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Twenty Fathoms Deep;

Or, Trapped Beneath the Sea.

A Story of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

By the Author of "The Coffee-stall Mystery." etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Fight on the Launch.

NELSON LEE whisked his walking-cane down, and neatly clipped off a daisy head. There was something in the movement which suggested ill-temper. Nipper, the famous detective's young assistant, looked at his master rather askance. He saw that Nelson Lee's face was clouded, and his brow wrinkled.

"It's a bit rotten, I know, sir," began Nipper; "but, after all——"

"A day wasted—utterly wasted!" snapped Nelson Lee irritably. "I know what you're going to say, Nipper. You're going to tell me that the sea air will do me a lot of good, and more rubbish of that sort."

"Well, sir——"

"It's not well, Nipper!" growled the prince of crime investigators. "Here we are, on the East Coast, trudging three miles to the station, having been brought from London on a fool's errand. Bah! I'm fed up!"

And, as a matter of fact, Nipper was feeling in something of the same mood himself. That morning his master had received an urgent telegram at his rooms in Gray's Inn Road. Without delay Nelson Lee had hurried to Liverpool Street with Nipper, and the pair had taken train for an East Coast town. There they had proceeded by hired car to the home of a nervous old baronet, only to find that the robbery they had been called down to investigate was a mere trifling affair—simply a broken window and some food stolen, probably by a tramp. Nelson Lee had been highly incensed, and had had high words with his would-be client.

Refusing the offer of a conveyance—for the hired car had been sent off—Nelson Lee elected to walk back to the station by way of the coast. And he and Nipper were now about halfway on their journey, following a footpath along the cliff tops.

On their left the North Sea, calm and placid, stretched out to the horizon. A light breeze blew inland, refreshing and invigorating. Nipper drew deep draughts of it into his lungs, and looked at his master again.

"The air's simply ripping, sir," he said. "Suppose we squat down somewhere for a bit? It's no good hurrying to the station, because there's not a train until three."

Nelson Lee bit the end off a cigar savagely.

"Anything you like!" he said, with an air of absolute boredom. "I'm wild, my lad. There was that other case—the one I rejected in favour of this idiotic farce. Very likely that would have proved interesting and profitable. If there's one thing I dislike more than another, it is to be

dragged miles into the country just to satisfy the desire of some doddering old fool like Sir George!"

"Well, he paid your fee and expenses——"

"Confound it, boy, what do I care for that?" shouted Nelson Lee wrathfully. "If I don't take interest in a case I wouldn't go on with it for ten thousand pounds! If you can't make sensible remarks, shut up!"

"My word, sir, you are ratty!" murmured Nipper.

"What's that?"

"Nothing, sir!" said Nipper innocently. "Only spoke to myself."

"Then don't be such a young fool!" snapped Nelson Lee.

They walked on, the famous detective puffing at his cigar jerkily, with a deep frown. In a few minutes they came to a spot where large, smooth rocks were lying about in profusion. Without a word Nelson Lee seated himself upon one of these, and rested his elbows moodily on his knees. Nipper sat down, too, and took stock of his surroundings.

The cliff-edge was quite close. Just here the cliffs were by no means sheer, and it would have been quite easy to reach the beach by scrambling down. Below, a wide bay lay with the little waves breaking gently on the smooth sands.

Out to sea a little, just against the opposite headland, an ugly series of rocks stuck their jagged heads out of the water. At the present moment they looked harmless enough—but many a brave ship had been wrecked on their treacherous teeth. For the sea just there was deep, and a stricken ship invariably sunk before it could reach shallow water.

Nipper took a pair of small binoculars from his pocket, and focussed them upon a small steam launch that had just appeared in sight round the headland. It was a tiny craft, but she was cutting through the water very smartly.

"I'd like to be aboard that boat, sir," said Nipper enviously.

"Eh? Which boat?"

Nipper grinned.

"Well, sir, there's only one in sight, so there can't be any question about it," he replied. "I reckon it's ripping on that little craft. Miles better than sitting here, twiddling our thumbs, anyhow!"

Nelson Lee looked at the steam launch uninterestedly. It was quite clear to the naked eye, and even the form of the steersman could be distinctly seen. The detective grunted, and jerked the ash from his cigar.

"Never mind the boat, Nipper," he said, rising. "Let's be getting on."

"Half a tick, sir; I'm just having a squint through the glasses," replied Nipper, holding the binoculars to his eyes. Looking through them it seemed as though the launch was suddenly brought to within speaking distance. Nipper could plainly see the face of the man at the wheel. He was a tall man, youngish, with a distinguished-looking cast of countenance. He was very intent upon his task, for those treacherous rocks were not so very far ahead, and he was steering his boat on a course which would lead between two of the largest crags—one of them being the outermost of all.

"Hallo, there's another merchant appeared," remarked Nipper. "Some chap has come up the hatchway, and he seems to have got a spanner in his hand. Don't like his looks much. Why, what the dickens is he up to?"

Nelson Lee hooked his cane round his young assistant's arm.

"My dear Nipper," he exclaimed, "it is really no concern of yours what the gentleman is up to. Put those glasses in your pocket, and——"

"Wait a minute, sir!" said Nipper quickly. "There's something happening on that launch!"

"So I presume—the engine is working, for instance."

Nipper turned to Nelson Lee excitedly.

"Look for yourself, sir!" he ejaculated.

The detective took the glasses promptly. It wasn't like Nipper to become excited over nothing. Something out of the common was taking place evidently, or the boy would not be so flushed and eager.

Nelson Lee placed the binoculars to his eyes, and soon had them directed towards the steam launch. As the little boat came into his vision, Nelson Lee became rigid and drew his breath in sharply.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "That scoundrel means mischief!"

What he could see was sufficient to startle any man. The deck of the launch was as clearly visible through the glasses as though it were only twenty yards distant. The man at the wheel was intent upon his work, and behind him a second man was stealing stealthily, quietly, along the white deck. In his hand he gripped a spanner, and the expression upon his face—distinct even at that distance—was murderous. Without a shadow of doubt he intended harm to his companion.

Even Nipper, with his naked eyes, could distinguish the two figures, and could see what was occurring. He gripped Nelson Lee's arm lightly.

"That chap means murder, sir!" he exclaimed tensely.

"Possibly, Nipper, but I think not," answered the great detective. "He certainly intends an assault, and by the look of that heavy spanner the poor steersman seems likely to come a fearful cropper before many seconds have passed. By Jove, why doesn't he look round?"

But the man at the wheel was utterly oblivious of his peril. The menacing figure behind him crept up slowly on tiptoe, his weapon already raised to strike. Before the eyes of Nelson Lee and his assistant the little drama was developing—and they were unable to lift a finger to help.

Nipper fairly danced with excitement.

"Can't we do something?" he shouted. "Hang it all, we can't stand here and see this going on, sir! Let's both yell together——"

"Useless, my boy! We are far too distant for our voices to carry across the bay," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "We can do nothing but watch and wait. It's galling, but—— Ah, that's better! Bravo!"

"What's happened, sir?"

"That which we both hoped for, Nipper. The gentleman with the spanner evidently made a noise of some sort, for the other man has looked round and is aware of his danger. I wonder—— Great Scott, they're at it!"

Nelson Lee watched intently. All his irritability had left him, and he was keen and alive to the possibilities of this strange little drama which was being enacted before his eyes. In that quiet bay, amid such peaceful surroundings, the whole affair seemed grossly incongruous.

Nipper, too, was watching with all his eyes. He could not see so distinctly as his master, of course, but the boat was near enough, and the air was transparent enough, for him to just make out what was taking place.

The man at the wheel had turned swiftly, and had apparently taken in the situation at a glance. For he dived swiftly into his coat-pocket—evidently for a weapon. But the other fellow was too quick. He dashed forward, his spanner whirling.

His would-be victim dodged from the wheel and twisted like a snake. The spanner shot down harmlessly. Next second the two men were gripping one another fiercely, and the little launch awayed dangerously as they lurched to and fro on the narrow deck.

"A fight, sir!" ejaculated Nipper breathlessly. "By gum, this is exciting!"

"And it seems likely to prove disastrous," said Nelson Lee grimly. "The launch is still steaming fast, and her crew are far too busy to control her. These rocks are ugly customers, and close acquaintance with them will not

be exactly beneficial to such a small boat. There's going to be a smash, my lad—of that I'm certain."

Nelson Lee's positive statement was made with conviction. His prophecy was well-founded, for the ungoverned launch was making head-on for the outermost crag. Unless her course was altered, she would crash into it at full speed and splinter her bows to atoms.

Backwards and forwards, locked in a fast embrace, the two men still struggled on, each one striving his utmost for the mastery of the other. But they were well matched, and neither seemed likely to end the battle in time to avert disaster. Indeed, they were so engaged that they probably knew nothing of their impending danger.

"There's no half-and-half business about that scrap, sir!" exclaimed Nipper. "That chap with the spanner has got the advantage—— Whoa! That wave came just in the nick of time!"

As Nipper spoke the little launch heaved from the effect of a gentle swell, and its course was altered a trifle. For a moment it seemed as though the threatened danger of collision with the rock had passed. But although the boat had been deflected from its course to a certain degree, that degree was not quite sufficient.

"Hard luck!" Nelson Lee exclaimed, biting his lips. "The launch won't do it, Nipper! There's going to be——"

Crash!

Even at that distance the sound of the launch striking the rock was distinctly heard by Nelson Lee and Nipper. They watched, horrified, and saw the two men, still locked together, hurled violently into the water. The launch, crippled and sinking, drifted back and commenced settling with fatal rapidity.

CHAPTER II.

Dead or——?

THE disaster had happened so suddenly that Nelson Lee and Nipper could only stare for a moment, rooted to the spot. The binoculars were now unnecessary, for the scene of the accident was sufficiently near as to be perfectly clear and distinct to the two onlookers. And they were the only two. Except for themselves, the whole coastline at that spot was devoid of other human beings.

"Let's rush down to the beach, sir," cried Nipper hurriedly. "We can see better from there, and we might be able to give a hand."

"Wait!" Nelson Lee replied briefly. "I do not think our assistance is necessary, my lad. Both men seem well able to look after themselves—at present, anyway. Gad, that launch is going to its last resting-place pretty swiftly."

The little craft, indeed, had almost disappeared. Bows down, and with its stern clear out of the water, the launch was settling rapidly for its last plunge. It had drifted a good distance out, away from the crag which had dealt its death blow. It was drifting still; but now, a clear fifty feet from the rock, it abruptly tipped up and slid beneath the surface with scarcely a bubble. Huge masses of steam, however, rose over the spot.

"Rotten shame!" grunted Nipper. "A smart little craft, too!"

He transferred his attention to the launch's late crew. Both men were swimming steadily, and they were a considerable distance apart. One of them—the man who had been at the wheel—was striking for the shore with masterly, even strokes. The spanner-man, too, was swimming powerfully.

Quite suddenly, however, he seemed to alter his tactics and floundered somewhat. The water splashed about him and he rolled as though in peril. One hand shot upwards and waved wildly, and then its owner plunged beneath the surface.

"Queer!" muttered Nelson Lee, with contracted brow. "The fellow was striking out boldly enough a moment ago, too!"

"Cramp perhaps, sir," said Nipper. "Well, we can't do anything to help him, poor chap. He'll be gone long before we can reach the spot, even if we try."

But apparently there would be no necessity for them to try. The drowning man—if drowning he actually was—probably raised a cry of appeal, for his late would-be victim turned and swam to his assistance.

"That's jolly decent, anyhow," commented Nipper. "I'm blessed if I'd try to save the life of a chap who'd attempted to murder me ten minutes before!"

Nelson Lee watched keenly. The steersman was swimming steadily, rapidly. But the distance between himself and the other man was considerable, and the latter was now throwing up his hands and struggling as though in the last despairing throes of death. With a cry that reached to the top of the cliff he suddenly disappeared below the surface and was seen no more. The rescuer swam over the spot, and dived twice in succession, but he came up empty-handed on both occasions.

"He's gone, sir," Nipper said, in an awed voice.

The celebrated detective made no reply. He gazed out over the placid sea beneath lowered eyelids. There was a frown upon his brow which Nipper did not understand. As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee had a suspicion that everything was not exactly as it seemed. Of course, it was possible that the man had been seized with cramp, as Nipper had suggested, but that did not seem probable. To Nelson Lee's mind it was far more likely that the fellow had feigned helplessness.

The detective had noticed that he had been swimming in a masterly fashion, with the rapid strokes of an expert swimmer. It seemed highly unlikely that he should crumple up so dramatically. There was also another point. Immediately after his plunge—his death plunge, as it seemed—Nelson Lee had observed a curious ripple upon the surface. To the trained criminal tracker's astute mind, an explanation at once presented itself. For some reason the man wished himself to be thought dead—so he had shammed drowning in order to accomplish a rather smart move. That move was to dive and swim beneath the surface until he reached the cover of the rocks. There he could easily take breath and swim unseen to the next rock. Thus, without being detected, he would reach the shore in safety.

"It's possible—quite possible," Nelson Lee murmured. "I may be entirely wrong, but I will bear the matter in mind. In all probability the man has gone to his last account, but the abruptness of his collapse was highly suggestive."

The other swimmer, realising that his noble effort had been in vain, faced the shore once more and struck out. But it was perfectly obvious that his prolonged swim had told upon his energies. He no longer swam with such decisive movements. Nipper was looking rather anxious.

"One of them gone, sir!" he exclaimed. "And it looks very much as if the other chap's taking the same road. Can't we do something, sir? He risked his life to save the other man, and it would be simply awful—"

"Quite so, Nipper," Nelson Lee replied briskly. "I don't think he's in much danger; but we'll lend him a hand, in any case."

And the detective stepped forward and nimbly commenced scrambling down the sloping cliff, Nipper hard at his heels. It was not a very difficult

• descent, and the pair were soon upon the beach. They ran swiftly across the hard sands until they arrived opposite the swimming man. He was still pegging away, but his efforts were getting more and more weary—and he was still a fair distance from the shore.

Nelson Lee ripped his coat and waistcoat off, and then unlaced his boots. Meanwhile, the swimmer was obviously on the verge of collapse. His movements were slow and sluggish, and he evidently knew that it was impossible for him to reach safety unaided.

"Help!" he shouted gaspingly. "I'm done! Help!"

"Coming!" yelled Nelson Lee. "Float, man, and save your energies!"

The swimmer understood, for he immediately turned upon his back and remained inactive. Nelson Lee ran out into the water and struck out with powerful strokes. He was a magnificent swimmer, and very soon reached his objective. The nearly drowning man gave Nelson Lee a look of gratitude as the latter grasped his collar.

"Thanks awfully!" he panted. "I'm just about used up! If you hadn't come——"

"That's all right," said Nelson Lee. "Leave the talking till afterwards."

It was a simple matter for the detective to tow his companion ashore. The distance was fairly long, but Nelson Lee was as fresh as paint, and he was as much at home in the water as any fish. When at last he felt the sand beneath his feet, he found that the rescued man was unable to walk, so exhausted was he. So Nelson Lee lifted him in his arms and carried him up on to the dry sand.

"You'll find a brandy flask in my coat-pocket, Nipper," he said crisply. "Fetch it over!"

Nipper threw it over promptly.

"A few drops of this inside you will soon alter matters," remarked Nelson Lee, holding the brandy flask to the young man's lips. The latter took a large gulp, and the fiery spirit soon sent the blood coursing through his veins and caused a glow of colour to appear in his cheeks. He sat up, and impulsively thrust out his hand.

"You're a good 'un!" he said quietly. "You saved my life. Thanks!"

"Don't trouble to talk now——"

"Hang it, I'm all right!" said the young man, struggling to his feet and standing rather unsteadily. "I feel a bit groggy. I'll admit, but I'm not winged by any means. May I have the honour of your name, sir? I'm Lieutenant Armstrong, of his Majesty's Navy, on special leave."

The detective smiled.

"Thought you were a Service man," he replied. "I'm Nelson Lee."

"And I'm Nipper," put in that youngster cheerfully.

Lieut. Armstrong stared.

"Nelson Lee and Nipper!" he ejaculated. "Well, I've often heard of you two fellows, but I've never had the pleasure of your acquaintance. We've met under mighty queer circumstances."

And Armstrong looked out into the bay with a clouded face.

"That scoundrel has gone to his last account, anyhow," he went on grimly. "I suppose you spotted that little scrimmage on the launch?"

"We saw it all, sir," said Nipper.

"I guessed so. Well, I suppose I must be thankful for small mercies. I'm still alive and kicking, and I don't suppose that launch is in more than thirty feet of water."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Wrong," he replied. "I happen to know this part of the coast. I've

made a study of this sort of thing. And the water beyond that furthestmost crag, where the launch sank, is every inch of twenty fathoms."

"Hundred and twenty feet!" exclaimed Armstrong seriously. "If that's the case, then there's going to be considerable trouble. There's something on that launch that's simply got to be recovered—if I have to spend a thousand pounds to do it!"

CHAPTER III.

Lieutenant Armstrong's Story.

