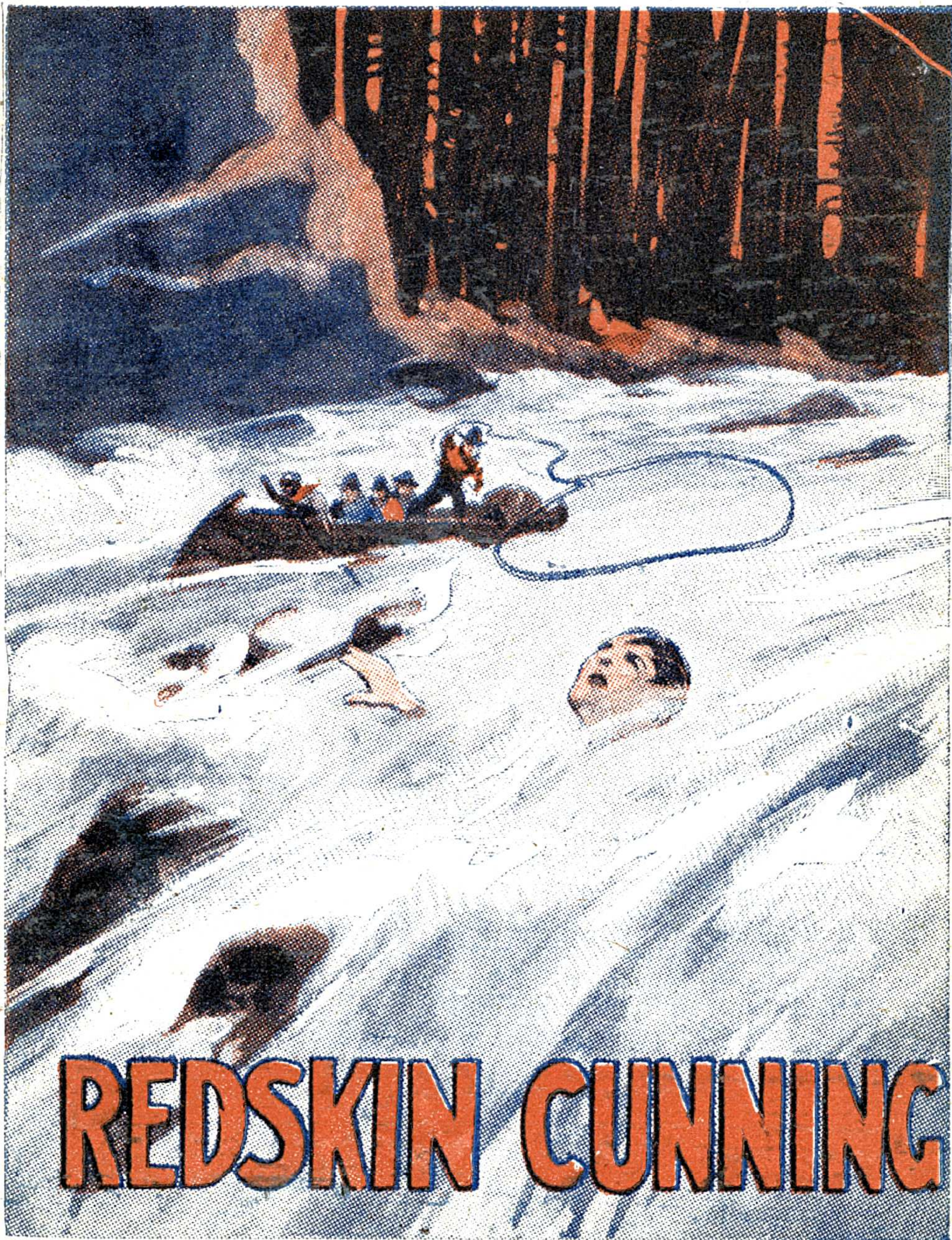


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ON THE WARPATH

HISS-SS! Phut!

The arrow, apparently coming from nowhere, shot through the air, quite close to Nelson Lee's head. Then the sharp point dug itself into the side of a small wooden box which was standing near. And there the arrow remained, its shaft still quivering.

"Dear me!" said Nelson Lee smoothly.

He stared at the arrow, and Big Jim Farman and Lord Dorrimore, who were just near by, followed the direction of his gaze. They saw the cause of that strange hiss, and then they stared at one another.

"By gad!" said Dorrie, removing his cigarette. "Where did that drop from, old man? It passed rather too close to you to be healthy."

Nelson Lee was already on his feet, and he looked round keenly. Certainly the spot could not have been more delightful. No place on earth could have suggested such peace and quietness and infinite charm.

On Nelson Lee's right the Ghost River flowed serenely and quietly on its course—a solid mass of moving water, with scarcely a ripple or a break on its surface. Beyond were glorious green meadows, patches of willow trees, and hills in the background—hills

which caught the eye, and which compelled one to gaze in admiration and a feeling which was akin to awe.

The stately pines rose, tier after tier, and up above the mountains reared in all their majesty, their summits snow-capped and scintillating in the slanting rays of the setting sun.

It was a picture of Athabasca, north of fifty-five, in summer-time. It was a scene in the great Canadian north-west, where men were scarce, and where one went for hundreds of miles along the rivers without seeing more than a dozen souls.

Just in this particular spot, however, there were, to be precise, twenty human beings. Eight of them were men, and the other twelve junior schoolboys of St. Frank's College—including myself.

We had camped in a grassy glade for the night, and our dugouts were all drawn up out of the water on the river bank. Dotted about were a number of small tents, and a big camp-fire crackled in the centre of the cleared space.

Just a little distance to the left lay a thick belt of trees and bushes, and Nelson Lee fixed his gaze upon this spot; but a glance at the arrow proved that it had not come from this direction. There was no other cover within sight, excepting a few boulders lying about amidst the grass and wild flowers.

"Don't say anything to the others—particularly the boys," exclaimed Lee, in a low voice. "We don't want them

to be alarmed. As you say, Dorrie, this doesn't look exactly healthy."

"An arrow!" exclaimed Mr. James Farman, the millionaire. "Say, Mr. Lee, I guess I'm puzzled. Who's playing this darned game? Arrows are not used nowadays, excepting by cannibals, and heathens of that sort."

Whizzzz!

Even as Mr. Farman was speaking, a second arrow hissed through the air, quite near to the ground. The point dug itself into the turf.

"Well, the fellow's got a rotten aim, whoever he is," said Lord Dorrimore. "It's queer he couldn't hit one of us—"

"There is no doubt that we are easy marks," interrupted Nelson Lee. "The man who shot these arrows missed us deliberately, I expect. It is probably a kind of warning—an indication that we must not proceed further."

"A shot hein' fired across our bows, eh?" said Dorrie. "Yes, but who by? Who in the name of wonder would wish to bar our progress down the Ghost River. It's a free waterway, isn't it?"

Nelson Lee did not reply at once. He was looking anxious, particularly when he noted that only nine juniors were visible. Handforth and Church and McClure, as a matter of fact, had wandered off for a little walk. They had not been stopped, because no danger was suspected.

The other juniors—Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, myself, Justin B. Farman, Fatty Little, Pitt, and the rest—we were all sitting together near the river bank, discussing the situation, and we had not the slightest idea of the mysterious incident which had just taken place.

Supper was over, and we had a little respite before the mosquitoes were due to get busy, for these troublesome beggars were greatly in evidence during the late evening. Not far distant from the camp-fire Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, and Ace-High Peter were lounging about, smoking continuously. These three cowboys of Roaring Z ranch had accompanied us on our trip North. They were "swapping" yarns with Leon Ascara, the Indian-French half-breed.

Leon was our guide, and there was very little trace of white blood in his

appearance. But in his nature he was far from being Indian; we trusted him implicitly.

"I'd no idea we should have such a ripping time of it up here," Reginald Pitt was saying. "Why, it's simply glorious—even better than Montana."

"Wal, I guess I wouldn't say that," said Justin B. Farman, loyal to his own land. "I'm figuring that Montana is some country—"

"Granted," put in Pitt. "But it can't boast of such scenery as this, old son. Why, these rivers and valleys are simply wonderful. Even if it wasn't for the excitement of our trip, we couldn't possibly be dull."

"You're just about right," I agreed. "But we're on a grand adventure, and we shall probably have all sorts of excitement before many days have passed. To-morrow, for example, we shall shoot the Thunder Rapids, and after that we shall be at the approach to the secret valley."

"Begad! That's what I'm waitin' for, dear old boys," said Sir Montie languidly. "It's an amazin' place, by all that I can hear. A whole tribe of Indians in their natural state—an' gold lyin' about so that we can pick it up by the bally pocketful!"

I grinned.

"It seems rather too good to be true," I said. "Before a chap finds gold he generally has to work for weeks and months—work like a slave, too. Gold is about the hardest acquired metal on the face of the earth, and men fight and kill one another for the sake of it."

"The lecture will continue at seven-thirty," said Tommy Watson, with a chuckle. "You ass, Nipper! We know all that stuff about gold being hard to get. But this is exceptional; this valley is unknown to anybody excepting us. Leon Ascara got the secret, and he gave it to Mr. Macdonald, the fur trader at Fort Derwent. Mac is employed by Mr. Farman, and he told his boss all about it. That's why we're here."

"And we dished the enemy pretty decently, too," said Bob Christine. "My hat! It was glorious the way Jako Crashor and those three rotters with him were diddled by Mr. Lee! There's not much chance of their doing us any harm now. We've left them well behind."

"I'm getting to like Leon better every day," I said. "I think he's

straight, and he wants to do us a good turn and get his revenge on those Indians at the same time. He formed that community in the secret valley, twelve years ago, and all the thanks he got was to be kicked out and left for dead. It was a jolly good thing that Angus Macdonald saved his life."

"Well, we've got to thank him for this adventure, anyway," said Pitt. "My only aunt! We're only just starting it, too! I'd give anything to know what's going to happen when we arrive in the valley!"

"I hope there'll be plenty of grub!" said Fatty Little. "Great doughnuts! If we can't get enough to eat I shall fade away to a shadow. So far we've done rippingly, what with moose flesh, and bannock, and all the other sorts of grub. Bannock is jolly decent stuff, it it's properly cooked."

"They use it instead of bread up here," I explained. "You can't very well make bread in camp—that's why they cook these flat Lannock cakes. We shall hardly know where we are when we get back to civilisation."

"It scarcely seems possible that we were in England only a few weeks ago," said Bob Christine. "And we shall have to be getting back pretty soon, so as to be in time for the new term."

"Oh, leave that to Mr. Lee," said Lawrence. "He's in complete control, and we can trust him to get us back all serene."

While the juniors were talking, Leon Ascara had left his place, and he walked over from the three Montana cowboys to the spot where Nelson Lee was sitting with Dorrie and Umlosi and Mr. Farinan.

"Him moch bad sign," he said unemotionally.

"What are you referring to?" asked Nelson Lee, looking up.

Leon squatted down on his heels.

"I see him arrow me," he replied. "Wa! Wa! Him t'rown by red man from valley. I no lak this, I guess. Indians from valley moch bad, I t'ink me. They cause plenty trouble."

"You've got sharp eyes, Leon," said Nelson Lee. "I imagined that nobody else saw those two arrows—"

"I not ver' strong, but I got eyesight lak eagle's," said the half-breed.

"Me see arrows com'. They not meant to hurt you—only scare, I guess. Red

man moch cunning. Wa! Red man cunning lak fox; me onderstan' him ways proper. No tak chances wit' Indian."

"We shall be well on our guard," said Nelson Lee quietly. "You need not fear that we shall be caught napping, Leon. Neither are we likely to be taken in by any trick which these Indians might adopt."

"But if they keep on this game, we shall have to get busy," put in Dorrie. "I don't exactly fancy bein' jabbed by one of these bally arrows—they look rather too sharp for my likin'."

"Him arrow moch dangerous," said Leon. "Jus' as dangerous as fire gun bullet. Him com' with force lak you never t'ink—keel you plenty quick. Red man in valley use arrow for everyting. No got guns there."

Nelson Lee looked about him anxiously.

"I think it will be a good idea, perhaps, to scout round," he said. "I don't quite fancy sitting here idle; and I am rather worried about Handforth and his two companions. They have wandered away from the camp."

As a matter of fact, Handforth and Co. were not very far distant. About half a mile away, hidden by the willow trees, they were gazing round at the scenery, and Handforth was arguing with Church and McClure. This, of course, was only natural. Handforth and Co. were always indulging in arguments.

"It's no good trying to kid me," Handforth was saying. "This scenery's all very well, but it's nothing to be compared to England. In Sussex, or Surrey, or—or any old county you like, the scenery's better than this."

"Rot!" said Church. "This is simply gorgeous—I've never seen anything to equal it. Look at the valley—look at the river—look at the mountains raising their summits to the sky—"

"Topping!" said McClure. "You asses haven't got any eye for beauty!" said Handforth witheringly. "I suppose you call this place interesting? I'm blessed if I can see anything particularly beautiful about it."

Church nodded.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he said. "After all, when I come to look at it thoroughly, I've got to agree. Handy. Even the flat marshes of Essex look better than this."

"Rot!" said Handforth promptly. "Why, this scenery beats Essex into fits—"

"But you just said that any English county was better—"

"Never mind what I just said," interrupted Handforth. "I know what I'm talking about, and I don't want you to make any fatheaded quibbles. Look at the pine forests—ain't they lovely? And the river—and the rapids? When I come to think of it, this Athabasca scenery is just about perfect."

Church and McClure said no more. Handforth was the most difficult fellow in the world to talk with. Without warning he would veer round from one expression of opinion to another. If his chums agreed with one argument, he would immediately change about and oppose them.

"Oh, well, we don't want to stop here jawing all the evening," said Church at last. "Let's be getting back to the camp. It'll soon be bed-time; we've got to be up at dawn, you know, and then we're going to shoot the Thunder Rapids!"

Handforth smiled.

"There'll be nothing particularly exciting about that," he said. "These rapids don't scare me a bit—there's nothing really dangerous about them. When it comes to the point, shooting the rapids will be as tame as anything!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said McClure. "Anyhow, we shall know for certain to-morrow. Come on!"

They moved away from the spot, going in the direction of the camp, and as they rounded a clump of willow trees, Church suddenly came to a halt. He stood quite still, staring straight before him.

"What's the matter with you, you ass?" demanded Handforth.

Church raised his hand.

"Shush!" he whispered warningly.

"What on earth—"

"Look!" went on Church softly.

"Can't you see those two figures crouching there behind that boulder? They're not members of our party, I'll swear! My only hat! They're Indians!"

