there's no need for you to worry. The guv'nor has swum in worse seas than this before now—and greater distances, too."

But it was a very perilous undertaking that Nelson Lee had essayed. The sea was even rougher than he had supposed. But he fought against the waves grimly, and with an iron determination, and, foot by foot, he won the battle. He drew nearer and nearer to those foam-smothered rocks.

At last he had passed them, and then he struck out to the right, so that he would be taken round to the other side of the wrecked lighthouse. And, through the spray, he could catch glimpses, now and again, of the iron ladder, and he could distinctly see Dick Goodwin's figure bound there. The lad was motionless, and Lee believed that he was insensible.

The sea, even when comparatively smooth, was now well over Goodwin's knees, and the waves were dashing over his form, soaking him and smothering him. Even now it would be touch and go. Perhaps the lad was already on the verge of death and beyond recovery.

But this was certainly not the case.

Nelson Lee found this out almost at once, for he observed a movement of Goodwin's head. And then, faint and indistinct, came a husky shout. He heard it even above the roar of the waves and the singing of the water in his ears. The detective struck out fiercely and powerfully for that ladder.

The sea had now covered the rocks, and it was thus possible for the detective to swim right up close to the stonework of the lighthouse. But he had to be very careful, for if he happened to get caught on one of those waves, he would be dashed to death against the stonework. He would be crushed before he could protect himself.

And so he awaited his opportunity, and at last, when a comparatively calm period set in, Lee swam rapidly forward. Even as it was a wave overtook him, and sent him whirling forward helplessly. It was a critical moment.

Almost by a miracle, it seemed, Nelson Lee escaped death. And now he was right close to the ladder. Three powerful strokes, and he grasped one of the rungs. He hauled himself up, and clung there desperately.

A wave came roaring up behind, and it broke with terrific force. Lee was flattened and bruised, but he clung there, and the water subsided, leaving him somewhat exhausted, but as grimly determined as ever.

Rung by rung, he hauled himself up until, at last, he was immediately beneath Goodwin, with his head and shoulders occasionally submerged in the waves.

"Thank Heaven you have come, sir!" gasped the boy weakly.

"Bear up, Goodwin! Do not despair," said Nelson Lee huskily. "We shall soon have you out of this predicament, lad. When I cut you free, make no attempt to swim. I will take you safely back to the shore."

"You—you can't do it, sir," said Goodwin faintly. "In—in this sea—ay, it's impossible, sir! Wouldn't it be better to get up into the lighthouse? We shall be safe there until the tide goes down."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"A good suggestion, Goodwin," he said. "Yes, we will get up into the lighthouse, into safety. But I must cut you free first."

Clinging there, Nelson Lee felt in his trousers pocket—a somewhat difficult task, considering that his clothing was clinging to him in a most uncomfortable manner. But after a while Lee succeeded in pulling out a sharp pocket-knife. Opening a blade, he proceeded to slash at the ropes which bound Goodwin to the ladder, and at length the lad was free. But his strength had nearly given out, and although he tried desperately to cling to the ironwork, he failed.

And as the last band of rope gave way, Goodwin fell forward, half unconscious, Nelson Lee attempted to save the lad, and he would probably have done so, but just at that moment another big wave came along, and Goodwin was washed away from the ladder in the foam and smother.

But Lee succeeded in grasping the boy's foot. And he, too, was carried away. A few seconds later they were both well clear of the lighthouse, and Lee was grasping the semi-conscious boy firmly and grimly. It was too late now to enter the lighthouse. There was only one possible course to pursue. Lee would have to get back to the shore, and, once clear of the rocks, this would

not be such a difficult task, coming in by the tide, they would be literally swept ashore.

But the trouble was in getting clear of the rocks.

Lee was greatly handicapped by his burden. But he was a wonderful swimmer, and he nearly succeeded in getting clear of those deadly fangs. Then the pair were carried on the crest of a wave, helplessly, and unable to do anything.

