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From the window came a flash, followed by a puff of smoke, and the policeman stumbled forward.

THE COLONEL'S SECRET.

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "Who Killed the Colonel?" "The Schoolboy Sleuth," etc., etc., etc.

February 22nd, 1919.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING DOING!

NIGHT!

Night, black and gloomy, with heavy, impenetrable clouds obscuring the stars. The whole countryside in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's was asleep and silent, but there was an air of sinister mystery brooding over the district.

That paragraph is meant to be dramatic—I want that clearly understood—because, to be exact, on this particular night there was something doing. It was a night which had already contained several exciting incidents, and seemed likely to provide a good few more.

Nelson Lee was on the warpath; that was the long and the short of it. I was with him, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson were with me. That's another way of saying that we were all together.

Of course, it wasn't the usual thing for three leading lights of the Ancient House Remove—namely, Montie and Tommy and my humble self—to be gadding about the neighbourhood between the hours of one and two in the morning. Neither was it usual for our Housemaster to accompany us.

But this was a very special occasion.

In short, Colonel Howard Clinton was about to be arrested. He deserved to be, for we had every reason to believe that he was something a good many shades worse than a cold-blooded murderer. He had killed somebody, and had done his utmost to lay the blame upon Dr. Stafford, the Headmaster of St. Frank's.

Hold, then, the guv'nor and I trudging down a muddy lane with Tregellis-West and Watson. We were bound for Bellton, the village near the school, and our cheerful intention was to drag from his bed no less a person than Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard.

This brilliant officer of the C.I.D. had his temporary headquarters at the George Inn, and it was a ten-to-one chance that we should find him snoring. It was really a piece of cheek on his part. While he slept we were doing his work. But Nelson Lee didn't mind this; and the guv'nor wouldn't raise any

objection to Lennard taking all the credit for the night's doings later on.

Not that the inspector was that kind of man. On the contrary, he would probably make it known far and wide that Nelson Lee was responsible for the murderer's arrest. Lennard himself had been working hard, but from a different angle of the case. And he had met with no notable success.

The main reason for this was that our official friend was not aware of certain facts which had been known to us for some time. For example, he didn't know that Colonel Clinton had been in the habit of visiting an old house near the river known as Stowe Lodge.

Consequently, he had given the place no attention. Nelson Lee, on the other hand, had watched it closely and keenly—with the result that we now had positive evidence that Colonel Clinton was hiding there.

"You see, boys, the case is a somewhat complex one," observed Nelson Lee, as we trudged along. "To-night the climax has come, and I have little doubt that we shall meet with complete success later on."

"I hope so, guv'nor," I remarked. "After all the trouble we've had about the colonel, it's time the whole thing was cleared up."

"Begad!" said Montie. "Rather, dear old boy!"

Tommy Watson scratched his head.

"But I can't quite get the hang of it, sir," he said, in a puzzled voice. "I suppose complex means kind of mixed up?"

"Something of the kind, Watson."

"Well, it's a jolly good word to use—that's all I can say, sir," declared Watson. "I'm blessed if I can follow it all, it's so jolly mixed up! First we thought the colonel was dead, and that the murderer was some foreigner, and now we find out that Clinton's alive, and that he murdered— Well, that's where I'm stuck! Who did he murder? And why did he murder him?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I think we should all be somewhat clearer-headed if the recent events were briefly recapitulated," he exclaimed. "What do you think, boys?"

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Watson. "I-I don't know what re-re— That word you

used. I don't know what it means, but I guess the idea is to go over the case, as it were."

"I can see, Watson, that it will be necessary for me to have a word with your Form-master," said Lee grimly. "Yes, the word I used—recapitulated—does mean what you suggested. It will take us ten minutes to walk to the George Inn, and so I will employ the time by chatting over what has recently occurred."

The gov'nor lit a cigarette, and then proceeded.

"Colonel Clinton, as you are aware, came to St. Frank's at the commencement of the present term," he said. "It is old history how the colonel attempted to enforce a kind of military regime upon the College House. The boys were, perhaps, justified in rebelling, and the colonel was obliged to leave the school."

"In disgrace, sir," I added.

"Exactly, Nipper," agreed Nelson Lee. "Dr. Stafford is the Headmaster, and when Colonel Clinton attempted to flout the Head's orders, it was necessary for some drastic step to be taken. The colonel, therefore, received orders to quit. He was maddened, and his rage against Dr. Stafford was well-nigh uncontrollable."

"But you've forgotten about Stowe Lodge, sir," I put in.

"I can't talk of two things at once, Nipper," the gov'nor reminded me. "However, we will deal with that aspect now. Stowe Lodge was occupied by a man named Hardy, who apparently lived quite alone. For some mysterious reason the colonel was in the habit of paying visits—secret visits—to that lonely house near the river. I am even now somewhat puzzled as to the nature of the work which was being undertaken by the colonel and Hardy, for they were undoubtedly associated."

"Well, I can remember some horrible poison gas, anyhow!" I said grimly. "I was nearly done for one night, gov'nor."

"You are exaggerating somewhat, young 'un; but the incident was undoubtedly a perilous one," Lee agreed. "So much, then, for the colonel and Stowe Lodge. On the evening of his dismissal from St. Frank's he went away from the school, apparently for good. But he returned rather late, and went to the Headmaster's study, where I happened to be at the time. He was most anxious for the Head to have a private talk with him at about eleven o'clock, and Dr. Stafford agreed. But a somewhat curious incident occurred at that time, which now assumes a significance which was not apparent at the time."

"You're puzzling me now, sir," said Sir Montie.

"You needn't remain puzzled long, my boy. The incident in question concerns the large military moustache which the colonel affected. In lighting a cigar he accidentally burned his moustache—at least, it appeared to be an accident. In a fit of impatience, he grasped some scissors and snipped his moustache completely off. It is now possible to

understand why he did so, for the action was one which had undoubtedly been premeditated."

"How do you know, sir?" asked Tommy Watson.

"I'll come to that presently," replied the gov'nor. "Well, the interview with the Headmaster took place, and the colonel caused it to develop into a violent quarrel. In the morning Clinton was found murdered. That, at least, is what everybody believed, including myself. I don't want to horrify you, boys, but the unfortunate victim's face was unrecognisable owing to the violence of the blows which had been rained upon it."

"The body was clothed in the colonel's garments, and Clinton himself had vanished. Furthermore, the victim was in the colonel's own study. It was inevitable that it should be believed that Clinton himself was the deceased. And every clue available pointed to the fact—or seeming fact—that Dr. Stafford was the murderer."