LIEUT. ARMSTRONG made that statement in such a positive tone that both his hearers knew that there was more in this affair than met the eye at first glance.

"I gather," Nelson Lee exclaimed, "that some valuable object is aboard the launch, and that your unfortunate companion attacked you with the intention of overpowering you, so that he could——"

"Overpower me!" interrupted Armstrong grimly. "Swan—that was his name—meant to kill me, Mr. Lee! Fortunately I became aware of my peril in the nick of time, and it is he who has gone to the bottom. I suppose the police will have to be told the whole yarn, and all the rest of it. Confound it all, I can see piles of trouble ahead!"

He frowned, and shivered a little.

"Yes, and one of those troubles will be a serious illness if you don't get into dry clothes quickly," said Nelson Lee. "Of course, it is none of my affair——"

"It's my opinion you're entitled to know everything," interjected the lieutenant. "You saved my life, Mr. Lee, and I'm going to tell you the whole yarn."

"Then we'd better make a bee-line for the nearest hotel and get into dry clothes," said Nelson Lee briskly. "I think there's a village within half a mile."

They set off without loss of time, and soon arrived at the little village of Peggley, which nestled at the foot of a hill some little distance inland. At the Oakapple Inn they were provided with a hasty change of clothes while their own were being dried. Then, over an early tea, Lieut. Armstrong told his story.

"I don't mind admitting, Mr. Lee, that I'm upset—infernally upset," he began. "The work I have been engaged upon for the last two months is now twenty fathoms deep. To say the least, it's pretty rotten. Of course, the launch can be recovered—the contents, I mean—but that will take a whole heap of time—and time, just now, is extremely valuable."

Nelson Lee helped himself to a plate of ham.

"From that remark," he said, "I gather that you were engaged upon some work of military or naval importance?"

Armstrong nodded, and swallowed a mouthful of bread-and-butter.

"Exactly, Mr. Lee," he replied. "Perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning. Well, some time ago I happened to strike a really valuable idea for the manufacture of a new type of gun. The military authorities were tremendously pleased, and I obtained special leave in order to spend my time in getting out a small model of the proposed gun."

"And I suppose some rotten German spies came along and stuck their beastly noses in?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Wait, young 'un—wait!" said Nelson Lee gently.

"The lad's pretty near the mark, anyhow," exclaimed the lieutenant,

ripping his tea. "I'll come to that point in a moment or two. I've been doing the work at my home, twenty miles along the coast from here. I have a kind of out-house which I've been using as a workshop. I don't want to weary you with the yarn, so I'll leave out all the padding and get straight down to facts. One night, whilst I was hard at it, I became aware of somebody prowling in the grounds. Of course, I sallied out and investigated, with a hammer for company. It was lucky I took that persuader with me, for two men sprang out of the bushes, and the next two minutes were quite interesting."

"Did they down you, sir?" asked Nipper keenly.

"They did not," Armstrong answered curtly. "On the contrary. I managed to give one of them such a frightful crack on the napper that I doubt if his skull is still whole. Anyhow, he crumpled up like a piece of wet blotting-paper, and the other fellow forgot himself for a second and swore, under his breath, in pure, unadulterated German!"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Nelson Lee.

"Of course, that gave me the tip, as it were," went on the lieutenant. "The man took to his heels before I could give him my full attention. His companion was collared by the police, and he actually proved himself to be a native-born British subject, and was sentenced to fourteen days' hard labour for attempted assault. That's all they could do to him under our beautiful laws, but I'll stake my life the fellow was a German secret agent."

Nelson Lee nodded grimly.

"And there are hundreds of his type about our country this very day," he agreed. "Men who seem to be absolutely British, with British names, and with loud denunciations of the enemy. They are, nevertheless, working night and day in the interests of the Fatherland. Those kind of chaps are the worst enemies we have, for it is practically impossible to intern them unless they are caught absolutely red-handed at their dirty work."

Armstrong nodded.

"After that little affair I changed my habits a bit," he continued. "Instead of sleeping indoors I faked up a camp-bedstead arrangement in the workshop. But, two nights later, the spies made another attempt to gain their object. Three of the beggars broke in, and actually succeeded in overpowering me before I awoke—unfortunately, I'm a confoundedly heavy sleeper."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Nipper, with a fork-full of ham halfway to his mouth. "And did they get the gun, sir?"

"Well, you see," explained the lieutenant, "I'd taken double precautions. Although I slept in the workshop I'd placed every valuable article and all the plans in the strong-room indoors. So, although I was made a prisoner in my own workshop, the scoundrels succeeded in getting absolutely nix. My precautions were fortunate."

"Very neat," commented Nelson Lee. "But I fancy the attentions of the spy gentlemen were getting rather too warm for you?"

"Precisely, Mr. Lee. I decided to shift everything to a little bungalow I own about two miles from here—that is, twenty-two miles from my home. To cut it short, I packed everything aboard my little steam launch and then set out, deciding that the journey would be far safer by water. I reckoned that by going to the bungalow I should give the spies the slip; but they were too clever for me. Even after such a lesson I did not fully grasp the magnitude of their organisation. My very chauffeur must have been a spy himself, or in the pay of the spies."

"You are referring, I presume, to the man who attacked you on the launch?"

Armstrong nodded.

"Exactly," he replied. "I always trusted Swan implicitly. He was a clever driver, and, I believed, a thoroughly decent fellow. It was he who acted as engineer on the launch, and I had no suspicion of his treachery until I discovered him crouching behind me with an uplifted spanner. The man looked like a fiend, Mr. Lee, and I only saved myself from certain death by acting promptly. I have no doubt whatever that he intended to kill me and then pilot the launch out to sea to some waiting steamer, which would then steer straight for Germany. Swan gave no inkling whatever that he was of Gorman origin, but I am quite sure now that he was one of the Kaiser's Secret Service men. In any case, he's dead now."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Appearances point that way, certainly," he said slowly.

"Surely there are no doubts about the matter?" asked Armstrong. "We saw the man drown!"

"We saw him sink," corrected Nelson Lee. "But I presume you have told us all?"

"Yes, I have related all the salient facts," said the lieutenant, frowning, and wondering why the detective had changed the subject so quickly. "My launch, the Blunderer, is at the bottom of the sea, together with the nearly-completed model gun, and all my valuable plans. Fortunately, the latter are in an air-tight metal box, so there is no fear of them getting ruined by water. I named the launch the Blunderer because she was such a clumsy little beggar to steer—and, by gad, she's blundered badly now, anyhow!"

"What do you intend doing?"

"There's only one thing to do," answered Armstrong. "Divers must be procured at once and sent down to the wreck. I don't care tuppence about the boat so long as I get the gun and the plans. Every second is of importance. That gun is going to revolutionise everything; once the actual articles are turned out they'll prove to be of terrific value to both the Navy and the British Expeditionary Forces at the Front. Divers must be sent down without delay."

Nelson Lee sat back in his chair and rubbed his chin.

"Don't think me a pessimist," he said slowly, "but I've got a shrewd suspicion that you will have big trouble. The Germans evidently know the value of your gun, Armstrong, and they'll move heaven and earth to frustrate you. I'm interested in this affair, and if you will allow me I should like to stay down here for a few days and keep my eyes open. I might possibly be of some service if there is any trouble."

Armstrong looked up quickly.

"Stay by all means, Mr. Lee," he replied. "I shall be only too delighted to have you by my side. I, too, have a fancy that I have not got to the end of my adventures. Having gone so far, the spies will go further still; and you, with your wonderful abilities, will prove a valuable ally. I thank you for your offer, and accept it gratefully."

Nelson Lee turned to Nipper and smiled.

"So you see, my lad, we didn't come to the East Coast for nothing, after all," he said evenly. "We stay here now until Lieutenant Armstrong thinks fit to dispense with our services. I fancy, however, that a storm is gathering—a storm of danger and cunning—and we shall need all our resources to combat it successfully."

Nipper grinned.

"That's all right, sir," he said cheerfully. "I've never known anybody get the best of you yet, and I'm jolly certain a pack of measly, sneaking, rotten old Huns won't do the trick now!"

"Don't make the mistake of under-estimating the cleverness of our foes, Nipper," answered Nelson Lee grimly. "They are clever—and unscrupulous and villainous into the bargain. We'd better get that fact rammed well home into our heads before the game starts."

CHAPTER IV.

Nipper in Peril.

THAT evening, after Nelson Lee and Armstrong had changed into their own clothes, the former telephoned to the local big town and got into communication with the police. Nelson Lee briefly told the inspector in charge that an accident had occurred out in the bay, and that the engineer of the steam launch had met his death.

Armstrong, meanwhile, put machinery in motion to have divers sent down to Peggley the following day. Very little more could be done that night; but the following morning there was ample evidence that things were beginning to move.

The police came over in force, and the whole bay was searched diligently for the body of the missing man. A Government tug, too, had put in an appearance, and lay anchored over the spot where the Blunderer had gone to the bottom. Armstrong had no intention whatever of the German spies outwitting him if he could possibly help it.

He had the full support of the Admiralty and the War Office, for they had thoroughly gone into the matter, and realised that in all probability the gun would be of immense service. So it was in the interests of the country that the secret should be preserved and the spies frustrated.

If anything, the water was even deeper outside the bay than Nelson Lee had stated—probably a fathom or so more. But the promptitude with which the Government tug had appeared calmed Armstrong's mind to a considerable extent.

"You see, Mr. Lee," he said easily, as he and the detective strolled on the beach during the morning, "the Germans can't do very much with that tug over the spot. It's only possible to reach the launch by diving, and I don't see how our enemies can do that under the circumstances."

Nelson Lee threw the end of his cigar into the waves.

"I shall only feel confident of success," he replied, "when the plans and the model gun are once more in your keeping. Remember, the Germans would give tens of thousands for your secret."

"But, my dear man, what can they do?" protested Armstrong. "With all these precautions, I fail to see how it is possible for Swan's confederates to move at all. In common parlance, they're dished!"

"Don't be too sure!" was all Nelson Lee answered.

That evening the divers arrived, and they obtained rooms at the inn. Operations could not commence until the morning. At about eleven o'clock the tide would be favourable, and previous to that time, from dawn onwards, the men would be busy preparing their apparatus. The latter had already arrived, and was at the goods station, packed in several large cases. This method of transit had been adopted because a considerable amount of time was saved—and time was very important.

Nipper was properly fed-up. So far nothing exciting had happened—and nothing exciting seemed likely to happen. The affair had apparently resolved itself into a matter which would be all over by the following noon. The German spies were nothing but myths, so far as Nelson Lee and Nipper

were concerned. There had been no sign of them whatever, and Nipper was highly indignant at having to stick down in such a sleepy hole for nothing at all.

"It's rotten, sir," he growled, as he and his master sat in their private room that night at the inn. "There's nothing for us to do here, and there might be heaps of cases waiting at Gray's Inn Road. I vote we pack up and clear off."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Not until Armstrong has recovered his property, Nipper," he replied. "I admit the affair has been lamentably tame so far, but this is a world of uncertainties, and one never knows what might happen."

"Yes, there'll be a fat lot happen," grunted Nipper. "We shall simply stick on the beach and watch some fatheaded divers bob into the water, and then they'll bob up again. That'll be the finish!"

Nelson Lee laughed heartily.

"Cheer up, Nipper," he smiled. "You seem to forget that our greatest desire is to get the job completed without interference. Great Scott, surely you don't want affairs to go awry?"

"I don't know about that, sir," said Nipper. "But I know I'm jolly well tired of this rotten hole! I wish to goodness something would happen. Perhaps a Zeppelin will come over and drop a diver!" he added hopefully.

After that remark Nipper went out of the room, and took a stroll down the dark village street. He had no particular reason for going for a stroll, except, perhaps, to work off his feelings. For Nipper badly wanted something to happen.

He wasn't disappointed!

Something did happen, and it happened promptly. Nipper, with his hands stuck deep in his trousers pockets, lounged disconsolately down the street until he came to the station. Peggley Station was only a small affair, and the train service was extremely limited. There were only about half a dozen trains a day, and the last train had long since departed. The station was dark and silent. A little distance from the platforms the small goods depot stood out clearly against the night sky. A narrow lane led past it, and there was only a small wooden fence to divide it off. Nipper leaned against the fence and inwardly anathematised every East Coast village in general, and Peggley in particular. If there had been something to do—if there had been some excitement knocking about—Nipper would have been perfectly satisfied. But there was nothing—absolutely nothing. The case of the sunken gun seemed likely to end exceedingly tamely, although it had begun with so much excitement. But Nipper didn't know that the case had scarcely begun; that many adventures had to be gone through before he and his master were finally successful, and before Armstrong recovered his valuable plans.

"Thank goodness we shall be going back to London to-morrow!" murmured Nipper disgustedly. "Nothing doing down here at all. Blessed if it isn't like a desert island! Nobody about——"

He paused abruptly and stared into the gloom.

"Ain't there anybody about, though?" he went on under his breath. "If I didn't see a couple of dim figures over against the goods station door, then I'm a Dutch cheese!"

Nipper's lassitude vanished as if by magic, and he became all intent upon the view immediately in front of him. Some persons were evidently prowling round the goods shed, and it was fairly obvious that they had no right there. Therefore, the affair was worth investigating; and just at that moment Nipper felt like inquiring into anything which might possibly lead to something interesting.

His keen eyes soon detected a dim outline against one of the windows of the building.

"Wonder what they're up to?" Nipper asked himself. "There's nothing particularly valuable in the goods station——"

His thoughts seemed to freeze up for a second, and he stood rooted to the spot. Then his mind became flooded with suspicions, and he felt his heart beating swiftly with excitement.

The diving apparatus!

Could it be possible that these figures he had seen had any designs on that valuable property? Anyhow, the affair was decidedly suspicious and well worth investigating.

"I don't believe I'm wrong," Nipper told himself shrewdly. "Chaps don't prowl about country stations for nothing. Even a common or garden tramp wouldn't risk being copped for the sake of pilfering in a luggage yard. Nipper, my son, I believe you've struck something on the giddy nail! Get busy!"

And Nipper, obeying his own command, got busy.

He swiftly scaled the fence and then crawled cautiously and silently towards the little building. Suddenly he stumbled on the railway track of a siding, and fell sprawling. He lay there for a moment, breathing hard, wondering if his movements had been heard. There was, however, no sign of anything amiss; indeed, it appeared now as though he had the whole yard to himself.

Yet he knew quite well that at least two men were within a very short distance of him.

Ruefully rubbing his shins he scrambled to his feet, and then continued his way onwards. At last he arrived at the shed, and crept round until he was immediately underneath one of the windows.

It was open!

He craned upwards, for the window was high, and peered into the dark interior. It was pitchy black, and not a sound could be heard.

"I'll swear the beggars were here," murmured Nipper. "They could not have gone by——"

He paused suddenly as a brilliant beam of light from a electric torch ripped the darkness. At the same second a low murmur of voices assailed his ears, and he saw two men quite distinctly walking across the wide platform, within the shed. They stopped before a large covered van, and stood for a moment whispering, the light playing on the van's door.

And the men were not tramps by any means; on the contrary, they were well-dressed, and had the appearance of gentlemen.

"Ten quid to a bloater my suspicions are right!" breathed Nipper under his breath. "It is up to me to stop their little game, and I'm jolly well going to do it!"

Nipper didn't pause to consider things; but leapt up on to the window-sill and stepped lightly into the shed. What his exact idea was in so doing he didn't precisely know, but, as it happened, he wasn't going to be given an opportunity of doing anything at all!

For, as he set his foot upon the floor, there was a sharp slap as a loose plank jumped up and then fell again. The noise in that silent shed was considerable; quite sufficient, anyhow, to warn the man of the intruder's presence.

"Crikey!" muttered Nipper in dismay. "That's done it! What rotten luck!"

It wasn't luck at all. The two men had placed that board there for the express purpose of giving them warning in case they were surprised. Swiftly as Nipper acted, it was, nevertheless, not quite swift enough. He

twisted like lightning, placed his hands upon the window-sill, and prepared to take a flying leap outside. But, even as he was in the act of doing so, he was gripped from behind and dragged back.

"Hold him, Cooke!" hissed one of the men savagely. "I didn't think we should be spotted to-night. Bring him round by the van, and we'll see who he is."

"A kid of some sort," said the other. Then, as the electric torch was flashed upon Nipper, he continued furiously. "Why, it's that confounded boy of Nelson Lee's. By thunder, if we let him go our work will have been for nothing, Larne!"

Larne swore under his breath.

"He isn't going to get away, my friend!" he snarled. "Where's your master, eh?" he added to Nipper.

"Find out!" said Nipper coolly.

"You young hound——"

"Steady," interrupted Nipper. "No need to call me names. If it hadn't been for a piece of bad luck you wouldn't have collared me. You speak English well enough, but I bet you're both Germans, in the pay of the rotten Fatherland!"

The two men both started.

"This boy is dangerous, Cooke!" said Larne with set teeth. "He has discovered us by accident, and if we value our lives, we'd better act without compunction!"