Nelson Lee's efforts were quite in vain. The great detective felt a jar which went through every bone of his body. He almost lost his grip on the boy.

For his left side had been hurled against one of the jutting rocks. Fortunately that rock was smooth, and Lee had only just glanced it. If he had been flung against the rock with full force, his bones would have been broken as though they were twigs.

Even as it was, however, Lee's left arm was quite useless. It was numb and racked with pain. He could not use it at all.

And this was a disaster.

For Lee was seriously handicapped. He was holding Dick Goodwin with his right hand, and he had been using his left to strike out for the shore; but with his left hand he could do nothing but drift and paddle with his feet.

It really seemed as though Nelson Lee's wonderful swim had been in vain. Not only would Dick Goodwin drown, but Nelson Lee himself would perish in an attempt to save the boy.

The detective knew quite well that he would never be able to get to the shore. With his arm in this condition, and with his whole left side useless, the task of swimming ashore was quite out of the question.

It was a struggle for life—a desperate, hopeless struggle. And how long would it last?

Fortunately, he and Goodwin were now clear of the rocks, and they were being swept slowly—ever so slowly—towards the beach. But Lee knew that long before they got there they would be submerged. Lee's strength was already giving way, and it seemed a terrible distance to the shingle. He would never be able to do it; he knew that.

As for Goodwin, the lad was beyond any effort on his own part. He hung limp in Nelson Lee's grip, and he was practically unconscious. He was a dead-weight upon his rescuer.

Nelson Lee's thoughts were bitter as he kept up that uneven struggle, that struggle which he instinctively knew would end in failure.

Half blinded by the salt sea, numbed with pain, and with despair in his heart, Lee drifted on, with Goodwin in his arm. He didn't seem to care now, for he knew that he would never be able to get to the shore alive. What did it matter whether he sank at once, or whether he continued the battle?

And then it seemed as though voices came to him. He heard shouts—excited, desperate shouts. But they were thousands of miles away, it seemed, and one of the voices was strangely reminiscent of Edward Oswald Handforth!

Lee clenched his teeth, and he knew that he was the victim of a delusion. He opened his eyes, and they were blurred with water, and he could scarcely see. But then, abruptly, he shook his head viorously, and he was able to see more clearly.

There, not fifteen yards distant, a boat lay tossing in the angry sea. A sailing-boat, with the canvas torn to shreds round the mast, and with three figures plainly visible—the figures of Handforth, Church, and McClure! All three juniors were staring at Nelson Lee, and the boat was rocking about wildly, obviously out of control.

"Boys!" gasped Nelson Lee faintly.

"Hang on, sir!" came a roar in Handforth's voice. "We're drifting towards you. We shall soon be alongside! Hang on, and we'll haul you in!"

Surely it was the Hand of Providence which had caused that helpless boat to drift to this spot!

CHAPTER VII.

ALL SERENE!

HANDFORTH and Co. had had rather a terrifying time of it.

With their craft helpless and unmanageable, they had been able to do nothing, and they had drifted with the sea—they had been tossed about, hither and thither, until they were dizzy, sick and chilled to the marrow.

But they had not drifted in vain. To their great joy they had found

that they were getting nearer and nearer to the beach, and they had reckoned that they would just miss those treacherous rocks near the ruined lighthouse, and would go inshore in a fairly safe place. And then, quite suddenly, they had caught sight of Nelson Lee and Goodwin.

Now, thrilled with excitement, and forgetting all about their discomforts, the chums of Study D waited for a moment when they would be able to seize the pair in the water. They were drifting nearer and nearer—already they were within five yards.

"It's all right, sir: we can't miss you now!" shouted Handforth, between chattering teeth.

A wave sent the boat surging forward, and the next moment Nelson Lee and Goodwin were right under the stern. They would have been swept by, and then all chance of holding them up would have been lost, for Handforth and Co. could not control their boat.

