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THE SECRET MISSION!

A Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S. Introducing the
"CIRCLE OF TERROR." By the Author of "The Sign of the Purple Circle,"
"The Lighthouse Prisoners," etc., etc. *March 16th, 1918.*

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THE SECRET MISSION!



A Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S. Introducing The "CIRCLE OF TERROR."

By the Author of "The Sign of the Purple Circle," etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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

CHAPTER I.

STARKE ISN'T PLEASED—THE NEWSPAPER REPORT—NELSON LEE'S THEORY.

STARKE, of the Sixth, wasn't in the best of tempers.

As a matter of fact it was very seldom that Starke, of the Sixth, was in the best of tempers. As the juniors of the Ancient House knew to their cost, the bullying prefect was always ready to cuff somebody or other—whether they deserved cuffing or not.

It was a bright morning, and only a few juniors were down. Breakfast wouldn't be ready for another twenty minutes. Starke hadn't an atom of appetite; in place of it he had a nasty taste in his mouth. A late party in his study the previous night probably had something to do with Walter Starke's mood. He had smoked heavily, and he had lost three pounds at banker. Smoking and gambling wasn't a part of a prefect's duty, but the bulk of the juniors knew that Starke indulged in these gentle pastimes.

He strode into the Ancient House, and was just crossing the lobby, when a wild yell made him pause. The next second an avalanche descended upon him. In other words, a small Removite, careering down the balustrade, hit Starke forcibly where his breakfast was destined to go.

The pair sprawled over, and for a second there was wild confusion.

"You—you infernal young rascal!" snarled Starke gaspingly.

As the Removite was scrambling up, Starke grabbed his leg. The pair were facing one another a moment later, Starke's eyes blazing with fury and pain. The junior was

Sessue Yakama, the Japanese boy in the Remove.

"I am of the extreme sorrow, Starke," said Yakama softly. "The apology which I tender is sincere——"

"You confounded heathen!" roared Starke. "I'll skin you for sliding down the balustrade in that way! You'll do five hundred lines——"

Yakama looked pained.

"But I have voiced the magnificent apology, Starke!" he protested. "It was the unfortunate and unavoidable accident. Must I write five hundred preposterous lines? My regret for the incident is deep——"

"Take that, you Japanese brat!" snarled Starke savagely.

But Yakama didn't take "that"—which happened to be a brutal cuff. Starke's hand whizzed through the air, and he nearly lost his balance. Already furious, this non-success on his part almost made him frantic.

"Hang you!" he raved madly.

The burly prefect simply hurled himself at the small Jap, and it would have gone hard with Yakama if he hadn't been amazingly agile. His own temper—almost invariably hidden behind a constantly-smiling visage—was up now in earnest. Starke had completely gone beyond the bounds of his authority.

"You are the bully and the unmitigated hooligan!" said Yakama hotly.

"What! You—you rotten yellow shrimp!" roared Starke, making a rush.

Quick as Yakama was, he couldn't avoid Starke's furious charge. He received the prefect's flat hand upon his cheek. The lobby resounded with the smack, and the junior's face burned.

But Starke did not get another chance. Yakama, instead of retreating, met the Sixth-former's onrush boldly. Then something remarkable happened to Starke. He seemed to crumple up; he went flying clean over on to his back. The thud as he fell shook the very floor, and he lay gasping.

"You requested me to act so," said Yakama quietly. "It is the great crime to strike a prefect, but you forced me, Starke. You are the disgraceful bully."

Starke scrambled to his feet dazedly.

"I'll smash you!" he panted, with a savage scowl.

He was quite out of control now, and unless Yakama fled, it looked as though he would catch it very hot. For the Japanese boy couldn't hope to get in another jujitsu grip so opportunely.

"Starke!"

The voice was cold and steady; and Starke stood stock still as though turned to stone. It was remarkable how that clear voice acted upon him. His fury vanished, and he paled.

There, at the head of the stairs, stood Mr. Alvington, the housemaster—in other words, Nelson Lee. He descended slowly, his expression grim, and Starke suddenly felt his knees weakening. Bully though he was, he felt insignificant and puny in the presence of Nelson Lee. But he attempted to bluster.

"Did you see that, sir?" he asked hotly. "This junior threw me down—me, a prefect! I was about to punish him——"

"That will do, Starke," interjected Nelson Lee. "You needn't tell me what happened—I saw it all from the head of the stairs. Yakama did throw you down, and I do not blame him."

"Don't—don't blame him!" stammered Starke.

"At that moment you were not a prefect, Starke—you were a vicious bully," went on Lee sternly. "You deserved all you received, and more. You not only acted in a disgraceful fashion, but you used language which I will not allow in this house. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Starke nearly choked.

"But—but he cheeked me, sir!" he burst out. "The young heathen——"

"Silence!" commanded Lee. "How dare you, Starke? Yakama is not a heathen, and he did not cheek you. He called you a bully and a hooligan, and your actions have been those of a contemptible——"

"He slid down the balustrade, sir!" roared Starke desperately.

"That will do," snapped the housemaster-detective. "I am beginning to think, Starke, that you are not fit to be a prefect. If anything of this nature occurs again I shall certainly deprive you of your prefectship. You may go!"

Starke stared stupidly.

"But—but——"

"I told you to go, Starke," said Lee coldly. The prefect went off without another word,

scowling furiously, and feeling as though he would like to kick something—hard. Several faint chuckles came from the head of the stairs—where a bunch of gleeful Removites were viewing the scene. The discomfiture of Starke was a delight to the Fossils.

Nelson Lee regarded Sessue Yakama severely.

"I understand, Yakama, that you were sliding down the balustrade?" he asked.

"It is with extreme and wonderful regret that I must acknowledge the accusation, sir," said the Japanese boy meekly. "I disobeyed the school regulations in using the august balustrade as a sliding-medium. My sorrow is genuine, sir. I am of the keen regret."

Nelson Lee restrained a smile.

"Since you have openly admitted your fault, Yakama, I will not punish you," he said. "Your treatment of Starke was justified, and we will let it pass. You may go now, my boy."

Yakama beamed.

"You are the kind master, sir," he said. "Thank you extremely, sir."

Nelson Lee passed on, smiling. He chuckled when he reached his study; there was a quaintness about the little Jap which was always amusing. It was really impossible to be seriously cross with him. And Starke had undoubtedly received no more than he had deserved.

Having lit a cigarette, Nelson Lee picked up the morning's newspaper and stood by the window, glancing over the headlines. There was nothing of a particularly startling nature reported; but Lee suddenly became tense, and he sat down.

His attention was occupied by a paragraph which was given a fairly unimportant position half way down the page. The detective read it through, and then pulled thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"Upon my soul!" he murmured. "So it has come to that!"

The paragraph claimed his attention again. It was fairly short, and ran as follows:

"EXTRAORDINARY AFFAIR IN PALL MALL."

"A remarkable happening occurred in Pall Mall last night, between the hours of nine and ten. The weather was somewhat misty and a slight drizzle was falling at the time. The central character in this astounding occurrence is none other than Major-General Stanley Leighton, D.S.O., who will be remembered for his splendid work in Belgium during the early months of the war.

"General Leighton, who is at present on leave, emerged from Farr's Club, Pall Mall, soon after nine-thirty. The thoroughfare was dark and almost empty at the time; and a few seconds after the general had appeared, he was abruptly attacked by six men. The assault was so unexpected that General Leighton was knocked over before he could defend himself.

"The resulting scrimmage was quite brief.

The porter from Farr's Club, and another man, admirably attempted to effect a rescue. Although the odds were so uneven, they valiantly rushed to the attack. General Leighton, surrounded by his assailants, was hustled across the pavement to a large motor-car which was standing ready.

"The whole incident was over in less than one minute. The two porters, struggling with the unknown men, only succeeded in dragging a curious article from the motor-car, which, upon examination, proved to be a strait-jacket. Both porters were knocked down, and before they could rise the motor-car had made off into the darkness and mist with its unfortunate captive. By the time the police arrived upon the scene the vehicle had completely vanished.

"Many theories have been suggested regarding the nature of this extraordinary affair of kidnapping; but none are satisfactory. The police are doing their utmost, and hope to obtain a definite clue almost at once. It cannot be denied, however, that there is an element of sinister mystery in the whole matter, which points to a deep-laid plot. And one is forced to marvel at the ease with which a gentleman can be forcibly abducted, at a comparatively early hour of the evening, in such a well-known thoroughfare as Pall Mall."

Nelson Lee allowed his gaze to wander across the page to the Stop-Press column. And here was a further item of information.

"GENERAL LEIGHTON.

"In the early hours of the morning the police succeeded in tracing the motor-car which was used for the abduction of Major-General Leighton. The car was discovered on a lonely part of Putney Heath, abandoned. It was then identified as the property of a well-known peer. The automobile had been daringly stolen from the open street early in the evening whilst the chauffeur was away for a few minutes. The recovery of this car can scarcely be described as a clue, and the police are still at a loss regarding General Leighton's fate."

If the police were at a loss—and Nelson Lee could quite believe that they were—the schoolmaster-detective himself was not puzzled in the least. He was quite convinced that General Leighton had been forcibly abducted by agents of the Circle of Terror. Certainly there was no clue to point in this direction; but certain events, which had taken place within the last day or two, made it impossible for Nelson Lee to come to any other conclusion.

There had been excitement in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's very recently. General Leighton was aware of "Mr. Alvington's" real identity, and he had begged Lee to help him in a grave difficulty.

This difficulty was in connection with a demand from the notorious Circle of Terror. In brief, the general had been ordered to meet a representative of the Circle at a cer-

tain named spot—with the object of undertaking a special mission. The nature of this mission was not disclosed; but the demand, coming from the Circle of Terror, could only be a criminal one. And the general had refused to move a single inch in the matter.

In order to force their victim to comply with their command, the Circle had laid cunning plans for the kidnapping of the general's son, Stanley, from the River House School—a private establishment in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's.

Owing to the brilliant work of Nelson Lee and Nipper—ably assisted by Miss Eileen Dare—the Circle had been defeated, and now Stanley Leighton was safely away from all the trouble. But, as events were now proving, the affair was not over.

"There can be only one conclusion to arrive at," Nelson Lee told himself, as he lay back in his chair. "Having failed with the son, the Circle has now attacked the father. It is fairly obvious that this secret mission is extremely urgent and will admit of no delay. For this reason Professor Zingrave has had the general taken by force—before he became aware of the fact that his son was out of danger. H'm! The thing is growing really serious."

In view of what had already occurred, Nelson Lee could see right into the depths of the plot. The police, on the other hand, were groping in darkness. As Lee well knew, young Leighton was to have been imprisoned—or, at least, held secure—within a home near the village of Rapley, in Surrey. This home, in reality, was a private lunatic asylum, and its whereabouts had become known to Lee owing to the extreme shrewdness of Nipper. The knowledge would possibly come in very useful now.

Nelson Lee rose to his feet and paced up and down.

"A strait-jacket!" he murmured absently. "Truly a remarkable find. But surely a very significant one. The police may be at a loss, but the inference is really obvious. A strait-jacket suggests a lunatic asylum; and it is a perfectly feasible supposition to assume that the unfortunate general has been taken to the Rapley Home. At all events, I shall base my plans upon that theory."

Lee knew that he could not be going far wrong by so doing. His plans? Well, the great detective had no intention of remaining idle. Although a housemaster at St. Frank's, he was not exactly bound down. And risk or no risk, he intended pursuing this matter to the bitter end.

Lee had given his word to General Leighton that he would do everything in his power; and it was his intention now to get "good and busy" without the slightest loss of time.

Five minutes later Nelson Lee had called Dick Bennett, of the Remove, into his study. And Dick Bennett—otherwise Nipper—listened eagerly whilst his master outlined his plan of action.

CHAPTER II.

(Told by Nipper.)

IN WHICH MY CHUMS AND I GO FOR A LITTLE WALK, AND MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE WHICH WE DIDN'T EXPECT AND HADN'T BARGAINED FOR.

"RIPPIN', dear fellow, simply rippin'!" Sir Montie Tregellis-West, who made that remark, did so in a tone of extreme satisfaction.

"Well, that's the programme," I said confidentially. "I think it's jolly decent of the guv'nor to allow you chaps to come into it. He's been absolutely top-hole all the time."

"Benny, boy, I wouldn't deny it," said Sir Montie earnestly. "It's amazin', really. Old Alvy is a brick of the first water! Begad, that sounds rather queer, you know—still, my meanin' is clear, ain't it?"

I grinned.

"You generally manage to make yourself understood, old son," I said. "Mind, not a word to the other chaps. The adventure may come to nothing, and we don't want to jaw about it."

"No need to tell us that, you ass!" said Tommy Watson. "We ain't chatterboxes. But what's going to happen when we get to this giddy dotty home?"

"Well," I said thoughtfully, "we might leave you there, Tommy. It's a comfortable place, I believe, and would suit you down to the ground—"

"You—you fathhead!" roared Watson.

Montie and I chuckled, and Tommy joined in after a moment or two. We were all in good spirits, in fact. My little chat with the guv'nor had been very interesting. He had told me all about the abduction of General Leighton, and had given me a brief outline of his plans.

After tea he was going on a scouting expedition, and we three were to be allowed to accompany him. Of course we couldn't do so openly, and so we were going for a little walk, and Nelson Lee would calmly sail up in a motor-car and take us aboard. We were to be at the corner of the lane near the Bannington Road at exactly half-past five.

As a matter of fact the guv'nor needed our help. Montie and Tommy were quite useful chaps in their way; they had proved their worth on many an occasion, and Nelson Lee trusted them implicitly.

Morning lessons were nearly due to start, and I had taken the opportunity to tell my chums of what was in the wind. Needless to say, not another fellow in the Remove—or any other Form, for that matter—knew a word about it. They'd probably know afterwards, but it wouldn't matter then.