Handforth fairly quivered.

"Indians!" he repeated. "By George! I wonder if they're hostile, or just peaceful chaps? Why, look! They've got bows and arrows! Who-

ever heard of Indians using weapons like that nowadays?"

There was no doubt about it; the two figures crouching behind the boulder were Indians—attired in full war paint, by all appearances. They were not very large, but nevertheless picturesque. Both wore feathers in their head-dress, and their faces were strangely painted.

The Indians appeared to be watching the camp, which at this spot was not visible to Handforth and Co. The juniors continued looking for some moments, and then Handforth grinned.

"Oh, there's nothing to be scared about," he said. "I expect these chaps have got some furs to sell, or something like that. They're too nervous to go into camp—that's about the truth. Let's go down and put them at their ease."

"Hold on, Handy!" gasped Church. "I don't quite like the look— Why, did you see that? One of the men just sent an arrow!"

"So he did!" said McClure breathlessly. "Oh, but it couldn't have been aimed at anybody! The Indians wouldn't dare to harm anybody in camp!"

Handforth was already moving down the slope. He went at a run, and his chums followed, both of them uneasy. They were not exactly afraid of the Indians, but they certainly did not like the look of those bows and arrows.

And then, when Handforth was about a hundred yards distance from the Indians, one of the latter turned his head. He uttered a low cry, jumped up, and sped off like the wind. In an incredibly short space of time he reached a clump of willows, and vanished. His companion followed on his heels.

Handforth came to a halt, and stared.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed blankly.

"I told you what it would be, Handy!" panted Church, as he came up. "These Indians are hostile, and I shouldn't be surprised if they come from Leon Ascara's wonderful valley. We'd better tell Mr. Lee all about this."

Handforth sniffed.

"Well, the beggars were afraid of me, anyway," he declared. "They just took one look, and bunked for all they were worth. Blessed cowards!"

Whiz!

An arrow shot past at that second. It did not come close, but passed about six feet away from Handforth, and dug

its point into the trunk of a tree twenty yards ahead.

Church and McClure changed colour.

"Great Scott!" said Church. "They—they're aiming at us!"

"The rotters!" roared Handforth indignantly. "We'll jolly soon show them what's what! The awful nerve! Two blessed Indians shooting off their beastly arrows at us!"

The three juniors hurried to the camp at top speed. Handforth himself was not exactly comfortable now, and he thought it better to get out of range. The chums of Study D arrived in camp breathless.

Nelson Lee hurried over to meet them.

"I'm glad you have got back, boys," he said. "In future you must not wander away from the camp——"

"We—we've seen two Indians, sir!" broke in Church.

"Eh?"

"Two beastly Indians!" said Handforth. "They were watching the camp, you know, and they scooted as soon as they caught sight of us. Of course, they could see that we looked dangerous!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I hardly think that was the reason the Indians scooted, as you term it, Handforth," he observed. "There were two, you say?"

"Yes, sir; queer-looking fellows, if you like!" replied Edward Oswald. "They were crouching behind a boulder, and they buzzed off an arrow while we were watching. After that they aimed one at us, the beastly rotters!"

"How were they dressed?"

"Well, they weren't dressed hardly at all," said Church. "Just paint, sir, and feathers, and all the rest of it—exactly the same as we've seen in Wild West films! I never thought we should see any real Indians like that, you know. I thought Indians were dressed like ordinary white men nowadays."

"As a general rule, they are," replied Nelson Lee; "but these Indians belong to this one particular tribe—the tribe that has gone back to its original state, and is living in complete seclusion in the secret valley. We must be constantly on our guard against these Redskins."

"Do—do you think they'll attack us, sir?" asked McClure, looking round.

"They might pinch our scalps!"

"I think you can be quite content in the knowledge that your scalp is safe, McClure," replied Nelson Lee. "These Indians may be hostile, but they will not cause very much trouble, I imagine. In any case, we are fully prepared, and if they are insane enough to attack us, we can look after ourselves and teach the Redskins a lesson they will remember for many a long day."

"Red men moch dangerous," put in Leon Ascara gravely. "Me onderstan' moch better than you. More dangerous than you think. Him Indian lak snake—wriggle in grass and no show himself. Moch cunning, I guess."

"Well, Leon, we are prepared to fight their cunning, and there is no reason for you to be alarmed," said Nelson Lee. "During the night we will keep a watch, and we will not give the enemy any chance of surprising us."

It was impossible to keep the knowledge of the incident from all the other members of the party. Handforth knew about it, and, naturally, everybody else was acquainted with the facts before many minutes had passed, and when we all got behind our mosquito nets, into our blankets, we were thrilled by the feeling of possible danger.

We knew that the valley Indians were about—that, indeed, the Redskins were menacing our progress. But this only gave an added zest to our quest; there was a piece of danger in the adventure now.

And we went to sleep feeling that the morrow would bring more than its usual quota of excitement.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN THE THUNDER RAPIDS!

BREAKFAST was over, everything was packed, and the four dugouts were in the water ready for immediate departure.

They were strange-looking craft, these dugouts. Hollowed out from long cotton-wood trunks, they were astonishingly stable and waterworthy; but it was always necessary to remain perfectly still when once upon the bosom of the river, for even a small movement by one of the occupants was liable to make the dugout lurch in an alarming manner.

Each dugout accommodated five persons. These craft were capable of carrying more, but as our party numbered exactly twenty, we divided ourselves up equally. Leon Ascara was in charge of the leading dugout, Nelson Lee commanded the second, Umlosi wielded the paddle of the third, whilst Dorrie brought up the rear. The aft paddlers in each canoe were Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, Aco-High Peter, and Mr. Farman respectively.

The morning was simply glorious—a perfectly blue sky overhead, with the sun peeping over the mountain tops, and casting brilliant rays down upon the surface of the Ghost River.

We were all feeling in the best of spirits.

The end of our journey was almost within sight, for after descending the Thunder Rapids we should be within an hour or two's paddling of the secret entrance to the mysterious valley.

There had been no further sign from the Indians, and it seemed certain that they had left the neighbourhood altogether. We came to the conclusion that the two Redskins had been merely a couple of hunters, who had come upon our camp by accident. It hardly seemed likely that the valley Indians would have outposts on the watch above the Thunder Rapids.

Indeed, it did not appear feasible that any watch should be kept at all. These Redskins were not anticipating any attack, and the entrance to their valley was of so secret a nature that no white man had ever discovered it. And the Indians fully believed that Leon Ascara had died.

Perhaps they knew otherwise now.

And that was a point which made Nelson Lee and the others think deeply. Those two scouts had, without doubt, seen Leon Ascara on the previous evening. They knew that he was alive, and his very presence among this camp of white folks indicated the nature of this expedition.

The Indians had received a warning by now. It would therefore be impossible to take them by surprise, as we had first planned. It made our task much more difficult—not that we ever thought of giving it up.

Angus Macdonald, the old trader at Fort Derwent, had expressed a great contempt for the Indians. They be-

longed to the Nassi tribe—quite a small one, speaking the Creo language, which appeared to be general in this part of the country.

For many years the Nassis had been almost forgotten—and this, as we knew, was because they had settled in one body in the secret valley. At any of the trading posts down the various rivers one would hear that the Nassi Indians were extinct—that they had died out.

For years not a member of the tribe had been seen in the outside world. One or two of the old-timers were puzzled by the way in which the Nassi Indians had vanished off the map; but even these men did not trouble to think very deeply on the subject.

We knew the full facts.

Only just recently the Nassi Indians from the valley had broken out of their natural stronghold, and had committed various plunderings and killings among the weaker Indian tribes which were dotted about.

The news of these escapades trickled very slowly down to the outposts and settlements, and such news was generally believed to be greatly exaggerated. Nobody believed that the Nassi Indians were responsible.

And now we were ready to start upon the last lap of our trip.

Before we descended the rapids we should come to a point where the Ghost River collected in the waters of the Perth River—a fairly big stream which came out from the North-East, tumbling down the mountain passes at a great speed.

We started off, the four dugouts gliding down the river about a hundred yards apart. I was in the second one with the gov'nor. The other juniors were distributed in the dugouts, Handforth and Co. being all together in the third one.

It was very enjoyable, gliding serenely down the stately river.

After a mile or so it broadened considerably, and a number of islands came into evidence, dotted here and there in the centre of the stream in a haphazard kind of fashion.

Then, rounding a gradual bend, we came within sight of the great expanse where the Perth River joined forces with the larger stream. The two rivers, so I understood, flowed in the same

valley, one coming from the north-east and one from the south-west, and they met head on like two onrushing locomotives, afterwards swinging away at right angles.

The result can easily be imagined.

Where the two rivers met, everything was turmoil and surging water, and as we drew nearer we noticed a most peculiar fact. The two rivers were of a distinctly different colour, one being bluey-green and the other almost brown.

We drew nearer and nearer, all the paddlers being pent up for the big moment when we should enter the broken water.

That moment came at last.

With an impact which sent our dug-out reeling over, we struck the boiling waters; then we swung round like a cork, and went shooting off on our new course. It required careful manipulation in order to avert disaster.

I glanced round anxiously, and watched each of the following dugouts successfully pass through the short battle. Now we were all speeding along at a much greater rate, with a peculiar appearance about the water.

"Just look at it, Montie!" I said, turning my head. "Did you ever see anything so extraordinary?"

"Dear old boy, it's positively staggerin'," said Tregellis-West.

The dividing line between the brown water and the bluey-green water was quite sharply defined—almost as though one was water and the other sand. In this part of the river the two waters did not seem to make any attempt to mingle, and the reason for this was clear. The Perth River flowed at a tremendous speed, whilst the Ghost was a stately, slow-moving stream.

Our progress was rapid now, and the whole character of the scenery had changed, becoming more rugged and wild.

Not many minutes had elapsed before Sir Montie touched my arm.

"Dear old boy, I can hear something peculiar," he said softly.

I listened.

And then I understood. Faintly to my ears came a low, growling murmur. We were sweeping down the imposing flood of the double river, as it might be called, and from the indistinct distance ahead came that murmur, grow-

ing louder and louder with every minute that passed.

Before long the growl was no longer soft. It became a rumble—a thudding, booming rumble which struck the eardrums in a manner which caused every one of us to listen intently, and which set every heart beating more rapidly.

It sounded like the far-off thudding of artillery, and it grew even louder, until it became a roar. There was something about this sound which made me catch my breath in—which made me realise the insignificance of our clumsy craft.

"The rapids!" I said, between my teeth.

"Yes, dear fellow, so I imagined," said Montie quietly. "Bogad! What a truly frightful noise! I'm feelin' shockingly scared—I am, really!"

And, if the truth must be told, all the juniors were in a similar state. I had been down rapids on many occasions, but this made no difference. I was feeling just as excited as the others.

Danger lay ahead—there was no getting away from it. Providing we had skilled paddlers and worthy craft, there was not much to fear. And our paddlers were of the very best, and our dugouts perfectly sound. At the same time, there was a feeling of uncertainty and peril in the air.

Since our departure from Fort Derwent we had descended several insignificant rapids. Perhaps Handforth thought the Thunder Rapids were of this type; if so, his eyes were now being opened.

"I say, Handy—what you said last night was all rot!" said Church nervously. "These rapids seem to be terrific. Just listen! They're miles away yet, and they sound like the booming of big guns."

Handforth turned.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he replied. "These rapids are always noisy——"

"Say, young man, you'd best sit tight!" shouted Ace-High Peter from the rear. "Guess these dugouts ain't like Atlantic liners. You need to sit as still as rock statues. Keep that in mind, sonny."

Handforth turned again, and the dug-out rolled alarmingly.

"Gee!" gasped Peter. "Say, you'll spill the hull crowd of us!"

Handforth himself was rather surprised by that lurch, and he sat very

still. From the front of the dugout came Umlosi's voice.

"Thou art foolish, O youth!" he rumbled. "The words which Peter has just spoken are wise words. Thou must remain still, or thou wilt cause the death of us all. Be thou not unwise!"

"Thore you are!" whispered Church. "You ass, Handy! These blessed dugouts will tip over as easy as winking!"

"Keep your hair on!" growled Handforth.

He gazed ahead rather anxiously. The roar of the rapids now made conversation somewhat difficult. It was like the voice of a giant, booming out menacingly, compared to the noisy chatter of the rapids which had been previously encountered.

And then, in the distance ahead, we could see something different.

Instead of the smooth surface of the river, little white spots appeared, bobbing up in a hundred places. It reminded me of the sea on a stormy day, with the white horses leaping and rearing. The stream further down became a whirling, boiling mass of disturbed water.

It shot down the pass at an incredible speed, the whole river jumping like a thing in pain. This was a mighty water course, plunging with almost incredible force over a grim barrier of rocks.

With such force behind the river with such a stupendous volume of water only one result was possible when that volume of water met the rocks. It was converted from a deep, smoothly flowing stream into a raging torrent of broken water.

The very thought of our flimsy dugouts riding safely down the rapids seemed ridiculous. Surely we should be hurled out of the water and upset within the first few moments of the ordeal.

It seemed remarkable that we should be gliding along so smoothly; but this, as we all knew, was merely the calm before the storm. These rapids had to be conquered, however, since the entrance to the valley lay at least twenty miles further on, and there was no other method of reaching it.

Formidable as the Thunder Rapids seemed, there was not really any actual danger, otherwise Nelson Leo would never have allowed us all to pass down. These rapids had been "shot" hundreds of times without mishap, and

there was no reason why we should anticipate any disaster.

And now we were nearly on the point of the great encounter.

We were just at that spot a few hundred yards from the hidden ledge, where the rocks began. The water here, deep and swiftly flowing, moved smoothly along with a surface which reminded one of flowing oil. Then it shot on more rapidly until, without any warning, it abruptly boiled up into a surging mass of foam.

And here the river was nearly a third of a mile in width, and, from one shore to the other, the surface was white—a welter of boiling foam. The roar was simply deafening, and it thudded in our ears painfully.

But we were too excited to notice this much. Every one of us had the impression that we were going to certain death—that no power on earth could save us from swift and awful destruction.

And then, almost before we knew it, we were in the turmoil.

Clinging desperately to the sides of our dugouts, we entered the rapids. Leon Ascara, in the leading dugout, had been down this river scores of times, and he knew every trick of these rapids; they had no terrors for him.

It seemed as though it made little difference which side of the river was chosen, since it was all the same surging smother. But Leon Ascara knew differently; he chose the left side of the river, since here there was a clear channel, undisturbed by rocks.