But McClure gave a desperate leap, and he nearly hurled himself overboard. But Handforth grasped him, and the next moment Nelson Lee was held. McClure's outstretched hand had grasped the detective's shoulder. After that it was a comparatively simple matter.

Goodwin was hauled into the boat first. He was still conscious, and he helped himself somewhat while the three juniors hauled him in. Then he staggered back, and sank into a heap on the floor of the boat. Nelson Lee was pulled in next, and the detective breathed a sigh of thankfulness.

"I don't pretend to know how you boys came to be here," he exclaimed, "but you arrived in the very nick of time, Handforth. You have saved my life and Goodwin's!"

"Oh, that's rot, sir!" said Handforth. "We didn't know we were coming this way—it was just chance—just Providence. That's all we can call it, sir!"

The boat drifted nearer and nearer to the shore. The tide was running in fast now, and it was inevitable that the boat would be cast ashore sooner or later.

It was going towards the shingle in an oblique direction, and with every big wave that came along, the boat was lifted and taken nearer and nearer to safety.

And on the shingle stood Tregellis-West and Watson and myself. We were watching excitedly and with tremendous interest. We had seen nearly everything, and we knew that the guv'nor was safe, and that Dick Goodwin had been rescued. But we were certainly amazed to find Handforth and Co. there, in a boat which was beyond control.

Seeing that the little craft was coming ashore, we kept pace with it, and ran along the shingle, remaining opposite all the time. And we could see that the boat was coming nearer and nearer.

At last it was quite close inshore, and we believed that it would be sent safely on the shingle on the crest of a wave; but this was not the case.

Just at the critical moment the sea twisted the boat broadside on, and the next moment it was lifted high and flung down in the surf, overturned, and flinging its occupants into the foam, in all directions.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie blankly.

"Come on!" I yelled. "We can lend a hand here—if we don't, they'll be drowned!"

I charged into the water, fully clothed, and my chums came dashing in after me. We were nearly sent bowling by one of the great waves which came tumbling in. Everything was confusion for a moment or two.

Nelson Lee succeeded in getting himself ashore, and he had Dick Goodwin with him; but Handforth and Church and McClure were dazed and bewildered and perfectly helpless.

Handforth would certainly have been drowned had it not been for the valiant efforts of Sir Montie Tregellis-West. Montie swam out powerfully, and succeeded in pulling Handforth through the surf. I had given my attention to McClure—not that he needed much, for, by the time I reached him, he had found his feet and, was struggling up the loose, treacherous shingle.

Church was already in the grasp of Tommy Watson, and the pair managed to get ashore somehow or other. At last we were all standing beyond reach of the waves—exhausted, but triumphant.

Dick Goodwin was the only one amongst us who was not able to stagger to his feet. The poor chap was nearly done; he was practically at the point of unconsciousness. Nelson Lee attempted to lift Goodwin in his arms, but he

failed, and I noticed the look of extreme pain on the guv'nor's face as he lifted his left arm.

"Anything the matter, sir?" I gasped.

"Yes, Nipper—my arm!" said Nelson Lee. "I was dashed against the rocks, and I am badly bruised, I believe. Help me with Goodwin, will you?"

"Right you are, sir," I said quickly. "Where shall we go—what shall we do?"

"We must go up the Gap, and then make our way to a little group of cottages which stands about half a mile distant," said Nelson Lee. "It will be a trying task, Nipper, but we must not waste a moment. We all need dry clothing, and we must not wait a moment here."

"But—but I don't understand, sir——"

"There is no time for explanations now, Nipper!" interrupted Lee grimly. "We must get these wet clothes off, and Goodwin must be attended to. The poor lad is in a bad way. Come!"

It was certainly impossible to go into any questions or details now, and so we staggered up the shingle towards Bramley Gap—the whole crowd of us. Nelson Lee and I supported Dick Goodwin; Sir Montie and Handforth and the others came along behind. We looked a sorry party, indeed, but, in spite of our appearance, we were feeling elated.