The day passed as usual, and tea in Study C was a somewhat hurried meal. I don't mean to say that it was a scramble, for we had heaps of time to reach the meeting-place before half-past five. As a general rule, however, our study tea was a long-drawn-out affair.

When we emerged into the triangle just before five, with ample time before us, we

found the evening sun shining brilliantly. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and a good many fellows were already on the playing fields. We should have been there ourselves under ordinary circumstances, but more important business was on hand.

"We'll take the towing-path," I suggested. "That'll lead us out on to the lane, and the walk's more pleasant by the river. If anybody asks where we're off to, we'll tell 'em that we're going for a walk—that's true, anyhow."

We were soon striding along the towing-path by the river, and, as it happened, we hadn't been questioned by anybody. There was not much prospect of meeting any St. Frank's fellows now that we had left the school grounds behind. One or two juniors, perhaps, had gone to the village, but the bulk of them were still partaking of tea, or on the playing fields.

We walked easily, pleasantly thrilled by the prospect before us. A twenty-mile motor trip would be followed by some real detective work, and I was simply bubbling over with satisfaction.

"Gorgeous evening," I remarked. "Real spring, my bonnie boys. And by the look of it we're in for a clear night, with a moon later on."

"Hallo!" interrupted Tommy. "Who's that ahead?"

We all three gazed with interest at a group of forms a short distance ahead of us. We had just turned round a clump of willows, and one glance made me pause.

"Hold on!" I whispered. "Let's dodge back. They're Hogs!"

"We ain't afraid of Hogs, I suppose?" growled Watson indignantly.

I didn't waste any more words, but yanked Tommy back by force. We stood concealed by the trees. Sir Montie was mildly astonished, but Tommy Watson seemed inclined to jib.

"You ass, Benny!" he snorted. "Do you think I'm going to back away from a few beastly Hogs? Besides, they might be Brewster and his lot, and they're decent chaps—"

"They might be, but they're not!" I said. "They're four of the esteemed Honourables!"

"Well, we can wipe 'em up—"

"All in good time," I said gently. "There's no particular hurry, Tommy. My eyes are a little bit sharper than yours, it seems—and I've got an idea that there's going to be an entertainment before long. Those River House chaps have got hold of young Jappy, and he's looking as mild as milk. You know what that means!"

Tommy and Montie broke into soft chuckles, and they peered round the trees cautiously. The four Hogs were practically surrounding the diminutive figure of Sessue Yakama; and by remaining still we could hear all that was being said.

The Hogs were pupils of the River House School—Dr. Hogge's Select Academy, as it was called. A good few fellows belonging to that establishment were thoroughly decent—

Hal Brewster, Georgie Glynn, and Dave Ascott, for example. They were quite chummy with us already. But, sad to relate, the majority of Dr. Hogge's pupils were prigs and cads of the very first water.

The school was divided into two sections—known as the Commoners and the Honourables. Brewster led the Commoners, and the Honourables were under the leadership of the most insufferable upstart I'd ever had the misfortune to meet. His name was the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne, and his bosom chums were two fellows named the Hon. Bertram Carstairs and the Hon. Cyril Coates. It was owing to their great distinction that their party was known as the "Honourables."

Well, the four fellows who were now within sight were the three prigs I have just mentioned, and another fellow whose name I didn't know—but he was one of the same breed.

They were all grinning amiably, and I guessed that they had evil intentions with regard to Yakama—they weren't above pitching him into a shallow part of the river. Their ideas of a joke were rather weird.

Yakama looked such a little chap—so harmless—that the Honourables were easily deceived. Yakama himself was always ready for a joke, and he was smiling with his usual meekness and geniality.

"I suppose he's a real boy, ain't he?" the Hon. Bertie was saying, with an air of inquiry. "Fancy havin' a dashed yellow kid in the school! I'd bar that kind of thing at our place!"

"Thank goodness old Hogge knows bettah," drawled Wellborne. "Bai Jove! I should protest feahfully if we had to put up with beastly Japs among our fellows. We simply wouldn't stand it. But St. Frank's is an absolute hole, dear boys. It's a shockin' low place."

"Must be to have a kid like this there!" remarked Coates.

Tommy Watson breathed hard.

"Let's go and slaughter 'em!" he muttered fiercely.

"Don't be in such a hurry!" I whispered. "Jappy'll do all the slaughtering that's necessary. He can settle that lot with one hand if he likes. They're on the edge of a volcano—but they don't know it!"

"Begad! It's interestin', dear fellows—it is really!" breathed Sir Montie.

We waited expectantly.

"I suppose it can speak, can't it?" asked Carstairs wonderingly.

"Ask it a question, an' see!" grinned one of the others.

Wellborne tilted his shiny silk topper back and adjusted a monocle. Yakama, meanwhile, still retained a bland, expressionless smile.

"What's your name, you yellow shrimp?" asked the Hon. Aubrey.

No reply.

"You ain't deaf, I suppose?" went on Wellborne.

"Is it to me that you are addressing the disgusting and preposterous conversation?" inquired Yakama softly.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the Hon. Aubrey mildly. "It can talk, then!"

"I have retained the honourable and august silence hitherto," said Yakama. "My ears have been attentive to the wonderfully enlightening language from your disgusting lips. It is the insult that you have placed upon me, and with extreme regret I must now explain my own convictions regarding your unwholesome personalities. I am the polite boy always, but there is what you call a limit to my enduring capacity. Will you kindly transfer your fearfully revolting persons from this splendid path, so that I may continue the genial ramble?"

Wellborne and Co. looked astonished—as well they might. Yakama's voice was as soft as silk, and he spoke English with absolute perfection. He spoke it so well, in fact, that he generally used about twenty words where five would have sufficed. And, in spite of his delightfully smooth speech, he often managed to put quite a sting into his tone.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated the Hon. Bertie. "Did you hear that, chaps?"

Wellborne scowled.

"I did, bai Jove!" he said savagely. "Unwholesome personalities—eh? Revolting persons—what? Grab the feahful cad. We'll pitch him head first into the rivah if he doesn't apologise on the spot."

Yakama held up his hand.

"I must issue the warning," he said softly. "Your hands are not to my liking, and they must not lay themselves upon my person. In brief language, such as I have grown to learn—hands off! Gracefully oblige me by partaking of coke!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Tommy Watson, nearly exploding.

Wellborne and Co. simply glared.

"You'd better not——"

"The interruption is really unmannerly," protested Yakama. "I have not completed my astounding remarks. It was the warning that I was issuing, and I must expressly explain that you will touch me at your own dangerous peril. You smile, is it not so? But there is a saying that those people who live occasionally learn!"

"You—you cheeky young Chinese!" roared the Hon. Aubrey furiously. "Are you tellin' us to keep our hands off? What do you think of it, deah boys? He's actually got the feahful nerve to think that we're afraid of him!"

"Dotty!" commented Coates briefly.

"Grab him!"

"I warningly advise you to desist——"

Yakama could say no more, for he was suddenly seized by four pairs of strong hands. He simply disappeared beneath the pile of assaulting forms. Both Tommy Watson and Sir Montie started forward.

"Begad! We can't stand this, Benny——"

"Stand still, you asses!" I cut in. "It

Yakama goes under we'll jolly soon rescue him. But I've got an idea— There you are! Oh, my hat! Just look at that, my sons!"

It was well worth looking at.

Without any apparent cause the Hon. Cyril Coates had suddenly tumbled over backwards. Practically at the same second the Hon. Bertram rose into the air in an inverted position, his arms and legs flying wildly. Unfortunately he fell upon Coates, who was in the act of rising.

Yakama could now be seen. The little Jap had completely dropped his languid air, and looked like a human live wire. His actions were so quick that they were bewildering. Wellborne charged at Yakama, and then went flying headlong. He didn't have a mite of a chance against the wrestling Japanese boy. Yakama's tricks of ju-jitsu were really astonishing.

In less than a minute the Honourables had had quite enough of it. They backed away, ruffled and untidy—to mention nothing of a considerable number of bruises. Yakama was just a little too tricky for them.

"It was with the most astounding and stupendous regret that I was compelled to treat you in such a drastically violent manner," said Yakama sweetly. "But you must admittedly acknowledge that you were in receipt of the esteemed and preposterous warning."

"You—you young Hun!" snarled Wellborne furiously.

Yakama, who had been setting his cap straight, abruptly ceased. Then he proceeded to turn his sleeves up in a manner which left no doubt as to his intentions. It was simply gorgeous to see the Hogs backing away in alarm—four big fellows retreating from a tiny junior like Yakama!

"Now we'll buzz along as soon as you like!" I said briskly. "This is where we get busy, my sons. Yakama's got the pluck of a lion, but if those cads all charge on him at once, he'll be done. They won't be taken by surprise a second time!"

"Come on!" said Tommy eagerly.

But just at that moment something of a very unforeseen nature occurred. It was about the most unfortunate thing that could possibly have happened. And I won't deny that I was partly to blame.

I had been so intent upon Yakama and the Hogs that I didn't take any notice of one or two slight sounds from the rear. Subconsciously I had heard them, but had believed that they had been caused by Sir Montie.

But now, with a series of yells which fairly startled me, a dozen boys sprang upon my chums and myself. They simply bowled us over and had us down flat before we could lift a finger.

"Got 'em!" said a chuckling voice.

I twisted round, filled with surprised rage, and saw the grinning faces of Fullwood and Co. and about six River House School fellows.

We were in the hands of the Philistines!

CHAPTER III.

(Nipper continues.)

IN WHICH MISFORTUNE OVERTAKES US—BUT
YAKAMA TURNS UP TRUMPS.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was very pleased with himself.

Of course, strictly speaking, he oughtn't to have been anything of the kind. In a matter where two rival schools were concerned he ought to have stuck to his own schoolfellows through thick and thin, sinking all differences for the time being.

But that wasn't Fullwood's way. Neither was it the way of Gulliver and Bell and Merrell and Noys, his trusted henchmen. They had always been up against the decent fellows in the Remove; and this affair proved that they were now hand-in-glove with the River House Honourables.

Fullwood and Co. and the Honourables, in fact, had formed themselves into a common enemy. And Montie and Tommy and I were completely collared—we were outnumbered hopelessly. It was a galling position, but one which wouldn't have been improved by useless struggling.

To make matters worse, Yakama was captured, as well. He had been taken off his guard, for he had turned round upon hearing the commotion from our quarter. Wellborne and Co. hadn't lost their opportunity—and Yakama was now a prisoner.

"This is where we crow!" grinned Fullwood pleasantly.

"You—you howling rotters!" roared Watson. "You traitors! You ought to rescue us from these rotten Hogs——"

"My dear chap, they're my bosom pals," said Fullwood. "We're just givin' them a hand. You and your beastly chums are goin' to catch it in the neck; I've been waitin' for a chance like this for weeks an' weeks!"

Sir Montie, who was being held down by Gulliver and Bell and a River House cad, looked very pained.

"Begad! Mind what you're doin', dear fellows," he complained. "My glasses have dropped somewhere, an' I'm sure they'll get smashed——"

"Good job, too!" grinned Gulliver.

"Yank 'em to their feet!" said Fullwood, who had appointed himself master of the ceremonies. "An' don't let 'em use their fists. Hold on! We'd better tie their hands behind their backs first."

"Look here, Fullwood, this isn't playing the game," I said fiercely. "We don't expect you to play the game, of course, but it's a treacherous thing to side with these beastly Hogs——"

"Rats!" said Fullwood shortly.

He took my cap off and jammed it over my mouth, and I knew that it was useless arguing with him. The Nuts and their allies were not satisfied by merely tying our hands together; they placed us all in a row. Yakama included, and fastened my left ankle to Sir Montie's right, and so on. It was simply impossible for us to get away, however much we tried.

Our bonds were merely our handkerchiefs, but they sufficed to hold us secure. By vigorous struggling I could have got free, of course, but this wouldn't have been any good with the cads looking on all the time.

Having rendered us helpless, the whole crowd stood round in a circle, chuckling hugely and discussing our fate. There were fifteen or sixteen of them, so I'm not going to blame myself in the least for what had occurred. The odds were altogether too heavy for us to have escaped.

"Bai Jove! You just came in time, deah boys," said the Hon. Aubrey. "We had a simply shockin' time with that Japanese kid. The young cad tried to bowl us ovah, you know."

"What, the four of you?" asked Bell, staring.

I chuckled.

"Yes, the four of 'em," I said, with satisfaction. "You ought to have seen it! Four hulking prigs against one little Jap—and he bowled 'em all over, too! And when he began turning up his sleeves they backed away!"

"My hat! Talk about funks!" said Watson contemptuously.

Wellborne and Co. scowled.

"I vote we chuck the whole lot into the river!" said the Hon. Bertie savagely. "That's what we were going to do to the Japanese kid——"

"You must allow me to enlighten you upon the misapprehension," interrupted Sessue Yakama smilingly. "I should not have allowed the unmentionable fellows to deposit me in the august and esteemed river. It is my habitual custom to partake of a bath with the clothing removed."

Fullwood and Co. grinned.

"I ain't sure that Jappy's not right," said Gulliver. "He's a terrific handful, although he is such a shrimp. That ju-jitsu wrestlin' of his takes a fellow by surprise. Why the other day he even bowled me over!"

"Amazin'!" murmured Sir Montie. "Oh, begad!"

Tregellis-West had received a dig in the ribs from Gulliver's foot, for the latter young gentleman did not approve of Montie's sarcastic tones.

"Well, we can't stand here like this," grumbled Carstairs. "What are we going to do with the rotters—leave 'em here?"

"Not likely!" said Fullwood. "Now we've got 'em helpless, we'll make 'em sit up properly. I suggest that we cart 'em along to your one-eyed school, Wellborne, and bung 'em into old Wraggy's study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! That won't do!" protested the Hon. Aubrey.