On the right-hand side black spots showed themselves everywhere—the pointed fangs of treacherous rocks. It was far better to choose the left side of the river—not that this course would be a smooth one.

Billows of water rose up in a strange, uncanny fashion—great curling waves which roared deafeningly and rolled about without advancing a foot. It was one of the strangest sights one could possibly imagine; and these great billows were treacherous, and one touch would be sufficient to upset any one of the dugouts. Skillful paddling was absolutely essential.

In spite of myself, I felt a thrill of sheer exultation as we took that dreadful plunge. Ascara's dugout was already over the ledge, and it was bobbing about like a cork just in advance of us.

Nelson Lee worked like a nigger. He plied his paddle with extreme skill. Our dugout plunged down, sending her nose deeply into the white, curling billows. Water came aboard in cataracts. The dugout staggered madly, and then rolled drunkenly over on one side.

But Nelson Lee kept her head down stream, and this was all that was necessary in order to ensure a safe passage. If once we had swung round broadside to the current our doom would have been sealed. We should have been raked from stem to stern by those terrible waves, and our dugout would have been washed from beneath us.

But each dugout was kept under perfect control, and the danger was slight, although, to us, it seemed appalling. The stupendous roar of the rapids was, in itself, enough to strike terror into the strongest heart.

Umlosi was in his element. He had passed down many rapids in Africa, but he had never encountered any that compared to the might of these. He felt confident, and there was no question of his skill.

On we surged, shooting down that chaotic mass of water like so many logs, except for the fact that each log was under control.

And, as we found ourselves safe and sound, our confidence returned. Already we were halfway through the rapids. Our speed was so great that the whole ordeal was only a matter of minutes, although it seemed like hours.

Soaked through, but quite sound, we opened our eyes and began to pay attention. We found that the terror was vanishing from our minds, and we clutched at the sides of the dugouts, wildly exhilarated.

"What did I tell you?" roared Handforth. "Nothing to be scared about, is there?"

"It's awful!" gasped Church. "Oh, my only aunt!"

"Sit tight, you asses!" said McClure desperately. "Oh, I'm soaked—and this water is like ice! How much longer will it last?"

As a matter of fact, we were nearly through the rapids, and the quiet, smooth water was visible below. In another two minutes we should be out of all possible danger. And then, of course, Handforth started trouble.

If there was one member of our party likely to do anything of this kind, it was Edward Oswald Handforth; but even he did not realise what sheer disaster he nearly brought to himself and others.

We were almost through the rapids—on the last lap, so to speak; but the water all round us was surging and tossing in gigantic billows. The danger here was no less than it had been higher up the river.

But Handforth considered that all peril was at an end, and that caution was no longer necessary. Either this, or he acted in sheer thoughtlessness—which was quite characteristic.

A steep hill sloped away on the left-hand bank of the river, and, as Handforth glanced up at this, he suddenly flung out an arm, pointing.

"Look!" he shouted. "There's a bear on that ledge!"

There certainly was a bear—a huge brown specimen of formidable appearance. Not that we took much interest in the bear at that moment. Handforth, in his anxiety to tell his chums about it, half jumped out of his seat. The next second the disaster occurred.

A wave struck the dugout at that moment; the frail craft rolled over. Handforth gave a wild yell, clutched at Church, and lost his balance.

It was over in a flash.

Handforth, unable to save himself, tipped into the icy water. His head showed just for a moment; then he was flung away from the dugout, and smothered by the foaming mass of water.

"Handforth's gone!" shrieked Church wildly.

McClure was too stunned with horror to speak. Dorrie and the others in the fourth boat had seen everything, and they were filled with apprehension. Handforth had gone; he had been swallowed up in this raging torrent.

But the next moment something appeared above the surface of the water, about twenty feet from the dugouts. That something was Handforth's head. He flung up an arm, and just managed to give one gasping cry; but his voice was choked by the gripping iciness of the water.

The junior was discovering that these rapids were terrible things, after all. Although a fairly good swimmer, he

was helpless—he could do nothing. The currents of the river clutched at him like giant hands. He was whirled about this way and that way—upside down, sideways, and in every conceivable position.

He was flung to the surface like a piece of cork; but he only had time to draw in one gasping breath of air before a billow caught him and drew him under once again. He was like a straw in a gutter—a plaything to be tossed about by every fickle fancy of the surging eddies.

Ace-High Peter, in the stern of the dugout, acted with commendable precision. Dropping his paddle, and leaving the control of the boat to Umlosi, he grabbed up a rope which lay on the floor of the dugout.

The next moment the rope went whirling out over the waters. Only Handforth's head was visible. The rope settled down with unerring accuracy. It was a magnificent throw, and one which undoubtedly saved Handforth's life.

The noose dropped neatly over Handforth's head, drew tight, and became encircled round his neck. It was risky, but the only possible thing that could be done. Handforth felt the rope, and clutched at it desperately.

He got it between his fingers, jerked it from his head, and then hung on like grim death. And by now the smooth water had been reached, although the current here was like that of an express train.

The leading dugouts were already making for the river bank, and Umlosi paddled with all his strength to edge his craft in. Meanwhile, Ace-High Peter hauled in at the rope, dragging Handforth nearer and nearer.

Then the dugout lurched drunkenly.

It gave one giddy swerve, and nearly tipped up. A hidden rock had been struck, and Umlosi was not to blame in the least, since he could see no sign of the concealed menace.

The dugout regained an even keel, but the water came surging in at an appalling speed. Umlosi knew what had happened, and he paddled for dear life. And, at the last moment, he succeeded in getting the disabled vessel to the bank. All the occupants were shot out into shallow water, the dugout overturned and lay jammed.

Ace-High Peter retained his hold on the rope, and Handforth was dragged in practically unconscious—bruised, battered, and exhausted. But he was very much alive, and tragedy had been averted.

Meanwhile, the other dugouts had been brought to the bank and made secure. The occupants came rushing along to the spot where Handforth was lying stretched out on the grass, with Ace-High Peter and Church and McClure doing everything they could to restore the battered junior to his senses.

Handforth was looking very bad, his face pale and drawn, and his eyes only half open—for he was not absolutely unconscious. The sun poured down upon his soaking clothing.

Nelson Lee bent down quickly over Handforth.

"Splendid, Peter!" he said approvingly. "You've saved the lad's life, and—"

"Aw! Quit that stuff, sir!" growled Ace-High Peter. "I guess I slung the rope, an' that ain't nothin' to get yellin' about. Say, I'm doggone glad I had that rope right handy. I'm figgerin' it was sum useful."

Nelson Lee poured a few drops of brandy down Handforth's throat, and the spirit soon had effect. The junior opened his eyes wider, and a touch of colour crept into his cheeks.

"Hallo! What's all the fuss about?" he muttered dreamily. "What—what's happened? I—I was fighting somebody, wasn't I? I remember getting knocked about— Oh, yes, I fell in the beastly river! I remember now—"

"That's all right, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee softly. "There is no need for you to speak. Just lie quiet, and you'll soon be yourself. Nipper, fetch a couple of blankets."

I soon had the blankets on the spot, and Handforth's clothes were dragged from him, and he was rolled in the blankets. Within twenty minutes he was quite bright, and was insisting in a loud voice that he wanted to get dressed.

And during this interval the broken dugout had been examined. A great hole had been torn in the stern—a hole which rendered the dugout quite useless. But the craft was necessary to us, for it was impossible to crowd twenty into the other three vessels.

"We shall have to repair it—that's all," said Nelson Lee. "It'll be rather a long job, I'm afraid, but I suppose we ought to be thankful that we have passed down the rapids in safety."

"We should have been as right as anything, sir, if Handforth hadn't been such a silly ass," put in Church. "In spite of all the warnings we'd had, he jumps up and upsets the boat!"

"Why, you silly ass, I only just pointed!" interrupted Handforth, sitting up in his blankets. "How was I to know——"

"Now then, Handforth, you mustn't talk!" said Nelson Lee sternly. "It won't do any good to argue about this matter. You are quite safe; and that is the most important thing. I have come to the conclusion, though, Handforth, that you are incorrigible."

Handforth subsided.

And while he was arguing heatedly with Church and McClure—in spite of Nelson Lee's advice—the other members of the party were making all things snug and secure, for, of course, it was necessary to camp at this spot, just below the rapids. We could not proceed until the broken dugout was repaired.

It was still quite early in the day, and two hours had elapsed before the camp was made snug. All the tents were erected, and, much to Fatty Little's delight, active preparations for a meal were in progress.

"I've got a frightful appetite," said Fatty, eyeing the preparations longingly. "I suppose it must be these rapids; they make a chap hungry, you know."

"Anything makes you hungry, my son," said Pitt. "Anyhow, you've always got an excuse on the tip of your tongue."

Bob Christine pulled Pitt's sleeve.

"What's this thing coming down the rapids?" he asked. "Can't you see it? Just up there—near the left bank. It looks to me like a log of wood, or something."

Pitt and several others gazed intently.

"No, it's not a log of wood," said Talmadge. "It's flat, and I believe—Why, great Scott! It's a raft!"

"A raft?"

"Yes!"

"And there's somebody on it!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What's the excitement, boys?" asked Dorrie, strolling up. "Anythin' interestin'?"

"Yes, sir; there's a raft coming down the rapids—a raft with somebody on it!" shouted Bob Christine. "Look, sir!"

Dorrie looked, and all the other members of the party looked too, for Christine had shouted loudly in his excitement. And even Handforth raised himself in his blankets, and looked up the river.

The object which was being tossed from billow to billow was quite clear now—a rudely constructed raft of rough logs, tied together with thongs of fibre. And upon this raft lay stretched a human figure—a brown figure, almost devoid of clothing. And it did not move.

"Good gracious!" said Nelson Lee. "The man is bound to the raft, I believe. There is some devilry about this!"

Leon Ascara nodded.

"Him Indian," he said shortly. "Moch cunning."

We were all too excited to take much heed of what Leon said. Square-Deal Reeve, Umlosi, and Nelson Lee were already rushing for one of the dugouts. They jumped into it, pushed off, and paddled as rapidly as possible out into the swiftly flowing river.

They were obliged to wield their paddles with the full force of their muscles in order to stand against the current; and they were just able to succeed. Working hard, they kept the dugout in the same position, neither moving down nor up.

And the raft, swept down on the current, came rapidly nearer. It was comparatively close to the bank, having passed down the rapids on this side of the stream. It was whirling round dizzily in the eddies, still tossing about in the most bewildering fashion.

And as it came down we stared at it curiously.

It was a comparatively small craft, about eight feet by six, and upon this was spread-eagled a human form—a Redskin, bound securely at each wrist and each ankle. Even his head was tightly bound so that he could not lift it.

He merely wore some rags about his middle, and I was quite certain that the man was dead. In any case, he had

passed through a ghastly ordeal, having swept down the rapids on this frail craft.

In the dugout, Square-Deal Reeve reached out as the raft swept by. At the same moment the others ceased paddling, and the dugout and the raft were swept down the stream together, the raft being held securely.

Again the paddles were got to work, and as speedily as possible both the dugout and the raft were edged towards the shore. They succeeded in making a landing half a mile below the camp.

A good many of us had run down on the shore, and we arrived, breathless, at about the same time. Quickly the man on the raft was cut free and lifted ashore. He was laid down in the grass, and Nelson Lee made an examination.

The Redskin certainly appeared to be dead, and we were all concerned to see that he had several nasty wounds on his chest and arms—jagged cuts which were still bleeding. This fact proved to me that the man was still living.

"The fellow is in a bad way," said Nelson Lee, after a few moments. "He has taken in a lot of water, and would have suffocated in a very short time. By means of artificial respiration we may possibly save him."

Leon Ascara pushed forward.

"No do that!" he said quickly. "No save him!"

"We must certainly make every attempt to do so, Leon——"

"Ver' foolish do that," broke in our guide. "Him Nassi red man—better dead. Let him die. No good to bring back life. I know what I saying, me. 'Trow Indian back in river, and let him die lak dog. Him moch safer lak that."

But Nelson Lee shook his head, and artificial respiration was immediately applied. Leon's advice was somewhat drastic, and it could not be accepted. Indian or no Indian, we could not possibly let the man die if there was any chance of bringing him back to life.

And gradually conscience returned to that battered form. Nelson Lee succeeded in restoring the life which had so nearly ebbed away. The Redskin was carried up to the camp and placed in one of the tents.

We had had quite a lot of excitement that morning; but we had no idea of the stirring events which were destined to occur before many more hours had elapsed.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

JAKE CRASHER swore vigorously. "We'll git our own back, I guess!" he exclaimed, with a savage note in his voice. "By gosh! I'm figgerin' I ain't the kind o' man to play the fool with! Say, pards, we'll sure make them guys wish they hadn't been born afore we've done——"

"Aw, can that talk!" snapped Josh Sims harshly. "We'll do a darn lot o' damage, won't we? Gee! I'm allowin' we kinder mussed this game up a hull heap! Say, ther's nothin' we kin do. I guess we're left!"

"Sure!" agreed Bob Doane.

Pat Hara merely grunted and spat savagely into the river. The four men were in their own camp, quite a number of miles above the Thunder Rapids. The spot was a most peaceful one, and very beautiful, too. It was befouled by the presence of these rascals.

It was only natural, perhaps, that their tempers should be on edge, for they were the victims of their own destructive policy. Madly anxious to be ahead in the race for the valley of gold, Jake Crasher had performed a trick which gave him the lead. He had, in brief, smashed two dugouts belonging to Nelson Lee and his party.

But the tables had been turned neatly.

For while Jake Crasher and Co. were still celebrating, Nelson Lee and the rest had descended upon the camp and had taken Crasher's two sound dugouts in exchange for the damaged ones.

And since then the rascals had been working feverishly on the necessary repairs. It did not sweeten their tempers to realise that this wanton damage had been done by their own hands.

It was just about midday now, and there had been a pause while food was being prepared. The dugouts were almost ready for the river again. But of what use were they now?

"Lee and Furman and the hull crowd have got a start on us," growled Bob Doane. "Say, we might just as well hit the trail back to Fort Derwent. Guess we don't stand no sort o' chance o' catching up wi' them guys."

"By thunder, we'll do it!" snarled Jake. "Say, I ain't a quitter; guess

I'm stickin' to this trail t' th' finish. Get me?"

"We'll sure be wastin' our time," grunted Hara.

Gloom had settled itself over the camp ever since Nelson Lee had delivered his stunning blow, and now that the repairs had been made—now that the dugouts were nearly ready again—there seemed very little hope.