"No need to tell me that," replied the other man. "I was startled when I learned that Nelson Lee and Nipper were down in Peggley. They are dangerous—both of them. We had better make short work of this young brat while we have him in our power. Nelson Lee will have to be dealt with afterwards."

Nipper listened to the conversation with fast-beating heart. He was positive now that the men were indeed spies, and he knew that he was in a terribly tight fix. It was so tight, in fact, that he failed utterly to see any way out.

He was rapidly tied hand and foot, and then Larne, who was a tall dark man, drew a revolver from his pocket. The expression on his face told Nipper at once that the man was ready to go to any length at a second's notice. The revolver was pointed at Nipper's head.

"A sound," said Larne grimly, "and it will be your last!"

Nipper very wisely kept silent, and lay looking at the two men with an outward air of calm, which he no way felt within him. On the contrary, he was decidedly alarmed.

Germans, he knew, held human life very cheaply, and when that life belonged to an enemy, they cared no more for it than if it had belonged to a fly. He was a menace to them, therefore he had to be done away with.

And, Nipper, poor lad, saw absolutely no way out of the predicament into which he had fallen so dramatically and so suddenly. He racked his brain again and again for some scheme whereby he could make his escape. But, in the end, he had to tell himself that he was perfectly helpless. He was in the hands of Providence. If the fates allowed him to go under, then they were very cruel. But, in spite of the black outlook, Nipper somehow felt that these men would not be successful in their designs. For that they meant harm to him, the lad was certain.

Even while he was wondering what to do, Larne stepped forward and dragged him to his feet.

"You will do as you are told implicitly," said the man sharply. "We don't intend to put up with any nonsense, my lad. I'm going to untie your hands, and you will write as I dictate!"

"Write!" repeated Nipper. "Write what?"

"You will know soon enough," replied Larne curtly.

Nipper's hands were released, and he was then propped against a crate, and a piece of paper was laid upon the woodwork. Then a pencil was thrust into Nipper's hand, and Larne stood over him, the revolver steadily pointed at Nipper's breast.

"Write!" commanded the spy: "I was following a suspicious character—a hunchback man—when I happened to get my foot caught in the points. A train is coming, and no help is in sight. Tell Nelson Lee that I died—"

"What's this?" demanded Nipper hotly. "What do you want me to write this rubbish for?"

"We have no time to waste!" snarled Cooke. "Make him get on with it!"

"I'm hanged if I'll get on with it!" declared Nipper. "I suppose you're going to chuck me under a train or something, and make it appear an accident? If you mean to murder me, you brutes, I'll be murdered right away! I'm not going to help you in your fiendish scheme!"

Larne uttered an oath.

"You've got pluck, boy," he exclaimed, "but it doesn't suit me to shoot you here. But we're not going to be intimidated by your courage. I give you fair warning. Unless you write that note instantly, as I have dictated, I'll shoot you as you stand!"

"An idle threat!" cried Nipper scornfully. "Why, the report would be heard——"

"The report would not be heard a dozen yards away," interrupted Larne. "This weapon is an automatic pistol and the bullet is released by a spring. You understand?"

Nipper did understand, and he did some quick thinking. It would be perfectly easy for these men to murder him and then make their escape. While there was life there was hope, and any delay might mean rescue. So he decided within ten seconds.

"I'll write!" he growled sullenly.

And without a word he took down the note to Larne's dictation.

"Tell Nelson Lee that I died doing my duty," concluded Larne.

"I'll do my best to drag my foot out, but I'm afraid it is impossible!"

That note was quite sufficient to warn Nipper of the fiendish death in store for him. He wasn't allowed to think much more, for a bottle was suddenly held beneath his nose, and almost before he knew it, he was choked and stunned by the fumes which arose. Like a limp rag, he collapsed and lay upon the floor.

"I think our plan will be extremely successful," said Larne cold-bloodedly. "Not only shall we get rid of this brat, but it will be done in such a way that Nelson Lee, smart as he is, will not suspect that his assistant was put to death. Our hands will not be stained, Cooke. This boy is an enemy of the Fatherland, and must therefore be rendered helpless. The express train will render that service with excellent results. It will come by in half an hour, so we have plenty of time."

Nipper was left upon the floor, and the two men transferred their attention to the van which stood alongside the platform. In a minute they were inside and were occupied there for a considerable period of time. Then they came out, secured the van door again, and lifted Nipper to his feet.

"He is still unconscious," remarked Cooke. "We must go cautiously

now, Larne, for discovery, at this stage, would be fatal. The train, too, is due in five minutes!"

Larne consulted his watch hastily.

"Five minutes!" he echoed. "A little longer than that, my friend, but we must be quick, nevertheless."

They bundled Nipper's unconscious form about and removed the ropes which bound him. Nipper was drugged, so there was no danger whatever of his making a dash for freedom.

His captors unceremoniously lifted him up, took him to the window, and hoisted him through. Then, having made certain that the coast was clear, and that they were unobserved, they carried their burden round the goods station and across the sidings in the direction of the main track. The night was dark, and as they moved silently, it was practically impossible for any person, even close by, to be aware of what was going on.

But, without warning, there was a sudden and abrupt whistle—a shrill, piercing whistle of a curious character.

"By thunder!" hissed Larne, "the boy's recovered! Quick! We must give him another dose of the fumes!"

Nipper struggled weakly.

"Yes, I have recovered, you rotters!" he panted. "Let me go! Bust you—"

But poor Nipper was not allowed to say another word. Held tightly by the two men, the little bottle was again held under his nose. The deadly drug within emitted its stupifying fumes, and Nipper, although he did his utmost to prevent it, breathed them into his lungs. He sank back limp and senseless once more.

"We are safe," said Larne. "Nobody heard that whistle; and, even so, the boy will be dead long before rescue can come. The train is already within a mile!"

They arrived on the track a moment later and laid Nipper's still form across one of the rails in such a manner that death would be instantaneous. At this exact spot a siding branched off, and Nipper's left foot was thrust into the wedge of iron between the two rails, and rammed tightly in. The paper with the false message upon it, was laid close by on a sleeper, and a stub of pencil was thrust into Nipper's inanimate hand.

"Excellent!" murmured Larne callously. "There is no escape for him, and, boy though he is, he was one of our worst enemies. We shall be rid of him, and his infernal master will never know the truth. The fumes will leave no trace, such as chloroform would have done!"

Like two shadows the cold-blooded spies slipped away and disappeared among the trees at the far side of the track. Nipper, helpless and unaware of his awful danger—unable to lift a finger to help himself—lay across the rails, in the darkness, and alone.

Far away a low rumble sounded. The engine of destruction, which was to crush the life out of him, was already within earshot!

It was now a matter of seconds.

CHAPTER V.

A Startling Discovery.

NELSON LEE glanced at the old-fashioned clock on the mantelpiece, and then consulted his own watch.

"H'm! Nipper's taking a decent while over his little stroll," he murmured. "I'm afraid Nipper is rather disappointed at the lack of

excitement. I've got a kind of inkling that there will be plenty doing before so very long—perhaps Nipper has found something to occupy his attention already."

If Nelson Lee had only known what was happening to Nipper at that very moment!

But the famous detective had no suspicion that anything was wrong. Nipper had been absent a fair while, it is true, but there was nothing strange in that. Nelson Lee felt inclined to have a breath of fresh air himself, so he donned his cap and sallied out into the dark village street. He lit a cigarette and then strolled along a few paces until a dark figure loomed up out of the gloom. It was Armstrong.

"Seen anything of Nipper?" asked Nelson Lee. "The young bouncer went out half an hour ago in a rather gloomy humour, and he's moping about the village somewhere."

"I haven't seen him," replied the lieutenant briefly. "Where are you bound for, Mr. Lee?"

"Nowhere in particular," replied the detective. "I'm just taking a stroll. Perhaps you'd care to accompany me. There are a few points I wish to discuss."

"Good enough," said Armstrong. "Only for goodness' sake, give me a cigarette. My supply has run out."

The pair walked along in the direction of the station, not for any particular reason, but because that way was just as good as any other.

"Somebody coming," said Armstrong. "Perhaps it's Nipper."

But the newcomer proved to be old Jacobs, a village rustic, who Nelson Lee and Armstrong had already met in the tap-room.

"That be Mr. Lee, ain't it?" said the old man. "That there young boy o' yours is 'aving a game o' some sort, I reckon."

"Indeed," said Nelson Lee. "Have you seen him?"

"Not twenty minutes past," replied Jacobs. "I was comin' along the lane agin the station when I 'appened to look into the goods yard. There was Nipper close by the shed. I didn't take no particular notice, sir, but I count he ain't up to any good there. Mischief, I'll be bound!" he added darkly.

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Not a bit of it, Jacobs," he said easily. "Nipper was up to no mischief." The detective turned to the lieutenant. "I expect Nipper has been doing a bit of scouting on his own," he added. "Well, we may see something of the young rascal if we walk in the direction of the station."

"Right you are," said Armstrong. "That way is as good as any other."

So the two men continued their walk, and soon were in the little lane along side the goods yard. Nelson Lee was about to say something to his companion when there suddenly arose on the still night air a curious, shrill whistle. It was penetrating and insistent.

Nelson Lee snapped his teeth.

"Nipper!" he exclaimed sharply.

"I suppose that was some kind of signal——"

"Exactly!" interjected the detective. "Nipper and I only use that signal in a moment of supreme danger. The youngster has got himself into trouble, Armstrong. We must find him without a second's loss of time. From which direction did the whistle come? To my mind it seemed to be in the direction of the railway line."

"Hardly so far away as that," Armstrong protested. "I fancy the boy's further up the lane. Suppose we run a few yards in that direction?"

Nelson Lee made no answer. He was tense and alert, for Nipper's whistle had told him that something was badly amiss. The detective mentally

decided that Nipper was not alone—that he was, probably, in the hands of the enemy. Otherwise he would have repeated the whistle in the hope of it being heard. Everything pointed to his being silenced before he could utter another sound. For a moment Nelson Lee was half inclined to answer in the same manner, but he realised that such a course would be unwise, for it would make known to the enemy the fact that help was near at hand.

"Perhaps the young rascal is having a game," suggested Armstrong, as he and Nelson Lee ran along the lane. "Surely there is no danger——"

"There is danger everywhere," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Nipper would never play such a trick. He did not know that you and I were near at hand, remember, and probably uttered that whistle in sheer desperation."

They came to a halt and stood listening. But not a sound assailed their ears except the soft rustle of the trees in the light breeze. Then, even as they were about to continue their search, a low rumble sounded in the distance.

"Train coming," remarked Armstrong briefly.

Nelson Lee started.

"Good heavens, man, we must be quick!" he gasped in alarm. "I understand now! That rumble has restored my wool-gathering wits!"

And the detective leapt over a low fence and set off across a meadow at deer-like speed. Armstrong, after a second's hesitation, set off after him, and they were presently running side by side.

"What's the game?" panted the lieutenant. "What's the meaning of this marathon, Mr. Lee? I'm hanged if I heard anything except a bally train——"

"Isn't that enough?" panted Nelson Lee. "I thought, in the first place, that Nipper's whistle came from the direction of the line; now I am positive. The lad is in terrible danger, Armstrong—I'm certain of that!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Armstrong, the detective's unspoken suspicion flooding his mind. "We mustn't lose a second!"

"I'm afraid we have lost too many precious seconds already!" said Nelson Lee tensely. "See! The train is already in sight—within a minute or less, it will roar past!"

Armstrong glanced up the line, for they had now reached the permanent-way. Twinkling in the distance were two bright points of light, one green, one white. They were the headlights of the express!

"Nipper!" shouted Nelson Lee desperately. "Nipper! Where are you, my lad?"

No response.

The two spies, Larne and Cooke, heard nothing of this, for by now they were far out of earshot, congratulating themselves on having ridded themselves of one of their enemies in a manner that admitted of no miscarriage.

"I think you're mistaken, Mr. Lee," exclaimed Lieut. Armstrong. "Nipper is certainly not here. Besides, there is no time to act, even——"

Nelson Lee darted forward along the permanent-way.

"Help me!" he called. "I think I can see something lying across the rails! There may just be time to drag the lad clear before the train rushes past."

Armstrong, his heart beating hard, followed his companion. The detective's keen eyes had seen a dim blob on the rails about a hundred yards away. It was impossible to tell whether the blob was merely a shadow or something else. But a moment later Nelson Lee uttered a shout of triumph. Armstrong panted up excitedly.

"Quick!" gasped Nelson Lee. "Help me to drag him clear!"

At their feet lay Nipper, still and silent. They had found him in the

nick of time! The express was within five hundred yards. Between them they lifted Nipper and endeavoured to carry him to safety. But something hindered them—the lad's foot was jammed tight in the points!

"Good heavens!" breathed Armstrong in horror.

The train was almost upon them!

The roar of its wheels created an insistent din, and the sparks simply poured from the funnel. Was Nipper to be dashed to death after all?

With a great sob of despair, Nelson Lee lifted his young assistant bodily in his powerful arms and pulled with the mad strength of desperation. It was touch and go now—the lives of Nipper and his master hung on a slender thread. For, should Nelson Lee fail, he would assuredly be wrenched under the cruel wheels of the speeding train.

"Give it up, man!" roared Armstrong shrilly. "You'll be killed yourself! Oh, you fool—you fool!"

The lieutenant staggered back, his hands over his face, horror and alarm filling his heart. With a deafening rattle the train roared past, and the wind it caused nearly threw Armstrong off his feet. Then it had gone, leaving the air filled with dust and smoke.

The rear lights gleamed out redly, and Armstrong looked at them through a mist. Something moved near him, and he shifted his gaze.

"By George!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "That was a near shave!"

"Are—are you alive?" gasped the other.

"Well, dead men don't usually indulge in conversation," replied Nelson Lee, scrambling to his feet. "Yes, I'm alive—and unscathed. Thank Heaven I succeeded in dragging Nipper clear in time!"

Armstrong choked.

"I—I thought—you—you——"

"Good gracious!" interrupted the detective. "Why, man, I managed to get Nipper clear of the rails when the train was still ten yards off."

"Ten yards!" ejaculated Armstrong. "Why, it was a miracle you weren't both killed."

"A miss is as good as a mile," replied Nelson Lee lightly. "Now let's see what's wrong with Nipper. His foot was jammed in the points, and I fancy I saw a piece of paper lying against the rails. It strikes me that the boy accidentally managed to get himself imprisoned."

Nipper was still unconscious, and his master bent over him and swiftly sniffed his lips. A cold gleam shot into Nelson Lee's eyes, and he rose to his feet with a black brow.

"I was mistaken," he said quietly. "This was no accident, Armstrong; some infernal devilry has been at work here to-night. The lad's drugged—or I'm a nigger! I can't exactly say how he was made insensible, but I'm pretty sure there's some sort of narcotic still befogging his brain. The fresh air and a good shaking will soon revive him."

Nelson Lee stepped across the gleaming railway lines and picked up a scrap of paper which lay on one of the sleepers—tucked into a crack in fact—so that it would not blow away. Beside it was a short piece of pencil. The detective flashed his electric torch on the paper, and he and Armstrong read the scrawled words.

"That doesn't look much as though the boy was drugged," remarked Armstrong. "Apparently it was a sheer accident. Nipper was following some Johnny, an ordinary tramp, most likely, when he caught his foot in the points and became imprisoned."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"There are three reasons why that theory is very far from the mark,"

he answered. "Number one, Nipper wouldn't be such a young ass as to follow a tramp. Number two, if he had merely caught his foot, as stated in this note, he would have yelled for help, and not whistled. The fact of his whistling proves, to my mind, that he was in the hands of some enemy. Reason Number three, his foot was not jammed—it was simply tucked into the points. Had he been in possession of his wits, he would have extricated himself within twenty seconds."

"Quite right, guv'nor," said a weak voice.

They turned abruptly, and saw that Nipper was sitting up rather dazedly. Nelson Lee helped the lad to his feet.

"My goodness, I thought I was a goner," said Nipper coolly. "Somehow, guv'nor, you always manage to lug me out of terrific holes when I'm ass enough to fall into 'em! Those two rotten German spies——"

"Eh?" said Armstrong quickly. "Did you say German spies?"

"Of course!" replied Nipper, and he rapidly told Nelson Lee and the lieutenant of his adventure. They listened with serious faces, the former nodding to himself as Nipper described how Larue and Cooke had forced him to write the note, and had then drugged him.

"You were lucky, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "But for that brief spell of unconsciousness, when you whistled to me, you would now be lying across those rails——"

"In two halves!" added Nipper lightly. "Well, I'm not, so there's nothing to worry about. In a way, it's rather a good thing this has happened, sir."

"Decidedly," agreed Nelson Lee. "Our enemies have shown their hand. We now know that we are fighting against a cruel and relentless foe. If it is humanly possible, Armstrong, the Germans mean to get that secret of yours, and they'll go to any lengths of villainy and murder to attain their object."

"Well, I'm in your hands, Mr. Lee," said the lieutenant simply. "Personally, I'm confident. I don't see how the beggars can do anything. The model gun and the plans are at the bottom of the sea, and a Government tug is guarding the spot. In the morning the divers will go down, and—and—— Well, that's all there is to say. My property will be recovered without a hitch."