I nearly grinned myself. Mr. Wragg, the undermaster at the River House School, was a most ill-natured gentleman, and for us to be deposited in his study would be about the limit in cheek. Fullwood and Co., of course, could easily see the humour of it; but the Honourables would have to stand the racket afterwards, and they naturally tabooed the idea.

"Won't do!" asked Noy. "Why not? I reckon it's a jolly good wheeze!"

"I don't care what you reckon, you beastly boundah!" snapped Wellborne. "Do you think we're goin' to get into hot watah ovah this mattah?"

"Rathah not!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "Bai Jove, what an ideah!"

Sir Montie and I chuckled, and the Hon. Aubrey scowled.

"Kick that beast for me, Bertie!" he exclaimed savagely.

Bertie obliged, and Tommy Watson realised that it would be far less painful to remain silent.

"Well, if you don't like that wheeze, suggest something else," said Fullwood shortly. "Personally, I think it's a rippin' idea."

"I'll tell you what," remarked Coates, in a thoughtful way. "Let's carry 'em up to St. Frank's an' shove 'em in the headmaster's study. That's just as sensible as the other idea, ain't it? Of course we couldn't get there, but for that matter we couldn't get into old Wraggy's study, either."

"If we keep jawin' like this we shall be spotted by some of Bennett's pals," grumbled Bell. "Then a rescue party will come along an' we shall be diddled. It's a quarter past five and the chaps'll have finished tea by this time."

I started.

"Quarter past five!" I muttered. "Oh, my hat!"

I suddenly realised that we should probably miss our appointment with the gov'nor. He would go off without us, of course, and we shouldn't travel to the home, and we shouldn't do any scouting. Our whole plan, in fact, was in danger of being hopelessly ruined. It hadn't struck me until that minute.

"What's the matter with that cottage?" asked Gulliver suddenly.

He nodded towards a small building which stood by the river. It was deserted and empty, and had been so for months past.

"What's the matter with it?" repeated Fullwood, staring. "Well, it wants rebuilding, for one thing——"

"You ass!" snapped Gulliver. "Why can't we use it, I mean? Why not shove all these chaps in one of the top rooms an' lock 'em up there? Then we could give the tip to some of their pals at about nine o'clock, so that they'll get in just in time for bed. They'll miss their suppers——"

"By George! That's not a bad idea!" exclaimed Fullwood. "We'll do it, Gully. Nobody goes to that cottage, and they'll have three or four hours to brood over their sins. It's a rippin' wheeze!"

Gulliver looked flattered, and I inwardly congratulated him. The idea, in fact, was splendid. Five minutes after the enemy had vanished I should be able to wriggle free.

But I was somewhat too previous!

"It ain't so bad," said the Hon. Aubrey, regarding us thoughtfully. "But it'll be no good unless we can tie 'em up bettah, you

know. These handkerchiefs ain't any good at all—— Bal Jove! Theah's a pile of old rope down by our boathouse, don't you know? Cut along an' get it, Bertie, deah boy."

Gulliver offered to accompany the Hon. Bertram, and the pair hurried off. My spirits sagged, for escape wouldn't be an easy matter once we were thoroughly roped up. However, it was no good displaying any anger, for that would only have pleased the Nuts more than anything.

Tommy and Montie were alarmed, too, as I could tell by their glances. Yakama, as usual, wore his continual bland smile.

While Carstairs and Gulliver were away, the other cads hauled us along to the cottage, a low, ramshackle sort of place which stood near the river. We were treated roughly, and practically dragged over the ground.

Within the cottage—which was quite empty—the staircase led straight up from the front-room. And, as is usual in small cottages, it was steep and narrow. We were pushed up by sheer force, and couldn't possibly resist owing to our temporary bonds. And by the time we reached the small back-room, Gulliver and the Hon. Bertie arrived with the rope.

Tommy Watson couldn't contain himself any longer.

"You—you howling rotters!" he gasped desperately. "If you will let us go——"

"Shurrup!" I grunted. "Don't be an ass, Tommy."

"Begad! It's no good arguin' with the horrid cads," murmured Sir Montie.

"Of course not," grinned Fullwood. "The horrid cads won't take any notice, will they? This is a lesson, my son—we're just doin' it to convince you that we're top dogs at St. Frank's!"

"Rats!" growled Watson. "You couldn't have done it at all without the help of these confounded Hogs! You're a rotten traitor, Fullwood!"

"Thanks!"

"You're a blackguardly Hun!"

"Good!"

"And I'll punch your head when I get free!" roared Watson.

"That'll be splendid!"

"You—you——"

Words failed poor Tommy, for Fullwood's calm attitude simply made him frantic. I felt like saying quite a lot of things myself, but I knew that it was useless. Later on, of course, I should demand complete satisfaction from Fullwood, and get it. This satisfaction, in all probability, would take the shape of a severely swollen nose and a couple of black eyes.

Fullwood was always shortsighted, and he couldn't see that retribution would certainly follow.

The absurdity of it! Here were we, about to start on a grim, serious expedition in connection with the Circle of Terror, and were

being detained by a set of malicious rotters to whom we couldn't possibly explain! I should have been frantic myself if I hadn't kept my temper in hand.

The allied cads roped us up thoroughly, and my heart sank. They simply bound us like trussed fowls, and not a bit like one sees a fellow bound in a photo-play. It was a thorough job in every way. Our hands were behind our backs, and the ropes were passed tightly to our ankles. Accordingly, we were simply doubled backwards in the most uncomfortable positions, and couldn't get any purchase on our bonds.

"I reckon that'll do," said Fullwood pleasantly. "You can reckon on being released at about ten past nine, my dear chaps. That'll just give you time to rush to the school in time for bed. You don't mind losin' your suppers, do you? It's half-past five now, so you can reckon up how long you'll be——"

"You—you—you——"

Tommy Watson couldn't find any name bad enough, so he gave it up.

"Let's hope you'll have a stunnin' time, deah boys," chuckled the Hon. Aubrey.

They descended the stairs, grinning, and we heard them cackling hugely as they left the cottage.

"Half-past five!" I exclaimed grimly. "We're done, you chaps!"

"It's shockin', Benny boy—simply shockin'!" groaned Tregellis-West.

"What about old Alvy?" asked Watson desperately. "We shall miss him, and we sha'n't go on that trip, after all! Oh, the rotters—the awful bounders!"

"Shut up, Timmy!" I said warningly.

Yakama didn't know anything about our projected journey; but his ears were sharp, and he looked at us with smiling inquiry.

"Is it that you have arranged the esteemed meeting with Mr. Alvington?" he inquired. "I have not the desire to be inquisitively curious, but Watson made the honourable remark concerning an august trip."

"August trip!" growled Watson, disgustedly. "We shall do a fat lot of tripping here, sha'n't we?"

"We were going for a motor ride with old Alvy, Jappy," I explained. "We arranged to meet him at the corner at half-past five. We can't do it now, of course!"

"Would not the beloved Mr. Alvington pausingly wait?" asked Yakama.

"He'll probably pause for about five minutes, I suppose."

"Then it is the successful venture that we shall attempt," smiled Jappy. "The esteemed corner is not more than two or three minutes' run, and it will still be certainly possible to arrive within six tremendous minutes."

Tommy Watson grunted.

"Yes, they jolly well will be tremendous minutes!" he snorted—"so tremendous that they'll be hours! Don't be a young ass, Jappy, for goodness' sake! If we could get

free, I'm blessed if we wouldn't take you along with us! Old Alvy wouldn't mind. But what's the good of talking rot?"

"It is not the splendid rot that I articulate," murmured Yakama sweetly.

And then all of a sudden he seemed to turn himself into an excellent impersonation of a snake. He wriggled and twisted convulsively for about fifteen seconds. Incidentally, he kicked Sir Montie in the tummy, but in the confusion this was scarcely noticed, except by Montie himself.

I've always had the idea that I could wriggle out of ropes pretty decently, but I freely admit that I couldn't hold a candle to Yakama. As true as I'm setting this down on paper, he had his hands free within twenty seconds!

"Great Scott!" I yelled, staring at him.

"It is the easy trick," murmured Yakama, as he nimbly unfastened his ankle ropes. "It is only necessary to be acquainted with the esteemed art of squirming. Do you not follow me? It was with inside delight I allowed myself to be bound, for the knowledge was known to me that I could excellently free myself."

"It's a miracle!" gasped Tommy Watson excitedly. "Jappy, old boy, you're my pal for life! For goodness' sake cut these ropes!"

Within a minute we were all free. And the voices of Fullwood and Co. and the River House cads had scarcely died away!

All my hopes returned.

"If we're quick, we shall catch old Alvy yet!" I exclaimed crisply.

I had nearly said "the guv'nor," but remembered in time that Yakama was an outsider, so to speak. However, after what Tommy had said we couldn't possibly leave him behind. Besides, it was only fair that he should accompany us. Without his aid we should have been helpless.

"Come on!" I said, rushing to the door.

We pelted down helter-skelter. We were in such a hurry, in fact, that we neglected to thank Yakama for his timely assistance. But he didn't mind. He was only too pleased to know that we had defeated Fullwood's mean scheme.

I couldn't help feeling in a tiny degree that I had been "side-tracked," as Farman would have said. I was the leader, and yet Yakama had been entirely successful where I had failed. At the same time, I don't profess to be a squirming contortionist. So he was welcome to take all the credit.

We ran like mad across somebody's meadow, this being the shortest cut to the lane. The fact that we were trespassing didn't concern us in the least. Somebody else might have worried over it, but we didn't.

When we broke through the hedge at the other side we were within sight of the corner. And there stood a big motor-car, with Nelson Lee at the wheel. Good old guv'nor!

He was waiting for us, and I gave a joyous whoop as I realised that Fullwood and Co. were beaten, after all.

CHAPTER IV.

(Nipper continues.)

NELSON LEE GIVES HIS ORDERS, AND YAKAMA AND I MAKE AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY— THEN I ADOPT A SOMEWHAT RISKY PLAN OF OPERATION.

NELSON LEE eyed us very severely as we hurried up, hot and breathless.

"Upon my soul, what is the use of my making an arrangement, boys?" asked the guv'nor irritably. "Do you know that I have been waiting here for over ten minutes?"

"Begad! We're—we're frightfully sorry, sir——"

"Dry up, Montie! I'll do the jawing," I interrupted.

"In other words, you believe you will have a better chance of pacifying me than Tregellis-West, eh?" exclaimed Nelson Lee sternly. "It is most fortunate that you arrived when you did, for I was on the point of leaving at once. And I was not aware that you were bringing Yakama with you."

"I am of the most extraordinary regretful sorrow, sir," murmured the Japanese boy. "If I am not required to be present I will hasten myself from the proximity of this neighbourhood."

Nelson Lee couldn't help smiling.

"I don't think it will be necessary for you to do that, Yakama," he chuckled. "In fact, you may as well come along with us now. But you will have to be very careful, for our mission is of a delicate nature. I have reason to know that you can keep a secret well, or I would not trust you now."

Yakama flushed slightly with pleasure.

"The trustfulness which you can place in my unworthy person is stupendous, Mr. Alvington," he declared gravely. "It is the secret that I always keep magnificently well. I am not the blabber."

"All right, Yakama. You needn't be left in ignorance of our mission for long, for Bennett will explain matters to you as we go," said the guv'nor. "Now, Bennett, I am waiting."

"To start, sir, or to hear what I have to say?"

"Both."

Nelson Lee was in a good humour again, and we climbed on board the car, and were soon buzzing away towards Bannington. I sat beside the guv'nor, and gave him a vague outline of what had happened. It wasn't quite possible to go into details without sneaking. I mentioned no names, but Nelson Lee understood all right. And he was unfeeling enough to laugh heartily.

"I dare say you will have your revenge one day," he said, turning to me. "Yakama seems to be quite a useful youngster, and there is no reason why he shouldn't be with us. Just give him an outline of our plans, young 'un!"

It didn't take me long to enlighten the Japanese boy. Of course I didn't tell him everything; but he was very eager when he

learned that our expedition was up against the Circle of Terror.

Yakama himself had every reason to loathe the Circle, since he had been victimised by that great gang of rogues himself a few months previously. I've set down all the incidents of that exciting episode long ago, and I take it for granted that you know as much about it as I do.

Still, to refresh your memory, I'll say that Yakama came near to dying on two or three occasions owing to the activity of the Circle of Terror. He didn't die, of course, and it was the gov'nor who saved him.

Consequently, Sessue Yakama was grateful in the extreme to "Mr. Alvington," for he wasn't aware of Lee's real identity. And now that he learned that we were bent upon visiting a stronghold of the Circle's, with the object of helping General Leighton, he was eagerness itself. As the gov'nor had said, Jappy could be thoroughly trusted, so everything was all serene.

The trip to Rapley was enjoyable in every way. The evening was simply splendid, but it had drawn in by the time we reached the neighbourhood of our destination. The air was mild, and the night promised to be dark and still. The moon wasn't due to rise until about midnight, or soon after.

Rapley, I may as well explain, was a tiny village nestling in a little valley. It was quite a tiny place, and extremely picturesque in the summer-time. The Home was situated some little distance out, and stood by itself, so far as I knew.

The place didn't actually belong to the Circle of Terror. They merely used it for their own purposes now and again. The gov'nor had obtained all the information possible concerning the establishment.

It was run by a gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Dr. Cleveland Grimes, and was, in strict truth, a lunatic asylum. There weren't many patients, for the place wasn't at all extensive, and nearly all the cases were of the most harmless variety. In fact the Home was more like a convalescent sanatorium than anything else.

To the world at large it was ultra-superior, the fees being extremely high and the patients themselves being all of the upper classes. But Nelson Lee and I knew well enough that Dr. Cleveland Grimes was a personal friend of Professor Zingrave's, and one of his chief advisers. In a way, therefore, the Rapley Convalescent Home, as it was politely termed, was a part and parcel of the Circle of Terror's organisation.