"Begad! That was perfectly horrid, sir," said Montie indignantly.

"You are quite right, Tregellis-West," said Nelson Lee. "Unfortunately, Inspector Jameson, of Bannington, felt himself justified in placing the Headmaster under arrest; but I was successful in obtaining his release, for I proved that the murder had been committed outside the school, and that the evidence had been faked."

"That was the first step," continued the gov'nor. "After the Head's release, I began to put two and two together, and I suspected the actual truth. The murdered man was not Colonel Clinton, and the colonel was in hiding. That was what I deduced from the data at my disposal."

"And it's turned out to be correct, sir," I remarked.

"Quite correct, Nipper," Nelson Lee replied. "You will now understand why the moustache was removed—because the actual victim was clean-shaven, and his face, although battered out of recognition, was not entirely missing. The moustache, then, was an obstacle, and had to be removed."

"But it was the colonel's moustache, sir," protested Watson—"not the victim's!"

"Ah, but Clinton was supposed to be the victim," Nelson Lee pointed out. "And Clinton performed his work thoroughly. His chief object was to make it appear that he had been killed, and that the Head was his murderer. Meanwhile, he was secreted in Stowe Lodge—alone."

"I suppose the colonel really killed the man at Stowe Lodge?" I suggested. "Then he took the body to the school, sir. And who do you think the victim was?"

"Surely, none other than Hardy, the actual tenant of the house," replied Nelson Lee. "I have now brought the facts down to this very night—when I determined to make quite sure. As you know, Nipper, we investigated, and we saw a black-bearded foreigner in the house. He was Colonel Clinton in disguise. Even though his intention was to remain in close hiding, he thought it advisable to drop his own identity."

"And to construct man-traps in his garden, sir," I added grimly.

"One man-trap, at all events, Nipper—into which we blundered barely an hour since," remarked the guv'nor. "We should have been there now but for the timely assistance of these two chums of yours. The colonel, I believe, will take no step until the morning, but it behoves us to act promptly. And the sooner we can be back at Stowe Lodge with the police the better. Colonel Clinton's arrest is imperative. Is there any point which is still puzzling you, lads?"

"I don't think so, sir—I don't, really," said Sir Montie. "You've dealt with everything in the most toppin' manner, an' it's all clear now. I only hope that we shall be able to arouse Mr. Lennard."

"Leave that to the guv'nor!" I said comfortably.

Two minutes later we reached the George Inn, and found it dark and silent. Nelson Lee set to work in earnest, for he pulled the bell vigorously and hammered upon the door.

After a very short wait an upper window opened, and a head appeared in view.

"Who's that?" came a sleepy inquiry.

"Why, the very man I wanted!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Rouse yourself up, Lennard, and get downstairs as quickly as you can."

"The deuce!" ejaculated the chief inspector. "What in thunder are you doing out at this time of night, Lee? When I heard the bell I suspected that I was wanted by somebody, but I'm hanged if I can see—"

"You'll see everything soon; but I can assure you, Lennard, that I'm not going to shout up my information to that window," said the guv'nor. "If you're not fully awake yet, plunge your head into the jug of cold water!"

"No, thanks!" growled the inspector. "I've had my wash for this year!"

The guv'nor chuckled, and the head disappeared. Five minutes later the front door was opened by Lennard—nobody else in the building seemed to be awake. And there was really no reason why they should be disturbed.

"Come indoors," invited Lennard. "We can't talk—"

"My dear man, I want you to come at once," put in Nelson Lee.

"You can want all you like; but I positively refuse to walk about on these muddy roads without any boots!" said the Scotland Yard man firmly. "In addition, I should like to put a collar on, to say nothing of some trousers!"

"Do you mean to say you've been all this time shoving a dressing-gown on?" I demanded, as we entered the stone-paved passage.

"Nipper, too!" exclaimed Lennard, yawning. "Well, well! As for the dressing-gown, it's not mine at all, and I had to fish it out of an old cupboard. You don't catch me getting dressed unless I'm forced to!"

"I never thought you were such a lazy specimen, Lennard," said the guv'nor

severely. "I'll wake you up very thoroughly in a minute."

We marched into the inspector's private sitting-room at the rear of the inn, and he managed to light an oil-lamp. Then he turned and surveyed us with interest. He was only attired in his pyjamas, slippers, and a dressing-gown, his hair was ruffled, and he looked sleepy.

"Four of you!" he exclaimed. "I thought St. Frank's was a boys' school—and here I find a master actually gadding about with three juniors! I'll bet a fiver you've got some startling news, Lee. You wouldn't be so inhuman as to wake me out of my beauty sleep if you hadn't."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"As a representative of Scotland Yard, you are in charge of this Clinton case, Lennard," he said. "I've come to the right man, and it's up to you to act immediately upon the information I am in a position to supply."

The inspector sat down, and pushed his head back.

"I never knew such a man!" he exclaimed plaintively. "Two o'clock in the morning, and you want me to act! It's all very well for private detectives like you, but I'm paid for my job, and I can't work unless I get my proper sleep. And if you'd any grain of feeling in you, you'd offer me a cigarette!"

"Take half a dozen if you want them," said Nelson Lee, producing his case. "This joking is all very well, Lennard, but the position is really serious. I want you to come with me at once in order to arrest the murderer."

"Good lor! You haven't found him?" ejaculated Lennard.

"I shouldn't ask you to arrest him if I hadn't," retorted Lee. "Don't faint, old man; but the murderer is Colonel Clinton!"

The inspector nearly dropped his cigarette on to his bare chest, down the neck-opening of his pyjamas.

"Eh?" he said. "Colonel Clinton? The fact is, I'm not properly awake, or else I'm dreaming. How can I arrest Colonel Clinton for murdering himself? Talk sense, for goodness' sake!"

Nelson Lee did talk sense, in crisp, sharp tones. Within the space of five minutes he had acquainted the amazed inspector with all the chief facts. And Lennard was no longer inclined to joke, but brisk, wideawake, and as eager as a terrier after a rat.

"Lee, old man, you make me feel like an infernal office-boy!" he declared. "While I've been messing about down here, doing nothing, you've cleared the whole matter up! The very next time you hear me boasting about something, just mention 'Colonel Clinton!' I shall shrivel up into my shell in a second!"

We all laughed, and the inspector rushed upstairs to get dressed. While he was doing this I remained in the sitting-room with my chums. Nelson Lee hurried out to the policeman's cottage, further along the road. There was another constable—a Bannington man—upstairs. He was Lennard's assistant,

and the inspector roused him out unceremoniously.