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"Don't be too sure," he replied. "What were those Germans doing at the goods-station when Nipper discovered them?"

"Hanged if I know!"

"Well, I know," said Nipper. "Have you forgotten the diving apparatus, Mr. Armstrong?"

The lieutenant started.

"Good heavens, you don't mean——"

"Nipper's right," said Nelson Lee. "Those two men were endeavouring to locate the diving apparatus—probably with the gentle intention of rendering it useless. We had better warn the men and investigate at once."

Accordingly the trio made their way to the inn once more. Nipper was rather shaky, but otherwise well and cheerful. As a matter of fact, he was feeling more contented, for he now knew that the stay at Peggley wouldn't be uneventful.

He never dreamed of the startling happenings which were actually to take place!

Adams, the man who was in charge of the diving operations, was rather

startled when Nelson Lee took him into his confidence, and told him of the facts. At the same time Adams was inclined to be sceptical. He was a bluff, middle-aged man, and regarded the German spy peril as something of a myth.

"We'll go along to the station, Mr. Lee," he said; "but it's my belief that boy of yours has been yarning. Boys are queer cattle, you know. Seems to me he's been imagining a lot of things. More likely the men were just tramps, lookin' for what they could find."

Nelson Lee smiled to himself, but said nothing. It would be time enough to disillusion Adams when he had had some encounter or other with the spies himself, as he probably would do before the affair was over—and then it would be unnecessary.

About half an hour later Adams entered Nelson Lee's rooms at the inn and announced that all the packing-cases were intact, and that nothing had been tampered with. Nipper looked doubtful.

"If that's the case, I can't understand it," he said bluntly.

"Did you examine the interior of the cases?" asked Nelson Lee. "Did you unfasten them and—"

"Oh, that was unnecessary," replied Adams. "I saw at once that nothing had been touched. When we unpack the things in the morning you'll find this scare had been rather previous. Why, the cases are roped and screwed up so that nobody could tamper with them without leaving a trace of their handiwork!"

Nelson Lee smiled quietly.

"Well, it's no good my talking," he said. "In any case, it's too late to do anything to-night, even if my suspicions are correct. I sincerely hope you are right."

"Don't worry, Mr. Lee," said Adams. "Everything's in order."

But when he had gone Nelson Lee and Nipper looked at one another with curious smiles, and the detective shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm afraid our excellent friend will receive somewhat of a shock in the morning," he said. "Well, there's nothing to be done to-night, so we'll turn in. I expect you're feeling rather shaky, my lad."

"Rats!" said Nipper. "I've had a narrow squeak, I admit, but I'm not a kid, sir. The thing I'm most anxious for now is to get even with those two Germhuns—Larne and Cooke."

"Those names are the British versions of their real ones, I suppose," said the detective. "Probably they were originally Lahue and Coch."

"Blow their names!" said Nipper, yawning. "It doesn't matter tuppence to me if they're called Smith or Brown—they're murderous rotters!"

Soon afterwards they turned in, and slept like tops until dawn. As day was breaking Nelson Lee awoke, and he tumbled out of bed without delay. Nipper was as refreshed as his master, and eager to get out into the fresh air.

But as the famous detective descended the stairs there was a sudden draught as a door opened, and the next second Adams appeared, alarmed and furious.

"Mr. Lee," he exclaimed breathlessly, "I have made a startling discovery!"

"I think I can guess what it is," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"The packing-cases were opened ten minutes ago," went on Adams, "and we have found that the diving-suits and the whole apparatus have been tampered with and rendered utterly useless! It will be impossible to carry out the operations to-day!"

CHAPTER VI.

Nipper Finds Things Out.

NIPPER whistled.

"That's just what we suspected," he said with a long face. "I was jolly sure those brutes were up to something rotten in the goods shed. Well, Mr. Adams, what have you got to say now?"

Adams scowled.

"I had better not say what I think in front of you, my lad!" he said grimly. "You're a boy, and it is not good for boys to hear violent language. I admit I am startled, Mr. Lee. The wind's completely taken out of my sails—I'm becalmed! Gosh, those scoundrels did their work well, for the cases were repacked as though they had never been touched. The rubber diving-suits are slit up, and Heaven knows what other mischief has been done!"

And Adams went off into a muttered string of choice language beneath his breath. Nelson Lee was in no way surprised at the news; indeed, both he and Nipper had been practically sure that this revelation would come.

"Have you told Lieutenant Armstrong of this?" asked the detective.

"Yes, five minutes ago," replied the other. "In fact, Mr. Armstrong came along to the station and saw the thing for himself. We're all up in good time this morning, and the diving operations were to have been completed by noon. We can't do a thing now; we're absolutely stuck."

They walked outside into the cold, grey daylight, and even as they did so a motor-car whizzed up and stopped. Armstrong, who was in the car alone, jumped out. He looked worried and anxious.

"Glad I got this car over, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "It'll come in mighty useful now. I wired for my man to bring it over last night, and he arrived a short while ago. Well, what do you think of the turn events have taken?"

"I'm not exactly surprised," replied Nelson Lee, "and at the moment I don't exactly know what to think. But it's evident that we're up against a pretty tough proposition. I don't quite see what the Germans can do, but they're tricky beggars, and we must be absolutely on the alert or they'll win the game. What have you decided to do?"

"Well, I have just come from the station," replied Armstrong. "I have wired to London for a fresh lot of things to be sent to Liverpool Street, and I am going to take the morning train up to the metropolis. In the afternoon I shall return with the new apparatus, and Mr. Adams tells me that if the weather's suitable it will be possible to dive this evening."

Nelson Lee nodded approvingly.

"You could not have done better," he said. "But there is one thing I want to ask. Have you been down to the bay this morning? Have you been in communication with the tug?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because there is a bare possibility that the Germans have wrecked our apparatus for the purpose of undertaking diving operations themselves," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "We must not make the mistake of underestimating our enemy, and it has already been made evident to us that they are willing and prepared to go to a very considerable length to obtain possession of your secret. I think it possible—mind you, I don't say probable—that the enemy have been busy during the night, and have sent somebody down to the wrecked launch."

"But the tug, Mr. Lee," ejaculated Armstrong. "The tug's on guard!"

"Admitted," said the detective. "But you must remember that the tug's

crew consists of only four men. Four men could be easily overpowered if surprised at night. This possibility has only just occurred to me, or I would have taken steps last night to guard the boat. However, I don't think we need conclude things are quite so bad, although it will be just as well to make certain."

The lieutenant leapt into the motor-car.

"We'll rush over at once!" he exclaimed anxiously. "By heavens, if we've been foiled so early in the game——"

"Wait!" interjected Nelson Lee quietly. "There is no sense in taking things for granted. We shall find out the truth soon enough."

He followed Armstrong into the car, and Nipper and Adams did likewise. Then, with a roar, the automobile started off, and the party were rapidly whisked to the bay.

As it happened, the skipper of the tug had just pulled ashore in a dinghy, and he took the pipe out of his mouth and looked up in astonishment as the quartette jumped out of the car and hurried down the beach to him.

"Is everything all right?" called Armstrong.

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Have you been raided during the night——"

"By hookey, no!" exclaimed the skipper. "Raided! What's the idea, sir? I can't quite understand."

Armstrong stated his suspicions.

"There ain't been a soul near the tug all night," said the captain shortly. "We've been snug and quiet, without even a breath of danger. Them Germans are helpless, sir. I reckon they ruined the diving apparatus out of spite. As for gettin' down to the wreck—well, what can they do with me right on the top?"

The lieutenant looked relieved.

"Happily your suspicions were unfounded, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed. "You see, nothing has happened at all. Nothing, in fact, can happen now. Even the wily Germans can't very well come in broad daylight and dive to the wrecked launch under our very eyes."

"Don't be too sure," Nelson Lee said quietly. "The enemy is powerful and unscrupulous, and we must not relax our vigilance in the least. Not until the plans are recovered from the ocean-bed, and in your hands, shall I feel confident."

Armstrong, however, in spite of the set-back he had suffered, was in good spirits. In his opinion the Germans' plans had gone wrong, and there was now nothing to fear. Nelson Lee and Nipper, although they had no suspicion of the next move on the enemy's part, were anxious and quite certain that they had not seen the last of Larne and Cooke.

When the party arrived back at the inn, Armstrong had a hurried breakfast, and caught the early train to London. Nelson Lee and Nipper had not finished their meal, and the detective was looking thoughtful.

"Worried, sir?" asked Nipper, helping himself to more coffee.

"Well, in a way, my boy," replied Nelson Lee. "So far you are the only person who has been in actual touch with the foe. I have seen nothing of them. I do not know where they are, or how many of them we have to contend against. Where did Larne and Cooke go to last night, after they left you on the railway-line to die? Where are they now? And what about Swan, the man who caused the launch to be sunk?"

"He's dead," said Nipper.

"On the contrary, I believe he is very much alive," replied the detective, pushing his plate aside. "I am convinced that he is at the head of the German gang. Confound it, young 'un, there is nothing I dislike more than

working against an intangible enemy. I wish the brutes would show their hand!"

"They'll do that to-day, if they mean to win," said Nipper shrewdly. "They know that Armstrong will be back this afternoon, so I suppose they reckon they've got the whole of to-day to work in. Well, the only thing we can do is to mooch about and keep our peepers skinned."

Nipper was right.

The enemy did show their hand—but accidentally, and not in the way Nipper or Nelson Lee suspected. It was, in fact, by pure chance that the discovery was made.

All the morning Nelson Lee and his young assistant "mooched about and kept their peepers skinned," but nothing resulted. Everything was peaceful and quiet. The sun shone down brilliantly, and the day was glorious. It seemed absolutely impossible that any Germans could be within miles of Peggley Bay. The tug lay placid and quiet out beyond the crag. It seemed certain that the Germans had abandoned their task as hopeless.

After dinner Nipper took himself off on to the cliffs. He was fed-up. This was the second time Nipper had been in that unfortunate state. On the previous occasion his fed-uppishness had been rapidly dispelled by an exciting adventure; and, as events turned out, he was in for an adventure this time even more exciting than the last.

Nothing had happened since the previous night—and nothing seemed likely to happen. Therefore, Nipper felt that life was hardly worth living.

He sat down on a rock and stared out over the calm waters of the bay. Like his master, Nipper was happier when there was something actually to do. He hated waiting for the enemy to make a move. To his mind it didn't seem in the order of things that he and his master should be kept hanging about, helpless and impatient for something to take place.

"It's all wrong," he told himself disgustedly. "The gov'nor's dotty! He ought to have gone on the track of those two wrong 'uns. I know he's been trying all the morning to trace them, but that's no consolation. What's the good of a detective if he can't track people? I'm beginning to think we're used up!"

He picked up a stone and hurled it far out over the cliff into the water. Then he waited for it to make a splash. But as he gazed intently down upon the sea his attention was attracted by something quite different—something decidedly curious.

Three hundred yards from the shore a faint, almost imperceptible ripple showed upon the surface of the water. Yet there was no boat; there was nothing whatever to account for it. Nipper stood up with a puzzled frown.

"Queer," he muttered—"jolly queer!"

Where was the ripple coming from? What was causing it? Quite distinctly the disturbance of the water moved slowly, and in a straight line towards the rocks. Just at this point the cliffs were sheer and high. Even at low water the depth was considerable at the cliff-base. Nipper was full of curiosity. What was the meaning of this remarkable phenomenon?

"Looks like the wake of a boat," he murmured. "Yet there's no boat within sight! My goodness, I wonder if it's a blessed whale, come south by accident, swimming beneath the surface——"

Nipper paused and his eyes grew wide.

"Great jumping kangaroos!" he gasped excitedly. "Can it be? A submarine! Great Scott, I believe I've hit it!"

The thought had naturally followed as a consequence of the whale notion. The latter, of course, was out of the question; but a submarine—— Nipper had seen submarines travelling beneath the surface on more than one occasion. True, this ripple was very small and very unnoticeable, but if it

wasn't caused by a submarine, what was it caused by? And, anyhow, why not a very small submarine? It was quite possible.

Nipper watched fascinatedly.

Very slowly the ripple was moving towards the cliff-base at his feet. It was not only remarkable, but absolutely astounding.

"Perhaps I'm wrong," decided Nipper. "Submarines can't do this sort of thing. By this time it would have busted on the rocks. Besides, what could a submarine be doing here? It can't be a U boat—"

Nipper paused and gave a jump.

A U boat!

A German submarine! Weren't the Germans trying to get hold of Lieut. Armstrong's plans? It was impossible for them to attain their object by instituting ordinary diving operations; but a submarine— Nipper began to scent possibilities—big possibilities. By using a small submerged vessel the enemy might possibly manage to foil Armstrong yet. Nipper knew well enough that the Germans were full of new and unheard-of dodges; and a submarine, fitted with a watertight compartment, by means of which it was possible for a man to leave the vessel in a diving-suit, was by no means new.

In fact, it seemed to Nipper that he had at last hit upon the German plan of action. This was brought home to him the more forcibly because he realised that the course of the moving ripples was a purely natural one. He had been talking to old Jacobs that morning, and the ancient inhabitant had been yarning about the huge caves which honeycombed the cliffs at Peggley. Some of these caves, so old Jacobs had said, were half-filled with water, even at low tide. At high tide it was quite impossible to enter them.

It seemed highly probable that a small submarine was, even at that moment, carefully and slowly feeling its way through the narrow opening into one of the caves.

Nipper was galvanised into action.

What if the Germans had already obtained the plans? What if they had been lurking on the sea-bed, right under the keel of the guarding tug? They could have done their work by now, and the tug's crew would know absolutely nothing of it. The guardians, in fact, would be calmly taking their ease, awaiting the arrival of the divers, sublimely unconscious of the fact that the enemy had been hard at work for hours past.

"My hat!" muttered Nipper, with gleaming eyes. "That's why Larno and Cooke mucked up that apparatus last night—so that they could do their dirty, plundering work while Armstrong was getting fresh supplies! I understand now; I grasp the giddy depth of the dirty plot! The guv'nor's been in a fog so far, but this gives us a line to work upon, and no blessed mistake!"

He was quite convinced that his theory was correct; he didn't even cast a doubt upon it. Well, what was to be done?

"First of all," he decided, "I'll buzz down to that cave I found this morning, and do a bit of exploring on my own account. If I can't hit upon something within a quarter of an hour I'll rip back to the village and tell the guv'nor!"

Accordingly, Nipper hastily made a detour and scrambled down the cliff where it was sloping, and at last arrived upon the lower level of rocks. There was no beach here; only massive boulders and towering pillars of rock. The sea broke in tiny wavelets quite close to Nipper, but his whole attention was centred upon finding a small cave he had entered during the morning. He reckoned that it was very close to the spot where the ripple had disappeared seemingly into the cliff face beneath the sea. The tide was fairly low just now, and so he was able to scramble over the slippery rocks—

which at high tide would be totally submerged—until he arrived at the spot.

He found that there was very much more rock exposed now than there had been at the time of his last visit. In fact, there were several other cave entrances within sight. Haphazard, he plunged into one of these as a preliminary, and fished out his electric torch, flashing this before him as he walked. Progress was rather slow, for he found himself in a kind of a tunnel, with slimy seaweed underfoot and wet, glistening rocks on either hand and overhead.

Presently, however, the aspect of the tunnel changed, for it broadened out, and Nipper found himself in a kind of large cavern, right in the bowels of the cliff. At first he had thought the tunnel would lead to a blind end, but now he realised that he would probably have arrived in this cavern by whichever entrance he had entered; for as he flashed his torch around he saw several other tiny tunnel mouths.

Before proceeding further, Nipper took off his cap and laid it down at the entrance of the natural passage he had just emerged from. He did this so that he would be able to find his way out easily, for old Jacobs had warned him that men had more than once penetrated the caves and had been imprisoned within them for days, until at last rescued by search-parties.

Just now Nipper was feeling rather reckless, and, having taken that slight precaution, he walked forward across the dark cavern, stumbling now and again on the uneven flooring which, to make progress more difficult, was slimy and slippery. Nipper made a bee-line across, and in a few seconds he reached a wall of rock. In this was one low, narrow opening, half-choked with seaweed.

"Might as well have a squint up here while I'm at it!" he murmured. "Well, here's luck!"

And he plunged in without further thought. Progress was very slow up this tunnel, for it was low and he was forced to proceed in a doubled-up position. Nipper thought that it was never coming to an end, but at last he emerged into another cavern similar to the last. More by luck than anything else he switched his light off as he did so, for he caught his arm a sharp rap against a projecting rock. It was lucky, in the light of after events. For as Nipper stepped forward he instantly became aware that he was not in total darkness.

Apparently at a considerable distance from him a queer kind of light illuminated the roof of the cavern. The light itself was invisible, so he had concluded that a large projection of rock hid it from view. He paused breathlessly, and with fast-beating heart. The silence seemed absolutely intense. And then, even as he was about to step forward, a voice boomed out echoing, and the words that were uttered were German! Probably the speaker's voice was quite soft, but the curious construction of the cavern caused it to reverberate as though the words had been shouted. Nipper simply stood stock-still, every muscle quivering.