If the gov'nor could only expose Dr. Grimes, he would do a big service to the community, but Nelson Lee hoped for even higher results.

I don't want my meaning to be mistaken. Dr. Grimes ran his establishment on strictly open lines. There was nothing shady about his method of business at all. It was only on rare occasions that the place was used for sinister purposes, for practically always everything was open and above-board. This, of

course, was one of the rare occasions I have just referred to.

It wasn't by any means certain that General Leighton was at the Home; but Nelson Lee had formed a theory, and he was anxious to test it without delay. Hence this prompt visit to Rapley on our part.

We didn't anticipate any particular excitement. It was first and foremost a scouting expedition; but, needless to say, we should hold ourselves ready to act with decision at the slightest opportunity.

The gov'nor was satisfied that no strict watch was being kept. The Circle believed that the Rapley Home was above suspicion, so it would have been pointless to have a host of spies knocking about. In fact it would have been risky, for chaps of that sort couldn't hang about such a quiet district without being noticed, and that would have led to gossip—the last thing desirable.

We reckoned, therefore, that we had a clear field, and it wasn't so long before we discovered that our calculations were true to the mark.

Nelson Lee brought the car to a standstill at a spot a mile from the Home itself. We were in a tiny gully, with high trees on either side, completely to ourselves, and here the motor-car was side-tracked. That is to say, it was driven into a little clearing near the road and concealed from the latter by a very high hedge.

From this point we proceeded on foot, since it would have been too risky to drive straight up boldly. Even if we hadn't been seen, we should certainly have been heard. And motor-cars weren't as common as flies at Rapley.

At last we came within sight of our objective. I found that I had pictured the Home fairly accurately, for it turned out to be a big, picturesque mansion, surrounded by beautiful gardens. A high wall shut it off from the road, and the wall continued, in fact, completely round the whole garden.

There were many lights showing from the windows of the house—lights which were well screened by dark-coloured curtains. The whole establishment wore an air of prosperity and respectability, and I found it hard to realise that anything of a criminal nature could take place there.

A great many high trees grew just within the walls, forming a kind of continuous shrubbery completely round the gardens. Thus the grounds were surprisingly private—a really essential feature considering the nature of the patients.

"Well, sir, what's the first move?" I asked softly.

"I think I had better make the position quite clear, boys," said Nelson Lee, mainly, I believe, for Yakama's benefit. "This house, although it looks so eminently respectable, is really connected with the greatest gang of criminals that England has ever been cursed with. If we trespass, therefore, we shall be doing no wrong. My object is to defeat the Circle of Terror in a very scoundrelly enterprise, and I cannot do that without under-

going some slight risk. There is one very important fact which you must all bear in mind."

"An' what's that, sir?" asked Sir Montie.

"Under no circumstances must you allow yourselves to be seen-or heard," said the guv'nor warningly. "I am going to trust you to be extremely cautious, and I don't think I shall be disappointed. If, by any chance, you run into somebody, make tracks at once—pelt away as fast as you can! It may not be exactly in accordance with your desires, but that cannot be helped."

"We understand, sir," said Tommy Watson, bubbling with eagerness. "But what's the programme? What have we got to do, sir?"

Well, to begin with, this wall must be scaled!"

Nelson Lee stepped through the long grass to the foot of the high wall, and I nimbly leaped upon his back and reached the stonework above. A row of ugly spikes was placed upon the top of the wall itself, but these were more for look than use. Spikes are practically no good, anyhow. Broken glass is quite a different proposition! I'd had a taste of that sort of thing more than once!

Having reached the top, I turned round cautiously and gave the others a hand up. Nelson Lee himself took a short run and grabbed the stonework. In another five seconds he was beside me, and we dropped down to where my chums were waiting.

We were now all within the privacy of the thick plantation. A well-kept lawn lay between us and the house, with evergreen bushes dotted thickly about. The garden couldn't have been better than it was from our point of view. There was cover of some kind in practically every corner.

We softly crept through the trees until we arrived at a smooth gravel path. Just here, on the border of the lawn, a great ornamental flower-stand stood. It was made of stone, and gleamed clearly in the darkness.

"Splendid!" breathed Nelson Lee. "This flower-stand is an excellent distinguishing mark, and we will adopt it for our base. It is here we will meet after doing our preliminary scout round."

"Who's going, sir?" I asked somewhat anxiously.

"We will form ourselves into three parties," said Nelson Lee with a chuckle. "That will be somewhat difficult, considering that we only number five; but I must regard myself as one party. Bennett and Yakama will take one course and Tregellis-West and Watson another."

I saw the guv'nor's wheeze in a moment. Yakama being out of the secret, it was far better that he should accompany me. Montie and Tommy were quite all right on their own.

"An' what are we to do, sir?" asked Sir Montie languidly.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" I asked, staring.

"By that statement I mean that you must confine your activities to a mere glance

round," murmured the guv'nor. "Bear in mind that there is no hurry. Go with extreme caution, and take note of everything you see. You will then report at this spot at the end of half an hour."

"But what are we to look for, sir?" asked Tommy Watson.

"That's just it, my lad. I don't exactly know," replied Lee. "You are to look for anything. Until we get the lie of the land we cannot possibly adopt any definite plan of action. Therefore we are now undertaking the task of finding our bearings. By the time we meet again we shall be in a far better position to discuss plans."

The guv'nor's system was absolutely sound. Until we knew exactly where we were we couldn't possibly make any decisive move. This scouting on our part would give us the hang of the place completely, and, after another word of warning regarding absolute quietness, we all set off.

Sir Montie and Tommy went towards the left, with the object of scouting that side of the house thoroughly; Yakama and I took the right course; and Nelson Lee simply faded into the gloom before I knew what his intentions were.

Although there was nothing doing yet, there was a certain thrill about this adventure which was altogether enjoyable.

Yakama was full of enthusiasm, and I could see that he was intent upon the work in hand.

"This way, my son!" I breathed softly.

"It is your place to lead, Bennett," murmured Yakama. "I will willingly follow your magnificent commands."

"Good! And don't jaw!"

"My lips will be as the esteemed oyster," whispered Jappy.

I grinned in the darkness and we set off.

For the first twenty or thirty yards we crept along the edge of the lawn, dodging from bush to bush. Not a soul was within sight, although now and again we caught the faint echo of a voice from within the building. I had half feared that we should find a few dogs knocking about, but there was no sign of them. If we did surprise one—or, to be more exact, if a dog surprised us—we should simply make tracks, as the guv'nor had advised. It would be simply fatal to be caught on the premises.

Having left the lawn, Yakama and I proceeded down a beautifully kept avenue, and at last found ourselves at the rear of the mansion. Here there were extensive vegetable gardens. The dim outlines of forcing-houses and vineries stood out against the skyline. A short strip of lawn bordered a neat terrace, and beyond this the house walls rose direct, with only one door visible.

At the rear here the building was quite low and much older. I judged that this was the original house, and that an imposing front had been added to it. Large masses of ivy clung to the old walls near the angle of the building, but near the terrace itself the brickwork was bare except for some flimsy creepers.

Yakama and I crept round and took note of everything. Not that there was much to see. I was beginning to think that our scouting trip wouldn't be of much use. The others, perhaps, were meeting with greater success.

By this time we had covered our "beat," and it was getting near the time to return. Fifteen minutes had passed, and it would take us practically ten to get back. Ordinarily, of course, we could have covered the distance in about two minutes; but now it was necessary to creep noiselessly.

We had turned just as we were facing the terrace, but a sudden noise made me start. It was so abrupt that I received quite a shock for the moment. A bang and a creak sounded upon the air with a loudness which was almost deafening, so it seemed. Actually there was nothing unusual in the noise, but our nerves and ears were on the stretch.

A window had been pushed up in point of fact.

It was immediately above us, on the first floor, and so near that we were within whispering distance. There was no cover available at that particular spot, but Yakama acted even before I did.

He simply flopped down upon the grass and lay full length upon the edge of the flower-bed. I followed his example, realising that a better move couldn't be made. In the gloom we couldn't be distinguished from the grass and surrounding plants.

It would have been wise to have kept my face downwards to the ground; but I ventured to peep round with extreme caution. And I saw the figure of a man at the window. So far as I could see he was looking up at the sky.

"Not a sign of it!" he exclaimed, obviously talking to somebody within the room. "It will be perfectly fine to-night, Grimes. There's no prospect of rain whatever. It will be quite easy for us——"

I lost the latter part of his sentence, for he withdrew his head and shoulders whilst speaking, and the window closed again with a bang. And without hesitation both Yakama and I slid away to the cover of some laurels.

I was quivering with excitement.

The words I had heard were not in the least significant; they were, in fact, perfectly innocent and commonplace. It was the voice itself which had set my pulse throbbing with keen satisfaction. For I recognised it at once as the voice of Grant, a chief agent of the Circle of Terror. It was this man who had collared Tommy Watson and myself a day or two earlier—when we had been imprisoned on the South Crag Lighthouse.

His presence at the Home was hugely significant.

I knew that he was engaged upon the case of General Leighton, and the very fact that he was down here practically proved that the gov'nor's theory was right—that the general himself had been brought to this spot.

Instantly I became eager for action.

"Did you hear, Jappy?" I asked intently.

"Was it of the importance, Bennett?" breathed Yakama.

"I should think it was," I said.

"But the honourable man only made some esteemed remark concerning the condition of the atmosphere——"

"I don't mean the words," I interrupted.

"It was the voice, Jappy. That fellow was Grant, one of the biggest rascals in the Circle. I'll bet a quid that General Leighton is a prisoner in the house, in that very room, perhaps."

"Oh! We must make the haste to give information to Mr. Alvington," whispered Yakama keenly. "He will surely be extremely and wonderfully interested."

"Hold on, Jappy," I said softly. "No need to be in a hurry. The iron's hot, and I believe in striking before it cools. I'd give quids to hear what's going on in that room. We should waste precious time by returning to the meeting-place now. But how the dickens can I manage to hear anything?"

Yakama eyed the wall of the house critically.

"It is the impossible," he decided, shaking his head. "The august creeper is not of the tenacious variety. It is the great pity that none of the glorious ivy grows near the window."

I bit my lip anxiously.

"I'm not so sure that ivy would help us," I whispered. "Easy enough to climb, perhaps, but ivy rustles a good bit when you're scrambling up, and that would give the alarm. The window's still a bit open, and sounds carry jolly quickly in still air like this."

"Then there is unhappily nothing splendid that we can accomplish——"

"Wait a minute, I'm thinking," I interrupted.

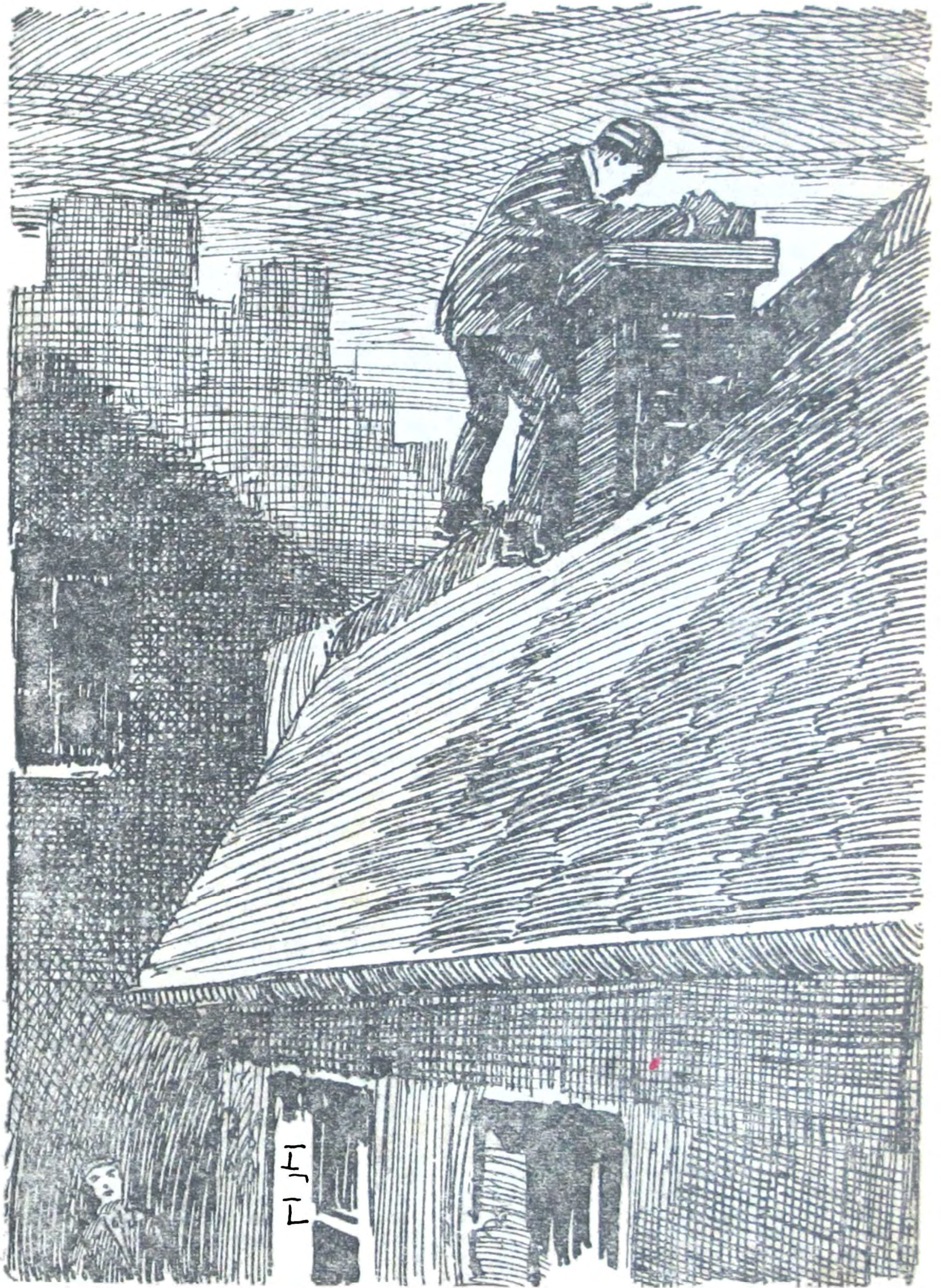
Yakama dutifully remained silent, and I eyed the window and the wall of the house with considerable concentration of mind. It was certainly impossible to climb the wall itself; I don't happen to be an insect. And even Yakama, with all his agility, couldn't achieve the impossible.