Thus when we set off for Stowe Lodge we were quite a formidable little force. The inspector was the official leader, and he had two constables to back him up. It seemed to be quite an easy matter to effect Colonel Clinton's arrest, and we fondly imagined that the whole thing would be over within half an hour.

It wasn't!

The task of capturing the colonel wasn't to be quite so easy!

CHAPTER II.

ADVENTURES IN THE NIGHT!

"**W**E don't want any fuss over the job," remarked Detective-Inspector Lennard, as we neared Stowe Lodge. "The best thing, in my opinion, is to get into the house quietly and collar Clinton while he's asleep."

"That, of course, would be ideal," agreed Nelson Lee. "But the colonel is wary, Lennard, and you must be on the alert for trickery. It's quite possible that the scoundrel will make a break for freedom. As far as it is practicable, I should suggest placing a cordon round the house."

"With two constables?"

"I'm here, don't forget," said Lee, "and the boys will do their share. I'm not suggesting that they should take part in an encounter, but they can certainly watch different sections of the garden."

"Rather, sir!" I put in. "We'll do anything you like in that way."

The first thing upon arrival at Stowe Lodge, therefore, was to find positions for the various helpers. Tommy and Montie and I were provided with stout cudgels, and we were told to hit out forcibly if, by any unforeseen chance, the colonel should break away from the police and attack us. It wasn't in the least likely to happen, but it was just as well to be prepared.

Nelson Lee himself took up his stand immediately in front of the house. Lennard, with one of the constables, decided to force a window at the back, and to get in. Then they would steal quietly upstairs and take the colonel by surprise.

Rather to the inspector's astonishment, the window was not very difficult to conquer. True, it had two catches, but both were slipped back with very little trouble.

"Screwed up, I expect," muttered Lennard—"or nailed."

"That'll be about it, sir," agreed the constable.

They couldn't quite believe that the window had been left so inadequately protected, considering that Clinton was a fugitive in hiding. But when the inspector applied force, the lower sash slipped up smoothly and noiselessly.

"The deuce!" said Lennard. "It's a walk-over, Sparrow."

"More like a walk in, sir," said the constable wittily.

The Scotland Yard man grinned, and pulled out a revolver.

"Just for show," he remarked. "I'll go in first, Sparrow, and you follow close behind. We don't want—" He paused and coughed. "What the thunder's this queer feeling in the air?" he added. "Have you got it, Sparrow?"

"Sort of catchiness, sir?" asked Sparrow.

"Yes, it do seem queer, sir."

"Well, never mind—let's get in."

The inspector climbed nimbly and swiftly through the open window, and Sparrow quickly followed.

The next second they gasped chokingly.

Fighting for breath, dizzy and in agony, the two men staggered back towards the window and the open air. Lennard's brain was reeling, and he was quite sure he would collapse at any second.

More by accident than anything else he reached the window and fell to the ground. His throat felt burning, and his lungs seemed to be on the point of bursting. He groaned painfully as he lay.

I was the nearest to the spot, and I heard the groans distinctly. The next moment I dashed forward, and was shocked to find Detective-Inspector Lennard lying upon the ground beneath the window, still and deathly pale.

"What's happened, inspector?" I panted huskily.

Lennard managed to open his eyes.

"Gas—poison gas!" he gasped. "That—that room—it's full, Nipper—full of fumes! Good heavens! Where's Sparrow?"

By a supreme effort the inspector staggered to his feet and stood swaying dizzily for a moment or two. Then he shook himself and threw his body at the open window. It was an exhibition of great bravery, for he knew well enough that terrible danger lay within.

I was fresh, and that made a difference. Taking a deep breath, I dashed in after the inspector, and found him groping round on the floor. We both came across the constable at the same time, and the poor chap was dragged outside unceremoniously. But was he done for?

"He's got it bad, Nipper," muttered the inspector huskily.

"That—that awful gas stuff is hanging about here now," I murmured. "My head's all dizzy, Mr. Lennard. Let's drag the chap further away."

We did so, and Nelson Lee himself soon appeared on the scene, attracted by the slight commotion.

While he was examining Sparrow I managed to shake the dizziness from me. Of course I had only received a touch, but it was quite sufficient. That poison gas was apparently the same stuff as I had experienced about a week earlier. It was really impossible to enter the room.

Not only this, but the fumes hung heavily on the still air, and did not disperse out of the open window. It was almost impossible to approach the wall even. Colonel Clinton had taken due precautions.

"He'll be all right soon," said Nelson Lee at last.

"Then the stuff isn't deadly?" asked Lennard.

"Not particularly. A full dose would undoubtedly cause a man to die, but Sparrow hasn't received a full dose by any means; neither have you, old man. How are you feeling now?"

"Oh, better," said Lennard.

"Still dizzy?"

"My dear man, I've never been exactly drunk, but I should imagine that this is something like it," growled the inspector. "But it's far worse, because my throat's burning frightfully, and I can't breathe without pain."

I nodded.

"That's how I had it," I remarked.

"You'll be all right soon, Mr. Lennard. But, of course, the worst hasn't come yet."

"Eh?" said the Scotland Yard man, with a start.

"You'll be sick soon," I explained.

"Sick?"

"Oh, awfully!" I said comfortingly. "But you'll feel all the better afterwards, so you needn't look worried."

The inspector took out his pocket-flask, and indulged in several "swigs." By the time he had finished the flask was half empty.

"By George, that's better!" he exclaimed.

"You'll be dizzy now!" I remarked. "This is a fine thing—a brilliant Scotland Yard official boozing instead of arresting a desperate murderer!"

"If you're not careful, my lad, I'll take you by the scruff of the neck and pitch you through that open window," said the inspector threateningly. "That brandy's done me a heap of good, and I don't think I shall suffer the fate you just outlined. You'd better pour some of this brandy down Sparrow's throat, Lee."

But the guv'nor was already using his own flask. The constable was not quite unconscious, but yet he was so dazed and dizzy that nothing could be done with him. He was obviously useless.

"Bed's the best place for him," said the inspector. "For the present, I think we'd better make him as comfortable as possible in one of these little outhouses. Everything seems to be properly upset."

"I suppose the fault is mine," said Nelson Lee. "I should have warned you that there might be some of that gas about—although, I confess, the possibility did not occur to me."

"You did tell me about the gas," said Lennard. "But I thought that was an incident of the past. Thank goodness, we were able to get out, that's all. We shall have to try one of the other windows."