Some rapid thinking followed, and Nipper was not long in deciding what to do. If he proceeded onwards he would probably give himself away, and so ruin all the good work he had already done. It would be far better to acquaint Nelson Lee with the facts, and then rely upon the detective's astute judgment as what to do next.

Once decided, Nipper wasted no time. He turned back, fighting against the impulse which egged him to go onwards, and retraced his steps with all the speed possible in the circumstances. Arriving in the cavern, he let his cap remain where it was, and a few minutes later emerged into the open sunlight. His face was flushed, and his eyes were glittering.

"Now for the guv'nor," he muttered with clenched teeth.

And, like a deer, Nipper scrambled over the rocks and then up the sloping cliff until he reached the summit. Without pausing to take breath he dashed off, with every ounce of speed he could command, to acquaint Nelson Lee with the startling facts.

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CHAPTER VII.

Trapped Beneath the Sea.

THERE'S only one thing to be done," said Nelson Lee briskly. "We must hasten to this cavern beneath the cliff, Nipper, and ferret out the actual truth. You've done well, my lad, and I'm pleased with you. Those sharp eyes of yours did good work when they spotted that submarine skulking to its shelter."

Nipper looked excited.

"Shall we go now, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"At once."

Nipper had told his master everything that had occurred, and Nelson Lee had listened with gleaming eyes. At last they were on the track! Indeed, there was a possibility that the Germans had already obtained the sunken plans. Well, if so, it was up to Nelson Lee and Nipper to recover them.

And there was not a second to be lost.

Nelson Lee was quite positive, after hearing Nipper's story, that the submarine theory was the correct one. As a matter of fact, there was no other explanation. And every second they wasted in talking lessened the prospects of foiling the foe. It would indeed be a terrible set-back if they arrived at the cavern and found that the birds had flown.

With all possible speed the famous detective hastened to the cliffs, led by Nipper, and at last, breathless and hot, they stood before the narrow opening of the outer cave.

"In you go, Nipper," panted Nelson Lee. "You've already made acquaintance with this pleasant place, so you'd better take the lead."

Nipper needed no urging. With his electric-torch flashing ahead of him, he scrambled along the damp tunnel, his master hard at his heels. They emerged into the first cavern, and Nelson Lee straightened his back with a grunt. Nipper grinned.

"You'll grunt in earnest presently, sir," he said cheerfully. "The next tunnel is a lot narrower than the one we've just passed through."

"Well, we've got to get through it," replied Nelson Lee. "No good grumbling. We can't stretch the walls."

There was no possibility of making a mistake, for the low entrance of the little passage was the only one visible on the opposite side of the cavern. Into it Nelson Lee and Nipper plunged, the former almost on his hands and knees, so confined was the space.

As they progressed, the detective found time to ponder over this amazing development which Nipper had stumbled upon. But for the boy's chance spotting of that mysterious ripple, these caves would never have been explored, and the Germans would certainly have won the game. Even as it was, Nelson Lee feared that the plans had already been recovered from their twenty-fathom deep resting-place.

"Here we are, sir," breathed Nipper.

He dropped his voice to a mere whisper, for he bore in mind how the German's voice had echoed. His own would naturally echo in the same way, and it would be sheer madness to warn the enemy at this stage.

"Mustn't speak above a faint whisper," he went on. "I'm going to shove the electric light out now, because it might give the show away. Just round the corner this passage widens into another cavern."

"Lead on, then."

In another minute the detective and his assistant were standing with their backs upright in the second huge cavern. They were in the bowels of the cliff. Yet, as they stood, perfectly still, they heard the lapping of water. That same curious gleam of subdued light dispelled the darkness at the other side of the cavern. After a few moments Nelson Lee and Nipper were even able to faintly see one another.

Sounds of movements came to their ears; then a voice, impatient and wrathful, spoke in German, the articulations echoing strangely.

"Himmel! Shall we never get the thing in order?"

"Patience, Larne," said another voice. "There is no particular hurry. That fool Armstrong has gone to London, and he won't be back yet awhile. Even then it will be at least three hours from now before the divers can descend. We have ample time to forestall them."

Nelson Lee clicked his teeth, and pressed Nipper's arm. He understood German perfectly.

"We're in time, young 'un," he breathed. "They haven't got the plans or the gun yet—and they won't if I can help it!"

"Let's creep forward and explore," suggested Nipper eagerly.

"I mean to. But we must be careful."

With the utmost caution Nelson Lee crept forward, Nipper just behind. The floor of the cavern was rough, so they had to be extremely careful. But at last they arrived at the opposite side.

Here they discovered that the screen of rocks merely concealed a larger and much loftier portion of the cavern. As Nelson Lee lifted his head over the edge of the rock wall he caught his breath in. Right below him he could see water, and he realised that the intervening rocks prevented it entering the portion of the cavern in which he and Nipper were standing.

About fifteen feet to Nelson Lee's right the water lapped on a rocky ledge, and right up the cavern, at the far end, where it was dry, an acetylene-lamp burned rather dimly. It was a motor-cycle headlamp, and it shed the light in the opposite direction to the place where Nelson Lee and Nipper were standing. It was therefore quite impossible for the two men, who were revealed by the light, to see the silent onlookers.

But Nelson Lee only glanced at the pair. His attention was wholly centred upon a dull mass of metal which projected from the black water, almost within three feet of the rock-wall.

It was the conning-tower of a submarine!

Nelson Lee felt a thrill run through him as he gazed upon it. Nipper's supposition had been correct. The German's secret was revealed. But the submarine was not a U boat. On the contrary, it was a tiny craft—a mere toy compared to the ocean-going submarines with which Germany had been pursuing her diabolical war of frightfulness on the high seas.

This little vessel, to judge from the appearance of her, would have foundered in a big sea within ten minutes. She was obviously a fair-weather boat, and had probably been dropped overside from some innocent-looking tramp steamer now hanging about the coast just below the horizon. She had been launched during the night, Nelson Lee shrewdly concluded, and would be taken on board again, her mission accomplished, when darkness fell again. Such a programme could have been carried out easily, for the parent ship would certainly be flying the British or a neutral flag.

How the little submarine had entered this retreat in the bowels of the cliff was a remarkable problem. But she was there, and it was quite obvious

that the entrance to the cavern from the sea was fairly large, or the Germans would never have risked entering. It seemed to Nelson Lee that there must be a huge submerged channel in the cliffs. With extreme caution the submarine must have worked her way along this until at last she was in the cavern.

Once there, she was probably only a few feet from the surface, and simply rose without difficulty. By whatever means the vessel had got there, however, the detective was quite sure that the Germans had made exhaustive exploration in the Peggley cliffs long before the launch had been wrecked. Without any delay whatever, the enemy had got a submarine on the spot and had hidden her in a perfect natural harbour.

Nelson Lee suspected that the man Swan had attacked Armstrong on the launch with the specific object of wrecking it, in order that the submarine might obtain the plans without fear of detection. On the other hand, it might merely have been an accident. If so, then the Germans had been amazingly quick in carrying out their plan of action.

The detective's thoughts were interrupted by Nipper, who nudged his arm.

"Wonder how many of the beggars there are, sir?" he whispered tensely.

"Well, there are only two in sight at present," replied Nelson Lee, with his mouth close to Nipper's ear. "But we mustn't talk, my lad. Even a whisper echoes in this place!"

Nipper froze up, and remained watching the proceedings with fast-beating heart. He had no idea what his master intended doing, and, as a matter of fact, Nelson Lee himself had formulated no plan of action so far.

He could see that Larne and the other man—probably it was Swan, who was supposed to be dead—were busily preparing a diving-suit. This was no ordinary diver's dress, for it was self-contained, with no air-pipes or life-line. The diver simply walked about free and untrammelled, and he obtained his air supply from a contrivance which was affixed to his back. As Nelson Lee watched, he knew that suit was to be used very shortly in order to search the wreck of the Blunderer.

Larne was working hard at the air apparatus, and had apparently nearly finished. He looked round in the radius of the acetylene lamp.

"Where's the spanner?" he growled. "You left it in the boat—didn't you, Swan?"

Nelson Lee gave Nipper a significant look, but said nothing. Their suspicions were correct. Swan was alive, and actually facing them.

"I thought the spanner was out here," replied Swan briefly. "Still, I'll go and fetch it, if you like. I'm rather uneasy about that leak in the ballast-tank, too. I don't like leaving the submarine by itself for too long."

"Ach, you're nervous!" said Larne lightly. "Are you afraid of the leak becoming larger and the submarine sinking, and leaving us imprisoned in this dismal cave? The leak's nothing, man!"

Swan laughed a little, and came striding down the cavern towards Nelson Lee and Nipper. They dogged down behind the rock, and heard Swan entering the submarine. He came up in a few minutes, leapt from the tiny deck to the rocks, and rejoined his companion.

"These Englishers make me smile!" he chuckled, throwing the spanner to Larne. "First of all I tricked Armstrong into believing that I was dead without the slightest difficulty. And now that hopeless duffer, Nelson Lee, is waiting about Peggley for something to happen while we're quietly and easily getting to work. In two hours, my friend, the plans will be in our hands and our mission will be accomplished. Ach, these British are a nation of fools!"

"I'll bet you'll shove on another record before long!" growled Nipper,

Nipper, under his breath. "So the gov'nor's a silly old duffer, is he? I say, sir, ain't you going to knock the two beggars to Jericho?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That would be rather drastic, Nipper," he answered softly. "I'm exceedingly pleased to hear the gentleman's opinion of me. If they consider that I'm a duffer, they won't be on their guard, will they? They'd be very surprised to know that two of the fool Englanders had been watching them and listening to their conversation for ten minutes past. We've got the advantage, Nipper, and we mustn't lose it by doing anything rash."

"Well, what's the next move, sir?"

Nelson Lee looked grim.

"I have just learned a very interesting piece of information, young 'un," he breathed. "These two men are the sole crew of this submarine. We know that the boat is lying there without a soul on board. Well, don't you think it would be easy to slip down that manhole into the interior of the vessel?"

"Easy as winking, sir!" replied Nipper. "But what's the idea? The blessed place is a trap if Larno or Swan come along afterwards."

"There are no 'ifs' about it, Nipper," said the detective quietly. "We've got to delay those scoundrels, and, although I think both you and I are not lacking in pluck, I'm not exactly hankering after an open encounter with the brutes. I don't relish a scrap."

"Why not, sir?" asked Nipper in surprise. "Surely it would be better to deal with the rotters straight away?"

"Granted, my lad! But I have a shrewd idea that we should be dealt with ourselves," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "Of course, we could level our revolvers this very minute and drop both the scoundrels where they stand, but that isn't the British way. It's too cold-blooded for white men. Suppose we clamber over these rocks and attempt to get near enough to fight them fist for fist? What would be the result?"

"Why, we should wipe them up!" replied Nipper promptly.

"I'm afraid you don't realise the difficulties of the situation," went on Nelson Lee. "To begin with, we should be detected long before we reached firm ground, and we should have no chance whatever of getting close. Two revolvers would spit out death, and we should not have a dog's chance. Don't forget these men are our country's enemies, and at the slightest prospect of capture they'll shoot—and shoot to kill. It's not murder to them. The slaughtering of babies, the vile killing of hundreds of helpless people in the Lusitania, was not murder to the Germans."

"Larno and Swan would show no mercy. They would catch at us at a disadvantage, and we should be done. On the other hand, even if we succeeded in reaching firm ground, these fiendish villains are probably provided with other weapons. We don't know. They drugged you with a deadly gas, Nipper, and they may have something of a similar nature ready for instant use. No; we can't risk an open encounter."

"Then what shall we do, sir?"

"We shall do nothing, Nipper," replied the famous detective quietly. "You will remain here whilst I go forth on a little venture. I think there will be scarcely any risk if I make haste. So I don't intend to stop here talking another minute."

"What are you going to do?" asked Nipper anxiously.

"I'm simply going to slip into the submarine and do the greatest amount of harm possible in the smallest space of time possible. Then I am going to steal out again and rejoin you, my lad. When the Germans attempt to set off on their mission of robbery, they'll find that their game is knocked on the head at the outset."

Nipper looked dubious.

"Goodness!" he murmured. "I don't half like the look of it, sir! Suppose one of the rotters——"

"We'll suppose nothing, Nipper!" interjected Nelson Lee curtly. "Don't forget the tremendous issues at stake. For all we know, the next five minutes may prevent a national disaster, for if this gun is as valuable as Armstrong makes it out to be, it would be indeed a national disaster to let the secret fall into Germany's hands. Wait here until I return!"

Nipper started speaking, but his master gave him no chance to complete the utterance. Nipper, indeed, was decidedly ill at ease. Although Nelson Lee had made light of it, the youngster knew quite well that the detective's task was one fraught with danger and terrible risk.

"Yet it was the only thing to do," thought Nipper. "It's now or never! If these blessed Huns once get away in their rotten submarine, it's good-bye to Armstrong's plans. They'd be at the scene of the wreck in ten minutes, and by the time the Government divers went down the job would be done and the enemy clear away."

He watched anxiously, one eye on Nelson Lee and the other on the Germans, still busy with the diving-suit. They had no suspicion that anything was wrong, for they were laughing and talking cheerfully.

Nelson Lee slid quietly on to the deck of the submarine, and a second later disappeared into the narrow opening of the conning-tower.

"Now for it!" murmured Nipper. "If these brutes make a move now, it'll be all U P with the guv'nor!"

Almost as though in answer, Larne straightened his back and looked at his companion.

"It is done!" he announced grimly. "The time is getting on, Swan, and we must make haste. Don't forget that Armstrong may be even now back from London with the replacements."

"I am ready," said Swan at once. "There is nothing out here except the suit and a few tools. We have already prepared the submarine for instant departure. We will go at once, my friend. Himmel, we are getting on magnificently! Within an hour our great mission will be accomplished!"

The Germans gathered up their tools and the diving-dress, and came walking down the rocky cavern, Larne carrying the lamp.

Nipper dodged down out of sight. Needless to say, he was utterly dismayed at the startling turn events had taken. Nelson Lee had left it until too late! The spies would be aboard the tiny submarine before he could make his exit!

"Good heavens!" gasped Nipper to himself. "The guv'nor will be caught like a rat in a trap!"

The lad stood hidden by the wall of rock, frozen with horror and anxiety. He realised that there was no way out of the difficulty for Nelson Lee, whatever happened. If the Germans entered the boat, he would be discovered and almost certainly murdered, and if he appeared now the spies would make no hash of the matter. Two revolvers would be jerked out, and two spurts of flame would rip the air. Then Nelson Lee would be no more.

What could Nipper do, alone, to help his master? A dozen hasty plans flashed through his mind, but before he could make any decision whatever all prospect of rendering assistance to the trapped detective was lost, for, upon peeping up cautiously, he saw that Larne had disappeared down the little manhole and that Swan was even then in the act of following. A minute later both the Germans had disappeared, and Nipper stood upright, and gazed at the submarine blankly, with his heart beating a wild tattoo against his ribs.

Every moment he expected to hear the dull report of a revolver. Every

moment he expected to see the spies reappear with Nelson Lee's lifeless body. But nothing happened—nothing of that nature, at all events. On the contrary, he heard the air-tight cover of the manhole being screwed up; then, while he was still watching and waiting, the tiny submersible boat slowly and steadily sank from view. Only a little swirl remained upon the surface of the dark water.

Nipper seemed stunned. The submarine had gone, and Nelson Lee was within its steel walls. Was he dead? Had he been discovered and killed?

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper, aghast. "The poor old guv'nor's done for! I'll bet a quid I know what those brutes are going to do! They've knocked the guv'nor on the head, and when they fill the water-tight compartment for the diver to venture out, they're going to shove Mr. Lee out as well, with weights tied to him to hold him down. He'll lie at the bottom of the sea, and——"

But Nipper checked his awful thoughts with a shudder. It was too horrible to contemplate. Pale as death, and almost sobbing with grief, he nevertheless realised the importance of instant action. Putting aside all his own personal feelings, he knew that the most important thing of all was to prevent the Germans succeeding in their well-laid scheme. No good would come of remaining in the cavern bemoaning the possible fate that had overtaken his master. And prompt action, too, would help to clear his brain and drive the dumb misery from his mind.

Choking back a sob, Nipper switched on his electric torch and then hastened through the wet and slimy tunnels to the open air, stumbling, slipping, bruising himself, and tearing his skin.

At last he stood under the open sky, and he was almost blinded with the glare, after having been so long in the comparative darkness. With every ounce of speed possible, he dashed away, and ran with despair-driven pace to Peggley. Almost the first person he saw was Lieutenant Armstrong himself, looking pleased with himself.

"Hallo, Nipper!" he called cheerily. "We sha'n't be long now, my lad! I've been looking for you and Mr. Lee. I've got the new apparatus, and Adams says that they'll be able to go down within half-an-hour. He—Great Scott! What is the matter?"

Nipper grabbed at Armstrong's coat, and sobbed for breath.