And yet I had a strong conviction that something important was going on within that room. Even now I could hear the soft hum of conversation, with an occasional rise or fall in the different voices.

How could the trick be worked?

Then I found myself considering the shape of the building. As I have already said, this part of the house was much older than the rest, and the eaves were extremely low. There was only one floor above the downstairs rooms, and the roof sloped back in a gradual line to the apex. It was tiled in the old-fashioned way, and it would almost have been possible to ride a bicycle across it. It wasn't steep in the least. Jutting out from it was a big, ornamental brick chimney.

Then I turned my head and gazed at the thickly growing ivy at the corner. My heart



Nipper overhears the Circle's plans by means of the chimney.—(See p. 14.)

beat faster, for a sudden idea had entered my head.

"Do you think they'll have a fire to-night, Jappy?" I asked suddenly.

Yakama looked at me curiously, then his face cleared.

"It is of the great mildness," he murmured. "I do not think so, Bennett."

"Well, it won't much matter, anyhow, unless it's a whacking great fire," I whispered. "I'm going to try something, Yakama. I'm going to adopt a pretty risky wheeze."

The Japanese boy nodded.

"Will the voices carry so far?" he asked shrewdly.

"So far as what?" I said, staring.

"Doubtless the excellent chimney is wide

—"

"Jupiter! You guessed, then?"

"Is it that you think I am the dull fellow?" smiled Yakama.

Yakama wasn't dull—on the contrary, he was as keen as a razor. He had read my thoughts almost before I had formed them. For my idea was to shin up the ivy and reach the roof. That chimney could lead to no other room but the one occupied by Grant, and it was a ten to one chance that the voices of the men within would be easily audible at the mouth of the chimney.

This was so wide that any normal fire would not inconvenience me much, and it certainly wouldn't impede the sounds. And the night being mild it wasn't likely that they'd have a big blaze in the grate.

"No, Jappy, you're not dull," I whispered. "That's my wheeze. I'm going to climb the ivy at the corner, where I can't be heard, and then creep across the roof. What you've got to do is to get back to our 'base' and report."

"Cannot I give the assistance?"

"It wouldn't be wise for us both to get up," I replied. "Besides, somebody will have to go back to tell Mr. Alvington, otherwise he'll be in a fine stew. Look here, let's have a squint at the ivy. It may not be extra strong, and you're smaller than I am. If it won't bear me you'll have to have a shot."

"I am of the extreme eagerness, Bennett," murmured Yakama. "It is my wish to help and assist. But if the ivy is of the magnificent strength, you are the fellow to climb. The man within the room is known to you, but I am the stranger. You would lucidly understand the better."

Yakama was quite right, and it was jolly decent of him to say what he had done. I knew that he was bursting with eagerness to do something important, but he knew very well that I could manage this job better than he could, and he wasn't afraid to own it.

We reached the ivy and quickly examined it. The roots were thick and gnarled, and afforded excellent grip. It would be child's play to shin up, provided that the roofs were as strong at the top.

"The superb ivy is of the strength of the ship's rope," murmured Yakama. "It is for you to ascend to the preposterous roof, Bennett. I will hasten my ridiculous feet in

the direction of the meeting-place. It is for me to give the splendid information that you are industriously—employed in undertaking the perilous listen."

"Right-ho, my son," I whispered. "Don't worry, and tell old Alvy that I'll be along as soon as possible. Just wait for me."

Yakama nodded.

"My wish is for the magnificent luck to attend you, Bennett," he breathed softly.

The next moment he had vanished into the gloom, and I mentally decided that Yakama was a first-rate companion in a job of this sort; he didn't waste time in argument, but acted straight away.

I found the climb even easier than I had anticipated. The ivy was practically a part of the wall itself, and the roots were of immense strength even near the gutter. After a few acrobatic manoeuvres I gained the roof, and lay there for a second regaining my breath.

Then cautiously edging my way along, I progressed until I arrived at the old brick chimney. Standing up, I found that my shoulders came on a level with the top. It was easy, therefore, for me to incline my head right over the opening.

In one second I knew two things.

There was no fire in the room, for there was an entire absence of heat; and clearly and distinctly the voice of Major-General Leighton came up to my eagerly listening ears.

The gov'nor's theory was correct!

CHAPTER V.

(*Nipper continues.*)

I LEARN THE DETAILS OF THE CIRCLE'S CUNNING PLOT—A BID FOR HALF A MILLION—NELSON LEE IS EXTREMELY SATISFIED WITH ME.

EAVESDROPPING is a game I entirely disapprove of when it is performed for the mere purpose of satisfying an unhealthy curiosity. Teddy Long, of the Remove, was always receiving thick ears for listening at key-holes; and he undoubtedly deserved them.

But this affair was entirely different. I had no scruples now, for my "cavesdropping" in this instance would probably result in a large amount of good being done. It was with a clear conscience, therefore, that I glued my ear to the chimney hole.

The voices of the men within the room below were amazingly clear. Perhaps the chimney had unusual acoustic properties—it was certainly large—for the sounds echoed up distinctly in an almost eerie fashion. I didn't worry myself about the problem, however; I could hear everything, and that was quite good enough for me.

The very first words I heard were interesting.

"—brutal scoundrels!" said General Leighton furiously.

It was evidently the latter part of a whole sentence, and I heard Grant, the Circle Chief Agent, laugh amusedly.

"Perhaps so," he said. "You have excellent reason to know, general, that the Circle of Terror is always brutal. Certain plans are made, and those plans are carried out, whatever the cost. Our motto, as you know, is 'We Terrorise.' Our methods are absolutely ruthless; we allow nothing whatever to stand in our path."

"Not even murder!" said the general angrily.

"No, not even murder," agreed Grant, with perfect coolness. "I am frank with you since we do not wish to be at cross-purposes. Your son is in our hands, and unless you agree to our demands he will be put to death without mercy."

There was a short silence.

"Where is Stanley — my son?" asked General Leighton, at last.

"At the present moment he is probably asleep," replied Grant. "You need not worry about him, general. The boy will not be harmed in any way if you do as we require. His fate rests entirely with you. As to the locality of his prison, I am afraid you must remain unenlightened."

I was breathing hard now.

Stanley Leighton in the Circle's hands! Why the gov'nor was positively certain that the boy was safe—Miss Eileen Dare was looking after him. What had happened? How had the Circle agents got him? I was quivering with excitement and anxiety as I stood listening.

"He has been in our hands for two days," went on Grant, "and he will never see the light of the outside world again unless you —"

"Do not threaten me again," interrupted the general impatiently.

"You will listen to my proposals, then?"

"Yes, you infernal rogue!"

I heard Grant chuckle, and a wave of relief swept over me. The rotter had been lying, of course. I had seen Leighton junior myself less than two days ago, and only that morning Nelson Lee had received a letter from Miss Eileen, saying that Stanley was quite O.K.

Grant was deliberately lying; he had made the general believe that Stanley was a prisoner. The trick was simple. The Circle, having failed to collar the boy, had collared his father instead. And now Grant was bluffing the general into thinking that Stanley was also a captive.

"We have a mission for you," I heard Grant saying. "It is a very special mission, general, and your decision must be prompt. The matter is extremely urgent and admits of no delay. I fully anticipate that you will indignantly refuse, but you must carefully weigh all the issues before you finally decide. The fate of your boy rests upon what you say in reply to my proposal."

"Go on," exclaimed the general coldly.

"Your brother, Sir Maxwell Leighton——"

I heard a chair shift abruptly.

"My brother!" said the general sharply. "What has Maxwell to do with this infamous affair?"

"Everything," replied Grant. "If you will listen quietly, I will explain."

"Be as brief as possible, then."

"I'm afraid extreme brevity will be difficult," said Grant smoothly. "You must have patience, my dear sir. Your brother, Sir Maxwell, occupies a most elevated position, as you know—he is one of the few King's Messengers—one of that select body of men who are privileged to wear a silver greyhound in their buttonholes. At the present moment he is en route from a certain neutral capital with important despatches."

"Well?" the general asked coldly.

"We have had secret information to the effect that Sir Maxwell will arrive at Boulogne early to-morrow morning," continued Grant. "Your mission is perfectly simple, General Leighton. You are to meet your brother at Boulogne, and you must obtain possession of a certain bag of despatches which will be described to you later——"

"You are mad!" broke in the general harshly.

"If you will hear me out——"

"I repeat that you are mad!" I heard the general reiterate. "It will be utterly impossible for me to obtain possession——"

"Tut—tut!" snapped Grant. "The matter will be perfectly easy for you. You are Sir Maxwell's brother, and, consequently, he will not suspect you of any evil intent. Your high position will be a perfect 'open sesame' for you, and it will be child's play to trick your brother."

The general laughed mirthlessly.

"And you expect me to consent to this?" he asked in a hard voice.

"I do. You have no other choice; at least, the alternative is appalling," replied Grant smoothly. "Once we have come to an arrangement we shall be able to talk more freely. Before starting you will be given full and adequate instructions. And your task will be rendered as simple as possible by methods which will be open to you. Your brother will come to no harm, and you will be able to trick him without the slightest trouble, providing you follow our instructions. Upon getting away with the bag of despatches you will merely hand them to a waiting agent of the Circle, and your mission will be accomplished."

"I think not," said General Leighton. "For, believe me, I will have nothing to do with this treacherous affair."

"Come, come," said Grant softly. "We must discuss the matter smoothly, general. Under ordinary circumstances you would have returned to France by the Channel boat to-night. Well, you will still be able to do so. That is all a part of our plan. There can be no possible hitch, since your papers are in perfect order, and no delay can occur."

"If it pleases you to talk you may do so," I heard the general exclaim. "You may as well know, however, that your words are falling upon deaf ears."

The Chief Agent laughed.

"I don't think so," he said smoothly. "I may as well inform you, with perfect frankness, that our own agents could not hope to obtain Sir Maxwell's despatches. The King's Messenger is well guarded, and if we were to act alone our efforts would be doomed to failure. You, however, are in a unique position, and what would be impossible for us will be simplicity itself for you."

"I do not question your statement," General Leighton replied. "It would, indeed, be quite easy for me to hoodwink my brother, and just as easy for me to get completely away without arousing a single suspicion. But you are insane to suppose that I shall ever consent to such an infamous suggestion. You infernal scoundrel! By heaven, you will never force me to play the traitor to my King and country!"

There was a short silence, and I took a deep breath. The Circle's precious scheme hadn't surprised me. Treason was not at all out of their line. But I felt gravely concerned regarding General Leighton. A blank refusal on his part would lead to terrible trouble, I was sure of that.

"A traitor?" repeated Grant. "Let me hasten to explain matters. This plan is, first and foremost, a money-making dodge. The Circle of Terror does not dabble in international intrigue. In all our enterprises we are out to make money. This case is not an exception to the rule."

"This discussion is useless——"

"You are very impatient, my dear sir," interrupted Grant. "You will oblige me by allowing me to finish. The despatches will not be opened, the seals will not even be touched. Of course you will not accept that statement, but it is the literal truth. We have no intention of selling these official secrets to the enemy. The despatches are required for one purpose alone."

"To hand over to Germany!" exclaimed the general hotly.

"No; they will ultimately be delivered into the Prime Minister's hands intact," declared Grant. "The Circle merely intends to hold the despatches until the Premier redeems them by paying to us the sum of five hundred thousand pounds!"

"Phew!" I gasped involuntarily.

I stared into the darkness, quivering with excitement. Half a million! If the general doubted Grant's statement, I did not. I was quite certain that the whole scheme was nothing more nor less than a huge blackmailing dodge, about the most colossal enterprise the Circle of Terror had ever devised. With those despatches in their hands they would be able to dictate their own terms to the Prime Minister. Somehow, I couldn't help admiring the astounding check of the thing.

"Five hundred thousand!" I heard the prisoner exclaim.

"Exactly — a mere half million," was Grant's cool comment. "What is that to the nation? What is such a sum in comparison to the enormous daily expenditure on the war? A trifle, my dear general—a mere trifle. You will understand that our motives are

purely those of a financial character. In agreeing to our terms, therefore, you may be satisfied that no treachery is contemplated."

"I do not believe you," said the general quietly.

"I am sorry for that. And your answer?"

"Is no—emphatically no!"

There was a short, tense silence.

"I am afraid you do not fully grasp the exact position," exclaimed Grant, after a while. "Either you undertake this mission, General Leighton, or your son dies by dawn. I am not merely threatening now."

"By heaven, you—you——"

"Please do not allow your temper to warp your judgment," interjected Grant softly. "I can quite understand your feelings, and I appreciate the difficulties of your position. But would it not be an act of wisdom on your part to fully weigh the matter in your mind?"

"I have already done so."

"You are acquainted with the Circle of Terror's methods—you also know that we do not utter idle threats," continued Grant. "Think carefully, general. If you undertake our mission you will come to no harm—the country will come to no harm—and your son will be restored to you within twenty-four hours. We will now look upon the other picture. A refusal on your part means ghastly consequences. Your boy will breathe his last within a few hours from now, and you will never know what has become of him, or how he died."