"At the front, I should suggest," remarked the guv'nor. "Clinton, I believe, is sleeping in a room at the side of the house, and it is hardly likely that the front rooms will be saturated with the gas."

After making Sparrow as comfortable as possible in one of the small outbuildings, Nelson Lee and the inspector walked silently

round the front of the house. I returned to my post at an angle of the building.

So far we had done nothing, and there had been one casualty. Sparrow had been attended to as thoroughly as possible under the existing conditions, but there was not time to convey him to his home in the village.

Lennard was more grim than ever, and fully determined to capture Clinton without a moment's delay. He wasn't feeling exactly bright himself, but the effect of the strange gas was wearing off.

And then another unexpected incident occurred.

There were three upper windows in the front of the house, and the centre one was suddenly opened with a clatter. The head and shoulders of a man projected outwards, and Nelson Lee knew that he was Clinton.

"Who's that down there?" he rapped out.

Nelson Lee and the inspector exchanged glances. All necessity for secrecy was at an end, and it was obviously better to let the colonel know, at once, that the game was up. However, Lennard attempted a ruse to begin with.

"Awfully sorry to trouble you, sir, but could you do me a favour?" he called up genially. "A motor-car's not much good without any water in the radiators. I'd be greatly obliged if you could let me have a pailful."

"Go away!" exclaimed the colonel harshly. "I will not have the disturbance. You must go immediately. You understand? Go!"

Clinton altered his voice very cleverly, and spoke with the same foreign accent as he had used with the guv'nor and myself. He was probably very startled, and was no doubt wondering what had happened to his prisoners in the pit. He didn't know that we had escaped.

"Oh, come!" said Lennard. "You're not going to—"

"Go!" snarled Clinton. "You are trespassing! Leave these premises at once, or I will ring up the police!"

The inspector laughed.

"That would be rather difficult without a telephone," he said, thrusting all pretence aside. "And it will interest you, perhaps, to learn that you are addressing a detective officer at the present moment."

The colonel swore angrily.

"Am I to be pestered in this way because I am of another nation?" he shouted. "Leave me in peace——"

"You're doing it very well, Colonel Clinton, but it's not quite good enough," interrupted Nelson Lee calmly. "We are fully aware of the fact that you are not dead, and that the body found at St. Frank's was that of Mr. Hardy. Further pretences will not serve you in the slightest degree."

It had been a chance shot, but it went home. The guv'nor was not certain that the victim had been Hardy, but the colonel's attitude now proved that this was correct.

"By Heaven!" he shouted furiously. "So you escaped, eh? And you know that I am Colonel Clinton? Bah! Do you think I care?

"I defy you to do your worst, you infernal busybody!"

"The matter is in the hands of Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard," said Nelson Lee. "If you are sensible, Colonel Clinton, you will give yourself up at once to avoid——"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" bellowed the colonel. "How—how dare you dictate to me? Get out of these grounds before I throw you out!"

Needless to say, the uproar had been heard by all of us—there was no mistaking the colonel's bellow. It was famous, and within half a minute Sir Montie and Tommy had arrived at the front of the house, deserting their posts. I was there a moment later. We believed that the colonel had been captured.

But we soon discovered the truth.

And if Tregellis-West and Watson had experienced any slight doubts concerning the identity of the mysterious foreigner, all those doubts were now set at rest. He was Colonel Clinton, and none other.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "Some excitement, eh, dear fellows? The colonel appears to be in a temper—he does, really."

Detective-Inspector Lennard resumed the argument.

"I suppose you know, colonel, that you're doing yourself no good by ordering us off?" he asked politely. "Take my advice, and come down and give yourself up. There's no need to make any fuss——"

"Give myself up!" shouted the colonel. "Do you think I will submit in that tame fashion? Do you think I'll consent to be dragged away to gaol—to be cast into a cell, and hanged at the finish? I will resist with all my strength!"

"I shouldn't advise you to say too much——"

"What do you think I care," snarled Clinton savagely. "You know all, so I can do myself no harm. Yes, I did kill Hardy—why should I deny it? And, but for the interference of Lee, Stafford himself would have been hanged! I have failed—and now you will fail to arrest me! Try to do so—and see what will happen!"

Lennard turned to the gov'nor.

"It's no good, Lee," he murmured. "We can't argue with the fellow. Let's retire a few yards and consult."

They did so, and the colonel still remained at the window.

"Ah! You are getting nervous!" he shouted. "Make no mistake—I shall remain at this window; and any attempt to approach the house will be fatal. I am armed—see! You will come near at your own peril!"

As he spoke he raised something in his hand, and two revolver-shots rang out sharply. But the weapon was pointed skywards, as we could tell by the direction of the flashes. But the unexpected incident gave us a bit of a shock.

"Get into cover behind the trees, boys—quickly!" rapped out Nelson Lee, in urgent tones. "The next shots might be fatal!"

We were now very excited, but obeyed the order. There were no further shots, how-

ever, and it was clear that the colonel had merely fired them in order to demonstrate his determination to resist.

The consultation between the gov'nor and Lennard was a short one.

"No, old man, we can't do anything in this darkness," Nelson Lee insisted. "If we attempt to break in, Clinton will escape by some other means—and then we shall lose him. I'm not going to set these boys on guard now—it would be too risky."

"You're right, Lee," agreed the inspector. "That only leaves three of us, and three can't surround the house; besides, it would take us all our time to overpower the brute. In fact, we should probably be shot down before we got near him."

"Having killed one man, he is reckless," said the gov'nor. "He can only be hanged once, and I dare say it would give the colonel great pleasure to shoot you and me."

"It wouldn't give me any pleasure!" growled the inspector.

"Send the constable to the farm just up the road, and obtain the services of every man possible," went on Lee. "You must promise to pay them well, or they might not come. My idea is to place a complete cordon round the building. And then, in the morning, we will adopt fresh tactics. The sole idea of the cordon is to prevent Clinton's escape during the dark hours—and it must be done at once."

Lennard was in full agreement. Indeed, he half believed that the colonel would escape before the cordon could be organised. However, the constable was at once dispatched on his mission, and Nelson Lee watched the front of the house while Lennard took up his stand at the back. Sir Montie and Tommy and I remained in cover, watching anxiously and excitedly.

From our position we could see the front window, and we knew that Colonel Clinton was still there. He was on guard, and, it seemed, had no particular desire to make a break for freedom. This, perhaps, was due to a little ruse of the gov'nor's.

It was really a very smart move. Just before Lennard parted from the gov'nor, to go to the rear, the pair had raised their voices.