It was just about the same time, to be exact, that we were rescuing the Indian from the raft below Thunder Rapids. While we were doing this, Jake Crasher and his associates were cursing one another in their camp.

"Say, boys, wher's th' durned sense in snappin' at one another like a pack of all-fired dorgs?" demanded Jake, as he was eating. "I figger we've got t' pull together—right now an' all the time. We've got a man's job ahead of us, an' I ain't quittin'. Guess th' position don't scare me any."

"Yop, Jake, but wher's th' sense in keepin' on?" demanded Bob Doane. "Say, by th' time we git down the rapids them durned guys will be in th' valley. We sha'n't know a thing

"Say, boys, can this talk!" whispered Josh Sims suddenly. "I ain't the feller t' see things, but I'm tellin' you right now I spotted a bunch of heads around that bush. Say, we're bein' watched."

"By cripes!" muttered Hara.

They all looked round, suddenly feeling insecure, and before they could move between twelve and fifteen figures appeared from behind a clump of trees. They were Indians, most of them attired in feathers and war-paint.

"Gee!" muttered Doane. "A reg'lar bunch o' movie guys!"

It was certainly a most uncommon sight to see Indians attired in this fashion. They were evidently a party of young braves, strong-looking and fierce, with well-developed figures and forbidding features. One man had far more feathers in his head gear than the rest, and a gaily coloured blanket was wrapped round his shoulders. Without a doubt he was the chief.

As he came forward he held his hand aloft.

Jake Crasher and his companions rose. "How!" said the chief solemnly. "We no harm you. Talk Ingleese not much. We mak exchange."

"What's the durned idea?" asked Jake suspiciously.

"You got 'bacca—for smoke pipe?" asked the Indian. "We give you moch moose meat. You mak trade?"

"I guess we'll oblige you," said Jake. "As it happens, we're short o' meat. Who are you, and wher' d'you happen t' come from?"

"I no spik," said the Indian evenly. "Well, have you seen a party o' white men down the river?" asked Jake. "Mebbe you kin hand out som' information. I guess we're durned anxious to know about that party!"

The Indian shook his head.

"No savee," he said shortly.

"You can't work that all-fired bluff on me!" said Crasher. "You savee right enough, an' I'm figgerin' your best play is to loosen that durned tongue o' yours. Get me? You're Injuns, ain't you? Waal, what tribe d'you guess you belong to?"

The chief remained silent. A walled expression came into his face—a look of absolute blankness which only an Indian can assume. He seemed as though he had not heard the question and understood nothing.

"Say, I spoke some!" snapped Crasher harshly.

"You mak trade?" asked the Indian stolidly.

"Gee! Ain't these guys sure the limit?" muttered Bob Doane. "Injuns is all the same, Jake. Guess we can't do nothin'. Mebbe they'd like a drop o' something warm," he added.

Jake understood, and produced a whisky flask.

"You drink?" he asked, offering the flask.

"Mo lak drink wit' you," said the chief promptly.

An expression of intelligence came into his eyes, and he reached out for the flask. He took great gulps of the raw spirit, and the effect was almost instantaneous. He leaned forward, his little eyes gleaming.

"You mak trade?" he said eagerly. "Moch moose meat for 'bacca and spirit. We tell you everything we know

"Well, first of all, what's your name?" demanded Crasher. "But we don't need to stand here, I guess. Sit down, and make yourselves comfortable. Eat—smoke—I figger you're at liberty to do what you like."

The Indians accepted the offer, and within a few moments they were squatting round in a circle, their pipes full of Jake Crasher's tobacco.

"Me Muskis—big chief!" said the spokesman of the Indians. "Others no spik Ingleese—no on'erstan'. What you doin' here?"

"Oh, just explorin' the country," replied Jake.

"No lookin' for anyt'in?"

"I guess that depends."

"You spik of ot'er white men?" asked Muskis.

"Sure; ther's a party gone down the river I'd like to hear about," replied Jake darkly. "Say, I'm figgerin' you kin hand out some good talk. Them white men ain't friends of ours, an' I guess they're lookin' for a valley. They've got a half-breed with them named Leon Ascara."

"Wa!" said the Indian quickly. "Him wit' them?"

"Sure, he's with 'em," replied Crasher. "They're lookin' for this valley, and, what's more, it's a dead certainty they'll find it. They're on th' track, an' I'm figgerin' that you guys are located somewher' around this valley. Do I guess right?"

Muskis made no reply.

"I guess you belong to the Nassi bunch?" went on Jake.

"No use for tellin' lie," said the Indian. "Yes, we Nassi Indian from valley. Me give you moch truth. Me frien's wit' you. White men go down river to get in valley? This is true?"

"As true as your skin's red!" replied Jake Crasher, seizing his opportunity.

"Say, this same party is a gang of murderers, an' they've got guns an' ammunition fit to destroy an army. Say, that tribe o' yours is sure in danger. These durned whites are makin' straight fer th' valley, an' I figger I'd like t' help you some. I don't hold no grudge against you fellers. I guess I'm a kind man, an' I'd sure be a heap pleased t' help you to kick these skunks out!"

The Indian nodded gravely.

"Me moch pleased," he said. "You help me—no help you. You lak gold?"

"Gold?" put in Hara sharply.

"Let me deal with him!" muttered Jake. "You boys had best keep quiet."

He turned to the chief.

"Waal, I'm figgerin' we like gold

jest about as much as we like eatin' an' drinkin'," he said. "Guess ther's heaps o' dust lyin' around in this durn valley. Say, we'll fix up a bargain."

"You spik—I soon tell you what we do," replied Muskis shortly.

"Good enough!" went on Jake briskly. "Now, see here, this is the stunt. You take us into this valley, an' we'll git rid o' that gang o' whites fer you; they're our enemies, an' we'll sure be pleased to finish 'em off. Got me? You give us enough gold to weigh us down good an' plenty, an' we'll vamoose, an' leave you in peaco. How's that?"

"Good—I lak it moch!" said the Indian chief. "We no let white men com' in valley. We peaceful; we live quiet. You help to keep white men out. Good. Plentee gold. But you promise not com' back?"

"Sure!" said Jake promptly. "You don't need to be anxious on that account, old man. Jest give us a nice load, an' we'll sure quit. An', say, you'd best think this over real careful. If you don't hang on t' the game—waal, Ascara an' that durn crowd with him will sure wipe you out of existence. This way you're saved, an' I don't figger it'll cost you a cent's worth o' trouble."

The Indian nodded gravely.

"Wait!" he said. "I spik wit' my braves."

He turned and talked rapidly in Cree to the other Indians. In less than a minute they were all talking together at a great rate. Jake leaned over to his companions, and his eyes were glittering with greed.

"Say, we've sure hit it lucky!" he muttered. "These Injuns are from the valley, an' they'll lead us right into the durn place. Guess we'll hev the hull blamed crew as cold as mutton afore we've bin ther' a day."

"Mebbe it won't be so easy," whispered Josh Sims.

"Aw, I guess you're loco!" snapped Jake. "Say, the hull bunch don't number fifty. We've got guns; we'll settle them afore they kin know what's happened. Guess it won't take long to fill their hides with lead; and once we're right ther'—waal, we'll do jest as we like."

He turned to the Indians again, for they had ceased speaking.

"We all moch pleased," said Muskis shortly. "Good plan. Com' wit' us to valley. You help us. We give you moch gold. It is a trade?"

"Sure!" said Jake promptly. "We've had a bit o' trouble with our dugouts. I guess; but they're repaired now, an' we'll git on the move jist as soon as you like—the sooner the better."

The Indian nodded.

"We all go," he said shortly. "Break camp!"

Preparations were soon being made. Jake Crasher's camp was dismantled, and everything was packed in the dugouts. By the time this was done some of the Indians had brought up four large canoes, which had evidently been concealed some little distance down the river.

Jake looked at the frail craft doubtfully.

"Say, are you figgerin' to shoot the rapids in them canoes?" he asked.

The Indian shook his head.

"No go down rapids," he replied. "Mak different trip. Go ot'er way."

"But I guessed ther' was only one way into this valley——"

"Two way!" interrupted Muskis. "One way by river. Ot'er way we find out lil' time back. Bes' way. You com'—me show you."

This piece of news was exceedingly welcome to Jake, for he had been wondering how it would be possible for them to go down the rapids and enter the valley without being seen by the other party.

There was evidently a different way into the valley, and it would be far better to accompany the Indians by that method. There could then be no possibility of an awkward meeting.

Before another hour had elapsed the whole party had left the camp and were gliding smoothly round the wide Ghost River. Long before nightfall they had reached the head of the rapids, after the Perth River had joined forces with the Ghost River.

And here, with the roar of the rapids in their ears, the whole party made camp. It was decided to sleep well that night, and to continue the journey at dawn. And this programme was carried out.

Before the sun was up Jake Crasher and his companions were following their new Indian friends into the mountains,

along a secret trail which was rugged and tortuous. Indeed, no actual trail existed, and the white men were puzzled as to how the Indians could find their way at all.

The journey continued throughout the day, right into the mountains, through black canyons and rugged gorges. Crasher had an idea that the route lay parallel with the river, for now and again at intervals the muffled roar of the rapids could be heard. By evening the journey was nearly at its close.

And Crasher's party was eager now. Every one of these men was filled with the lust of gold, and the thought of entering this wonderful valley filled them with an intense longing to be on the spot.

During the final hours of daylight the trail led through the wildest possible mountain country. Hardly a pause had been made for food or rest, and under ordinary circumstances the white men would have been nearly exhausted. But the knowledge of what lay at the end of their journey kept them on the go.

Darkness was settling down in earnest when it seemed that it would be impossible to proceed further. Some little time they had been travelling down a gulch, deep in the mountains, with no apparent outlet. Ahead lay a towering, majestic precipice, with the snow-capped mountains raising their white peaks to the skies beyond.

But the Indians kept on, without pausing. Jake said nothing. Inwardly he was wondering how on earth this gulch could be left behind. It seemed that the only way out was by retracing their steps; but then, when the gloom was settling down in earnest, a turn was made in the course, and there a most peculiar formation of the rock presented itself.

Almost unseen, and, indeed, only apparent when one was right upon it, the mountain was slit in two. A narrow canyon led through the very rock itself. In places this canyon was a kind of tunnel, with jagged rock sides. It seemed an appalling proposition.

Jake, utterly spent, came to a halt. "Say, we'd best camp right here," he suggested wearily. "I'm calc'latin' we'll finish this trip to-morrer."

"We go on—no stay here," said the

chief. "Not moch longer—jes lil' way. You moch tired, I guess?"

"We'll keep on as long as you guys, anyway!" replied Jake curtly. "I figger a white man has a heap more strength than the best Redskin living. Keep goin', an' we'll foller!"

The Indian said nothing, but went on his way. That secret canyon seemed to be endless. The long northern twilight had faded into almost complete darkness by the time the journey was at an end.

The last lap had been through a huge tunnel, exceedingly high and broad. Jake Crasher and his three companions hardly had strength enough to drag one foot before the other. It had been the most gruelling day of their lives; but they had arrived in the secret valley—and that was everything. A good sleep would put them on their feet again.

Not much of the valley could be seen when the party first entered—a wide expanse of well-wooded country, with a fairish stream gleaming in the after-glow. It seemed a delightful place by night, and it would undoubtedly be ten times more delightful when the sun was shining.

"We are here!" said Muskis solemnly. "Ot'er entrance t'ree mile away. Bad white men not com' until to-morrow. We got time for rest before preparin' battle. Com', we giv' you tepee for rest."

"Aw, you don't need t' trouble none!" said Crasher. "I reckon we'll sleep right here in the open. Gee! I guess I'm sure as tired as a prairie coyote!"

The end of the journey was now in sight, for perched upon a hillside near the river a number of tepees could be seen. There were Indians, too—a far greater number than Jake had imagined.

And then, just when the white men were congratulating themselves upon the success of their new scheme, the blow descended. Without the least warning they were completely surrounded by the Redskins. In less than ten seconds their revolvers were taken from them and they were flung to the ground.

The cunning of the thing was staggering. Fresh and sleepless, the white men would have been on their guard; they would have been prepared for any act of treachery. But now, after their

long day's journey, they were utterly worn out.

And the blow descended before they could be prepared.

Jake Crasher momentarily forgot his tiredness, and he uttered a bellow of fury as he felt himself forced to the ground by four of the Indians.

"By thunder!" he roared. "What's this durn game?"

Muskis grinned down at him.

"You fall in trap, moch easy!" he said softly. "Me trick you lak you were child. Wa! You t'ink we let you go from this valley? You die, you pig white man! You all die!"

"Why, you red skunk, what——"

"No spik!" interrupted the Indian. "You prisoner. We kill you to-morrow. We kill ot'er white men next day, when they com'. We know all—we on guard. Not one escape from this country!"

This news was not exactly cheering, and Jake Crasher and Co. were bound tightly and placed in a tepee. This was carefully guarded, and the position seemed to be about as hopeless as any position could be.

The trap had been set, and the victims had walked into it!

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROWLER IN THE NIGHT!

"HOW'S the giddy patient?" asked Handforth.

"Oh, a lot better," I replied.

"These Indians are queer beggars, you know. They can be nearly dead, and they'll recover in next to no time. Of course, the gov'nor has done a terrific lot."

Handforth grunted.

"Too much, I reckon," he said. "I don't see why Mr. Lee should take such a lot of trouble over his blessed Indian. He may be a spy, for all we know. There's no telling what beastly tricks these blighters will get up to."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handy," said Church. "How can the Indian be a spy? He was nearly dead when he came down the river—covered with wounds, and three parts drowned. It's as clear as daylight that he's been tortured."

"And you're a nice chap to talk about Mr. Lee taking trouble," put in McClure. "What about you, Handy?"

"Well, what about me?"

"Didn't Mr. Lee bring you back after



Spread-eagled upon the raft was a human form—a Redskin, bound securely at each wrist and each ankle.

you'd been nearly drowned?" asked McClure. "Peter hauled you out of the river, and then Mr. Lee did the rest. You nearly killed yourself with your fat-headed recklessness."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"Peace, my children!" I interrupted. "There's no need to start any arguments now. Handy was nearly drowned this morning, but he's practically himself again, and there's no need to hold an inquest over it."

"Inquest!" said Handforth. "I'm not dead, you fathead! They only hold inquests over dead people."

I sighed.

"My dear chap, an inquest is an inquiry," I said patiently. "If you look in any dictionary you'll discover that the word 'inquest' does not necessarily imply an inquiry over a dead body. Talking about that Indian, I've got an idea he's all right. It looks to me as though he fell foul of his pals, and was chucked out—in just the same way as Leon."