For Dick Goodwin had been rescued, and Nelson Lee had been saved. Handforth and Co. had every reason to congratulate themselves, too, for, not long since, they had fully believed that they would be dashed to death against the treacherous rocks which existed on this part of the coast.

It was only by sheer luck that they had come ashore in a place of safety; everything, in fact, had turned out for the best. It seemed as though a kindly fate had engineered the whole afternoon's programme.

At last, after passing up the Gap, we came within sight of the fishermen's cottages, and there we received kindly attention and grateful warmth.

It was impossible for us all to get into one cottage, but the fishermen's wives were very considerate, and they divided us up, so to speak.

Handforth and Co. went in the one cottage, and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I went into another. Nelson Lee and Dick Goodwin were accommodated in a third.

And very shortly we were between blankets, warm and comfortable, and feeling quite O.K. again.

Meanwhile, our clothing was dried. This was rather a long business, and it was not until about tea-time that we were ready to leave. Sir Montie, of course, was in a terrible way, for his beautiful Eton suit was absolutely ruined. We all looked wrecks, as a matter of fact. Not that this mattered at all; we were uncomfortable; but our clothing was dry, and we had come to no harm.

Nelson Lee and Dick Goodwin were the only invalids of the party. Lee himself was suffering from a badly bruised shoulder; he had some difficulty in moving his left arm. And Dick Goodwin was well-nigh beaten. That terrible ordeal of his, on the top of his previous experience, had been rather too much for him, strong as he was. He had not tasted food for quite a long time, and he had been battered badly by the waves, and had also been chilled through and through.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that he was now in a state of slight fever; but he was not so bad as Nelson Lee had expected him to be, and some warm food, which was soon prepared, made him feel much better.

He was lying on an old couch when we were all ready and dressed. We were waiting for Church to come back from the village of Bramley, where he had been despatched by Nelson Lee. A motor-car would soon be at the cottage, and then we should be off to St. Frank's with no loss of time.

"Well, boys, I think that we may consider ourselves lucky on the whole," remarked Nelson Lee. "Our adventures have been rather peculiar, but everything has turned out well. But for the fact that Handforth and his chums arrived in their boat at that particular moment, Goodwin and I should have been drowned."

"Yes, sir, I believe you would," said Handforth.

"And but for the fact that Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were on the beach, disaster would have overtaken us then," went on Nelson Lee. "Everything has fitted in beautifully, and we have all escaped lightly. By the way, Handforth, how was it that you and the

other boys got into such a predicament?"

Handforth looked rather uncomfortable.

"Well, the fact is, sir, we took a boat out at Caistowe," he said. "We didn't know the sea would be so jolly rough outside the bay, and the sail went to shreds. Not only that, but the oars were washed overboard, and we had to drift helplessly with the sea. It was a jolly good thing, too, because we drifted just where we were wanted."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "There is only one feature of the case which I do not quite like. The men responsible for Goodwin's terrible predicament have escaped. Mr. Nuggs and his companion have got completely away, although I fancy they will not be at liberty for long."

"How did it all happen, sir?" I asked, with interest.

And Nelson Lee gave us all the details. He explained how he had gone into the cave, and how he had overheard the two men talking about Dick Goodwin's position. We listened intently and by the time the guv'nor had done the sound of a motor-car came from outside.

And then McClure came in; he had been outside, watching for Church.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "The car's here. We shall now be able to get back to St. Frank's right away."

And so, very shortly afterwards, we started off, watched with interest by the women and children of the cottages. They had been well repaid for all the trouble they had taken, and they were quite satisfied.

And so, just about forty minutes later, our car turned into the Triangle at St. Frank's. It was now getting rather dusk, and there were not many fellows about. Being a half-holiday that day our absence had not been noted at all. But there was a great shout at once as soon as the news got round.

Everybody was excited, everybody was laughing, and everybody was asking questions.