"Yes, that's right, Lennard," said Nelson Lee briskly. "You take your twelve men, and see that the back of the house is thoroughly guarded. I'll look after this side with another dozen."

"Good!" said the inspector, catching the idea. "Sergeant Smith and four men will protect the riverside, and Sergeant Jenkins the other. Clinton won't be able to escape with such a complete circle of men round the house."

With that the inspector went to the rear, shouting out orders to imaginary people all the time. Nelson Lee, too, was talking to his "men" for some time, putting them into their positions.

It was quite a comedy, and I was vastly amused. The intense darkness under the trees made it impossible for the colonel to

know that Nelson Lee and the inspector were the only two men in the whole garden.

"He's still at the window," I murmured. "I'll bet he's been diddled, and won't even attempt to get away. He thinks the house is surrounded."

"Well, dear fellow, it will be surrounded before long," said Sir Montie. "Begad! Ain't he silly, not to surrender?"

"Oh, he'll surrender by the morning—he can't do anything else," said Watson, yawning. "I expect he's mad at being bowled out; but when he's calmed down he'll give up the game. What's the time, Nipper?"

I glanced at my watch, which had a luminous dial.

"Ten minutes to three," I replied.

"Phew!" whistled Sir Montie. "Ain't it about time we got back to bed, old boys? There's nothin' doin' here now, so why should we stay? The inspector means to wait until mornin'."

"Oh, we'll wait until the constable gets back with those men," I said. "We might miss the climax of the whole affair if we buzzed off now."

And so we remained in hiding, watching and waiting. Occasionally Nelson Lee would give a low order, and other voices would address him in reply. Of course, it was the guv'nor himself all the time. But to anybody within the house it must have sounded exactly as though many men were on the spot.

It was nearly three-thirty before the constable returned. But he had been successful in his mission, and brought with him fourteen men—mostly farm labourers and other country workers.

Nelson Lee was very satisfied, and the real cordon took the place of the imaginary one. It was just a precaution to prevent the colonel making his escape in the darkness. When dawn came there would be no chance for him.

Sparrow, the village policeman, had partially recovered from the effects of the gas by this time. After being violently sick, he was strong enough to walk home, but quite incapable of further work.

The window at the rear of the lodge was still a spot to be shunned. The gas hung about heavily, and seemed reluctant to disperse. And the fact that Colonel Clinton was fully armed decided the inspector to wait until daylight. It wasn't such an easy matter to arrest a murderer who insisted upon firing revolvers at anybody who came near him. The proposition had to be tackled carefully.

"Good gracious! Are you boys still here?" exclaimed Nelson Lee severely, after he had placed his men in their positions. "You ought to have gone back to the school an hour ago; there's nothing more to see at present."

"We're going now, sir," I said. "But what about you?"

"I shall remain here."

"Until the morning, guv'nor?"

"Yes."

"But what about your sleep, sir?" asked Sir Montie concernedly.

"I don't think I shall become seriously ill if I miss one night's rest," smiled Nelson Lee,

"Arresting Colonel Clinton is not so easy as we originally believed. It is very foolish of him to resist, but you can't argue with a man who tries to shoot you when you approach him. And we are greatly handicapped by the darkness."

"I should have thought the darkness would be an advantage, sir," I remarked. "Clinton could be collared by surprise——"

"Hardly, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You must remember that the rear of the house is protected by poison gas, and I have no doubt that every room downstairs is full with the stuff. In the morning we shall adopt drastic measures—that is, if the colonel still resists. But I fancy that he will have recovered his normal wits by that time, and will know that resistance is useless. It would be wrong to expose ourselves and our helpers to unnecessary danger. Moreover, these arrangements are Lennard's, and not mine at all. He is in charge of the case, and I quite agree with him that it is far better to wait."

And so, within a minute or two, I started off for St. Frank's, accompanied by Tregellis-West and Watson. We were not sorry to get back to bed, for the adventure at Stowe Lodge had apparently fizzled out.

But only for a short period. The morning was to bring further exciting events, and that day was destined to be one long remembered at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIEGE AT STOWE LODGE.

CLANG—clang!

The rising-bell sounded as noisily as ever, and I roused myself from bed in the Remove dormitory and looked round sleepily. Most of the juniors were awake, but nobody was making any attempt to get up yet.

In the summer-time some of the fellows would jump out at the first sound of the bell—but not in February. The general inclination was to remain between the warm sheets until it was absolutely necessary to get out.

As a rule, I was among the first to commence dressing. But this morning I clung to my bed somewhat longer than usual. And Montie and Tommy followed my example. We had missed a clear four hours of sleep that night, and we weren't feeling quite so brisk now.

"Feeling lazy this morning?" asked Handforth, as he threw McClure's pillow at me. "Get up, you slacker!"

Considering that Handforth was in bed himself, this was somewhat cool.

"Gimme my pillow back!" exclaimed McClure, who slept in the bed next to Handforth. "Like your cheek, Handy, to pinch my pillow——"

"You don't want it any more, I suppose?" snapped Handforth, tumbling out. "What the dickens are you staring out of the window for, Pitt?"

Reginald Pitt, who was getting dressed, glanced round.

"Seems to be some excitement down in

the Triangle," he remarked. "Old Warren is holding forth to a crowd of seniors, and they're all looking bowed over—fairly amazed."

I glanced at my chums.

"The secret's out," I murmured. "I thought we should be forestalled in creating the sensation—still, there's a chance even yet."

"Some of the seniors are running indoors now," went on Pitt. "Oh, yes, there's some excitement brewing. I vote we get down quickly and find out what it is."

"I can tell you," I remarked calmly.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "How can you tell?"

"It's something to do with Colonel Clinton," I said, as I commenced dressing. "I expect the news has got round that he's been arrested. He's probably in Bannington by this time."

"Dotty?" asked Hubbard politely.

"Not that I know of," I said.

"Then what the dickens do you mean by saying that Colonel Clinton might be arrested?" demanded the junior. "You know jolly well that Clinton's dead."

"Is he?" grinned Watson. "You wait and see! Clinton's alive—and he's the murderer. He's been hiding in Stowe Lodge, by the river."

"Oh, the chap's off his rocker!" exclaimed Handforth.

"No, he's not," I said. "The fact is, you fellows, we've got some news for you—no need to ask old Warren what it is. Colonel Clinton is alive!"

"What?"

"Fact!" I went on. "It was somebody else who was killed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can grin all you like," roared Watson. "Clinton isn't dead at all—it was he who committed the murder——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right," snorted Tommy. "You needn't believe it."