"Leon doesn't seem to like him," put in Pitt.

"No, that's right enough," I said thoughtfully.

Our half-breed guide, as a matter of fact, had shown an intense dislike for the Indian we had rescued from the raft during the morning. Leon Ascara had been uneasy the whole day.

It was evening now, and our camp was full of life and interest. In one spot food was being prepared, with Fatty Little as a keen spectator; near the river Square-Deal Reeve and his own particular friends were busily repairing the disabled dugout. Nelson Lee was watching over the form of the sick Indian.

This man had recovered in an astonishing fashion. He was now in full possession of his wits, and, although in great pain, kept insisting that he would like to talk; but Nelson Lee would not allow this.

"We can't let him talk just now, Dorrie," said the gov'nor. "The fellow has been through a terrible ordeal, by what I can see. Even before he was given to the mercy of the river he suffered greatly."

"That joy-ride down the rapids wasn't exactly a picnic," remarked Dorrie. "By gad! I can't understand why the beggar is still alive. It was enough to kill anybody!"

Both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore looked down on the patient. The Indian, bandaged in a dozen places, was lying well wrapped in blankets. Now and again a spasm of pain crossed his face, but this was the only sign he gave of his sufferings.

He opened his eyes at that moment, and moistened his lips.

"I want spik, me," he said in a whisper. "Me got moch tell you. Me grateful for savin' life—plentee grateful, I guess."

"That's all right," said Nelson Lee. "Take it easy——"

"Me Keewa—belong Nassi redmen," said the Indian. "Wa! They heap bad. Me no longer proud of my tribe. They torture me moch. Me want tell you what they did. You listen?"

"I suppose we might as well let him jaw if he wants to," said Dorrie. "Anyhow, he's a lot stronger than he was two hours ago, an' I must admit I'm a bit curious about the fellow."

Nelson Lee bent over the Indian.

"If you think you can talk, we will listen," he said; "but do not strain yourself. Your name is Keewa?"

"Yes, I Keewa," said the Indian weakly. "Mo t'ink I die; but now I moch alive, an' I tell you all. I give you warnin'. Me do you heap service. You save me, I save you. You on'erstan'?"

"No, I don't quite understand," said Nelson Lee. "What service can you do us, Keewa?"

"Wait! Me tell you," said the patient. "I mak' mistake, an' chief moch angry. Him tell me I punish me. You on'erstan'? Chief punish me plentee. I get wild, an' say moch t'ings I not mean. Chief him wild too—t'ink I mean it. So he tortures me plentee."

"I think I can gather the meaning of your story, Keewa," said Nelson Lee. "You committed an offence, and made matters worse by arguing with your chief, and so you were tortured?"

"Wa! You on'erstan'," said the patient. "Yes, him right. Wa! I tortured heap moch, till I near die wit' pain. Chief say I no good to tribe, an' so I tied to raft an' sent down rapids. Me t'ought I die, just lak ot'ers who go same way."

"So that trick has been performed before?"

"Plentee tam," replied Keewa. "Chief Muskis bad man—cruel. We all

hate him lak snake, but can do not'in'—him chief. Wa! I give moch to kill him lak he try kill me."

"I'm afraid you can't very well do that, Keewa," said Nelson Lee. "Under the circumstances, it is just as well that you escaped from the valley, for you will be in no danger while you are with us—"

"But you go to valley?" interrupted the Indian.

"We are exploring the river," said Nelson Lee shortly.

"You no trick me wit' soch talk," said Keewa. "Me know all. You com' wit' Leon Ascara—him plentee good man. Chief Muskis try kill him same as me. Me warn you. No go to valley by river. Indians all ready kill you. They waitin', an' you die plentee quick if you go that way."

"Well, that's cheerin' news, by gad!" said Lord Dorrimore. "If we try to get to the valley by means of the river we shall all die! It's just as well to know beforehand, because we can make our wills in readiness."

Keewa nodded.

"But you no die if you tak' my advice," he said. "I tell you differen' way into valley—plentee queek an' easy. That way not guarded. You get in wit'out trouble. Go ot'er way an' you die."

Mr. Farman and two or three of the others had gathered round by now and were all listening interestedly. Leon Ascara was in the background, looking indifferent and uninterested.

"Let me get this quite clear, Keewa," said Nelson Lee. "You tell us that your chief knows all about our plans, and that he is preparing to kill us all when we try to enter the valley?"

"Yes, you say right," replied Keewa. "Me help you. Me tell you of better way. You get in safe, an' chief will know not'in' till too late. I walk soon, an' I lead you good."

The Indian talked for some length of time, and he kept repeating his statements—all of them to the effect that if we entered the valley by Leon's method we should be trapped and massacred. If, on the other hand, we followed his advice, we should be able to enter the valley without any trouble whatever.

"Well, this needs thinking over very carefully," said Nelson Lee, shortly

afterwards. "We must do what we think to be best."

Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Farman were standing a little distance from the tents, and they were all looking very thoughtful. Keewa's story had impressed them, and it was certainly very convincing.

"What we've got to guard against is a trick," said Mr. Farman. "I can't possibly see how there can be any trick about this. The man was nearly dead when we found him, and was obviously flung in the river to perish."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "It stands to reason, therefore, that he knows the true position in the valley, and it is hardly likely that he would tell us a false story after we had saved him from death. It is more probable, in fact, that he would wish to get his own back upon the men who tortured him."

"A kind of repetition of what happened to Leon," said Dorrie; "but this, of course, is different. Leon only knows the position as it was some months ago; but this Indian is able to tell us everything right up to date. That's where he's got the advantage."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Precisely," he agreed. "And we must not forget that little incident which took place on the Ghost River, when a pair of stray Indians aimed at us with their arrows. Without doubt they saw Leon Ascara in our party, and his very presence amongst us proved that we were on our way to the valley. It is only natural that the Indians should guard the entrance well. Keewa's story agrees exactly with my own ideas, and there is every reason for us to place faith in what the man says."

"You are thinking of following his advice?" asked Mr. Farman.

"I am," replied Lee. "We knew before Keewa arrived that we should have to contend with trouble at the valley entrance, for we knew that the Nassis were aware of our approach. Now Keewa comes along and tells us that he can guide us into the valley by a method which is unknown even to Leon. Considering that Keewa was cast out for dead, his natural instinct is to have revenge; therefore he wants to aid us, since he knows that the Indians are our enemies."

"Yes, old man, I'm pretty sure you're right," said Dorrie. "It's a good thing

we rescued that man. He'll be jolly useful, and in any case we can't do wrong, because we shall be constantly on our guard."

"It is a great pity we cannot enter the valley peacefully," said Nelson Lee; "but if these Indians are hostile, our only method is to show them that we are the masters. Quite possibly there will be no bloodshed and we shall enter the valley without trouble."

"And when do we start?" asked Dorrie.

"In the morning, if Keewa is strong enough—and he assures me that he will be," said Nelson Lee. "We are to go by land, through a pass in the mountains. Our original plan is abandoned."

Leon Ascara softly walked up.

"I lak talk some, me," he said.

"Go ahead, Leon," invited Lee.

"What do you want to say?"

"You believe Keewa—you do what he say?"

"Yes."

"Wa! Wa! Him moch bad!" exclaimed Leon, holding up his hands. "Me beg you not tak' notice. Him trick you. Him sent down river on purpose to mak' you t'ink lak he say."

"But that's impossible, Leon," said Lee. "The man was nearly dead, and would certainly have died if we had not got him ashore when we did. Indeed, it was amazing that Keewa did not meet his death in the rapids."

"Red man heap cunnin'," said Leon Ascara. "All trick—we know. Keewa sent down on purpose—they know you pull him out and listen to words. You go this o'ter way, an' you fall in trap. All kill—all die. You t'row red man back in the river—him no good. Come wit' me, an' I show you bes' way."

"I quite realise your point of view, Leon, but I'm sure you're wrong," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "There is no reason why we should suspect Keewa of the treachery you suggest. Naturally, you were extra cautious, and I don't altogether blame you; but, under the circumstances, we must go on this other route."

"You mean you follow Keewa, an' not me?"

"Yea."

Leon gave a deep sigh.

"Him bad plan," he said quietly.

"You ar' sorry soon. I ask you to do what I say—I beg you tak' no notice of

Keewa. Him moch bad—him full of tricks lak fox. All planned—all made to trap you."

Leon Ascara's point of view was understandable, perhaps; but it was obvious that his suspicions were unfounded. Keewa was weak and still suffering greatly from his wounds. He was absolutely sincere in all he said, and his warning exactly coincided with Nelson Lee's own fears.

And so it was decided that a start should be made in the morning—a start in the new direction, through the mountains. Nelson Lee only came to this decision after Mr. Farinan and Dorrie and all the others were in full agreement—after the whole matter had been thoroughly discussed and all the points considered. Leon himself said no more.

He accepted the position without a word, and I felt rather sorry for him. Until now he had been our guide, but from this moment it was altered—Keewa would be the guide in future, and Leon Ascara's services were not required.

But, of course, this was only a temporary arrangement. Once we had entered the valley Leon would be in his old position. I had exactly the same opinion as the gov'nor, and considered that we could do nothing better than follow the advice of this man who had been saved from the dead.

"Well, it doesn't matter much, anyway," said Tommy Watson, as we were discussing the matter. "The main thing is to get into this valley. Once we're there we shall be able to have a good look round, and the rest will be easy. I can't swallow that yarn about the gold, you know."

"It certainly seems frightfully thick, dear old boy," said Montie, shaking his noble head. "But there's no need for us to discuss it now; we must wait and see whether the yarn is true or not."

"And it's a pretty good thing we're not going on the river," put in Church. "Some chaps ain't safe in dugouts!"

Handforth looked round.

"What's that?" he demanded sharply.

"Oh, nothing!"

"You rotter! You were talking about me!" snorted Handforth. "If you make any of those giddy insinuations again, I'll punch your silly nose!"

"Oh, rats!" said Church. "Didn't you fall out of that dugout——"

"Perhaps I did; but it was your fault."

"My fault?" yelled Church.

"Of course it was!" said Handforth calmly.

"Why, you—you——"

"You were sitting just behind me, and you ought to have seen that I was tipping overboard," said Handforth. "If you'd had any wits you would have grabbed me in time, and pulled me back——"

"You fatheaded ass!" snorted Church wrathfully. "There wasn't time to do anything! And to say it was my fault——"

"Time for something to eat, boys!" said Nelson Lee, strolling up. "Come along!"

This, of course, settled all argument—at least, it ought to have done. But Handforth continued in the same strain even after his supper had been put before him. Church and McClure were weary by the time he had done. Church fully and freely admitted that he—Church—had been a careless ass, and that he could have saved Handforth without any trouble if he had been awake, instead of half asleep.

Handforth was satisfied, and the rest of the meal was partaken of in peace. And when it was finished only a brief space elapsed before all the fellows rolled themselves in their blankets and retired for the night.

Leon Ascara kept quite to himself, and was one of the first to get into his blankets. He was very disappointed, and did not wish to speak or to be spoken to. By the time the rest of the camp retired, Leon had been asleep for an hour.

The rescued Indian was in no need of attention, since he had dropped off into a peaceful slumber, and seemed to be gaining strength with every minute that passed.

But a watch was kept—and this was necessary.

There was no telling whether the Nassi Indians would swoop down and make an attack. It was far better to be fully on the alert. Every man slept with his weapons close at hand, and it was taken in turns to keep guard.

Nelson Lee had the first watch—until midnight. Then, when he retired to his little tent, Dorrie took over. At two o'clock Dorrie was relieved by Twirly Sam; and so it would go on until dawn.

Twirly Sam walked up and down for some time, smoking. Everything was quiet. The night was still, and hardly a breath of wind stirred; but the air was filled with a thunder of noise, for those gigantic rapids were never silent. Day and night, month in and month out, they kept up their infernal din.

Overhead, the stars were gleaming with wonderful brilliance, and the mountains were outlined sharply and clearly against the sky. The thought of any attack hardly seemed possible, but Twirly Sam kept his vigil properly.

It was just about three o'clock when Nelson Lee suddenly awoke.

He didn't exactly know why. He was always a light sleeper, and any unusual sound would awaken him; but this time there had been no sound. He looked up and caught sight of Twirly Sam's figure twenty yards away.

All else was still and quiet.

In the tent next to Lee lay Dorrie and Mr. Farman. The juniors were further away on the same side. In the other direction Leon Ascara was wrapped in his blankets, sleeping profoundly, and just near to Nelson Lee, Keewa in his tent was sleeping too.

At least, so Lee believed at first.

But, somehow, the famous detective had an uneasy feeling that everything was not right. Why he should think this way he could not imagine; but, if nothing was wrong, why had he awakened?

Lee was wide awake, although he gave no sign. He had not even lifted his head, and his only movement had been to open his eyes. And then, as he laid there, he heard a faint rustle.

The sound came from Keewa, the Indian.

Nelson Lee smiled to himself. Obviously, the Redskin was stirring in his sleep; and this was not surprising, considering that he was probably in pain. There was no reason why Nelson Lee should be uneasy. He prepared to go to sleep again.

Then that rustle came once more.

Nelson Lee looked closely. Keewa was sitting up, looking about him with extreme caution. Twirly Sam had been pacing up and down, and he was just on his way back to the farthest point away from this spot.

Indeed, the cowboy did not come near the camp at all. His idea evidently was

that he would disturb the sleepers if he approached too closely, and it was just as easy to keep watch at a distance.

The Indian softly threw his blankets off, and crept out of his half-open tent. All these tents were open at one end, so it was easy enough for Nelson Lee to know what was going on.

The detective had no suspicions as yet. Possibly Keewa was in want of a drink, or he had become restless and needed a little exercise. But somehow the Indian's movements were stealthy; they hardly seemed like the movements of a man who had nothing to conceal.

Keewa crept with cat-like tread over to the spot where Leon Ascara was wrapped in his blankets. He reached the still form, and crouched there for a moment or two. Nelson Lee imagined that the man wanted to speak to Leon in his own language—perhaps he was anxious to convince the half-breed of his sincerity.

But, as Nelson Lee soon discovered, this was not the case.

Lee watched closely, and then he caught his breath in with a sharp hiss; for something gleamed in the Indian's hand—something bright which caught the starlight. It was a knife!

Lee acted with startling promptitude.

His revolver was by his side. He grasped it, and cocked the trigger. Even as he did so the Indian raised the knife aloft in a manner which could mean only one thing—he was about to plunge that wicked blade into Leon Ascara's heart!