Handforth and Co. tumbled out, and Edward Oswald took upon his own shoulders to relate the adventures of the afternoon. He did this with great gusto, for he seemed to have an idea in his head that he had done something wonderful. He completely forgot the fact that the sailing-boat had been carried to the scene by a mere chance, and not by any skill on Handforth's part. But the leader of Study D had been prominent in the adventure, and it was only natural that he should make capital out of the fact.

Goodwin, of course, was taken straight into the sanatorium. He was carried, although he protested strongly, saying that he was able to walk. But the Lancashire boy was still wrapped in blankets, and at last he was snugly in bed, and Dr. Brett had been sent for.

However, before the doctor arrived another visitor came to Goodwin's bedside. He was a quiet-looking man of about fifty, slightly grey at the temples, and with rounded shoulders. His clean-shaven face was lined, and bore the marks of many troubles, and there was a glad light in his eyes as he bent over Dick's bed.

"Aye, my boy, I'm glad to see you safe and sound!" he exclaimed softly.

"Dad!" exclaimed Dick delightedly.

The visitor was, indeed, Dick Goodwin's father, and he watched by his son's bedside during the remainder of the evening and practically all through the night.

And in the morning the lad was much better. The fever had left him, and Dr. Brett was cheerful. He declared that Dick would be able to resume his ordinary place in the school within two days. His terrible ordeal had not had any serious effects upon his constitution.

But if the Lancashire lad thought that he had finished with Mr. Nuggs, he was rather mistaken.

His adventures were not yet over!

THE END.

Thrilling New Serial of Brother and Sister Detectives!

KIT & CORA

Mysterious Detectives

A TALE OF DETECTIVE ADVENTURE IN LONDON.

INTRODUCTION.

LIN FLEET, a lad of fifteen, wrongfully accused of stealing, loses his job at a motor garage. His parents being dead, he lives with an unscrupulous pair known as Uncle and Aunt Pawley, the former being better acquainted with the thefts at the garage than he would care to admit. Lin meets a stranger in a grey suit, who takes an interest in him, and the boy nicknames him "Mr. Mysterious." The stranger sends him on an errand to deliver a packet to a Mr. Crawson-Crake, who, behaves like a madman and threatens to shoot the lad unless he discloses the name of his employer. Lin escapes and recounts his experiences to "Mr. Mysterious." at the latter's house in Hampstead. To test his honesty, he is given a valuable diamond pendant to take to a jewellers.

(Now read on.)

A Desperate Venture.

LIN'S great hope was that she would be out at a meeting. Aunt Harriet was great on meetings, being a member of, or holding official rank in, any number of Women's Leagues, Associations or Societies for the Promotion of This, or the Abolition of That; and this being Wednesday, it seemed next to impossible that she shouldn't have a meeting that evening.

But he was doomed to disappointment. Aunt Harriet was at home! In fact, she seemed to have been waiting at home for him! She was in the gloomy parlour or living-room behind the shop, and Lin had to go through there to get to the passage and the stairs which led up to his own attic under the roof. He was so startled and dismayed when he saw her, that his face must have shown it, for the grim ghost of a smile for a moment twitched the corners of her hard, thin lips. Her voice, when she spoke, had a condensed sound, as though she had kept her intended remarks under pressure, in store for him.

Lin could not get past her. She stood at the other side of the table, her back to the door leading into the passage, barring it.

"And so you have come home!" she said. "You have the barefaced effrontery to return home after your crime of this morning! You—a detected thief!"

"I am not a thief!" said Lin.

"Do not seek to deny it; I know all!" said his aunt. "The young man whose watch you attempted to steal, and who surprised you, red-handed, in the act, has been here, and has sorrowfully disclosed the dreadful fact!"

"That's just what Ted Barker would do—the spiteful sneak!" thought Lin.

He knew that any further protest was quite useless. And he wasn't going to tell her that her own husband was the would-be thief. He did not love Aunt Harriet, but he shrank from telling her that.