"Thanks!" grinned Handforth. "we don't!"

"My dear friends, pray consider!" exclaimed Nicodemus Trotwood solemnly. "I, for one, am fully prepared to accept this amazing statement of Nipper's. Bear in mind the fact that he is no mere junior, such as ourselves. He would not make such a declaration without——"

"Dry up, you ass!" shouted Handforth. "Do you think we're going to believe that Clinton ain't dead?"

"You'll believe it before very long," I said calmly. "Nicodemus is the only sensible chap here—except his brother. I suppose Cornelius will share the same opinion—he's generally a kind of echo."

Cornelius was the twin brother of Nicodemus, and exactly like him in form, face, and manner. But Cornelius was a very simple youth, and deaf, whilst Nicodemus had plenty of sound common-sense in his head.

"What do you think of the news, my dear Cornelius?" Nicodemus inquired, turning to

his brother. "It seems that Colonel Clinton is alive and well."

"Yes, quite distinctly," said Cornelius. "But why?"

"Eh?"

"Did you not ask me if I heard the rising-bell?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Nicodemus gently. "I am afraid your deafness is rather severe, my dear brother. I did not refer to the rising-bell, but to the colonel."

The other twin shook his head.

"I am aware, my good Nicodemus," he said, "that you were talking of my sad affliction, but it is most unfeeling—indeed, brutal—for you to call it infernal!"

"Infernal?" gasped Nicodemus. "I don't see— Oh, colonel! My dear brother, I fear that it will be necessary for me to speak somewhat louder. Our dear friend Nipper, it seems, is in possession of information which leads him to believe that Colonel Clinton is not dead, as we supposed, but actually alive. Do you think it is true, or merely a rumour?"

"Why, I have no reason to doubt what Nipper says," beamed Cornelius. "Assuredly, I believe it. It is amazing, I will grant, for I was under the impression that Colonel Clinton was brutally murdered."

"You ass!" growled Handforth. "You'd believe anything! You'd probably believe me if I told you that that fathead standing there wasn't Nipper, but his giddy ghost! My son, you're a freak!"

"But why should I speak?" asked Cornelius. "You are surely capable of doing that, Handforth, since it is your favourite occupation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who said anything about speaking?" bawled Handforth. "I called you a freak—and everybody's a freak who believes that Clinton ain't dead. I sha'n't believe it until I see him with my own eyes."

"And then, at that rate, you'll be a freak yourself!" I said sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared, but said no more. When he went downstairs he did so with the firm intention of showing me up as a rumour-spreading idiot. Handforth was considerably astonished when he found everybody talking about the colonel's unexpected return to life.

"It—it's true, then?" gasped Handforth.

"Of course it's true, you young ass!" said Chambers, of the Fifth. "Don't look as if you're going to faint! It's a bit startling, I'll admit, and I know your brains aren't capable of standing much."

Handforth overlooked the insult in his astonishment.

"I—I thought Nipper was gassing!" he ejaculated. "Well, I'm jiggered! And is the colonel at Stowe Lodge?"

"Yes; and by what I can hear, there's a regular siege going on there," said Chambers. "Exciting times—what? Just fancy old Clinton being alive—and the murderer, too! By gad!"

Chambers strolled off, and left Handforth hove to, as the Bo'sun put it.

"Do you believe it now, Handy?" I inquired politely.

"I—I'm blessed if I know!" said Handforth. "Chambers is a donkey, of course, but he's not the only chap who said it. Everybody's swearing that Clinton's alive, so there must be something in it!"

The whole school became convinced in a very short time. A wave of excitement passed through St. Frank's, and there was little to be surprised at in this. For the stories which got about were very sensational.

It was positively stated that Colonel Clinton hadn't been arrested yet, but was still resisting. A fresh force of police had arrived from Bannington, and Stowe Lodge was surrounded.

I wasn't quite sure of this myself, but determined to get at the truth. Nelson Lee wasn't on the premises, and so I started away for Stowe Lodge with my chums—all three of us willing to miss breakfast, if necessary.

And we weren't the only juniors who undertook the trip. Quite a crowd of excited fellows came along; and there were some seniors, too.

"It'll be jolly queer if Clinton's still holding out," I remarked. "It's been daylight for two or three hours, and the police have had heaps of time to collar him. They must be asleep."

"Perhaps some fresh developments have occurred, old boy," suggested Sir Montie.

"I don't see how they could," I replied. "Dash it all, there's only one man to arrest, and that oughtn't to be very difficult. He's got a revolver, I know, but two can play at that game."

"You're not suggesting that the police should fire on old Clinton?" asked Watson. "That would be a bit too thick!"

"If he persists in firing on the police, they'll be forced to retaliate," I said grimly. "I don't suppose they'll try it on until everything else has failed, but it might come to it. There'll be a sensation through the whole county if the police don't look sharp."

"Begad! I fancy there's a sensation already, Nipper boy," observed Montie.

He wasn't far wrong. We passed groups of people along the road, talking excitedly together. And in the neighbourhood of Stowe Lodge about half the inhabitants of Bellton were collected—although they were kept well back by the police. The scene had undergone a great change since we left it in the night.

Police officers were everywhere—some of them mounted, too. The road was barred to ordinary traffic, and nobody was allowed to pass into the zone of activity. The St. Frank's fellows asked questions of the villagers, but only learned that Clinton hadn't been arrested yet. No details were known.

"We might as well go back at this rate," said Watson. "I don't see the fun of going without my brekker—"

"Hold on!" I interrupted. "I've just spotted the guy'nor!"

We pushed our way unceremoniously through the crowd, and were just about to burst into the clear space beyond when one of the Bannington policemen waved us sternly back.

"Now then, you youngsters, none o' that!" he said gruffly. "There's nothing to see, so you'd better—"

"That's all right, old chap," I interrupted genially. "I just want to have a word with Mr. Lee—or Mr. Lennard."

The constable stared.

"You cheeky young sweep!" he growled. "Get back, before I land you a clout! Do you think Mr. Lennard's goin' to waste time on a nipper like you? He's a chief inspector, from Scotland Yard, and is in sole charge of this affair."

I grinned.

"Hi, Mr. Lennard!" I yelled, waving my hand.

The inspector was standing a little way off, talking to Nelson Lee and Inspector Jameson, of Bannington. He turned as he heard my hail.

"You cheeky little beggar!" snapped the policeman angrily.

But I merely grinned again, and the villagers in the rear watched with great interest. They probably expected to see me finally and completely squashed. But the chief inspector came strolling down the road.