Crack!

The report was like that of a cannon in that silent camp. Practically at the same second a scream of agony rent the air. Keewa's knife went sailing through the atmosphere, to fall perilously close to Lord Dorrimore's head. The whole camp was awake.

The Indian lay on the ground, writhing and groaning.

Nelson Lee threw his blankets off, and ran swiftly to the man's side. Keewa's wrist was shattered, and blood was flowing freely from the wound. The man continued groaning.

"You treacherous hound!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "One second more, and you would have killed Leon! We now know you at your true worth, and every person in this camp owes Leon a humble apology for doubting him."

The half-breed was looking bewildered. "Wa! Wa!" he exclaimed. "Me scare' proper! Me t'ink red man mak' big attack. You know Keewa now? You find out him wicked liar?"

"Yes, Leon, I know the truth now," replied Nelson Lee. "The scoundrel tried to kill you, but I was just a little bit too quick for him."

"Me t'ank you moch. You got eye lak eagle!" said Leon. "Save me from bein' kill'. Me ver' grateful."

"You need say nothing, Leon," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "I ought to have listened to your words at the very start. I am amazed that this trick should have been attempted, and that it nearly succeeded in coming off."

"By gad! What's wrong over there?" asked Dorrie, sitting up.

"Say, you sure gave me a mighty big start!" said Twirly Sam, running up. "Guess you found trouble!"

"My hat! Is it an attack?"

"Looks like it!"

"Who's been firing revolvers?"

"Goodness knows!"

The juniors were all awake, and asking all sorts of questions. At least, they were all awake with the exception of one fellow. Handforth continued snoring, and he would probably have kept on if his chums had not shaken him vigorously. Handforth always slept like a log.

The excitement for the first five minutes was intense, for nobody knew what had happened, and all sorts of questions were being asked.

But then the truth became known, and the indignation was high. The rescued Indian was nothing more nor less than a spy—a decoy sent down the river for the express purpose of leading the party into a carefully prepared ambush.

"But I'm durned if I can understand it!" exclaimed Square-Deal Reeve. "Say, I'll be a heap o-blighed, Mr. Lee, if you'll hand out the meanin' of this hyar lay-out?"

Nelson Lee looked very grim.

"As I understand it, there is only one explanation," he replied. "The Indians sent Keewa down the river knowing full well that we should rescue him. Perhaps he received his injuries by accident; perhaps they were deliberately inflicted. These Redskins are stoical, and care little what they do if only they can gain their ends. In any

case, they were assured that we should rescue the man, and they were equally convinced that we should believe his story."

"By the holy Mackinaw! And so we did!" said Twirly Sam.

"Yes, but what's the object of it?" put in Mr. Farinan. "Why should the Indians go to all this trouble? If they want to trap us, surely they can do that when we go to enter the valley by the river method?"

"Ah, but you seem to forget that we should be well on our guard, and fully prepared for such an attack," said Nelson Leo. "The Indians thought that by adopting this scheme they would catch us unawares; Keewa, in fact, would have led us straight into a deadly ambush, from which there would have been no escape."

"You say right," put in Leon quickly. "Me guessed their plan; but I no let you go. I t'ink me moch, an' mak' scheme myself. Me plan to push Keewa in river," added Leon simply.

"Well, that was certainly an easy way out of the difficulty," chuckled Lord Dorrimore. "It's a good thing this has happened."

"River entrance to valley easy—no guard him moch," went on the half-breed. "That why red man tried this game. Wa! Him plentee cunnin', I guess; but we moch better now, Indian, him t'ink we follow Keewa, an' all warriors will be waitin' for not'in'. We slip in lak rabbit go in hole."

There was a feeling of intense relief throughout the camp. To tell the truth, we had all possessed uneasy doubts in the back of our minds; but now these were cleared away, and our course was clear.

In the morning we would go down the river, with Leon as our guide, and we would attempt to make the entry into the secret valley. Whether we should succeed was a matter which time alone would prove.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOORWAY TO THE VALLEY.

"GORGEOUS, dear old boys—positively gorgeous!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West uttered the words in a tone of intense admiration. He was gazing across the river, and the sight which he beheld was certainly one worth praising.

It was afternoon, and we had been travelling down the river for several hours. Camp had been broken at dawn, and the whole party had got on the move, the smashed dugout being fully repaired.

And now we were practically at the end of our journey.

The last lap had been accomplished without any trouble, and without incident. The scenery down the river had been of a wild and rugged description, and at last we had come upon a view which somewhat awed us.

The river had widened out, and now, away to the left, it swung off to the southward, travelling through an imposing gorge. To the right another river joined it, and this second river was at a much higher level.

It came surging over a sheer cliff in a roaring cascade of water. It was, in fact, a waterfall of unusual size and magnificence. The river simply poured itself over the ledge in one smooth volume.

And we were now within half a mile, gliding along in our dugouts, and making for the rocks just clear of the whirlpools and eddies. The whole scene was one which a fellow hardly ever has the opportunity of gazing upon.

Right up here, in this uninhabited part of the country, a white man scarcely ever passed. Perhaps half a dozen would go down the river during the course of the summer. But these men had no reason to pause; they went straight on their way down towards Graham Settlement, thirty miles further on. On our way out to civilisation we should be obliged to take this course, for it would be impossible to go up the rapids, and up the Ghost River against the current. The only outlet from this country was via Graham Settlement and then down numerous other rivers.

But we were not thinking of our outward trip now. We had just arrived at our real destination.

For this great waterfall was the entrance to the wonderful secret valley. There was not the slightest indication that any valley existed. On every hand the cliffs and mountains rose up thousands of feet. There was no break—no sign of outlet, and yet this valley was near at hand.

An aeroplane, perhaps, would have spotted it at once, but there were no

such things as aeroplanes in this far-flung corner of the Empire. In all probability no aeroplane will travel that way for many years to come.

We all landed comparatively near to the whirlpool at the base of the falls. The thunder of the falling water drowned almost every other sound, and we could hardly keep our eyes away from the grandeur of the scenery.

We needed a meal, however, and this was prepared as quickly as possible. Keewa, the treacherous Indian, was with us, for, of course, we could not have left him alone in his injured condition, and we should not have left him in any case. For, without a doubt, he would have given the warning to his own tribe.

And so he remained with us—a closely watched prisoner.

As soon as the meal was finished, Nelson Lee questioned Leon.

"How long will it take to get into the valley, Leon?" asked the gov'nor.

"Just give me a rough estimate."

"You mean how long we tak' from here to there?" asked the half-breed.

"Yes."

"Five hour—six hour—depen' how qucek we go," said Leon. "Moch difficult climb over rocks; then through passage and tunnel. Big journey. Start now, we arrive nightfall. You mak' go at once?"

"Yes, I was thinking of wasting no time, Leon."

"Him moch good plan," said Leon.

"Wait, and red man know plan has failed. Bes' go qucek, an' get in as soon as dark. We have no trouble then. Red man do not in' once we in valley. Him proper scare' of fire bullet."

It was decided, therefore, that there should be no delay. A start was to be made within the hour, and, by doing this, it was fairly certain that the valley would be entered just after darkness had fallen.

"Are we all going, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"No, my boy, we are not," he replied.

"Oh!"

"None of you juniors will come on this hazardous trip——"

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"We want to come!"

"Rather!"

"Why, it's a swindle!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Do you mean to

say we've come all this way, and now we're not going to be allowed to go into the valley?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"You needn't get excited, Handforth," he said. "And don't let me hear any more talk of swindling. There's more than a chance that danger will assail the party that enters the valley—and I shall not allow any of you boys to be exposed to unnecessary risk."

"But we'd love to go, sir!" said Pitt eagerly.

"We don't mind the risk, sir!"

"I am quite sure of that," said Nelson Lee. "But I am responsible for your safety, and until we know how the land lies you must not come. The party to enter the valley will be a comparatively small one. Afterwards, perhaps, when everything is peaceful, you will be allowed to enter."

"I suppose I can come, sir?" I asked grimly.

Nelson Lee regarded me with pursed lips.

"Don't say 'No,' gov'nor!" I whispered fiercely. "You must let me come: I couldn't dream of you going without me."

"Well, perhaps I shall make an exception in your case," said Nelson Lee. "The other members of the party will be Dorrie, Umlosi, Square-Deal Reeve, Peter, and Leon. Mr. Farman and Twirly Sam will remain here in charge of the camp, and they will see that you boys don't get up to any mischief."

Handforth glared at his two chums.

"Rotten!" he grunted.

"Oh, simply awful!" agreed Church and McClure.

"It's your fault," said Handforth unreasonably. "If you chaps weren't such asses, Mr. Lee would have let us go; but, of course, he knows you're absolutely hopeless."

Church and McClure felt like saying what they thought, but they checked themselves in the nick of time. It wouldn't do any good to point out to Handforth that he was every variety of a fathead. On the contrary, such a procedure would only result in extreme pain for Church and McClure.

Tommy and Montie were greatly disappointed, but they looked upon the matter in a reasonable light. They could see that I was in a different position from them. I nearly always went

with the gov'nor if there was anything of a hazardous nature on hand, and it was only right that I should go now.

And so, without any further palaver, the start was made. There were seven of us in the party, with Leon Ascara as guide. The gov'nor considered that it would not be necessary to leave more than two men in charge of the camp, particularly when they were such capable men as Big Jim Farman and Twirly Sam.

The camp itself was a kind of natural stronghold. It had been pitched on a rise, some little distance from the river. Rocks sloped away on all sides. Any enemy approaching it would be seen at once, and it would be possible for a single man to hold a hundred at bay.

It was necessary that the valley party should be fairly strong, for we did not know what dangers we should encounter. Once fairly established among the Nassi Indians all peril would be over. The main thing was to get there. If the Indians could keep us out they would do so. If they failed, we should be accepted with philosophical calmness. Once there, and in possession of the valley, the Redskins would accept us as their masters. It was characteristic of the race.

We started off with high spirits, and with every one of us carrying a couple of revolvers and enough ammunition to supply an army corps. Our loads were very light otherwise—just a small amount of food each.

We had not the faintest idea of where we were going. We left everything entirely to Leon Ascara, for we knew that he would lead us to the best of his ability, and the course to begin with was very difficult.

It was necessary to climb right up the face of the cliff. Leon pointed out the spot we should have to reach. This was a wide ledge at least five hundred feet from the surface of the river.

What we should do when we got there remained a mystery, for it seemed that there was no possible way off that ledge. To the left it dwindled away to nothing, and to the right it went right into the tremendous waterfall.

There was no particular danger about the climb.

But it was undoubtedly tedious and tiring. We found plenty of grip for our fingers and our feet. Even a fall

would only have meant a few bruises, for the cliff was by no means sheer, and even if there had been enemies above we should still have been safe.

For there was cover over every yard of the climb; but, as it happened, we saw no sign whatever of any Indians, and at length we arrived on the ledge, perspiring freely and tired out.

It had taken us three hours, and yet what a little distance we had come! Looking down, we could see the camp a mile away to the left, looking like a toy affair at that distance.

We waved, and the others waved in reply, for in this clear atmosphere every movement could be seen. Conversation was by no means easy, for we were close to the waterfall, and the thunder of it was tremendous.

Standing on that ledge, we could see right into the fall—a vast body of water hurling itself downwards, millions of gallons every second. It made one wonder where all this water could come from, and where it went to.

"What's the programme now?" I asked. "We've got on to this ledge, but I'm blessed if I can see what we shall do. The cliff above us is absolutely sheer—it rises like a wall."

"You no on'erstan'," said Leon, smiling. "Me show you somet'in' that mak' you look plentee. Him won'erful sight."

As Leon spoke he walked on the ledge, and we followed him. He went towards the waterfall; but, so far as I could see, there was no way off the ledge in that direction.

As we drew nearer we felt the spray in the air, like a fine Scotch mist, and as we proceeded it thickened, and became a drizzle. It was a most peculiar sensation, with the sun gleaming upon us from its low position in the sky.

At last we were within a few yards of the waterfall, where the river came tumbling down, filling the scene for a great distance. The water came flush with the rock, and my original idea that we should pass under the fall seemed knocked on the head, for the water came down in one solid mass, leaving not an inch of space between the water and the rock.

Then Leon suddenly vanished.

Without the least warning he disappeared down what appeared to be a

gaping hole in the ledge; but I was at the rear, and could not see as distinctly as the others. When I arrived at the spot I found that the gaping hole was really a natural kind of stairway.

The chasm was about ten feet across, and it led down into a pit-like cavity which became a tunnel. From the river, of course, this break in the ledge was absolutely invisible. Armed with the strongest telescope, no eye could have seen it. From below it looked exactly as though the ledge went straight into the waterfall—as, indeed, it did.

This way of getting down was not apparent until one was right upon it.

The rock was damp and slippery, and we trod cautiously as we followed Leon. We found ourselves in a dim tunnel, but it was only short. It wound round, and then we saw in front of us a very curious sight.

The tunnel on one side was of wet rock, and there appeared to be no roof. The other wall of the tunnel was of a transparent green, and it was some moments before I realised that I was gazing upon the inner surface of the waterfall!

That great body of water was falling down in front of my eyes, forming the other wall of this tunnel. We had simply come on to this ledge by rounding that brief tunnel, and this ledge, of course, was at a lower level than the one in the open.

One step, naturally, would have carried an unwary person right into the waterfall, and he would have gone to instant death; but the ledge was wide, and there was no possibility of a false stop.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed blankly.

My words were not heard by the others, for the noise here resembled the strident roar of a Tube train going at full speed. Conversation was practically impossible; but we could see one another distinctly.

We only paused a short while.

By this time we were practically drenched, for the spray was like heavy rain, and distinctly cold, too—not that we cared much about this. We walked on, following Leon as he led the way.

Then suddenly I heard a little thud, which I recognised as a revolver shot. I caught a glimpse of something falling forward in the distance—something that

hit against that green wall and then vanished as though by magic.

Leon turned, his revolver still smoking.

And then I understood. Without waiting for any word of command, the half-breed had fired at an Indian who had appeared from behind the rock. Whether Leon's bullet had killed the man did not matter—he was certainly dead by now.

This was rather drastic, and Nelson Lee did not altogether approve of it. It was just as well, perhaps, however, for the Indian would not have hesitated to kill the whole crowd of us if he could have managed it.

Passing along, we came to the end of the ledge. There was a sharp turn, and a wide tunnel led into the heart of the rock, right beneath the river. And this tunnel, curiously enough, was not totally dark; a greenish kind of light could be seen at the far end, and this was sufficient to show us our way.