"What is it?" demanded Armstrong urgently, realising that something serious was amiss.

"The guv'nor!" gasped Nipper. "He's finished!"

"Finished!" echoed Armstrong. "What do you mean? Pull yourself together, Nipper, and explain."

Nipper, with an effort, calmed himself. Then, speaking in short, breathless sentences, he poured forth his story. The lieutenant listened with a grave, troubled face.

"Phew! Things are serious!" he said blankly. "It's all up with Mr. Lee by this time, for certain."

"Oh, the brutes—the fiends!" sobbed Nipper.

"Come, come, be brave, young 'un!" said Armstrong sharply. "We never know—Mr. Lee may have scraped out of his fix somehow."

"I've no hope—no hope at all!" groaned Nipper. "Oh, what a fool the guv'nor was to venture into the rotten submarine——"

"The submarine!" interjected Armstrong, with a sudden start. "You say it set out for the scene of the wreck—to rob the sunken Blunderer? Great Scott! What fools we are to be wasting time here! Come, we must rush to the bay! Adams and his men have already gone!"

Within three minutes Armstrong and the nearly distracted Nipper were in the former's waiting motor-car, speeding to Peggley Bay. When they

arrived they found that the divers were already aboard the tug, making active preparations for an immediate descent. Armstrong and Nipper walked down the beach, and were rowed out to the tug. By the time they stepped on her weather-stained deck a diver was even then clambering heavily overside. He disappeared below the surface, leaving a string of bubbles on the water.

The next twenty minutes were anxious ones, but at last the diver signalled to be pulled up.

"Well?" said Armstrong anxiously, when the ponderous headgear had been removed, and the man had taken a deep breath of fresh air. "Well, what did you find there?"

The diver's answer was short and to the point.

"Nothing, sir," he said. "The launch is lying almost upright, and I searched her without difficulty. The model gun and the air-tight metal box are not aboard, sir."

Armstrong uttered a hoarse cry.

"Are you sure, man?" he shouted frenziedly.

"Positive, sir," answered the diver. "There's only one cabin, and I wasn't likely to make a mistake."

"Then—then those awful Huns have nicked the plans after all!" said Nipper dully. "Oh, this is the last straw! The gov'nor as good as dead, and the plans stolen!"

The lieutenant swore furiously.

"Poiled!" he raved. "By heavens, I'm not done yet, Nipper! I'll not throw up the sponge at this stage. If it's within the power of human beings, we'll recover those plans and avenge the death of your master."

But Nelson Lee wasn't dead—as a matter of fact, he had never been more alive in all his existence; and his enemies were by no means left in ignorance of that fact!



CHAPTER VIII.

The Fight in the Submarine.

WHEN Nelson Lee squeezed himself down into the interior of the tiny submarine boat, he had no suspicion of the exciting events which were to take place before he saw the welcome light of Old Sol again.

It was extremely dark, so he turned his electric-torch to the floor and switched it on. He found himself in a tiny apartment, which was evidently a look-out room. In one corner—indeed, almost filling up half the space—an iron ladder led downwards into the body of the boat.

Nelson Lee swiftly descended, and found himself in the chief compartment of the submarine. It was the engine-room, and also the place from where the boat was controlled and steered. In the forepart was the periscope, the steering-wheel, and various levers and dials, the meanings and uses of which were quite unknown to the detective. He had several times been inside an ordinary British naval submarine; but this vessel was a mere toy in comparison.

"H'm!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Not much room to swing a cat round in here! I expect this apartment is over half the entire vessel—the remainder being ballast-tanks and a watertight compartment for the purpose of leaving and re-entering the boat when it is lying on the ocean bed. Well, I'd better buck up, or I shall find myself in a tidy hole!"

He turned his attention to the engines. These were of a type with which

he was totally unacquainted—probably some German invention, which had been kept absolutely secret. But the detective was not there to discover things; he was there for destruction.

And with this object in view he picked up a hammer, which lay on the greasy, steel floor, and bent over the delicate machinery.

Then, even as he raised his arm to strike, the submarine swayed slightly, and a clang of a heavy boot striking metal reached his ears. For a second Nelson Lee turned pale.

Larne and Swan were entering the boat!

"By Jove, trapped!" murmured the detective between his teeth. "Well, if I've got to die, I'll make it jolly hot for these brutes before I go under."

And he whipped out his revolver and gave a hasty glance round. The light from the torch flashed upon a large, black piece of water-proofing, which hung from a hook at the aft quarter of the apartment. Probably it was the dust-cover for the engines, when the vessel was not in use. Whatever its purpose, however, an idea instantly flashed into Nelson Lee's fertile brain.

Without hesitating a second—for hesitation would have spelled death—he crossed silently to the dust-cover and crouched behind it. He found that it hung in loose folds, and there was ample room for him to stand hidden without the outline of his form showing.

But, at the same time, Nelson Lee practically gave up hope of getting out alive. He was hopelessly trapped, and the only thing he could do now was to frustrate the Germans. Well, he was serving his King and Country, and if he took the two spies with him into the Great Beyond he would have done well.

These thoughts, however, didn't remain long in his head. His mind was soon busy in another direction: he was keenly interested in what was going on, and mentally decided to seize the first opportunity of foiling the enemy. And, above all, one thought throbbed through his brain—he wanted to live! He wanted to come out of this triumphantly, successfully.

But how could he?

What about the odds? Weren't they all against him? But Nelson Lee had fought against long odds scores of times, and his pluck, ingenuity and strength had always won the day. He didn't throw up the sponge by any means.

The engine-room suddenly became flooded with light, and Nelson Lee knew that within the next few moments his fate would be decided. It was quite possible that he would be spotted at once. But, on the other hand, he certainly stood a sporting chance of remaining undetected behind the water-proofing. Luck was certainly in his favour, there was absolutely no doubt about that. The engine-room of a submarine—and, moreover, a very small submarine—was hardly the place for a man to hide. And yet here he was, more by chance than anything else, hidden from the enemy.

The lights were brilliant, but the detective made no attempt whatever to peep out from his cover. He knew that to do so would mean instant detection. The slightest movement, in fact, might end fatally. But, so far, he was on the right side, and he had no intention of betraying himself.

"We shall have to go carefully here, Larne," came Swan's voice in German. "This channel is confoundedly narrow, and we don't want to spoil all our plans by getting wrecked now."

The other man laughed.

"Nonsense!" he said briskly. "Even if we did scrape against the rocks we should do ourselves no damage. Once we get out in the open sea we can make up for the time we lose now."

A minute later Nelson Lee heard the engines humming musically, and a

short while after that he felt the movements of the little boat as it slipped silently from its retreat in the cliffs. Once there was a sharp grating sound, and Larne swore furiously. But apparently everything was all right, for there was no delay, and presently Nelson Lee heard that the channel had been negotiated in safety.

This was evident, for the engines increased their hum, and the whole steel shell quivered with life. Exactly how long it lasted Nelson Lee did not know, but after a considerable time the engines ceased their throbbing, and a slight bump announced the fact that the little vessel had touched bottom. A door clanged, and then there was complete silence. Yet, although Nelson Lee knew that he was alone, he made no attempt to move, for one of his enemies might return at any second, and he remained undetected for so long now that he had already formed a plan which might possibly lead to triumph.

A sound of rushing water told him that the water-tight compartment was being filled. Either Larne or Swan was about to make his exit in the diving suit, and ten minutes later Nelson Lee was positive that he was alone in the boat with one man. The other had gone on his rascally errand. And yet Nelson Lee still remained inactive. He knew quite well that he could come forth and overpower his single foe. But it wasn't the detective's way to act hastily, and he knew that even if he were successful he would not be able to raise the submarine to the surface, for he was quite ignorant of its control. The German, he was sure, would rather die for the Fatherland than admit defeat. So Nelson Lee was patient and awaited his time.

It was galling enough, but there was no help for it. Fully half-an-hour passed before he heard a pumping sound, and shortly after that a thunderous footstep on the iron plates announced the return of the diver. It was evident that Swan had made the journey, for the two entered the engine room and Larne uttered a chuckle of triumph.

"You have been successful, eh?" he exclaimed quickly. "The gun and the plans are with us, my friend. Those fools of Englanders will receive a shock when they send divers to the wrecked launch."

And Larne laughed joyfully. Nelson Lee, in his hiding-place, set his teeth grimly.

"Don't laugh too soon, my friend!" he murmured. "Perhaps you'll be the one who'll receive a surprise before so very long. You've been successful so far, but it's really all the better. By Jove, if I can only work out the plan I've got in mind!"

Nelson Lee was feeling jubilant now, for he saw a distinct possibility of the tables being turned if luck would only take his side. Once the little vessel was upon the surface again he intended to spring out, and before the Germans could recover from their surprise he would be able to deal with the pair of them. That was his plan.

But plans don't always work.

Nelson Lee was not going to have things so easy.

He heard Larne and Swan talking and chuckling over their triumph, and then the latter announced that they would rise to the surface and speed seawards. The engines recommenced working, and after a time there was a change in the throb.

"Under the sky once more!" exclaimed Swan. "And now for the last act, friend Larne. We have been successful all along the line."

"Where's the oil-can?" asked Larne abruptly. "This bearing is running hot, and—"

"It's behind the cover!" exclaimed the other. "I will fetch it."

Nelson Lee had one second to prepare himself. He knew that the oil-can was going to betray him, for his back had been pressing against it all the

time. The next moment the waterproof sheet was thrust aside, and Swan uttered a hoarse cry. But before he could move Nelson Lee's fist crashed into his face, and he staggered back drunkenly.

Nelson Lee's gaze swept round the little apartment, and saw that Larne was at the steering-wheel, now looking over his shoulder with a frightened and startled face.

"Ach, Himmel!" he grated furiously. "A spy! By thunder, Nelson Lee!"

The detective sprang forward.

"Yes, Nelson Lee!" he cried. "Come on, you brutes! I'm ready for you!"

He gripped his revolver by the barrel and lunged forward. But even as he was in the act of doing so, Swan leapt at him, whirling a heavy spanner aloft. Had that deadly weapon descended, Nelson Lee's brains would have been scattered. But fate took a hand in the game, and allied itself in the favour of the great detective.

For Swan's foot suddenly skidded on the slippery, oily steel floor, and before he could recover his balance he crashed down backwards, and his head struck a projecting bolt with a dull, sickening thud. He lay as still as a dead man, and without hesitating a second Nelson Lee turned his attention to Larne. Not a second did he delay, for chance had given him the advantage in the unequal fight.

He saw that Larne had felt hastily in his hip-pocket, and a revolver was in his grasp. One second more and it would spit death at him. But that second was not allowed to elapse. Nelson Lee was too far off to come to blows—indeed, the engine, running smoothly, was between the two men. So Nelson Lee did the only thing possible in the circumstances. He had his own revolver by the barrel, and there wasn't even time to jerk it round and level it. So he flung it, with all his strength, straight at Larne's fury-distorted face. The movement took the German completely by surprise, and before he could dodge the heavy revolver struck him between the eyes, gashing his forehead. He collapsed, and Nelson Lee sprang round and grabbed up a strap that was lying on the floor. Larne was only dazed by the blow, and Nelson Lee had no wish to engage in a fierce struggle in such confined quarters. So he swiftly secured the man's ankles, and then whipped his handkerchief round Larne's wrists.

"By Jove!" he panted triumphantly. "What luck! What stunning, glorious luck! I've downed the pair of them!"

"Hang you!" snarled Larne drunkenly in English. "You cur! You —"

"It is hardly a wise proceeding to abuse me," said Nelson Lee coolly, calmly brushing his clothes. "I have beaten you all along the line. But curse away if you wish to—a Britisher does not take advantage of a helpless foe!"

Larne was too furious and in too much pain to reply. He simply grated his teeth and lay back on the cold steel plates. A slight movement from Swan warned the detective that he, too, would be safer pinioned. Nelson Lee was well provided for the occasion, and produced from one of his pockets two lengths of strong cord. Indeed, he always made a practice of carrying such material about with him. The wisdom of such a practice was very much in evidence now.

Nelson Lee did his work thoroughly, for luck had favoured him so much that he had no intention of being under-dog now. He bound Swan hand and foot, and then made Larne's bonds absolutely secure.

By this time both men had recovered their wits, and Nelson Lee smiled grimly as they sat propped against the steel wall, side by side.

Swan—or Schwann, to give him his real name—cursed furiously in German, and tenderly rubbed the back of his head.

"A nasty crack, eh?" said Nelson Lee calmly. "It was lucky for me, my worthy spy, that you had that unfortunate side-slip. I have got the upper hand now—and it was really good of you to take all that trouble in getting the model gun and the plans from the wreck for my benefit."

"You—you infernal meddler!" snarled Schwann. "Do not crow too soon! For the moment you are successful—but you are helpless!"

"Indeed!" said Nelson Lee evenly.

"As helpless as the babes our Zeppelins have wiped off the face of this accursed country" went on the German with set teeth. "Only Larne and I know how to control this boat; and you can do nothing!"

Nelson Lee smiled amusedly.

"On the contrary," he remarked, "I can—and shall—steer straight for the shore. I shall control the boat——"

"You understand it, then?"

"By no means."

"Then how can you control it?" demanded Schwann grimly.

"Either you or your cheerful companion will give me directions," replied the detective coolly.

"Never!" cried Larne. "We will utter no sound, you dog! If you wish to control the boat you will have to find out for yourself how to do it!"

Nelson Lee's jaw set a little more firmly. He knew quite well that if he meddled with the mechanism he would probably do some vital damage. Yet, if the Germans would not direct him, what could he do? He had a suspicion that the spies were bluffing—that they wished to force him to release one of them. So he acted promptly.

"Very well," he said, "I will pull this lever and await events. If death follows I shall have the satisfaction of taking you with me!"

The motors were stopped; but as Nelson Lee pulled the lever over something clicked and the little boat quivered with life. Then it tilted alarmingly, and the detective felt an empty sensation at the pit of his stomach.

A dull roar sounded in the submarine, and Nelson Lee was forced to cling to the rail surrounding the engines for support. He gazed at a dial, and saw that the indicator was moving swiftly and steadily. It was registering figures—30, 40, 50—

At an appalling rate the submarine was diving to destruction!

CHAPTER IX.

Ashore—The Tables Turned

DOWN—down—down!

Nelson Lee realised that the next ten seconds would decide the fate of himself and his two helpless companions. For, unless the vessel was checked, it would strike the ocean bed with such violence that the steel plate would rip open and— Well, death would be merely a matter of a few moments.

But Larne and Schwann were gazing at one another with pale, terrified faces. They had no wish to die, and the latter uttered a hoarse shout.

"You fool!" he yelled. "You will kill us all! Listen—I will tell you what to do!"

"Go ahead!" said Nelson Lee crisply.

The directions were given, and the detective obeyed them on the instant. Immediately the submarine answered her control and gave a lurch that well-nigh knocked Nelson Lee off his feet. But the vessel was on an even keel now; and presently, as other directions were given, she commenced rising. At last she was upon the surface, and rolled lazily in the gentle swell.

"Now for the shore!" exclaimed Nelson Lee briskly. "What's the good of blinking the facts, my friends? You're helpless, and you may as well resign yourselves to Fate."

"Yes; you have beaten us, hang you," said Schwann sullenly. "If you turn that brass switch——"

And he instructed the detective how to set the submarine in motion. She was soon gliding swiftly along. Gazing into the periscope Nelson Lee took the steering wheel and saw that the boat was making straight for the stony beach near Peggley. She had been quite close to the shore during the exciting happenings of the last twenty minutes.

Larne and Schwann were talking together in low tones—so low that Nelson Lee could not hear what they were saying. Not that he cared particularly, for he had only to moor the submarine near the shore and wait for Armstrong or Nipper to row out, and then the two Germans would be instantly arrested.

But, astute as the detective was, he could not guess what was working in the mind of his helpless foes. He did not know that they had made arrangements beforehand with their fellow-spy, Cooke; he did not know that Cooke was waiting with a companion in a cleft in the cliffs, watching the sea through binoculars.

Schwann knew quite well that the odds were all against him. In all probability he was doomed. But there was one chance—one single loophole of escape—and he meant to risk everything.

If he and Larne were handed over to the police, a court-martial would follow and they would be condemned to death as spies. So if he finished it all now it would not matter much—and Nelson Lee, anyhow, would die with him.

At last the detective uttered the words which Schwann had been expecting.

"We are getting close to the beach," said Nelson Lee. "How shall I stop the boat?"

Schwann looked up sullenly.

"You see the lever with the brass knob—the one you moved before?" he said. "Push that right back—hard—and the motors will stop."

Nelson Lee obeyed the directions without hesitation. Instantly, however, the hum of the engine rose to a shrill, and the vessel leapt forward.

"We are going faster!" ejaculated the detective sharply.

Schwann chuckled harshly.

"Exactly!" he grated. "And in less than one minute we shall be dashed on to the rocky beach! Larne and I are booked in any case—and you will join us!"

"You infernal rogue!" roared Nelson Lee.