"Thought you'd be here in good time, young 'un," he said genially. "That's all right, constable—let those boys through."

"Let 'em through, sir?" gasped the policeman.

"Exactly—they're friends of mine," said Lennard.

Leaving the flabbergasted arm of the law staring at us blankly, we passed through and met the inspector.

"Wouldn't let you come past, eh?" said Lennard, with a chuckle. "Look here, constable, don't you know that this young gentleman is no less a person than Master Nipper, the famous assistant of Mr. Nelson Lee? He's a privileged person—and so are his friends."

"Yes, sir," said the constable, with a gulp.

We walked away from the crowd, and I noticed that a good many St. Frank's juniors were eyeing us with envy. Handforth, who was there, looked positively indignant, and I half expected that he would burst through.

"Well, Nipper, this is a jolly queer business," said the chief inspector. "Clinton is a regular masterpiece. He's threatened to kill every man who goes within range of his revolvers—and he means it, too!"

"Can't you fire at him?" I asked. "I suppose it would be justifiable, wouldn't it?"

"We could fire until we got tired; but it wouldn't make much difference," replied Lennard grimly. "The man's up to a trick or two. He's fixed up a couple of steel plates in front of the window, with just four little holes drilled—two for his eyes, and two for the revolvers. And it's pretty obvious that he's got a mirror arrangement inside, so it wouldn't be any good aiming at those holes."

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

kind of 'pill-box' arrangement, eh? He can shoot anybody down within sight, and yet he can't be touched himself!"

"That's the idea."

"I'm a frightful duffer at these things, inspector," observed Sir Montie; "but couldn't you take him in the rear?"

"We're going to try it on very soon," replied the inspector grimly. "I don't suppose it'll succeed, but we've simply got to do something. If everything else fails, we'll smoke the beggar out, or something. It reminds me of that affair at Sidney Street, in the East End, years ago."

"It's exasperating, anyhow," I remarked. "The chap must be dotty, to resist like this. He must know that he'll be collared in the end—so what difference does it make? He might just as well chuck the game up now."

"Exactly. But there's no arguing with him," said the Scotland Yard man. "The only thing is to apply strategy. I'm certainly not going to risk the lives of my men by making a blind rush. The game isn't worth it. I'll wait a couple of days rather than have another tragedy."

"It would be rather frightful if the colonel killed somebody else," remarked Sir Montie gravely. "An' he seems shockin'ly reckless, doesn't he, inspector?"

Lennard nodded.

"I suppose it's easy enough to understand," he said. "Clinton thinks he might as well have a run for his money—and finish up in a kind of burst of glory, so to speak. He knows that he'll be hanged, in any case, so it won't matter twopence to him whether he polishes a few bobbies off or not."

"That's about the size of it," I agreed. "I should say he's half dotty. While he was Housemaster at St. Frank's he was full of pomp and dignity—he thought he was IT. To give in tamely wouldn't suit him at all; being a warlike chap, he prefers to fight to a finish."

The chief inspector grunted.

"Fancies he's at the Front, I suppose," he growled. "Barricades and revolvers don't fit in with this little village, do they? Well, my job is to arrest him, and I'm going to do it."

"It won't be so easy, Lennard," remarked Nelson Lee, strolling over to us. "Well, boys, you didn't oversleep yourselves, then? How are you feeling this morning?"

"Fit as fiddles, guv'nor," I replied.

"An' you're lookin' wonderfully fresh, sir," said Montie. "Begad! It's surprisin'. An' you didn't have any sleep all night!"

"What a shocking state of affairs!" smiled Nelson Lee. "Oh, you might be interested to know that Constable Sparrow has practically recovered, and is on duty again. He is regarded locally as a great hero."

I grinned.

"Well, it was a nasty experience," I said. "But that poison gas doesn't seem to be exactly deadly, guv'nor. It simply stupefies a chap at the time, makes him sick and bad, and then the effects pass off."

"It is evidently effective enough for the colonel's purpose," said Lennard grimly. "Nobody can enter that rear room even now."

That infernal gas hangs about continuously. I wonder why it is that when we urgently require a gale there's a dead calm? Not a breath!" he added disgustedly.

"Couldn't you tie wet handkerchiefs round your mouths?" I suggested. "You might be able to get in——"

"My dear kid, you're behind the fair," interrupted Lennard. "We've tried all the tricks; but that gas would penetrate a diver's helmet, I believe. What we need is a sackful of regulation gas-masks; but, for some utterly mysterious reason, Bellton appears to be badly supplied with such articles."

I grinned at the inspector's somewhat sarcastic humour. And just then I noticed that a little commotion was going on on the outskirts of the crowd. It didn't take me long to discover what was in the wind.

"Hallo!" I said resignedly. "This is where we retire, my sons."

"Eh?" said Watson. "What the dickens—— Oh!"

He had turned round and had discovered the truth. Mr. Crowell, the Remove Form-master, had appeared upon the scene, accompanied by half a dozen prefects. Every senior and junior within sight was being marshalled into line. In short, the fellows were to be trooped back to the school.

"I suppose it's necessary, old boys," said Tregellis-West. "The chaps would stop here all the mornin' if they were left to themselves, begad! They forget all about brekker and mornin' lessons."

I thought for a moment that we were going to escape Mr. Crowell's eagle eye. But after he had sent the bulk of the boys away, in charge of prefects, he succeeded in getting past the constable at the barrier and came striding towards us.

"Good-morning, Mr. Crowell," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "Quite an amount of excitement here, eh? I'm afraid this affair will become notorious, for it is already attracting unwelcome public attention."

"We shall have half Sussex here in another hour or two!" growled the inspector.

"Dear me! It is most distressing," said Mr. Crowell. "To imagine that Colonel Clinton is actually alive—and a murderer! I was dreadfully shocked, Mr. Lee. And is he still resisting?"

"He refuses to allow anybody to approach the house," replied the guv'nor.

"But surely you do not take any notice of his orders?" asked Mr. Crowell, in surprise. "He has no right to order you from his property in such circumstances as these."

Detective-Inspector Lennard grinned.

"The colonel hasn't any right, perhaps; but he uses quite a good argument," he said. "His argument takes the shape of two first-class revolvers, and he's probably got enough ammunition to wipe out the lot of us."

Mr. Crowell looked horrified.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "What a terrible state of affairs! And these boys are actually within the—the danger zone, so to speak! You must come away at once, my boys!"