That one Indian had apparently been on guard, and there was no sign of any other. We walked quickly down the tunnel, filled with curiosity to see what lay beyond. We certainly did not expect what we actually found.

The tunnel ended abruptly, and a wall of green foliage barred our progress. I tried to imagine how this could be—how we had walked right into the rock, and had then come to an opening of this sort. I realised that this tunnel shot away at an angle, and that this exit was some little distance from the river bank, and down the side of a steep cliff. Until the country was thoroughly examined from the top we could never exactly know the precise nature of the topography; but it was almost impossible to examine the country from that upper river, since no boat could venture so close to the ledge of the falls.

Leon did not break his way through the green foliage, but squeezed his passage parallel with it, along a rocky footpath. We followed, and very shortly afterwards we found ourselves in a big open space, one side filled with green vegetation, and the other composed of rock.

"We go no further," said Leon placidly. "Wait till dark."

"But where are we?" I asked wonderingly.

"See!" said the half-breed.

He parted some of the foliage, and I stared through. And I stared in earnest, for I found myself looking down a steep hillside. Below stretched a wonderfully glorious valley, with green meadows, woods, a gently flowing stream, and a village of tepees here and there.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "But—but how can this be? Where is this valley? And why isn't it visible from outside——"

"Him country shaped fonny," said Leon. "River up high, big cliff both side. No possible climb him cliff; but if it could be done, man see right down into valley. We com' through onderneath."

"Well, it's amazing," I said, "and I can't understand why the Indians weren't guarding the entrance in force."

"No t'ink we com'," replied the half-breed. "You on'erstan'? They reckon we go ot'er way, an' they wait there lak fools. Wa! We bluff them plenteo. Get down valley wit'out them knowin'."

"The idea, Nipper, is to remain here until darkness falls," said Nelson Lee. "It is a most astounding place, and it is scarcely surprising that the entrance was never discovered. A man might search for years without knowing that this valley existed. I only hope that the Indians prove peaceable."

We waited there for two hours, while the gloom of the evening grew deeper. The rest was welcome to us, and we were hungry, too. I seized the opportunity to snatch an hour's sleep, and I actually snatched about two.

For when I awoke, to find Dorrie shaking me, the darkness was intense, and the air was cool. I sat up, wondering where I was for the moment, and then I remembered. I got to my feet.

"Time to be movin', young 'un," said Dorrie. "We're startin' off at once. If you'd care for a bit of grub, you'll find a couple of sandwiches tucked in your left pocket. There's no tellin' when we shall get any more."

"Thanks, Dorrie," I said. "This is a ripping adventure—what do you say, Umlosi?"

"Thy words, O Manzie, although sounding strange in mine ears, are expressive of mine own feelings," replied Umlosi gravely. "Wah! We are about to start on a real adventure. I

cannot see how such an expedition can be ripping, as thou sayest, since ripping implies tearing apart, or——"

"You never will properly understand our giddy language, Umlosi," I chuckled. "But everything's all serene. We've got to the hidden valley at last, and now we're going to have a look what it's really like."

There was not much time for further conversation, for we started off almost at once, Leon Ascara leading the way, Nelson Lee going next, and myself bringing up the rear.

We found ourselves descending a steep hillside, and we had to go very cautiously, or we should have lost our footing; but there was a recognised path, although we could tell that it had not been used much of recent weeks.

This, as Nelson Lee pointed out, indicated that Keewa's story was correct—that another entrance to the valley had been discovered since Leon's departure from it. This entrance was evidently handier, and accounted for the way the Nassi Indians came and went so easily.

Our trip down the hillside took all of two hours, for the distance was long, and the going not particularly easy. But at last, when the hour was approaching eleven o'clock, we found ourselves upon level ground.

The valley stretched out before us like some beautiful park by the English countryside; but all round rose the mountains. The valley was hemmed in, completely encircled by the towering barriers.

We should be able to see this to more advantage by daylight. For the present our sole idea was to get into the heart of the valley—to take the Indians by surprise, and swiftly overcome any attempts at hostility; for once we showed these Redskins that we were the masters, they would cause no trouble.

We followed a little creek at first, passing along the bank through long grass, where wild flowers grew in wonderful profusion. The scent of them hung heavily in the peaceful air, and it was difficult to imagine that we were far away in the Canadian north-west.

The floor of this valley was at a much lower level than the river we had come down, and the difference in the atmosphere was astonishing. It was a clear, dry atmosphere of considerable warmth,

The temperature, in fact, was the highest we had felt, at night-time, since leaving Montana.

And the very nature of the country about us gave one the impression that this place was semi-tropical. The thought of snow and cold seemed ridiculous. I wondered if all this beauty was buried in the snow during the winter months.

We were making for the central Indian village. We reckoned to get there within an hour; but we had not proceeded far before Leon Ascara suddenly went towards the creek and knelt down by the bank.

"See!" he murmured softly.

We went to his side, and we saw that he had dug his hands into the sand near the tiny watercourse. I did the same, and the sand seemed amazingly heavy. Then suddenly I realised the truth, and gasped.

"Look, guv'nor!" I panted. "It's nearly half gold—it's lying about by the bucketful!"

"By gad!" said Lord Dorrimore.

It was the truth, astounding as it seemed, and for some few minutes we remained there, strangely excited. Gold—just as Leon Ascara had first told us. His story was true—he had proved faithful all along.

We had arrived in the hidden valley—we had seen the gold. But, so far, we had not encountered the Nassi Indians. What would happen when we did so? What further episodes should we pass through before we finally took our leave of this valley of paradise?

And what of Jake Crasher and his men?

At the time we did not know what sore straights those rascals were in; but, as it happened, we were very soon to learn. And then— But that's another story altogether, and must be told in its right place.

But we had by no means finished with Mr. Crasher!

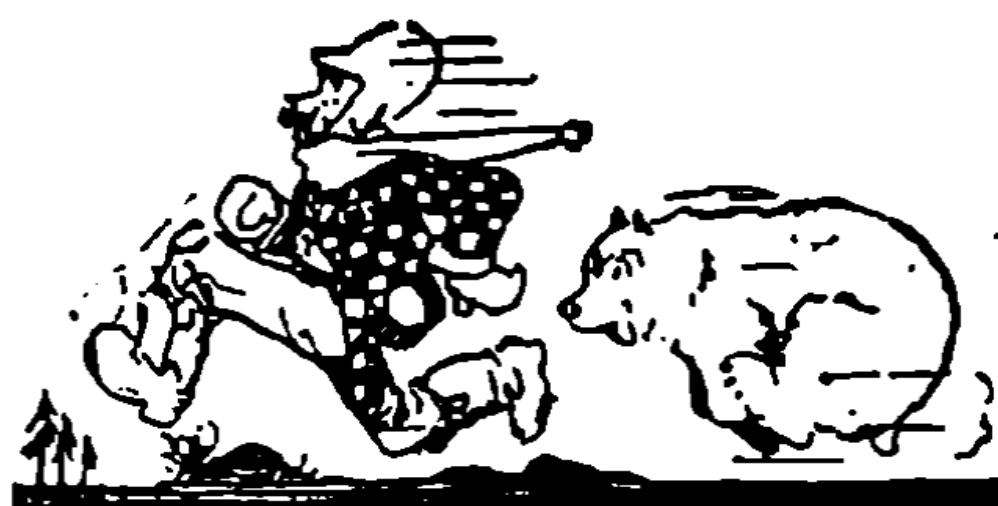
THE END.

TO MY READERS.

At last our adventurers have entered the Secret Valley, and have already found there abundant evidence of the presence of rich alluvial gold. In due course, when their claims are staked, the news of the great strike will create a sensation throughout the whole world, and, like a magnet, the precious yellow metal will draw thousands of feverish speculators to that lonely and secluded valley. The Nassi Indians, living here unmolested in their wild state, dread the encroachment of the white man on their domain. Consequently, they are not likely to give any quarter. Death, accompanied by torture, will be the penalty of capture. It is a bad look-out for Jake Crasher and his associates, while at any moment they may swoop down on Nelson Lee and his party.

Entitled "THE VALLEY OF GOLD," next week's story will be abounding in thrills and exciting adventures with Redskins.

THE EDITOR.



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The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

INTRODUCTION.

Mr. Herbert Drake, otherwise NELSON LEE, secures an appointment as games master at Marsh Manor School. His real purpose is to investigate the alleged appearance of a ghost at the school.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER IV. (Continued.)

How Nipper Saw the "White Abbot!"

"H O-HO, Miss Monica! You've fallen into the trap beautifully. Then you're the passer of notes to Dick Seymour, are you?"

And he laughed at the verse she had written, from Kipling's "Natural Theology":

"We had a kettle; we let it leak.
Our not repairing it made it worse.
We haven't had any tea for a week.
The bottom is out of the Universe!"

"Who is Miss Monica?" queried Nipper.

"A very charming young lady whom I strongly suspect to be at the bottom of this ghost stunt; but we'll talk about that later. Meanwhile, worm your way into the confidences of Tom, Dick, and Harry, and they'll tell you a great deal more than I know already. I want you to get to work now."

"What are the other masters like, guv'nor?" said Nipper, nodding.

"Jackson's an old fossil, Williams an insufferable prig, Vilotte, the Frenchman, I don't like, and the other two, who live out—well, they're just the ordinary average type of young 'Varsity men, who won't interfere with our investigations."

Then they went down to the playing-field, where Nipper was handed over to the tender mercies of Master Richard Seymour, who took to him at first sight, and introduced him to his two chums.

That afternoon Nelson Lee, looking up from Monica's album, saw Nipper and the trio, evidently on the best of terms, getting through one of the gaps in the railing, to explore the abbey ruins, and knew that

everything was going just as he could have wished. If he could only have heard their conversation, he would have been even better pleased.

"What's that master like that put me on to you chaps?" inquired Nipper.

"Best one we've got!" chorused Gurling and Tulk. "But he won't stand any hanky-panky."

"No," assented Dick, remembering his visit to Mrs. Chard and the beastly physis she had compelled him to gulp. "You won't get topsides with Mr. Drake in a hurry; but he is a ripper! See him at gym or drilling the cadets—simply fine! I wish he took some of the classes."

"That's all right," said Nipper, in a tone of great relief. "He's got to coach me up, you know. My head's like a sieve for books. But, I say, you chaps, I've heard this house is haunted? Is it true?"

The trio exchanged a look, and Tulk, of the red hair, lowered his voice.

"Swear on your honour that you won't breathe a word if we tell you something?" he whispered.

"I swear!" replied Nipper promptly.

"Well, then, it is haunted, and we've all of us seen the ghost—a tall, white monk, who glides about our corridor. And no one knows where he comes from, or where he goes to!"

"What does he say?" asked Nipper innocently, with wide-open eyes.

"Ghosts don't talk, you fool!" was the prompt response. "He's frightened some of the kids out of their lives, and three masters have cleared out because they couldn't stand it. But you're not a funk, are you?"

"Not much!" laughed Nipper.

"Hush! Don't speak so loud!" said Dick Seymour. "We've been forbidden to talk about it at all. Old Chard, who's really a jolly good sort, doesn't believe there's anything, and thinks some of us are playing him up."

"Are you?" asked Nipper.

"Crumbs, no! We've sworn a solemn vow to down it if we can. Are you going to help us?"

"I'm game for anything," said Nipper. "What time do you see him?"

"Always about nine o'clock," said Gurling; "just about the time we big fellows go up to bed. We're used to him now, but it makes your hair lift the first time you see him, I can tell you. He seems to shine all over." And Dick Seymour described the last appearance in great detail, adding: "I'm almost certain Drake did see him, though he says he didn't. I don't understand how he could help it, for there the thing was, as plain as the badge on my cap."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Tulk. "After prayers to-night you stop behind with us, and we four will be the last to go up the staircase. And, if we don't spot anything, the moment the master has seen all lights out, and Vilotte is tottling on his penny whistle, we'll open the door, and watch."

"Right-oh!" said Nipper. "What's that bell?"

"Tea!" they replied with alacrity, and raced back to the house.

The day wash-house, with its row of basins, was on the ground floor, and the new master, glancing in to see that everybody had obeyed the second bell, came face to face with the new boy, who had been expecting him, by arrangement.

"It's all right, guv'nor," he said, his cheeks glowing with something that was not due to cold water and jack towel. "They've told me the secret, and I hope to get my first peep at Mr. Monk to-night. If you're going to be on the warpath, don't let it be till quite a quarter-past nine, will you?"

And Nelson Lee nodded.

Nipper played chess with Sutcliffe that evening, and beat him badly, whereat the head boy, who fancied himself, vowed vengeance. And when the big fellows trooped upstairs, the four conspirators brought up the rear at a little interval, Tom, Dick, and Harry so demure and well-behaved that anybody but Mr. Williams, who was on duty, would have known there was something in the wind.

When that gentleman looked in and blew out the lamp every head was on its pillow, and for some minutes after they had heard his retreating footsteps there was not a sound in the dormitory except the deeper breathing of those boys who were already asleep.

Nipper lay on his back, in the first cot on the left-hand side of the room, every nerve of his body tingling with excitement.

The conspirators had agreed to count three hundred before any of them should stir, and, with his eyes wide open, looking into the blackness of space, Nipper had reached two hundred and fifty when a white figure appeared at the foot of his bed—the silvery, shimmering ghostly form of the monk, one hand protruding from the wide sleeve of his robe, and in the hand a huge, broad-bladed knife, that shone with the lustre of steel in moonlight!

With a gasping cry, which was echoed by

the other three, Nipper started on to his elbows, every hair of his head bristling, and, as silently as it had appeared, the apparition glided to the wall of the room and vanished through the panelling!

"Where are you going?" cried Seymour and Tulk, in a breath, as Nipper bounded out of bed, groping for the door, only to find it wide open.

"I'm going for Mr. Drake!" he cried.

"You fool!" shouted Gurling.

But the shout died away in his throat as he heard a stern voice from the corridor say:

"What is the meaning of this, Barton? What's going on here?"

And, with one hand grasping the new boy by the neck of his pyjamas, "Mr. Herbert Drake" loomed very large in the doorway, flashing the beam of his torch upon the luckless three.

Before he could speak, the clang of the alarm-bell on the roof made him let go his prisoner and take a step backwards, and there, at the other end of the corridor, was Mr. Williams, fully dressed, tugging at the bell-rope which dangled outside his bed-room door.

"Stop that, you idiot!" cried the new master, as shouts and cries came from the dormitories, and a piercing shriek from the floor above them told that the women servants had been aroused.