"If my hands were free I would break your neck," shouted the prisoner in a choking voice. "You vile reptile! You have me in your power, and you mean to exact a toll from me, one way or other. Let me think—let me think!"

"Take your own time, my dear sir, but remember——"

"Silence, you hound!"

I heard Grant chuckle softly; the sound echoed up the chimney in the most curious manner. And then I waited tensely and expectantly. What would the general's decision be?

At last he spoke again.

"I have decided," he said, in a voice which almost made me shiver.

"Well?" Grant could not disguise his anxiety.

"I—agree!"

I could scarcely believe my ears, but I realised, all at once, that General Leighton must be almost out of his mind with worry. He had broken down under the terrible strain. I couldn't blame him an atom, for his agony of mind must have been well-nigh intolerable.

"You agree?" exclaimed Grant crisply. "Splendid, general! I knew that you would be sensible."

"I will go to France, as you desire," said the prisoner. "I will meet my brother at Boulogne. If you will acquaint me with your plans, I promise you that I will leave no stone unturned to see the matter through successfully."

"Very well. You will leave this house at about midnight, and will be taken straight

to Folkestone quay by car. Your arrival will be timed within ten minutes of the departure of the boat—so there will be no delay."

"I quite understand," said the general, in an expressionless voice.

And I understood, too! The plan was extremely cunning—far more cunning than General Leighton realised. Stanley wasn't a prisoner at all; and the Circle did not mean his father to discover the truth before sailing on his mission. Afterwards, when the mischief was done, it wouldn't matter a jot.

I listened carefully, but only heard sounds of movements for a while. Then Grant's voice came up again; but it was now faint, as though its owner were at the door of the room. Previously, no doubt, he had stood upon the hearthrug.

"Later on, general, you will be told all the details——"

The voice died away, and I knew that my surmise had been correct. The pair had left the apartment. I waited a few moments, then decided that I had better make tracks without a second's loss of time.

Just as I was about to crouch down, however, Grant's voice again made itself heard.

"..... perfectly simple, my dear Grimes," he was saying. "The old idiot fell into the trap headlong. He doesn't suspect a thing. And he's agreed, mark you! This will mean ten thousand each for you and me, at least——"

"Precisely—if the plan succeeds," put in another voice. "I have my doubts, however. It's too big, Grant. The High Lord is aiming too high."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow—nonsense," laughed Grant. "The High Lord will be here himself at eleven-thirty, so you had better tell him to his face what you think of his latest scheme."

"I shouldn't do that," said Dr. Cleveland Grimes. "I can have my own ideas without voicing them to the High Lord. I'm glad he's coming to-night, Grant. There are several matters I wish to chat with him about. Anybody coming with him?"

"I don't think so," replied Grant. "Have one of these."

"Thanks. Will he be disguised?"

There was a pause—whilst cigars were being lighted, I judged.

"Sure to be," remarked Grant. "He'll come by car, of course. I'm glad we've brought Leighton round; the chief will be delighted. Now, look here, Grimes, about that affair of the Grainger shares——"

They had changed the subject, and were discussing some financial deal or other. I realised that I had overheard about all that was necessary, so I didn't lose a minute in descending from the roof.

I was simply bubbling over with joy. And I must confess that I didn't go so carefully as I might have done as I made my way across the garden to the meeting-spot. However, I arrived safely, so it didn't matter.

As I had expected, Nelson Lee and Sir

Montie and Watson and Yakama were waiting with genuine anxiety. My two chums hurried out as I sped across the lawn, and they grabbed hold of me.

"You—you boulder!" gasped Tommy. "We thought you'd been collared!"

"Rats!" I said coolly. "I've been finding things out."

The guv'nor looked at me keenly.

"Well, young 'un?" he asked, in his short, crisp way.

"I've been on the roof, sir——"

"Yes; so Yakama told me," said Nelson Lee. "It was a smart idea of yours, Bennett. And you acted wisely in sending Yakama back immediately. But have you done any good, my boy?"

"I've learned heaps of things, sir!" I panted excitedly.

"Good! What are they?"

"Well, in brief, they're these, sir," I replied. "I know exactly what General Leighton's secret mission is, and I know that the general himself is a prisoner inside this house."

"By James!" murmured the guv'nor. "Splendid—splendid!"

"But that's not all," I went on. "The High Lord himself is coming here to-night. He's coming by car, and he'll be alone!"

Nelson Lee gripped my arm in the darkness, and gave it a squeeze.

"You've done well, young 'un," he said quietly. "You've done very well indeed."

And such approval from the guv'nor was the highest praise possible. I glowed with delight as we stood there in the heavy gloom.

CHAPTER VI.

(Nipper continues.)

THE GUV'NOR MEANS BUSINESS—YAKAMA HAS AN EXCITING ADVENTURE, AND THEN DISASTER OVERTAKES US SWIFTLY—PRISONERS OF THE CIRCLE.

NELSON LEE listened carefully to my story. He was perfectly calm, but Sir Montie and the others, who were also listening, could scarcely contain their excitement.

At last I had finished—rather out of breath.

"Well, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"The information is of the highest importance, Bennett," said Nelson Lee. "Not the least vital is the news that the High Lord is due here at eleven-thirty. Indeed I may safely say that that particular item is the most satisfactory of all."

"Begad! Why, sir?" asked Tregellis-West.

"Because I intend to make a very determined effort to capture the High Lord this very night!" replied the guv'nor grimly. "The gentleman is very elusive, and he has escaped the police on very many occasions. If I can be of any service to the public at large, I shall be only too delighted."

"What a coup!" I exclaimed, with a whistle. "By Jupiter! If we can only capture old Zingrave himself it'll be absolutely ripping. But what can we do, sir? We can't act on our own."

"Certainly not," said Lee. "For one thing, it would not be the right thing, and the task would be a hopeless one from the start. I understand that General Leighton is to be taken away at midnight—presumably after the High Lord has had a chat with him? We must make all our plans so that they will materialise at eleven-thirty. If possible, I mean to have the High Lord arrested upon arrival; it will then be a simple matter to effect General Leighton's release."

"But—but how, sir?" I asked intently.

"I'm going straight to the nearest station," replied the gov'nor. "There I will 'phone direct to Scotland Yard. Within fifteen minutes a large party of detectives will start out, and they will easily be able to arrive by eleven o'clock. This will be a great triumph, Bennett."

"My hat! I hope it comes off!" I said, between my teeth.

For, somehow, I couldn't quite believe that it would. The gov'nor and I had attempted to capture Professor Cyrus Zingrave so many times without success that it seemed almost too good to hope that we should be victorious now. Yet, looking at all the facts squarely, I couldn't see any flaw.

"A scouting expedition, eh?" I chuckled gleefully. "We didn't expect to get busy like this, did we, sir?"

"We have been guided by circumstances, Bennett," replied Nelson Lee. "It was impossible for us to foresee that events would turn out so splendidly. As they have done so, we should be foolish to ignore such a golden opportunity."

"But—but what about gettin' back to St. Frank's, sir?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "If we stay here till midnight, we shall get home frightfully late. Begad, it'll be mornin' before we see the school again—it will, really!"

Nelson Lee stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, since I have brought you boys on this enterprise, I cannot well send you back alone," he said. "I fully expected to get back to St. Frank's in time for supper—after having performed our original purpose. But in the light of this information we must carry on. I take it that you are anxious to see the matter through?"

"Rather, sir!" said Sir Montie and Tommy with one voice.

"The anxiety of my ridiculous mind is astounding, sir!" murmured Yakama softly.

"Very well, then. We must all settle ourselves to the fact that we shall see very little bed to-night," continued Nelson Lee. "It won't do you any harm, boys. I warn you that you will have to rise to-morrow the same as usual, after only a few hours' sleep. But I dare say you will survive," he added drily.

"And what's the programme now, sir?" I asked.

"I am going away at once," replied Lee. "You, Bennett, will remain in charge here."

"Right, sir!" I said promptly. "We've simply got to wait until you return. I suppose?"

"Just that, and nothing more. Don't take any chances, for a slip now would probably mean the ruin of all my plans. You have merely got to watch."

"In couples, sir?"

"No," replied the gov'nor. "On this occasion you had better take up your positions singly. Simply select obscure spots, and remain quite still. Keep your eyes well open, and do nothing until I return. You, Bennett, had better remain just here—I shall then know where you are."

"Trust me, sir," I said easily.

"I can, my boy," was all Nelson Lee replied; but it was good enough.

Less than a minute later he had taken his departure, and we boys were left to ourselves. For some few moments we stood listening, but we couldn't possibly hear a sound. Nelson Lee had vanished as silently as a shadow.

"Begad! He's a wonder!" breathed Sir Montie. "An', if it comes to that, so are you, Benny boy. I'm simply too bewildered for words, you know. Dear fellow, how do you do these things?"

"What things, you dummy?"

"Why, climbin' up ivy, an' listenin' at chimney-pots?" said Sir Montie admiringly. "I should never have thought of that, begad—I shouldn't, really. It was an amazin' dodge, Benny."

"Rats! It was the obvious thing to do," I replied. "Yakama saw it in a tick—didn't you, Jappy?"

The Japanese boy nodded.

"Surely it needed not a magnificent amount of thoughtfulness to arrive at such a momentous conclusion? The window was the impossible feat, hence your reasonableness gave you the preposterous advice to ascend to the chimney. I am full of the amaze, Bennett. It is difficult to imagine the courageous General Leighton undertaking such a despicable enterprise."

"I was a bit bowled over myself," I agreed. "But what else could he do, poor chap? His love for his son overwhelmed everything else, don't you see? He simply went dotty with anxiety, fully believing that the kid is in the Circle's hands. You can't blame him, really. But it doesn't matter, anyhow—he won't even start on the mission, let alone accomplish it."

"And now for your orders, dear fellow," said Sir Montie. "We mustn't stay here jabberin', you know. Where do I take up my stand?"

"Well, you'd better edge along towards the drive," I said. "Make a note if anybody comes or goes. By the way, what did you chaps discover?"

"Nothing!" growled Tommy Watson. "We

don't have luck like you, Bennett. Blessed if you don't get all the giddy plums!"

I grinned, and mapped out other spots for Yakama and Watson. Then we stealthily crept to our stations—at least, the others did. I simply remained where I stood. Although invisible to one another, we were within easy earshot, so if anything happened to any of us, the others would be on hand.

I guessed that the guv'nor would have a chat with Detective-Inspector Lennard, if possible. He was the man who had been through many adventures with us whilst engaged upon the campaign against the Circle of Terror. I could just imagine old Lennard's delight at the news. Possibly he wouldn't be on duty, so we should see another of our Scotland Yard pals—Fuller or Morley.

I wondered how long it would be before the guv'nor would come back, and gave him an hour. Or, possibly, he would wait at the station until the Yard men arrived. It was quite on the cards, though, that they would travel down by road. Anyhow, I didn't concern myself; I knew that Nelson Lee would do the best thing under the circumstances.

About six hours passed. Not literally, but that's what it seemed like. By my watch I found that only fifty-five minutes had elapsed, and I wondered if the works had gone squiffy.

Hanging about in one spot is always a trying time, though. The minutes hang heavily and pass with reluctance. I hadn't heard a sound from the other three, and reckoned that they were just about as fed-up as I was. I like action, and plenty of it. But, of course, this wait was unavoidable.

And then something happened.

The hour had managed to crawl by, and I saw that the time was just a few minutes after ten. One or two lights had appeared at the upper windows, but nothing of any importance had occurred—until now.

I became aware of voices somewhere round a corner of the building, and then the eager bark of a dog. By the sound of it the animal was a big one, for the bay was low and throaty. Then the voices ceased, and I distinctly heard a door closed and bolted.

I stood rigid, filled with acute anxiety.

"Great Scott!" I muttered. "I didn't expect this!"

Without a doubt a dog had been turned loose in the garden! The animal was evidently a night guardian, and I suspected that it had been released from its kennel by one of the servants. I remembered the time, and came to the conclusion that the dog was let out regularly at ten o'clock. It was, after all, quite a natural custom; hundreds of people in the country do that sort of thing.

And I was on the qui vive the whole time now. What if the dog scented one of us? There would be a most unholy bullaballoo in a minute, of course. I didn't know what the dickens to do, but told myself that there was one thing I must not do. And that

was to move. The only chance of safety, now, lay in remaining perfectly still.

I began to have fears regarding the guv'nor's return. The dog would spot any attempt to get over the wall in a second, and—

But my thoughts ended there.

What I had been dreading happened! It came so abruptly that I nearly jumped. Without the slightest warning there came to my ears the furious barking of the dog. And the next moment I saw the animal pelt-ing across the lawn, straight for the spot where Sessue Yakama was concealed!

Now the fat was in the fire, with a vengeance!

To tell the honest truth, I was half-scared. Not only would our presence be revealed to the occupants of the house, but there was a very real danger from the dog itself. It seemed to be a savage brute. I didn't hesitate a moment in pulling out my revolver; if necessary, I should shoot.

The animal certainly scented Yakama, and a moment later I knew that the Japanese boy had become fully alive to his peril. For, as I hurried forward, Yakama himself came into view.

I paused with my heart in my mouth.

Yakama wasn't running away—on the contrary, he was deliberately rushing at the dog as it made for him. Without a doubt this was the finest thing to do, but it required tremendous pluck.

The dog was barking savagely, and it did not check its rush in the least. The whole thing was over in less than ten seconds; I expected to see Yakama go down, badly bitten.

But I saw, instead, a really amazing display.

As the animal leapt forward, with a final bay, Sessue Yakama hurled himself at his attacker with grim determination. The gloom was rather thick, and I could only see with difficulty. But I knew that Yakama gained the upper hand.

I heard a clash of teeth as the dog's jaws met. Then I saw that Yakama had gripped the animal firmly round the throat. He was twisting round with astounding agility, swinging the dog round in a circle with such velocity that it couldn't possibly use its paws or teeth.