"Yes!" resumed Aunt Harriet. "You return at your leisure to the home you have dishonoured, doubtless still expecting to find shelter—and even food. Shelter I will not deny this once, though you deserve nothing better than a prison cell. But food—neither bite nor sup shall you taste in this house to-night!"

Aunt Harriet had great faith in the starvation cure for wickedness in the young. Many a time had Lin been sent to bed, to repent his sins on an empty little stomach. As a very small boy, with never enough to eat, it had been the worst form of punishment he had to endure; but now he only hoped she would let him off with that!

She did move a little from that door leading to the stairs. Lin's hopes bounded up; he actually took a step forward. It was a bad move, for it brought him more into the light, and Aunt Harriet's beady eyes were instantly afire with suspicion.

"Ha!" she snapped sharply. "What is that lumpish thing you've got under your jacket? If it is food, and you thought to evade me and gormandise in secret in your own room, you will be very disappointed! Unfasten your jacket. Give that to me!"

She extended a long bony arm, and took a measured stride towards him. Lin retreated round the table back to the door leading into the shop.

"It is not food, aunt," he said.

"Food! He, he! Jolly rich food he's got there, I'll lay! Too rich to eat! He, he!" chuckled a hatefully familiar voice at his back suddenly. "Hold him, Mrs. Pawley! We'll soon see!"

And Aunt Harriet actually did seize hold of Lin's arms. She was a powerful woman, with a grip like iron; and before he could wrench himself free his jacket was torn

open—and there stood Blimber at the other end of the table, with the jewel-case in his hand, grinning!

Blimber, the man, was only Blimber, the boy, grown a bit bigger, and a lot more hateful! The same broad, squat figure; the same heavy, pasty face, and small, piggish eyes; and the same detestable grin—only worse!

His grin expanded, and his eyes opened wide, as he undid the clasp of the case, and its contents glittered in the gaslight. Aunt Harriet stared, too; forgetting to hold Lin, and moving to that end of the table.

"What is that?" she breathed, with a new, eager light in her eyes. "Real gold—real diamonds?"

"The real thing, and no mistake," grinned Blimber, with one eye on the case and the other on Lin. "Young Linny is a reg'lar hand at it now; he wouldn't steal dud stuff—not him!"

"Give it back to me!" cried Lin. "I did not steal it! It belongs to a young lady who——"

He checked himself. What good was it to explain?

He would have dashed round the table and sprang at Blimber. But the table was large, and the room narrow. His aunt blocked the way on one side, and, just at the critical moment, the door into the shop opened, and his uncle came in, blocking that side, and covering Blimber's other flank, so that Lin could not get at him.

Blimber was aware of this, and leered at the baffled boy over the length of the table.

"Young lady—old lady, he means," said Blimber. "I saw her—saw it all, 'cos I 'appened to be on the spot. He, he! Reg'lar old duchess, she was—all done up in furs, and oozing money all over her. Oh, trust little Linny to mark a bird worth plucking! He's been trained, he has, and knows his job. I knew that when I saw him crush past the old duchess, leap off the 'bus, and slither away through the crowd like a greased snake, fastening up his jacket as he went. Knew he'd made a jolly good haul; and so, by gosh, he had!"

He chuckled; making the thing in his hand glitter in the gaslight.

"And to see that old duchess 'anging on to the step of the 'bus as it moved off, made you die o' laughing! And to hear her screeching out: 'S-s-stop the 'bus! I've been robbed! That boy!'" continued Blimber. "But nobody couldn't stop him; he ran so neat, and dodged 'em so clever! Oh, you oughter have seen it! You'd have been proud of our little Linny!"

His mocking speech was rather wasted. Mr. and Mrs. Pawley paid not the slightest attention to him. They never looked at Lin, when the fellow wagged a fat forefinger playfully in his direction. They had eyes, thoughts, for nothing in that room—in the whole world, just then—but that glancing, glittering thing in the oblong case he held in his other hand.