He wrenched at the lever, in order to pull it over again; but it had locked itself, and would not budge. Schwann knew how to release it, but he remained silent. Nelson Lee gazed into the periscope with startled eyes—and saw, to his horror, that the beach was right ahead, within fifty yards!

"By Jove, tricked!" he exclaimed hotly. "We shall dash on to the

rocks and then slide back into the deep water and be caught like rats

He was interrupted by a hideous, tearing crash. Still looking into the periscope, he was even then in the act of whirling the steering-wheel round in an attempt to swing the boat round to safety. But there was no time. The submarine seemed to leap upwards, and her very vitals were apparently being torn out.

Crash—Crash!

Abruptly, with a final rear, she came to a stop. So suddenly, in fact, that Nelson Lee was pitched forward with terrific force. His head struck the steel plates, and he sank into a heap, partially stunned.

Larne and Schwann, close to the steel wall, felt the effect of the shock, but only enough to send them rolling over, bruised and shaken. They were helpless, of course, and saw that the submarine was lying all sideways, for their end of the engine-room was much higher than the other.

A sound of rushing water filled the air, and presently the foaming sea entered the apartment and washed angrily along the lower half of the engine-room.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Larne, in a startled voice. "The plates are ripped open, and we shall be drowned!"

"Even so, it is better to die now, than to be shot by these accursed Englanders," said the other curtly. "And this detective, this Nelson Lee, will die with us—that is some consolation."

"Consolation!" shouted Larne. "I want to live! What have we done our work for—why have we risked our lives for the Fatherland in order to get Armstrong's valuable plans? To die here, like dogs in a ditch? At the moment of success we——"

"Hush!" interrupted Schwann. "I hear something!"

As a matter of fact there was scarcely anything else to be heard but the water as it roared into the engine-room, most of it coming through some burst plates in the flooring. But there was another sound—the sound of someone moving on the deck. And before the pair had any time to express an opinion, the door was flung open with a clang, and a man appeared, looking startled and anxious.

"Cooke!" ejaculated Schwann joyously. "Ach, it is good you have come, my friend. By the powers, we shall succeed yet!"

"What has happened?" asked Cooke pantingly. "I and Fritz saw the submarine dashed ashore. We were astounded—our hearts were filled with fear. Who is this man——"

"Ask no questions!" said Schwann curtly. "Release us, and then bind this British fool before he can do any damage. It is well that you were on the look-out, Cooke. You have delivered us when failure seemed certain."

Swiftly Cooke released his two countrymen, and then Nelson Lee, who was rapidly recovering his senses, was roughly bound and flung down. Everything was done at express speed—otherwise the detective would probably have been murdered in cold blood and left. But the Germans only thought of escape, and they hastily bound Nelson Lee to prevent him following.

The detective was simply dumb with fury. Just when he had been on the verge of victory the tables were turned, and it was he who was now suffering from defeat. A sheer stroke of luck had swayed the grim game in favour of the enemy, and he realised that they were now making a bold bid for liberty. Their original plan had hopelessly failed—he had seen to that—but there was a distinct possibility of their getting clear away even now, unless they were instantly followed—and followed quickly.

"By Jove!" muttered the great detective huskily. "What a situation! Oh, if only Nipper were somewhere handy!"

If Nelson Lee had only known it, Nipper was very close even at that moment. For, when the submarine had been dashing along for the shore, Nipper and Lieutenant Armstrong were striding along the cliff top, gazing down to the sea every now and then in the hope of catching a glimpse of the submarine.

"It's no good, young 'un," said Armstrong hopelessly. "Your master is dead by this time—what's the good of us building up false hopes? He was trapped in that submarine, and by this time——"

"I don't believe the gov'nor's dead!" said Nipper, in a hollow voice. "I can't believe it! It's too awful. Why, what—— Look! Look out there, lieutenant!" he added, his voice rising shrill with excitement.

"Look where?" asked Armstrong, startled by Nipper's urgent tone.

"Down there!" replied the lad. "It's the submarine! She's making straight for the shore at full speed."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the lieutenant, halting by Nipper's side. "I can see it now, young 'un! By heavens, they'll bust themselves to smithereens if they're not careful!"

The pair watched eagerly, excitedly.

The submarine was well out of the water. Her conning-tower and periscope showed plainly, a tiny, swiftly moving speck upon the calm water. A line of foam streaked out behind, and the little vessel in no way slackened her pace as she drew nearer and nearer to the rough beach.

Armstrong dropped his cigarette in his agitation.

"They're booked for a smash!" he said grimly. "And a heap big smash, too! There's no time to turn even if they wish to, and she's still going full speed. I reckon they've lost control of the blessed thing!"

"Or else the gov'nor's still alive and he's doing it on purpose to wreck it," said Nipper tensely, wild hopes surging through his breast. "Oh, what do you think, Mr. Armstrong? Just fancy the gov'nor being alive after we've given him up——"

"There she goes!" interjected Armstrong. "By glory, that was a little bump, and no mistake!"

Before their eyes the submarine seemed to leap from the water, and the crash came distinctly to their ears, although they were a considerable distance along the cliff, and right at the top. The submarine lurched over drunkenly, and then wallowed in about six feet of water close to the shore, practically the whole of her sleek grey body showing.

Without a word, and without hesitation, both Armstrong and Nipper commenced racing back, away from the submarine. They knew that there was no path down further ahead, for the cliffs were sheer all along, and about a mile further on the water lapped their base. But by retracing their steps, they soon came to a place where they could scramble down to the beach.

It was while they were undertaking this detour that Cooke and his companion entered the submarine and rescued their fellow spies. And when the naval officer and his young companion rounded a jagged spur of rocks, they caught a glimpse of four figures hastening up the beach, one of them carrying something which seemed to be of considerable weight.

"It's the model gun!" panted Armstrong furiously. "By heavens, we must be quick, Nipper! What's happened? I see no sign of Mr. Lee!"

Nipper set his teeth firmly and raced as he had never raced before in his life. Armstrong kept up the pace without difficulty and at last they arrived at the scene of the wreck.

Not another soul was near the spot, for it was secluded and out of vision

of all houses. Probably nobody else had witnessed the occurrence. The submarine lay out in the shallow water silent and forlorn, and seemingly deserted.

"We'll go after those Germans!" began Armstrong, but Nipper interrupted.

"Wait!" exclaimed the lad tensely. "We'll make sure about the guv'nor before we go a step!"

Without waiting for the lieutenant to reply Nipper plunged into the water and waded out to the wrecked submersible. After a second's hesitation Armstrong followed, and they clambered aboard together.

Nipper was first down, and he literally dropped headlong into the engine-room, which was well awash. Strangely enough at least half of the electric lights were still burning, and Nipper uttered a joyful cry as he spotted his master.

"By Jove, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee coolly. "I was just thinking of you. You've turned up at the very moment I needed you. Good lad!"

"You're alive, sir!" gasped Nipper with a great gulp. "Oh, how ripping! Hooray!"

CHAPTER X

A Stern Chase,

NELSON LEE stood upright, and the water dripped from him copiously, for he had been lying almost submerged when Nipper burst into the engine-room. But although he was not exactly comfortable in wet clothes, the cold sea water had had the effect of restoring his wits and making him alert and active. Nipper stood watching his master with an excited face.

"You're alive, sir!" he repeated. "Oh, guv'nor, how the dickens did you manage it? I thought you'd been and done it this time, absolutely. Somehow, even now I can't believe that you ain't dead!"

Nelson Lee shook himself.

"I assure you, Nipper," he said calmly, "I never felt less like a dead man in my life. Those German scoundrels have beaten me at the post, as it were; but I haven't given up hope of winning the game even now. Everything depends upon speed. We must give chase without a second's loss of time."

And a few minutes later Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Armstrong were hastening up the beach. It was necessary to climb up the cliffs, but they were not steep here, and it was a comparatively easy task. When they arrived at the top they gazed round them hastily, but nobody was in sight except a small boy. But even such an unimportant person as a small boy was a welcome spectacle just then.

"Hi, my lad!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Did four men come up this way just now?"

The boy ran nearer.

"They come up not five minutes ago, master," he announced. "Lor', what's happened? I saw that boat come ashore——"

"Never mind the boat!" interrupted Nelson Lee, slipping a shilling into the lad's hand. "Which way did those four men go?"

"Why, they made for that there wood yonder," replied the boy, pointing to a thick clump of trees in the far distance. "They didn't go very quick, neither, because one of them was carrying somethin' 'envy."

Armstrong looked round him.

"We are not far from the village here," he said. "The best thing we

can do is to rush there and get into my car. We can do that in the same amount of time as we should occupy in getting to the wood."

"A good suggestion," Nelson Lee agreed. "But there is no necessity for all to go, my dear fellow. I and Nipper will hasten onwards while you fetch the car. We shall not miss one another, because you will find us at the wood when you arrive."

They separated accordingly, and Nipper and his master set off without a word. It was proving to be one of the most strenuous afternoons the famous detective had ever gone through. But he was like a bloodhound on the scent now. He had been foiled just when victory was within his grasp, and he meant, at all costs, to be the victor in the end.

Nipper was simply bubbling over with enthusiasm. Out of the depths of despondency and misery he had been lifted to the highest ecstasy of delight. His master was alive! Nipper felt, to use his own expression, that he could have pushed a blessed tram over!

Nelson Lee's face was grimly set as he hurried across field and meadow to the spinney the country boy had pointed out. The distance was done in record time, and when the detective arrived he cautioned Nipper to be careful. They went forward on the alert for any sign of the enemy. Quite suddenly the whir of a motor-car sounded behind a thick hedge, as though the engine had just been started.

"That can't be Armstrong," ejaculated Nelson Lee. "By Jove, I wonder——"

But there was no time for wonder. He dashed forward, Nipper at his heels, and they burst through the hedge just in time to see the rear view of a motor-car rounding a bend. In that one glimpse the detective's keen eyes recognised Larno and Schwann looking back from the tonneau.

"Too late again!" rapped out Nelson Lee. "Never mind, Nipper. We're on the track—the scoundrels haven't got so far as I expected. We're in luck, for that green car won't be difficult to follow."

Nipper grunted.

"We can't run after the rotten thing on foot, sir," he exclaimed impatiently. "Why the dickens doesn't Armstrong come?"

"Give him time, Nipper—give him time."

They stamped about the road impatiently, watching a distant bend in the direction of Peggley, round which Armstrong's car would have to swing. Nelson Lee was meditating upon the completeness of the Germans' plans. They had prepared themselves for any emergency. Their motor-car had evidently been waiting in the spinney should its services by any means be required. As events had turned out, the automobile had been the means of providing a last desperate bid for liberty on the part of the spies.

Nelson Lee could think of no way in which they could get clear away, for if he failed to catch them himself he would take steps to have every town diligently watched. But he was well acquainted with German cunning, and so was prepared for some unexpected development. Indeed, if the enemy once got clear away at this juncture they might, possibly, disappear for ever, model gun, plans and all. Therefore the necessity for immediate chase was vitally urgent.

"Here he is, sir!" yelled Nipper excitedly.

"Eh?" said Nelson Lee. "Oh, Armstrong! Good business!"

The lieutenant's powerful car came roaring up, and Armstrong looked eager as he pulled up.

"Seen any sign of 'em?" he asked.

"Rather!" answered Nipper. "They're ahead in another car. We're going to run them to earth—so you've got to travel like the very dickens, and let all the speed-limits and police-traps go to Jericho!"

"I'm a pretty good driver," said the lieutenant dubiously. "but I'm not the chap to go ramping over the country like a professional speed-merchant—"

"Let me take the wheel," suggested Nelson Lee briskly. "If I damage your car, Armstrong—"

"Oh, hang it, jump in!" said the lieutenant promptly. "I don't care how much you damage the car, Mr. Lee, or how much damage you do me, so long as we collar those German rotters!"

With Nelson Lee at the wheel the car simply roared along. It was a flyer, and Nelson Lee let it rip for all it was worth. After three miles had been traversed they came to a spot where the road branched off. Fortunately a tramp was trudging along near by, and Nelson Lee applied the brakes.

"Have you seen a green car pass this way, my man?" he shouted.

"It took the road to the left, sir," answered the fellow. "Buzzing like anything, it was. Went past two minutes ago."

"Splendid!" murmured Nelson Lee. "We're evidently gaining on them, if this man's word is to be relied upon. Of course, they might have bribed him to direct us wrong, but I don't think so."

He slipped the clutch in, and as the car gathered speed again the lieutenant extracted a coin from his pocket and threw it back to the tramp.

In a few moments the car was again going at full speed. Nelson Lee took everything flying, only slackening speed for sharp corners. Everything depended upon speed, and the great issues at stake were well worth a big risk.

But the famous detective was a magnificent driver; he knew, within a hair's-breadth, exactly how far he could go without courting disaster.

"By gum!" said Nipper, "this is 'some' going! If we don't catch the brutes up before long I shall be surprised. My hat! Suppose a tyre busted now?"

"Shut up, you young idiot!" growled Armstrong. "I've noticed that when one talks of punctures, punctures generally follow!"

But in this case no such disastrous happening occurred. A burst tyre, at that speed, would probably have meant the death of all aboard. But the wheels were exceedingly well shod, and the trio had no fears.

Like a streak of lightning the powerful car roared through a village, Nelson Lee crouching behind the wheel rigid and alert. The country folk stared after the car, angry and amazed, and one point that Nelson Lee noted gave him great satisfaction. Outside a small garage, two mechanics in overalls were gazing up the road ahead. To the detective's acute mind a solution instantly suggested itself. The Germans' car must have passed through only a moment before.

Once through the village, which Armstrong said was called Rappsdown, the road was straight and clear. The lieutenant knew every inch of the country herenabouts, and this knowledge was to come in useful very shortly.

"Hoornay!" roared Nipper suddenly.

"What's the matter, you young ass?" growled Armstrong.

Nipper stood up excitedly, and his cap was whisked off and disappeared for ever—not that Nipper cared a jot. He pointed ahead.

"They're in sight!" he yelled. "Look, sir!"

"I've already seen, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "We're gaining—gaining fast!"

The road stretched out clear and straight, without a house to be seen. It was really an ideal piece of country for the capture to take place. But would it end in capture? Nelson Lee was sorely doubtful.

Although they had caught the Germans up, the enemy were very far from

being captured. They were all armed with revolvers, and they would not hesitate to use them. Absolutely desperate, they would shoot the very instant the pursuing car came within range.

Nelson Lee had often seen motor-car chases in cinema pictures, where the occupants of both automobiles blazed at one another without limitations. The combatants, in fact, seemed to bear charmed lives. In real life, however, things would be very different—this affair would be no American-made picture drama. Probably the first shot fired by the Germans would strike Nelson Lee and mortally wound him. If that actually did happen then the end would be swift and sudden. And, really, in a chase such as this, where the fugitives were desperate to the point of murder, everything was in their favour.

Even Nelson Lee, daring and intrepid though he was, hesitated; and while he was hesitating, Lieut. Armstrong leaned forward until his mouth was close to the detective's ear.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Lee," shouted the naval officer, "I'm not exactly keen on catching up with those spies. They've got revolvers, and we shouldn't stand an earthly if they once started blazing away. I've got a suggestion to make."

"By Jove!" said Nelson Lee. "I was thinking the same thing. Well, what's the suggestion?"

"Half a mile further on there's a side turning to the left," replied Armstrong. "The main road takes a circular course in a minute or two, but if we go up that side turning we shall cut off a clear mile and arrive in the main road again. I should say, well ahead of the Germans. We can then block the road with the car, and they'll be forced to stop."

"Excellent!" Nelson Lee exclaimed briskly. "We'll do it, old man!"

It was really a splendid suggestion of Armstrong's—indeed, the only way out of the difficulty. For the pursuers to catch the fugitives would almost certainly end in disaster. But to get in advance of the Germans, and head them off, was a master-stroke. The distance between the two cars was now greatly diminished. The one ahead was clearly visible, and it was tearing along at full-speed, two of the Germans leaning out behind, ready for murder if necessary.

It roared round a bend in the far distance, and Armstrong touched Nelson Lee's arm.

"Here we are!" he yelled. "This turning!"

Nelson Lee nodded, and a moment later the car spun round into the side lane. It was fortunate that the Germans were unable to see this manoeuvre, for they would probably have guessed something. Shaving hedges, taking corners almost on two wheels only, missing disaster by inches, Armstrong's car whizzed along. Nelson Lee was proving his wonderful ability as a driver, and in spite of the excitement the lieutenant was lost in admiration.

Once an accident nearly occurred, and that was owing to a farm-cart being on the wrong side of the road. They came upon it suddenly, and there was no time to pull up. Opening the throttle to the widest extent, Nelson Lee sent the car hurtling past on the near side, before the startled farm-hand could even gasp.

"Gum!" murmured Nipper. "That was a near 'un! Still, a miss is as good as a mile!"

Three minutes later the main road stretched out before them, and they turned into it and pulled up. It was possible to see for a good distance ahead, but not a sign of the green car was visible. Behind, a bend hid the road from view.