Then, abruptly, Yakama released his hold.

The dog flew out of his hands, wriggling and squirming. With a sickening thud it crashed against the trunk of a neighbouring tree, and fell to the ground on its back. Yakama uttered several fierce words in Japanese and rushed at his fallen foe.

But the brute had had enough!

I don't suppose he was particularly hurt, for as Yakama rushed at him he slunk off with a wild howl and disappeared from under the trees. The howls were continued for several moments.

"Great Scott!" I murmured amazedly.

Although it had happened so quickly, I knew that the whole occurrence had been extraordinary. Yakama's nerves must have

been as strong as iron, or he could never have performed such a feat. And the speed with which he had acted was almost unbelievable. I hurried across to him.

"Are you hurt, Jappy?" I breathed anxiously.

Yakama gave a contemptuous little snort.

"It is the brutal mongrel-tyke which is suffering from the terrific hurt," he exclaimed. "Were you observing the little encounter, Bennett? It was excellently fine, was it not?"

"Well, I'm flattered!" I exclaimed. "You're a wonder, Jappy. I was expecting to find you on the ground, with chunks bitten out of you! The way you handled that giddy tyke was ripping!"

"But I am of the fear that much harm has been accomplished," murmured Yakama. "Was there not the great commotion, Bennett? It is inconceivable that the ridiculous inhabitants are suffering from the deafness. We must hasten our departure from this magnificent garden——"

"You're right, old chap," I cut in crisply. "You nip over and tell Watson, and I'll give the tip to Montie. Thank goodness, you weren't bitten!"

I was about to hurry off when there was a movement in the bushes near by. I paused, my heart jumping. Perhaps Tommy or Montie——

"Here they are!" exclaimed a rough voice.

"Run!" I roared desperately. "Run like blazes!"

But it was too late!

Even as I attempted to dash away I was caught from behind, and flung upon my face with such force that I was almost dazed. There must have been three men, at least, for two of them were dealing with Yakama. They had their hands full, too! The Japanese boy was as tricky as a freshly-landed eel. But eels, as a rule, are subdued in the end—and so was Yakama.

I was handicapped, for I had been partially stunned right at the outset. Both Yakama and I were taken into the building, and our feelings were almost too deep for words. My head was clearing, and I hoped that Sir Montie and Tommy would succeed in slipping away.

Our captors, I noticed, wore uniform, and they were evidently members of the staff. We were roughly taken into a small room, where a dim light was burning. As I saw at a glance, the window was heavily barred and the door itself was of stout oak.

Grant, the Chief Agent, came hurrying into the room.

"Boys, eh?" he exclaimed harshly. "What is the meaning of this, Martin? How is it that these confounded urchins were allowed to get into the grounds?"

One of the men scowled.

"I don't see as you've the right to question me, sir," he said sullenly. "Dr. Grimes has never complained about me, not

the whole time I've been here. The dog was loose, as usual——"

"Very well, the doctor will no doubt question you later on," interjected Grant curtly. "Search the grounds at once—every inch of them!"

"Very good, sir."

Martin and his companions retired, and Grant closed the door and turned up the lamp. Then he looked at us fixedly, and gave a little start as he regarded me.

"By thunder! You're one of the brats who escaped from the lighthouse!" he snapped. "What are you doing here, boy?"

"Pup—pup—please, sir, I—I——"

I got as far as that, and then pretended to break down. The move was rather an unwise one, for Grant gripped my shoulders and shook me until my head felt dizzy.

"None of that nonsense!" he grated. "You tried that trick before, and I was fool enough to be deceived. If you try the same game again I'll thrash you until you can't stand!"

I was too breathless to speak, and Grant turned upon Yakama.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

The Japanese boy looked absolutely blank.

"No Ingleesh!" he said dully. "Me Japanese."

"You infernal young liar——"

"Me Japanese," repeated Yakama steadily.

"If you don't speak within ten seconds——"

"No Ingleesh!"

Grant seized Yakama, and boxed his ears cruelly. By the time he had finished Jappy's face was red and his eyes were gleaming.

"Me Japanese!" he muttered.

And, at the same second, he dived forward and caught Grant by the left arm. Grant was a big man, but a second later he was howling with pain, and he fell to the floor with a crash, roaring madly.

"Good egg!" I exclaimed tensely.

I rushed to the rescue, and the pair of us piled upon Grant and held him down. Just for that moment we had a dotty idea that we should be able to escape. But the next second the door burst open with a crash.

"Oh, bedad!" exclaimed a well-known voice.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were propelled forcibly into the room, and the three keepers came after them. Yakama and I were kicked aside, and Grant rose to his feet simply boiling with fury.

"You fools!" he roared. "Why didn't you come before?"

"Why, we was searching the grounds, sir," replied Martin. "We found these two kids trying to climb the wall. But there's nobody else on the premises, and everything's all quiet."

"What about that infernal dog?"

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know what's happened to him," replied Martin. "He's in his kennel, whinin', and won't come out

for nothin'. Seems to be proper frightened, an' no mistake."

The Chief Agent swore.

"I'll have a look round the grounds myself!" he snapped, setting his collar straight. "See that those boys are locked in the room, and remain outside the door, Martin. The window's barred, isn't it?"

"Like a prison, sir."

Grant nodded, and passed out of the room. The next moment the door closed with a slam, and we heard it locked and bolted. Disaster had overtaken us swiftly, and I felt utterly miserable.

What would happen to the gov'nor's well-laid plans?

CHAPTER VII.

PREPARING FOR THE COUP—NELSON LEE IS ANXIOUS—COMPLETE SUCCESS.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, stepped out of a first-class compartment of a small special train which had just pulled up alongside the platform of Great Rapley station.

The special consisted of one coach only, behind a fast engine. About sixteen other men piled out after Detective-Inspector Lennard. And a brisk figure stepped across the platform and warmly gripped the inspector's hand.

"Splendid, Lennard," he said cordially. "You couldn't have arrived in better time. And you've brought quite a decent crowd with you, too. We shall probably need every man."

"How on earth do you manage these things, Lee?" asked the inspector wonderingly. "I thought you were stuck away in that beastly school? Anything happened since I last saw you?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Quite a lot," he replied, "but my position remains the same, Lennard. I may be a schoolmaster, but I'm not exactly a prisoner, you know. To be quite frank, I was literally pitchforked into this affair. The Circle of Terror commenced operating within a mile of St. Frank's, and I couldn't possibly remain indifferent. I'll tell you the whole yarn before long."

"Well, let's find the refreshment-room—"

"My dear man, you're not at Victoria," chuckled the great detective. "The only refreshment room here is the Red Lion—and that's half a mile away, and the landlord is probably in bed."

"What a rotten hole!" said Lennard disparagingly. "It'll have to be the waiting-room, then."

The waiting-room proved to be a very small apartment with a dim lamp burning in it, and the only liquid refreshment visible was a bottle of stale water. Needless to

say, this was allowed to remain strictly aloof.

"I was reckoning on some good country beer—" began Lennard.

"Upon my soul, one would think you were a regular toper, Lennard!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "There is grim work to be done, and I know that you are eager to get at it. Joking aside, we must lose no time."

The inspector nodded.

"Go ahead," he said briskly. "I can't quite believe that there's any prospect of nabbing Zingrave himself. But I'm in your hands entirely."

"Then don't interrupt."

Nelson Lee lost no time in going into details. The waiting-room was quite crowded. Detective-Inspector Lennard was the only man who knew Nelson Lee's real identity. The others were simply there to do their duty. Possibly they were somewhat curious, but it wasn't their place to ask questions.

"This information is of the utmost value, Lennard," Nelson Lee concluded. "The Home is twenty minutes' brisk walk from here, and if we look sharp we shall arrive just after eleven. The High Lord is expected at half-past, so we shall have ample time to place our men in their various positions."

"You are not proposing that we should all get into the grounds?"

"No, of course not," replied the schoolmaster-detective. "There are many trees near the heavy gates, and it is my idea to ambush Zingrave's car. The very instant he arrives we will spring out and take him prisoner."

"How shall we know him?"

"In all probability he will be quite unrecognisable," pursued Lee. "Undoubtedly he will be cleverly disguised. We must necessarily take certain chances. But it is very improbable that two cars would arrive at that particular time. Therefore, as soon as ever the vehicle puts in an appearance, we will stop it and arrest the occupant—no matter who it is! As you know, Zingrave is amazingly tricky, and we mustn't give him the slightest opportunity of slipping through our fingers."

"And after we've captured him?"

"Why, then we'll raid the Home itself," replied Lee calmly. "Grimes and Grant, at least, must be arrested. There may be others, but I'm not sure of that. Our movements will be largely guarded by circumstances."

The party set out soon afterwards, and in due course arrived at their destination. As Nelson Lee had reckoned, the time was now just after eleven, and all the Yard men were carefully concealed in the ambush.

It was not necessary for such a large number to remain hidden, of course; but they were there for the main purpose of raiding Dr. Grimes' establishment. It was just as well that they should be on hand when Professor Zingrave arrived.

The place was quiet and still, and Lee was quite satisfied that no watch was being kept. He stole off alone, and mounted to the top of the wall exactly opposite the spot where Nipper should have been waiting. It was not possible for Lee to distinguish anything in the gloom, so he dropped lightly into the garden and crept forward. The vicinity of the ornamental flower-stand was quite deserted.

Lee looked round him with a frown.

"Strange!" he told himself. "Where can the boys be?"

He gave a soft signal—well known to Nipper. It was similar to the cry of a night-bird, but very low and subdued. There was no response, and Nelson Lee was troubled with keen anxiety.

If Nipper had been anywhere close he would have replied to that call at once. It was quite certain, therefore, that neither he nor his chums were at their posts. Something unexpected had occurred—but what?

Nelson Lee waited for fully five minutes, but everything was still, and most of the lights in the building had been extinguished.

"I can't understand it," murmured the detective, puzzled.

But it would have been unwise on his part to make any searching investigation. The climax was now drawing near, and Nelson Lee fully intended to be on hand when Professor Zingrave arrived. It would have been a false move on his part to search for Nipper at this moment.

So, with strange misgivings, he noiselessly scaled the wall again. The keen satisfaction which had thrilled him previously had vanished. He could not help fearing that some fatal hitch had occurred.

Yet, at the same time, his trust in Nipper was complete. And he wisely decided to cast worry aside until he had better reason for concern. Nipper's absence could possibly have many explanations.

The wait commenced.

If Zingrave arrived punctually—and the High Lord had always been a keen stickler for punctuality—he would put in his appearance at the end of fifteen minutes. To judge by the appearance of the road, there wasn't a human being within a mile. Yet each tree and bush concealed a waiting detective.

The situation was tense, and a thrill ran through every man when the faint hum of an approaching motor-car made itself heard upon the night air. Quite suddenly a superb landaulette swung round the bend half a mile away, and came speeding down the long stretch towards the Rapley Home.

The concealed watchers saw nothing but the two subdued headlamps. They grew larger, and at length the big car came to a standstill exactly opposite the heavy wrought-iron gates. As every man saw, the automobile was a magnificent car, and the chauffeur wore livery.

He was in the act of climbing down when Nelson Lee acted.

A sharp cry ran out upon the air, and the

whole road instantly became alive with running figures. They surrounded the car in a swarm. At the same second Lee wrenched open one door, and Lennard the other. The chauffeur was already struggling fiercely with two of the other men.

"Great Scott!" gasped Detective-Inspector Lennard blankly.

The interior of the landaulette was softly lighted, and there, sitting back among the cushions, was one of the sweetest old ladies the inspector had ever seen! She was looking extremely startled, as well she might.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed falteringly. "Whatever is the matter?"

Lennard was completely confused. He roundly abused Nelson Lee under his breath. What a farce! After all their preparations they had done nothing but frighten this old lady nearly out of her wits!

"I—I beg your pardon!" stammered the inspector. "I— Good heavens!"

Whilst he was attempting to formulate an adequate apology, Nelson Lee leapt into the motor-car and roughly grasped the old lady's bonnet. It came off in his hand, and when he attempted to pull the grey locks they resisted.

"You're mad?" roared Lennard. "This lady——"

"Is Professor Cyrus Zingrave!" snapped Nelson Lee curtly. "Man alive, don't let yourself be tricked! Make your arrest at once!"

"But—but——"

"You idiot!" roared Lee. "Ask questions afterwards!"

The bewildered inspector attempted to pull himself together. Whilst he was doing so the old lady withdrew her hand from the folds of her dress. Nelson Lee saw the faint glimmer of something, and he pounced upon it like a wolf.

There was a short, sharp struggle—and Nelson Lee won.

"A harmless old lady, eh?" he said grimly. "Just glance at this, Lennard. A novel kind of pistol, by the look of it. I've no doubt it contains poison, or gas, or some such diabolical concoction.

Detective-Inspector Lennard was convinced.

"I arrest you, Professor Zingrave, on the charge of——"

"Never mind these formalities!" interjected the "old lady" calmly. "I am not such a fool as to resist when the odds are quite hopeless. You have been clever on this occasion—but your success will not be very prolonged, I assure you!"

Nelson Lee was highly elated.

The prisoner was undoubtedly the High Lord himself. He had been captured neatly, but he would certainly have escaped if Detective-Inspector Lennard had had his way. Not that the inspector was dull. He was a very smart officer indeed, but he had been totally unprepared for such a wonderful disguise.

Zingrave remained perfectly cool. His eyes—amazing eyes they were—glittered with fire, but he gave no other sign. He knew

well enough that any attempt to escape would be frustrated.

Nelson Lee knew that the professor's eyes were keen, and he had no wish to be recognised. So he remained in the shadow the whole time, and did not allow the High Lord to gain a clear view of him.

"Look after this prisoner, Smith!" said Lennard crisply. "You'd better have two other chaps with you."