It seemed to hold them entranced.

Aunt Harriet craned her long body towards it, muttering to herself:

"Gold—gold! And real diamonds!"

Uncle Ben had come home early, and in a gloomy mood. He thought he knew something about fluky billiards, and he did; but the stranger at the Friar's Head knew rather more, and he had come home cleaned out! But he brightened up amazingly at the sight of the dazzling object in Blimber's hand. His eyes flashed back the glitter of the diamonds with the light of cupidity and greed!

"Let's have a look at it! Hand it here, Blimber!" he said, reaching out a hand that positively shook with eagerness.

But Blimber merely grinned, and shifted the case to his other hand. This brought it nearer to Aunt Harriet, who took possession of it at once, by a deft motion of her long, bony fingers.

"Stolen! Oh, dreadful!" she ejaculated, closing the case with a snap, as if to shut out the light of temptation from the others. "Fallen, misguided boy! Your fate will be the gallows! This, of course, must be placed in the hands of the police at once."

"Yes, of course!" grinned Blimber. "I'll run round to the station with it now."

And he made a snatch at the jewel-case. So did Uncle Ben, leaning far over the table. But Aunt Harriet's long fingers had the grip of a vulture's talons, and she kept her hold of it.

Lin watched the contest in despair—well knowing that, whoever won, the diamond pendant was lost to him. And he could never go back to that queer little house at Hampstead and explain. Would they—would anyone believe him? And that man in grey would shrug his shoulders with an "I knew it!" sort of look. And she, the young lady with the lovely eyes and beautiful soft voice, who hadn't treated him as though he was only "just a boy," but had spoken to him as a friend, and trusted him—she—she would set him down as a thief!

The very thought made him desperate, and he did a desperate thing.

"Let go, 'Arriet, you old fool!" panted Uncle Ben, in a savage undertone, which, however, reached Lin's ears. "It's no good to you; you wouldn't know how to turn it into cash. I would——"

"Yes, and how to squander it, like you did my money!" said Aunt Harriet, tightening her hold on her end of the little oblong case. She had one end, Uncle Ben the other, while Blimber got only a thumb-and-finger hold in the middle.

"Your money!" sneered Mr. Pawley. "Potty little bit you ought to be ashamed to mention! Now, your share o' this—— Leave go, will yer?"

And he tugged the harder; but tugged in vain.

"Both of yer leave go—couple o' mugs!" hissed Blimber, under his breath. "Neither of yer could turn it into the hard. You

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don't know the right market like I do, and you'd drop in for rare trouble if you went 'awking a thing—a classy thing like that—around on yer own. 'And it over to me, and we'll make a square divide, all three of us!"

But, with a marked lack of faith in this fair offer, the two others clung on to the case. The struggle of hands became silent, intense—so intense, that the contestants entirely forgot the boy at the other end of the table.

"They mean to keep it—to steal it!" gasped Lin. "Even Aunt Harriet! But they sha'n't—they sha'n't!"

He thought rapidly. There was just the bare chance!

The long table was covered with oilcloth to camouflage the plain deal with a mockery of maghogany—cold, slimy, hideous stuff, but rather helpful to Lin now. With a rapid movement he threw himself upon the table, slid along it ,and brought his fist down sharply upon the knot of hands. Three sets of knuckles hit the hard table with a simultaneous, resounding crack! Annt Harriet squealed. Uncle Ben rapped out something pungent; so did Blimber.

The jewel-case flew from their grasp and shot upward. Lin deftly caught it, and slid backwards off the table with it secure in his hand!

But to get away with it?

A rush for the street by way of the shop was hopeless. Uncle Ben blocked that door. The only chance was by the other door leading into the house. He made a dash for it, and flung it open so violently that it threw Aunt Harriet back against the wall as she took a long, sliding stride to intercept him.