"They haven't passed yet," cried Armstrong triumphantly. "What's the programme, Mr. Lee?"

"Well, you two jump off," rapped out Nelson Lee crisply. "I'll do the rest."

Nipper and Armstrong obeyed quickly, for seconds were of value now. Nelson Lee shifted the car until it stood absolutely broadside across the road. There wasn't room on either side for anything larger than a motor-cycle to pass. A stone wall occupied one side, and a slimy pond the other.

The Germans were completely trapped.

"If there's an accident," said Nelson Lee, joining his companions, "I'm afraid your car will suffer, Armstrong. We'd better get on top of this bank well out of harm's way. I'm not exactly keen on being mixed up in the debris."

Armstrong was of the opinion that the spies would pull up and make a fight for it. But there was no time for conjectures. Even as Nelson Lee was talking a low hum made itself heard on the still evening air, and then the green motor-car burst into view round the bend, travelling at full speed. Schwann & Co. had tumbled headlong into the trap; they had never scented the ruse.

The trio on the bank watched eagerly. Nelson Lee and Armstrong gripped their revolvers tightly, in readiness for instant action. They heard a shout go up from the Germans—a shout of rage and alarm. But their car didn't decrease its speed one whit.

"The fools!" exclaimed Armstrong. "They can't get past; they're rushing to destruction!"

Nelson Lee uttered a grim chuckle.

"I fancy Schwann and his friends will receive a shock in a moment," he exclaimed—"and a wetting, too, probably. Look at that pond!"

His two companions did so, and they understood. The pond lay alongside the road, and was only a small one. Its surface was covered with green weed, and from a distance would be absolutely unrecognisable from grass. The Germans thought that there was a wide grass border, and that by steering over it they would foil Nelson Lee, after all, and shoot past unharmed.

Little they knew what that deceptive "grass" really was!

Nipper gasped.

"Oh, by Jerusalem!" he ejaculated. "What a lark! Those German sausages will have some of their ardour cooled off when they plunk into that pond!"

Nelson Lee or Armstrong had no time to make comment. Schwann, who was at the wheel, wore an expression of desperation, but had evidently no idea of the true state of affairs. With a wrench he spun the car off the road, and it leapt up the low bank giddily, making straight for the slime-covered pond. Rearing, jolting, but still travelling at fully thirty miles an hour, the car plunged on.

What happened! next was so sudden that the onlookers hardly had time to draw breath.

Splash!

The forepart of the car plunged down into the water and mud, and so great was the speed that the rear part shot up giddily and pitched every occupant out like stones from a catapult. It was really, as Nipper described it, a sight for sore eyes. The four men plunged into the green slime with frightened yells, and the car completed its somersault and subsided in the muddy water, wheels uppermost.

"By gad!" exclaimed Armstrong dazedly.

"Yes, it's a bit of a surprise, isn't it?" remarked Nelson Lee, with a calm smile. "Luck has played into our hands this time with a vengeance.

Our friends the Germans have not got an ounce of fight between the lot of them!"

And this proved to be the case. One by one, Schwann & Co., who were quite unhurt, wallowed out of the pond, simply smothered from head to foot in green, clinging slime. Their revolvers, even if they had still grasped them, would have been quite useless, for their faces were so entangled with weed that they staggered blindly, unable to see an inch. They gave in without a movement, and stood in a group swearing and muttering in German as though completely dazed and bewildered by the shock.

In five minutes a farm-cart lumbered along with several rustics in it, taking a ride home after the day's work. Willing hands helped to tie Schwann and his companions with rope, and then they were bundled unceremoniously into Armstrong's car and taken straight to the police-station in the nearest big town. On the last lap, absolutely within sight of the winning-post, the Germans had been baffled.

"Not a penny, my dear fellow," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "My services in that little adventure were only too willingly given, and I'll accept nothing. I know that you are spending your private fortune on your invention for the country's good, and I am not so unpatriotic that I would accept gold for serving my King."

Lieut. Armstrong gripped Nelson Lee's hand. They and Nipper were in the famous detective's consulting-room at Gray's Inn Road, and Armstrong had just called. Two days had elapsed since that tremendously eventful afternoon, and the Germans were now awaiting their court-martial. That they would be condemned and shot as spies was certain. And they deserved death, every one of them, for they were of that variety of spy who spoke perfect English and had been passing as innocent Englishmen for years. They and their type were the country's worst foes—murderous, unscrupulous, and cunning. Their cold-blooded attempt on Nipper's life was quite enough for the whole of Great Britain to demand their execution.

Armstrong shook Nelson Lee's hand warmly.

"I won't say another word about money," he exclaimed quietly. "But I will, at least, express my appreciation, Mr. Lee, of your pluck and cleverness. I can't find words to tell you how nobly you acted——"

Nelson Lee sighed.

"My dear chap, please cut it out!" he said wearily. "And besides, what about Nipper? The young beggar did as much valuable service as I did myself, so you'd better start on him!"

Nipper looked warlike.

"If you say a word to me, Mr. Armstrong," he growled, "I'll jolly well clear out of the room. Mr. Lee and I only did our best to serve our country's cause—and we see quite enough rot in the papers about us, without you chipping in!"

And Lieut. Armstrong gave it up.

Two weeks later Nelson Lee and Nipper learned that the Admiralty and the War Office were highly pleased with the lieutenant's invention, and that it had been accepted for immediate use.

It was evident, therefore, that the Germans had been well advised in making such strenuous efforts to obtain possession of the plans.

And although Nelson Lee and Nipper wouldn't allow anybody else to praise them for the part they had taken in the game, they were, nevertheless, feeling just a little proud of themselves for having beaten the enemy all along the line and emerging victorious at the finish.

THE END.

The Boys of Ravenswood College;

or, Dick Clare's Schooldays.

A New Story of School Life. By S. CLARKE HOOK.

Author of the famous Jack, Sam & Pete stories, appearing weekly in "The Marvel Library."

Dick Clare, a rich youngster, joins Ravenswood College, and he soon makes his presence felt.

One day news comes to the school that Dick and his chum, Tom, have been drowned, but ultimately they turn up safe and sound.

Melby, one of the other boys, takes a violent dislike to Dick Clare, and is especially jealous because the Headmaster takes special notice of the new boy.

Some time later Melby's father turns up at the school and causes a great disturbance. (Now read on.)

The Secret Revealed.

THE horrified expression on the Doctor's face at his extraordinary pupil's remarks was too much for Tom and Dick. They burst into roars of laughter. What the Head would have said never transpired, for at that moment there was a knock at the study door and Gowl entered the room.

"I did not know you were engaged, sir," he said. "The captain said you wished to see me."

"Yes, that is so, Gowl. I will——"

"Gowl!" exclaimed Melby, senior. "Is that boy's name Gowl—the son of Captain Gowl?"

"Yes!" answered the Head, looking surprised. "Do you know him?"

"Know him? I should do so, seeing that the scoundrel married my wife's youngest sister, and treated her like the scoundrel he is. And it was to save the life of such a scamp—a man who had robbed him of thousands to my own knowledge—that Colonel Clare gave his own life. He forgave the fellow, although he should have sent him to prison."

"Mr. Melby," said Dr. Stanley severely, "I am astounded that you should speak in this manner before the son. Even if your assertions are correct, the son is not to blame."

"Not to blame! Well, that's because you don't know him. Of course, when I learnt of the father's crime I refused to have anything to do with his scamp of a son, whom I had never met. In fact, I never met the scoundrel after he ran away with my wife's sister—hang him! I wish he had been stabbed instead of Colonel Clare, who stood in front of him to shield him from the foe, and I have never seen my rascal of a nephew until to-day. He is a young thief, like his father. Another sister of my wife—when his mother died—and his rascally father was in India, took the young cub in hand. Treated him like her own son, and I expect paid for his education here, for I'm certain his father couldn't do it, unless he has been robbing someone else. I know my sister-in-law forgave the young scamp, the same

as Colonel Clare forgave the young rascal's father, and as I tell you, gave his life for him."

"Are you aware that this boy is Colonel Clare's son?" inquired Dr. Stanley.

"No. I had not the slightest idea."

"Such is the case."

"Then surely he knew what a scoundrel that boy Gowl is. Did you know, boy?"

"Mr. Melby," said Dick. "I refuse to hold any intercourse with you. I consider what you have just stated is disgraceful, and that you ought to be ashamed of yourself for speaking in such a manner."

"What, you young rascal? So you have made a friend of the son of the thief who robbed your father of thousands—forged his name—and you knew, for you must have known that this young scamp actually stole money from the lady who had found him a home. Your mother knew all this, for I wrote to her to warn her. It was your duty——"

"I don't need you to tell me my duty," cried Dick. "When I have doubts concerning that I shall go to Dr. Stanley, and not to you. I say it is not my duty to rake up the past against a man or a boy. If my father forgave a wrong, who am I to bear malice, or to injure the offending party. I consider your action despicable, and tell you to your face, and in the presence of my master, that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. If you conceived it to be your duty to inform Dr. Stanley of Gowl's past you should have done so in private, and not blurt it out before your son, who will spread it all over the college."

"Oh, I say, Dick!" exclaimed Melby. "That's a rotten remark to make about me."

"Dr. Stanley knows that it is the truth. He knew what would happen before I told him. You have accused me for not revealing what I considered a secret, Mr. Melby; but how is it that your own son did not reveal it?"

"Because he never knew. Do you suppose that Mrs. Melby would let anyone on earth know that her sister had married a scoundrel. Why did you not mention the young rascal's name to me, boy?"

"What!" exclaimed Melby. "Why, there's lots of fellows names I haven't mentioned to you. You always want to know too much about them. But how was it he didn't know my name?"

"Because I don't suppose he ever heard that his aunt had married a Melby," said that person. "She was cautioned by your mother never to mention our name to the young rascal."

"I will speak to you at some other time, Gowl," said Dr. Stanley. "You can go, my lads. There will be no punishment for having come in late on this occasion."

Gowl went to his study, and having locked the door, seated himself in a chair and gazed into futurity. At last he rose and commenced collecting a few of his valuables. There were not many things he prized. He was determined to leave the college that night and to face the world as best he could, for he would not face the Head.

Presently there was a tap at the door. For some moments he hesitated, but knowing he would be forced to open it, he did so of his own accord, and Dick Clare entered the room, locking the door after him.

"So you have come to glout over it," sneered Gowl.

"If I were that kind of chap I'd have done the gloating a lot before this, Gowl," answered Dick. "Now, look here, in your own heart—however much you hate me—you know that I have never breathed one word of the secret. That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You know that I have never held it over your head when—well, when there have been rows between us?"

"Yes."

"You are going to bolt?"

"Yes."

"Don't do it, Gowl."

"Do you want me to wait till I'm expelled?"

"Nothing like that will happen. I have been talking to the Head. He knows that as far as concerns your father you are in no way to blame. As far as concerns yourself—well, I suppose there are precious few of us who would care to have all our past life laid bare. You see, Gowl, take yourself and myself—well, there's been a lot of difference. You see, my father inherited a very large fortune, and left it to my mother. You had no mother to look after you when you were a kid, and that makes a frightful lot of difference."

"Now, what occurred was when you were a kid—and they don't think much unless they have got some one to give them good advice. You know my father bore yours no malice. Whatever there was to forgive was forgiven. We have detested one another in the past. Well, let it be buried. Make a fresh start and let there be no enmity between us. There's my hand on it."

"Dick Clare," muttered Gowl, lowering his eyes. "I would give much, if I had it, to be like you. You have inherited from your father more than fortune. There is one thing I will say. I am glad you have spoken as you have. You are the one in all the world who should find it the hardest to forgive me. There's my hand. We shall never meet again. I'm done."

"Rats! Not a bit of it, Gowl. You haven't started yet. Of course, Melby's account will be all over the college, but he won't say half as much now he knows your secret as he has said before, so that won't make the slightest difference. It's an easy thing for an athlete like you to become popular in Ravenswood. As for the masters, they will never know. Dr. Stanley, Tom, and myself are the only ones who will ever know the truth, for what Melby tells is bound to be fiction. It would be ridiculous for a fellow's life to be ruined because he had done something in his very youthful days. You must see that yourself."

"Ah, but I see more than you know, Dick Clare," said Gowl. "I can't stay here now. It will all come out, and then the bills will come in. I owe more than I dare reckon up, and certainly more than I can ever pay."

"What's the little lot?"

"I really don't know. Thirty pounds—more."

"Will fifty pounds cover it?"

"Yes. More than cover it."

"The day after to-morrow I will place fifty pounds in your hands. I will write to-night to my mother for it."

"She would not send it when she knows what it is for."

"Yes, she would. She would send it just as readily as she will send it without knowing. I shall just ask her to send me fifty pounds to do some good. That's all. Your name won't be mentioned, although that would make no difference. No one on earth will know."

(Another Magnificent Instalment of this rattling School Yarn will appear Next Week.)

5,000 PRIZES COMPETITION RESULT.

It is now possible to announce the result of the above Competition :

The FIRST PRIZE,

A MAGNIFICENT NEW MOTOR BICYCLE,
has been awarded to—

WILLIE JONES, 102, WEELSBY STREET, GRIMSBY,
who submitted a list of 8,634 names and addresses.

Not quite 5,000 readers entered the competition, and therefore everyone who took part will receive a prize. We have not space to give the names and addresses of all prizewinners; but below will be found those of the fifty competitors who submitted lists next in order of merit:—

R. Fallows, Dungiven House, Londonderry; F. Bennett, 16, Davey Rd., Handsworth; C. Morgan, 156, Monk's Rd., Lincoln; J. H. Williams, 30, Eastbourne Grove, South Shields; G. Lennon, 25, Station St., Pennawr, Newbridge, Mon.; J. E. Morgan, 453, Warrington Rd., Goose Green, nr. Wigan, Lancs; W. Paton, 2, Melville Crescent, Motherwell, Scotland; P. Ellman, 400, Cheetham Hill Rd., Manchester; G. Proctor, 107, So. Frederick St., South Shields; J. Kay, 113, James's St., Laurieston-by-Falkirk, Scotland; T. Soakell, 6, South View, Billingham, nr. Stockton-on-Tees; D. Jackson, 81, Herbert St., Hightown, Manchester; W. Harland, 48, North St., Scarborough; S. R. Burley, 17, Bradiston Rd., Maida Hill, London, W.; L. W. Taylor, 97, Fernhead Rd., Paddington, W.; C. Lester, 40, Grattan Terrace, Cricklewood, N.W.; W. C. Austin, 64, Brayards Rd., Peckham, London, S.E.; B. Wall, 148, Walmeresley Rd., Bury, Lancs; E. Ford, 18, Crispin St., Newcastle-on-Tyne; I. Jaffe, 331, Govan St., Glasgow; R. Hogarth, 33, Hardwicke St., Monkwearmouth, Sunderland; E. D. Stedmond, 23, Wallace St., Stirling, Scotland; H. C. Williams, 1, Colum Place, Cardiff; R. Wilkins, 62, Hayward Rd., Barton Hill, Bristol; R. Hayes, 43, Harper St., Brook's Bar, Old Trafford, Manchester; M. Jones, 10, Poplar St., Everton, Liverpool; J. Bendle, 6, Prince's Rd., Aylesbury, Bucks; T. T. Davies, 33, Hill Terrace, Penllergaer, nr. Gorseinon; J. Greenhalgh, 39, Cornwall St., West Hartlepool; H. Smith, 50, Manchester St., Grimsby; S. Tasler, 78, Seagrove Rd., Seleby, nr. Loughboro', Leicester; C. H. Barfoot, 31, Blackwell Rd., Huthwaite, Notts; W. Evans, 51, School Lane, Didsbury, Manchester; G. F. Pardy, 1, Station Rd., Masbro', Rotherham; A. Grundy, 17, High St., Bolsover, nr. Chesterfield, Derbyshire; W. Hobbblethwaite, 21, Albert St., Newark, Notts; E. L. Higgins, 79, Colum Rd., Cardiff; G. Day, 31, Hawarden Grove, Herne Hill, S.E.; G. Lynch, 95, Henry St., Limerick; R. Buffrey, 2, Windsor Rd., Six Bells, Abertillery, Mon.; A. E. Hancock, Infant Orphanage Asylum, Wanstead, Essex; J. J. McGurgan, 20, Campbell St., Bootle, Liverpool; B. Evans, 48, Llwydarth Rd., Maisteg, nr. Bridgend, Glam; J. McDiarmid, 9, Primrose Terrace, Middlesbrough; L. S. Chard, Thorneycroft, Pymore Rd., Bridport, Dorset; A. A. Mercer, 60, Evering Rd., Stoke Newington, London, N.; P. Ahern, Maryville Cottage, Courtown Gorey, co. Wexford; W. C. Doyle, 8, Pellett St., Cardiff; J. Jackson, 9, James St., Harris Villa, Frizington, Cumberland; A. Saunders, 47, Middle St., Bevois Town, Southampton.



This vivid drawing depicts a stirring incident from

"The Air Raiders"

By **SIDNEY DREW**

which is just starting in

THE BOYS' REALM

OUT ON FRIDAY—ONE PENNY.