"What do you mean by calling me an idiot?" demanded the science-master, letting go the bell-rope all the same.

"Do you want to rouse the whole village?" exclaimed "Mr. Herbert Drake."

"I think it's about time someone was aroused!" retorted Williams. "I left my door ajar, and, as I came to close it, that confounded apparition there's been so much talk about whisked by like a flash."

"Eh? What's this?"

And the Head appeared suddenly from the west wing, as the boys crowded out of their rooms and Boyle, the butler, came running from the upper floor, looking exceedingly comical in his old-fashioned night-shirt.

"It's all right, Boyle," said Nelson Lee, seizing the situation, and handling it in masterly fashion. "Go and tell those silly women upstairs that Mr. Williams upset his candle against the old woodwork, but we've put the fire out. Don't delay. Some of them are going into hysterics already."

No one had seen the Rev. Octavius Chard so ruffled before, as he stood there, the bed-room candlestick in one hand and a policeman's truncheon in the other, and Nelson Lee found it difficult to keep a straight face, for the headmaster did not look his best in his night attire.

"Perhaps you will explain, Mr. Drake!" he thundered, his voice trembling with anger.

"If you will send the boys back to bed, sir, and step into Mr. Williams' room, I will tell you all about it. Barton, Seymour, Gurling, and Tulk stay here!"

The others did not wait for the Head to

speak, but melted away into the dormitories again, wondering what on earth was in the air.

"I expect," said Sutcliffe, "those three chaps have been ghost-hunting, and taken young Barton with them. Pretty nice cop! Shouldn't wonder if the whole jolly lot got expelled. Wasn't old Chard blazing mad?"

"Shut those doors!" called "Mr. Drake" sternly, and he led the way to the science-master's study.

"Now, Barton, tell Mr. Chard what you tell me you saw," he said.

And, amid dead silence, Nipper gave a lucid narrative of what had occurred, which was corroborated by Tom, Dick, and Harry, backed up by the testimony of the science-master, whose scowl was black as thunder as he glared at his new colleague.

"One thing is pretty clear," said the new master. "These boys are not lying, and we have some remarkably clever scoundrel among us who must be run to earth. It is a great pity, Williams, that you didn't notice which way the fellow bolted."

"It is a great pity you didn't see it yourself!" retorted the science-master. "I am not used to being called an idiot before the boys, and I object to association with one who has so little command over his tongue that he forgets to behave like a gentleman. Mr. Chard, you will be good enough to accept my resignation. I shall leave your establishment to-morrow."

"You can do as you like about that, Mr. Williams," said the Head tartly. "I think Mr. Drake was perfectly right to resent you ringing the alarm-bell. There seems to be a conspiracy on foot to wreck my establishment. I accept your resignation. Go back to bed, boys; I will see you in the morning. And perhaps you will be good enough, Mr. Drake, to come with me to my house."

As they left the room they met Monsieur Vilotte and Mr. Jackson, on the point of returning to their rooms, and Nelson Lee favoured them with his fiction about the false alarm of fire.

"Zut! Is that all? I thought at the very least you had caught the ghost!" sneered the Frenchman, and his mocking laugh followed them as they passed through the baize door.

For an hour Mr. Chard and the games master talked earnestly by the embers of the dying grate, without arriving any nearer at a solution. There was no one in the establishment on whom they could fix the slightest suspicion. The story of the boys was unshakable, and the headmaster's face

was a study in despair, in spite of all Nelson Lee's efforts to calm him.

"You are very good, Drake," he said dolefully, "and I appreciate your efforts, but I am really at my wit's end. Is it some result of this new radio-activity scientists profess to have discovered, some property of old walls to give off an iridescence at certain times of the year?"

"Radio-activity would hardly snap six strands of black worsted that I fastened across the staircases the other night. No: it is somebody who gets into the house, and we've got to find how he does it."

"Ah! I have an idea! There's such a thing as flashlight photography!" cried Mr. Chard. "Malines, the Belgian, is a very clever man, and has all the apparatus. Do you follow me?"

Nelson Lee's expression showed that he did.

"That is an excellent suggestion, sir. I will call on Monsieur Malines to-morrow, and we will see what can be done."

As he went back to his own room the games master listened outside each dormitory door, but there was no sound. Sane minds in healthy bodies were proof even against apparitions, and the school slept. All but Nipper, who was delighted with his first glimpse of the spectre, and foresaw that great fun, to say the least of it, would attend their investigations.

But his master's face, as he seated himself on the edge of his bed and filled a considering pipe, was graver than usual.

"When it comes to masquerading with knives, the next thing will be murder. It rather points to a lunatic at large."

CHAPTER V.

A Visit to the Hostel.

WHILE Nelson Lee was shaving next morning the French master, arrayed in a clean, white shirt, and in the act of adjusting his braces, tapped at his door and came in.

"Bon jour, monsieur! Ah, what a pity you do not speak French!" he said. "Tell me, my friend, between ourselves, it was this wonderful ghost last night, was it not?" And Nelson Lee nodded. "A most extraordinary people, you English!" said Monsieur Vilotte. "But I am sorry for Chard. I think someone must have a grudge against him."

"What about the colonel and the admiral and the previous tenants?" said the games master, plying his safety razor.

"Yes, that is strange, I must say," said Vilotte thoughtfully. "But you know I do not believe in these things. I am a scoffer. Unless I see a thing with my own eyes, I beg leave to hold my own opinion."

"Have you formed one on this subject?" said Nelson Lee.

"Oh, yes! You know those people over

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

there who live at the gatehouse—the hostel, as they call it? There was a slight disagreement, so I am told, some little trespass on the part of the boys, and those insolent beggars, who owe their existence here to charity, chose to express themselves—aliens in a country that befriends them. Bah! Don't talk to me about Belgians!"

"Then you think——"

"Yes, I do," interrupted Vilotte. "I think their national spirit is capable of such meanness that, though the affair was patched up, they take a revenge."

Nelson Lee looked at him. He was rather an aggressive type of Frenchman, with a habit of laying down the law and assuming that because he thought a thing that thing must be right.

"Of course, that is possible," said the great detective. "But will you tell me how they can get into the house and out of it again?"

"Ma foi! That should be easy enough in a building of this sort. No one knows the secret ways that exist. The walls open and shut. In those stormy times when this mansion was built it was very necessary to have means of escape. It was the same in France, and I could show you old chateaux where one can stumble for an hour in the thickness of walls without ever once appearing to the light of day. I affirm that there is an underground passage from the hostel to the Manor House."

Nelson Lee did not think it necessary to tell his self-satisfied colleague that he had already made the most minute examination of the vaults under the house, and that, even if such a passage did exist, every door had been securely locked and the keys removed by Mr. Chard himself.

But when the Frenchman had gone he resolved that while the school was at church he would pursue his examinations still further, assisted by the daylight.

"You know the Belgians don't you, Seymour?" he said to Dick after dinner.

"Rather, sir! Awfully nice people! Our school caps happen to be the Belgian colours, and I think they take it as a great compliment."

"Well, I'm going to call on them this afternoon, and you and Barton can come with me. You needn't say anything to the others. I don't want to cause any heart-burnings. Join me in the avenue at three o'clock."

As they left the gates and sauntered along the pleasant country road, where already the young beech in the hedgerows was beginning to turn orange, to Nelson Lee's secret satisfaction, the first thing he saw was Mr. Adolfe Malines walking towards them.

He was arrayed in a bright brown suit and wore patent-leather boots with white tops, his stained hands being hidden by yellow gloves. Between his fingers he twirled a black ebony stick, with a vulgar silver head, and in his mouth was a great

curved pipe, filled with his favourite herbal tobacco. The grass-green trilby hat that crowned the pale face, with its thin black beard, completed his curious colour scheme, which looked decidedly out of place in an English village. No wonder Vilotte the immaculately dressed Frenchman, disliked him, thought Nelson Lee, as they raised their hats in salutation.

"You are still here, then?" cried Mr. Malines, smiling. "Often have I thought of you. You take the walk—yes?"

"And for the express purpose of seeing you," replied Nelson Lee. "You promised to show me some of your photography."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said the effusive Belgian. "Come, all of you. The professor has finished his nap by this time, and Jules Trochon is walking in the garden with his wife yonder."

And, turning briskly round, the chemist led the way.

"Do you do anything in flashlight photography, Mr. Malines?" said Nelson Lee.

"We have all the apparatus; we do everything," was the reply. "What is it monsieur wants?"

Nelson Lee made a little sign and slackened his pace, allowing the two boys to get on ahead.

"You remember what you told me in the train about the haunted house? I want you to see if it is possible to photograph the ghost."

Malines stared at him incredulously, and laughed aloud.

"Forgive me—a thousand pardons!" he said. "But it is too funny!"

"It might be if it were not getting serious. But I have seen it myself, so has the new boy there, to say nothing of the others. Look here." And he came to a stand under a walnut-tree. "My door commands the entire length of the passage. Do you take my meaning?"

Mr. Adolfe Malines rubbed his hands, and grew quite enthusiastic over the idea.

"Yes, yes, with all my heart! It will be a spirit-picture if it comes off. Oh, we must tell this to the professor. At what time does the apparition appear?"

"Always about nine o'clock."

"Capital! Our little household retires early, but I often work into the small hours. When shall we start? To-night?"

"If you are agreeable. But not a word before the boys!"

"I know—it is forbidden, and very properly so. But you will pardon me, will you not, if I say I do not believe that there will be anything on the plate?"

"You think the flash of the magnesium will kill it?"

"I think so—if there is anything to kill."

And Adolfe Malines chuckled merrily.

"You are as incredulous as Monsieur Vilotte, then?"

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

"Pah! Vilotte! A conceited Frenchman!" And Malines' face assumed an expression of contemptuous disgust. "You would think, monsieur, that, being another foreigner here, in a strange country, and speaking the same language as ourselves, that Vilotte would hold out the hand of friendship. Is not that so?"

"Yes; one would have thought it."

"Eh bien—but it is nothing of the kind. He did not even fight in the war. Look at this man who approaches himself now—Jules Trochon, from Genappe. For one year and eight months he stood up to his knees in water for Belgium."

Nelson Lee nodded approvingly, feeling his dislike of the French master increase, and then, as Jules Trochon came up to them, Malines introduced him to the great, burly giant, who held out a hand like a leg of mutton, and poured out a voluble greeting.

"Unfortunately, Jules," interrupted his fellow-countryman, "monsieur does not speak French."

"Well, that does not make any difference," said the giant. "Thanks to the hospitality of monsieur's people, I have much English."

"You speak it very well," said Nelson Lee.

"Not so well as madame, my wife. Permit me to have the honour to introduce her. Madame Trochon, and——"

He paused.

"My name is Drake," said the games-master, raising his hat politely, as madame put out her hand effusively.

She was a fair-haired, very pretty woman, of about thirty, with faultless teeth that were all her own, and which she showed when she smiled. But it did not take that astute observer many minutes to decide in his own mind that he liked the husband better than the wife. She was too gushing to be altogether sincere, and he hated gush.

"I suppose the professor will be awake by now?" said Adolfe Malines. "Come, monsieur, you shall see how we occupy our time." And he added, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I hope it will turn out to have been profitably spent, for we are putting every franc we possess into the experiment, and chemicals are terribly dear since the war. It is abominable to think how dependent we were on the unspeakable Hun for so many things."

The old gatehouse was a picture in itself, and, though it had been added to, to make it habitable, the general effect had not been spoiled, and the room into which he was ushered was a very pleasant one and comfortably furnished.

A thin old gentleman, wearing a skull-cap on his white head, rose from an armchair, where he had been dozing, and welcomed the newcomer with stately courtesy.

"With your permission, professor, I may show Monsieur Drake some of our results?"

"Why, certainly—it is an honour!" said Professor Felix. "The house also is interesting, if monsieur would like to see over it."

"I may tell the professor what we propose to do?" questioned Malines. And, seeing the answer in their visitor's face, he said quickly: "Monsieur wants me to take a flashlight photograph of the apparition at the Manor House."

The kindly face of the elderly Belgian broke into an indulgent smile, and he looked Nelson Lee over the tops of his powerful spectacles.

"You do not seem to me like a man who should believe in ghosts, monsieur!" he laughed.

"I never said I did!" replied Nelson Lee, laughing also.

"But you told me you had seen it!" cried Adolfe Malines.

"I said I had seen something. But what it is I am hoping your sensitive plate may reveal."

"Of one thing be quite sure," said the professor, emphasising his words with his thin, delicate hand. "If it is a visitor from the other world—monsieur will pardon my smiling at the impossibility of such a thing—there will be nothing on the plate. If, on the other hand, someone plays the joke, ma foi, you will have them! And I only hope they will be looking at the lens when the shutter moves."

Nelson Lee nodded, and for a little while the subject was not pursued, for Malines had placed before him on the table a large port-folio containing twenty or thirty examples of the most perfect colour-photography he had ever seen.

They were all views taken in the neighbourhood, several of them of the gatehouse and the manor, every stone and brick and discolouration reproduced to the life, and each one more beautiful than the last.

"You have a fortune here," said their visitor. "What are you doing to place it upon the market?"

The professor opened his hands, with a deprecating gesture.

"First of all, we must be certain that we can obtain the result every time," he said. "You only see our successes here, but we have had many failures. Come into our workrooms."

And as he led the way into the adjoining apartment, Nelson Lee started, for the professor had suddenly switched on the electric light.

(To be continued.)

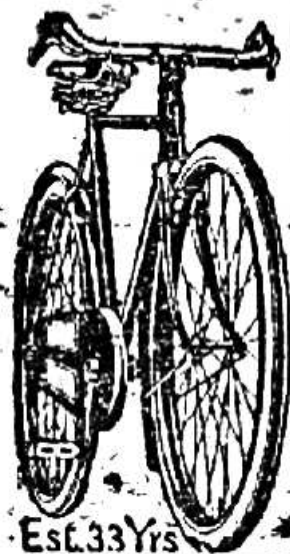
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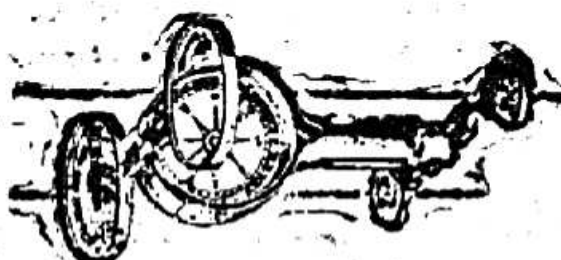
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