"If you will allow me to make a suggestion, Mr. Lennard," interrupted Nelson Lee, "I should advise you to remain with the prisoner yourself. Detective-Sergeant Smith can easily take charge of the raiding party, and I will accompany him."

The sergeant looked at Nelson Lee approvingly. He didn't want to be left in charge of the High Lord. He was a capable man, but he had had experience of Zingrave! If anything unexpected happened, Smith didn't want to be held responsible.

Lennard nodded at once.

"All right!" he said. "Get busy, then!"

The inspector was ostensibly in charge of the whole operation, but he knew well enough that Nelson Lee himself took the lead. And Lennard was quite content that it should be so.

Lee did not lose a minute.

With a dozen men he advanced towards the heavy gates. They were locked, but the climb was perfectly easy. The raiding party tumbled over quickly and hurried towards the house.

As Nelson Lee mounted the steps the door opened and Grant appeared. Obviously he had been expecting Zingrave, and now he started back with surprise and alarm expressed in his eyes.

"Why, what—" he stammered.

"We want that man!" snapped Lee. "Hold him!"

Grant was captured almost without a struggle. Then the raiders forced their way into the building. Several of the Yard detectives, however, hurried round to the rear to cut off the retreat of any possible fugitives.

But the move was really unnecessary. The surprise was complete, and nobody succeeded in eluding capture. The servants, of course, were quite harmless people, and the only actual captives were Grant and Dr. Grimes. The latter was almost incoherent with indignation and fury.

"How dare you?" he blustered. "How—how dare you force your way into my establishment? I have never experienced such a monstrous outrage—"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted Detective-Sergeant Smith. "You'll be able to do all the talking you like later on. I've just got to do my duty, and you've got to come along with us!"

"You are mad—mad!" raved Dr. Grimes.

But his protests were in vain. His connection with the Circle of Terror was very apparent, and he knew well enough that his career was at an end.

From every point of view the raid was a triumph.

Nelson Lee, however, was thinking of Nipper and the other boys. He had expected to see them long ago, but so far there had been no sign.

As the detective was walking swiftly down one of the passages, however, he heard a vigorous thumping, and he quickly turned in the direction of the sounds. The thumps, he found, were being delivered upon the panels of a big oaken door. It was bolted and locked.

"Who is there?" called out Lee sharply, bearing in mind the nature of the establishment, and having no wish to release a possibly obstreperous patient.

"Mr. Alvington!" came a roar in Nipper's voice. "Open the door, sir!"

Nelson Lee shot back the bolts and turned the key in the lock.

A smile of relief came into his eyes as Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson and Yakama literally piled upon him.

"Good old Alvy!" gasped Sir Montie. "Begad! I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir, but I can't help it! I can't really!"

"Have you got the general?" asked Nipper quickly.

"No," replied Lee. "Why do you ask? I presume he is still in an upstairs room, awaiting—"

"He's gone, sir! He's gone!"

Nelson Lee eyed Nipper steadily.

"Gone!" he repeated. "But you told me—"

"The plan was altered, I believe, sir," exclaimed Nipper quickly. "Anyhow, I overheard Grant saying to somebody as they passed this door that the general had left at half-past nine. He must have gone out by a rear exit, and I suppose he'll catch an earlier boat."

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

"In that case, General Leighton has already started upon his secret mission," he said grimly. "By this time, in all probability, the general is upon the Channel steamer en route for Boulogne."

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But General Stanley Leighton, D.S.O., was, however, fully acquainted with all the facts in time to avert the promised disaster. Everything came right. But both Nelson Lee and Nipper were destined to undergo quite a lot of excitement before the whole business was completely and finally settled.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN OUR NEW SERIAL TO-DAY!

In the Grip of the Huns.

A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.

By CLEMENT HALE.

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

The Chief Characters in this Story are :

GEORGE GRAY and his brother **JACK**, who are the English Staff of the Berlin Rovers, a football club in Germany.

OTTO BRACK is a scoundrelly German member of the team. But another German, named

CARL HOFFMAN, is friendly, and advises the Englishmen to leave Germany, which they refuse to do. They are arrested and sent to a camp at Oberhemmel. One of the guards illtreats Jack, and George goes to his rescue, knocking out a gaoler named Kutz. He and his brother are then put in separate cells. Some days afterwards all the prisoners are called out and formed up in the square. The new governor, Von der Klutz, is going to make a speech. He tells them that they are to leave the barracks and be put in an outdoor camp. The next day this removal takes place. The hours seem very long till a friendly warder gives them a football.

(Now read on.)

BENEATH THE SKY.

"**Y**OU can haf a game mitt dat," said the German with a nod and a smile as he turned away.

And George then recognised in him the friendly warder who had sympathised with him before.

"Thank you, Fritz," he cried. "Thank you. If ever a chance comes for me to return your kindness, I sha'n't forget."

An hour later the day waned fast, and so ended their first experience of the internment camp at Oberhemmel.

The interned prisoners suffered no discomfort that night. The weather continued to be delightfully warm, and the ground was dry.

The moon rose early, and shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky.

Many of the prisoners did not go to sleep for hours, but sat upon the dry earth talking, and sharing such tobacco as they possessed amongst them.

If it had not been for that empty feeling

that would make itself felt they could have suffered the changed conditions gladly. But the little they had been allowed to eat and drink was insufficient to satisfy their needs, and the new governor was denounced in unmeasured terms.

"He's as bad as the rest of them," growled Wilson, frowning darkly.

"We've got to thank him, though, that we're outside that hole," said George Gray, nodding at the distant and darkened walls of the prison. "And he saved me from further flogging; I mustn't forget that."

Round the barbed wire they could see the glistening bayonets of the sentries flashing as they moved in the bright moonlight.

More than once some of the more active prisoners approached the entanglement of wires and contemplated them critically. The thought of escape was in their mind, but they sighed as they realised how impassable was the barrier, to touch which meant instant death.

So far the only adequate preparation that had been made for the prisoners was in respect of the sanitary arrangements. These were thorough enough, which was something to be thankful for.

Into the small hours of the morning George Gray, Wilson, Jack Gray, and Ablott, with one or two more, sat in a ring discussing the possibility of escape.

"I think some of us might attempt it later," observed George; "but it will have to be carefully done. I suppose later on they'll erect a series of huts to shelter us from the weather, and we must wait till then, as we shall need a screen. It'll have to be done by tunnelling."

By boring underneath the ground until we've passed the lines of wire, eh?" said Wilson eagerly.

"Yes. It'll be risky. But we might succeed. If only there were more trees about, so that we could single out one as an objective and tunnel to it!"

Wilson shook his head.

"The country's very open. It'll be hard work boring once the winter's set in. And they'd shoot us down if they caught us at it."

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Ablott's face whitened as a terrible thought struck home.

"I say," he murmured, his lips quivering. "have any of you chaps thought what will happen if we have heavy rainfall before those huts are put up?"

Yes, they had, but no one had voiced his thoughts at length till then. Now they eyed the wide area of enclosed space, without a semblance of shelter of any kind, and then directed their gaze at the star-spangled and moonlit sky above.

In the event of rain they would be helpless. And to lie there without sufficient body-covering or protection while the clouds discharged their contents on the parched earth was too terrible a thing to contemplate.

"Oh, they'll do something. All Germans are brutes, more or less," said George. "But I don't think they'll go so far as that."

"And meanwhile," said Jack, with a faint smile and a yawn that made the others feel sleepy, "we've got that football. It was kind of that fellow to give it us, eh?"

Ablott nodded and laughed.

"Ay," he cried, "and we'll sample it to-morrow."

So they stretched themselves out, and without discomfort, gradually fell asleep.

In the morning most of them awakened refreshed and strengthened by the pure air they breathed. They roused themselves soon after the dawn broke. Then they walked aimlessly about, watching the sentries as they passed up and down, or stood at their posts, saw the guard changed, ignored the taunts and bitter epithets that were hurled at them by the armed Huns, and wondered when breakfast would be served.

Most of them felt desperately hungry, but the early hours lengthened, and the sun gained in strength, beating down upon the dry earth until the burnt and parched grass reflected his burning rays and took the edge off their misery.

Had the Governor forgotten them?

It seemed like it. And as the morning waned, so did the position become harder to bear, for crowds of women, old men, boys and girls trooped out from the town and walked about the wires, jeering at and taunting them, making fun out of their misery and obvious dejection.

They took no notice, but their blood boiled within their veins.

But as free men one and all until this catastrophe had fallen like a blight upon their lives, the Britishers found it harder to endure than the few Belgian and French civilians who shared their captivity.

It needed a considerable leaven of philosophy to stiffen their independent spirits to the necessary pitch of stoical endurance.

Patience they possessed, and courage too, defiance with it all, but resentment surged uppermost, and found a vent in many a grumble.

By the time the belated breakfast arrived, consisting of coarse bread, rancid margarine,

and thin coffee, and a small ration for each prisoner at that, close upon midday, they'd prepared a round robin of complaint which they insisted should be handed to the new governor of the prison, who had control over their internment camp, Von der Klutz.

The others, especially the Belgians, endured their discomforts like so many tamed animals.

The meagre and unappetising food they ate cheered them, and satisfied them a little, and restored their strength, and an hour after they'd eaten George Gray got hold of the football the Hun guard had given him, and sent it flying into the air with a powerful kick.

"Come along, boys!" he cried. "Let's mark out a pitch, set up such goals as we can, and have a game. It'll help us to pass the day."

THE GAME OF FOOTBALL.

THE suggestion was seized upon with enthusiasm. To the astonishment of the civilians from Oberhemmel who'd come to gloat over the sufferings of the prisoners, the interned British marked out a pitch of the regulation size, set goals at each end of it, which were marked by sticks of wood they managed to find, and more clearly defined by coats which were set there.

Other sticks showed the position of the corners of the pitch and the halfway line, which was continued in a rut across the width of the playing field.

It was then decided that George Gray should captain one side, who were to play with their waistcoats on, while Jack captained the other, and led the forwards, whose team played in their shirts.

Wilson played at right-back for the Whites, as the shirted players were called.

George Gray played centre-half, with a roving commission, for the Blacks, who played in waistcoats.

Ablott was right-back for this team. Two big men, Ford and Mason, who'd each had experience in the position, kept goal for the respective sides.

All the others who were selected for the game had played football and loved it.

A referee was chosen, a man named Green. The linesmen were selected, and the ball was set in midfield.

Then round the pitch gathered the rest of the prisoners, their backs turned upon the insulting, jeering, hilarious crowd, who marvelled at the spirit which enabled the British to play football when they suffered such daily privation, confinement, and misery.

The referee looked at his watch, a borrowed one, by the way, for his own had been stolen by the Huns almost immediately he had been arrested in Berlin.

The teams lined up—the three inside-forwards of the Blacks, who had lost the toss,

(Continued overleaf.)

inside the crudely fashioned centre circle upon the halfway line, those of the other side beyond it.

"Are you ready?" asked the referee.

A chorus of eager assent answered him.

"Time!" he cried, and blew his whistle, and the ball was set in motion.

And then the crowd had reason to stare and marvel more, for the prisoners hurled themselves into the game, in spite of the heat of the day, with a spirit and enthusiasm that caused the faces of the armed guards to lengthen.

In Belgium and in France the German Army was rolling irresistibly onward. Calais in a fortnight, Paris in three weeks, London captured in a month, and the whole of Europe at the mercy of Germany at the end of October, was the watchword that urged the legions of the Kaiser on to victory.

Therefore the people of the German Empire laughed and jeered and behaved with blatant and brutal vulgarity to every foreigner who had the misfortune to find himself on German soil after the outbreak of hostilities. Had they been the interned their spirit would have wilted under the strain; they would have given way to dejection and despair past recovery, and they expected their prisoners to do the same.

Some of them did, but not the British.

Nothing could tame them, it seemed, and so the people of Oberhimmel gazed in wide-eyed amazement at these light-hearted and stalwart irrepressibles, who entered upon a game of football with as much zest and enthusiasm almost as if they were playing at home.

The crowd drew nearer to the wires. The guard ceased their pacing up and down, and to the minds of many of them came a presentiment that Britain would beat them in this war, unless Germany could win quickly.

"Boys, take your time! Steady there!" cried George Gray as he hurled himself into the heart of the game.

Up and down the field, here and there, in front of the goal, or dashing for the enemy's

citadel, the famous player who had made the name of the Berlin Rovers famous throughout the German Empire made his presence felt.

Wherever the ball went he was to be found. His tackling was as it ever used to be, superb. Even his brother Jack, nimble on his feet, and as quick as greased lightning, a past-master in the art of dribbling, found his master when he came up against his brother.

Ding-dong the game went. First one goal was assailed, then the other. And, at last, his brother being out of the way, Jack dodged the back Ablott most cleverly, and cut in slantwise on the Black's goal.

A deft feint drew the goalie's guard, and a side glance of the foot sent the ball gliding between the posts.

The Whites were one up.

A wild outburst of cheering and hand-clapping greeted the scoring of the clever goal, and the Whites went to the middle of the field with the lead.

They did not hold it long. For some minutes afterwards the game continued on even lines, and then, seizing an opportunity, George dashed past Jack, called on the forwards on either side of him to leave the ball alone, and pounced upon it.

Then on he dashed, turning and twisting, tackling and feinting, until he beat man after man, and drove the ball past the White's goalie shoulder high with a force there was no withstanding, and an aim that was as true as if the football had been fired from a gun.

The scores were even.

Now the Whites had another turn, and literally swarmed round the Blacks' goal. They forced a succession of corners, and lined up to head in, only to find the goalie as firm as a rock. He punched away, caught the ball and threw it over their heads, while they charged him down, or punted it into touch threequarters the length of the field.

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Under the Title of

"TWIXT SUNSET and MIDNIGHT"

Will deal with the Further Adventures of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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