Lin gained the dark, smelly scullery. For a moment he thought of the door leading into the backyard; there was only a low wall around the yard, and an alley beyond. But the door, he quickly remembered, was sure to be bolted at that hour; and if he stopped to fumble with the bolts, he was sure to be caught there like a rat at the end of a box.

There was nothing for it but the stairs, and his own room up at the top. He might get a breathing-space there, and a chance to think.

He dashed out of the scullery by a door on his left, through the narrow passage and up the staircase. Blimber, youngest and most active of the baffled three, was so close upon his heels that, at the top of the first flight, he got near enough to make a grab at the skirt of Lin's jacket.

"Got yer! Give that thing 'ere, young fool!" the rascal panted in the darkness.

For answer, Lin kicked out behind. It was a chance kick, but effective! His boot-heel caught Blimber under the chin, causing him to reel backwards and return down the flight head first. Uncle Ben was not far behind him, and Aunt Harriet was a close third. Blimber, being heavy, took them with him down the entire flight, and the three landed together, in a complicated knot, on the hard boards at the bottom.

Lin heard the bump, the squeals of Aunt Harriet, and the heated remarks of the two men. He had gained a few precious moments, and he did not waste them.

Breathless, for he fairly flew up the remaining stairs, he gained the top landing, and plunging into the wretched little attic that served him as a bedroom, slammed to the door and and turned the key. Fortunately, he had long ago provided a key for that door, as a defence against sudden intrusion on the part of Blimber in former days.

But it was only a cheap, trashy lock, and the door of the flimsy kind that is fitted to such places. Lin knew that it would not long withstand the assaults of a man determined to get in. And here were two—to say nothing of Aunt Harriet, who was no weakling, as he knew to his cost!

"It won't stand half a minute against them!" he panted.

He had no bedstead to drag against it, for he slept on a mattress laid on the bare floor; and the only piece of furniture he had—an old box in which he kept the few articles of clothing not actually in wear—was far too light to be of any use. But—he suddenly remembered it—there was the loose board over in the corner!

He had once thought of nailing that board down; it wobbled and creaked when he trod upon it; but he was glad now that he had never done so. At the cost of a few finger-nails broken, and a knuckle grazed, he pulled the loose plank up, and lodging one end under the middle ledge of the door, jammed the other against the skirting of the opposite wall, which fortunately it just reached.

It was a frail defence at the best; but he could contrive nothing better; and, working with feverish haste, had barely fixed it in place, when a shuffling sound on the landing outside, heavy breathing and whispering, told him that it would soon be put to the test.

"You, Lin—open this door!" demanded his uncle. And the handle rattled violently.

"Unfasten this door, misguided boy!" shrilled Aunt Harriet. "I will harbour no thieves and their unlawful spoils in this house! Unfasten this door instantly, or I will send for the police! Oh, oouch!"

She finished with a gasp, which suggested that someone had applied an elbow to her ribs.

Then came Blimber's voice. He took the persuasive line.

"Don't play the giddy, young Linny!" he said, in a brotherly tone through the key-hole. "You can't do anything with a thing o' that sort—a nipper of your age! But I can; and I'll see that you get a fair half of the pro'. 'Cos it was your capture. I saw yer snatch it. It's going to be a square deal, Linny, give yer me solemn on that. So don't be a young fool! Open the door, and let's talk it over friendly."

Lin gave no response. He was thinking at top speed.

He knew that the lure of those glittering

(Continued overleaf.)

diamonds had done its work with all three of them even with Aunt Harriet! They were bent on wresting the pendant from him; and they would not waste much more time in mere words, persuasion or threat. They would try their strength on the door, and Blimber, or his uncle, alone, could easily force it.

Already one decided shove caused the upper part of the thin door to bulge inward, and the long flooring-plank to arch, and crack ominously!

The window—his sole chance now!

The small window was high in the wall. Lin dragged his box beneath it, clambered on it, pushed the sash up, and craning over the sill looked down. It was rather daunting! The door behind him creaked again.

(To be continued.)

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