"It's all right, sir," I said calmly. "This is what might be called a back area; we're nowhere near the trenches, and quite safe from artillery fire. But a little way in advance there's poison gas let loose."

It was quite entertaining to watch Mr. Crowell's face.

"I knew the position was serious, but I scarcely imagined it to be so acute," he said. "I am indeed glad that I advised the Headmaster to have all the boys fetched back to the school. Nipper—Tregellis—West—Watson. You must come with me without a moment's delay."

The gov'nor looked at me and smiled.

"Perhaps I must regard you as my assistant for this morning, Nipper," he said. "You may remain here and take a part in the operations—always providing that Mr. Lennard is agreeable."

"Nipper's a good man," Lennard said promptly. "Of course he can stay."

"Begad!" murmured Montie. "What a lucky boulder you are, old boy!"

"Thanks all the same, sir," I said; "but I'll go back with the others. It doesn't seem quite the thing that I should be granted any special concession. Half the Remove would be green with envy, and would say that I was favoured. No, I'll attend morning lessons as usual—and get down here the very instant I can."

"I thought you would decide that way, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I don't know what arrangements have been made at the school—whether this road has been placed out of bounds—but you have my permission to come here when you like; and that permission also applies to your chums. I don't forget the good services you rendered during the night."

"Oh, thanks awfully, sir!" said Montie and Tommy eagerly.

And with that we accompanied Mr. Crowell back to St. Frank's, collecting a number of stragglers on the way. We hoped that the excitement wouldn't be all over by dinner-time.

It wasn't!

But some stirring events were to occur almost immediately, for Detective-Inspector Lennard had decided to make a determined assault.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLONEL MEANS BUSINESS!

COLONEL HOWARD CLINTON was in grim earnest.

There was no sign of him at all, for the upper window in the front of the house was wide open, and the blank space covered by a barricade of iron or steel plates. Several small holes were visible, but that was all.

Lennard approached fairly close in order to survey the scene, and to make his arrangements for the coming assault. Perhaps he exposed himself to danger, but that was only a part of his duty.

"Stand back, there!" came a roaring command from the house. "I give you fair warn-

ing that if you come an inch nearer you will be shot!"

The inspector halted rather abruptly.

"Look here, Colonel Clinton," he shouted, "there's no need for all this melodramatic nonsense. Sooner or later you'll be captured, so why can't you give in now? It comes to exactly the same thing—"

"I shall resist to the last!" shouted the colonel furiously.

"Well, it'll be all the worse for you, that's all," retorted Lennard. "But I should like to know what you hope to gain by keeping up this siege?"

The colonel laughed harshly.

"I shall gain nothing—I am well aware of that!" he replied. "But I have never surrendered yet—and never will! As a soldier, my motto is to fight to the death—and you will never find me throwing up my hands. I shall fight—I shall resist; and it will be bad for those who attempt to take this fort by assault! Unfortunately I have no machine gun in my possession, but my revolvers are excellent weapons, and I have a large supply of ammunition."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Better come back, Mr. Lennard!" exclaimed Inspector Jameson urgently.

But Lennard seemed to be in no particular hurry. He was given a grim hint that the colonel was in earnest, for there was a sudden crack, and a shower of gravel spurted up near the inspector's feet.

"That's nasty!" he murmured.

A minute later he was behind the cover of the trees, and Inspector Jameson, of Bannington, was regarding him somewhat shakily.

"A near shave—a terribly near shave!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice. "You were reckless, Mr. Lennard—"

"Don't you worry your head, Jameson," interrupted the C.I.D. man. "The colonel's bark is worse than his bite—he didn't try to hurt me just now. At the same time, it was an unpleasant hint—and I've taken it. See that nobody else emerges from cover on this side of the house."

He walked away to where Nelson Lee was standing, munching some sandwiches which had been brought from the village by a constable. Neither Lee nor Lennard had partaken of breakfast so far.

"Oh, good!" said the inspector. "Grub! I'm simply starving!"

He seized one of the sandwiches, and was soon making it look extremely small.

"Hear that shot just now?" he mumbled, with his mouth full. "That was nearly my death warrant, Lee. The colonel took a pot-shot at my feet, but he missed—deliberately, perhaps. He wants us to realise fully that he's in earnest."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Our only hope, so far as I can see, is to break in at the side of the house, or at the rear," he said. "I don't suppose that gas saturates every room, and it'll be better to make sure before we try anything else. There could be a frontal attack at the same time, in order to take the colonel off his guard."

"A kind of feint," said the inspector. "Yes, that's the idea. Clinton isn't quite so smart, after all. A number of men can easily creep along against the wall of the house, and get beneath the window—without even being seen. My idea is to engineer the two attacks simultaneously. If we can only get a ladder up to that window, we can force our way in within two minutes. I shall lead the attack, and if I get potted, Jameson will have to carry on."

Lennard spoke quite calmly; he knew that there was a grim possibility of his being "potted." But his duty was to arrest this man, danger or no danger, and he wouldn't dream of backing out.

Nelson Lee volunteered to lead the rear assault, and the arrangements were soon made. Two forces of police were collected together and received their orders. The attempt was to be a determined one.

Nelson Lee and his men carefully prepared soaked scarves, for binding round their faces. The strange poison gas would penetrate, but, with brisk action, there was just a chance that they would be able to break through in one rush.

But the task proved to be difficult.

Lee decided to smash the kitchen window, and get in that way. There was no necessity to do the thing quietly. In fact, the more noise that was made the better. For this would distract the colonel's attention from the front, where Lennard's men would try to raise a ladder to the window.

"No, we'll smash down the back door rather than the kitchen window," said Nelson Lee, after a survey of the rear premises. "There's a big log lying amongst the trees, Sparrow, and you'd better fetch it at once."

"Yes, sir," said the constable.

Sparrow was not very happy, for he had had one taste of poison gas, and was not particularly anxious to sample another dose. This occurred, of course, before Lee and his men had donned the soaked scarves—they did that at the last minute.

The improvised battering-ram was a good one, and the men rushed it at the door with great force.

Crash!

The door splintered, but did not give way. The noise was considerable, and was heard distinctly by the crowds beyond the barrier. There was an immediate stir, for it was realised that something was doing.

Again the crash came, and this time the door splintered to atoms, and fell backwards into the passage.

Nelson Lee nodded—being unable to speak—and rushed into the house. He was closely followed by the constables.

They succeeded in getting up the hall as far as the staircase. But by this time Lee's senses were beginning to reel. Two men had dropped, and the others were unsteady. It would be impossible for them to live for another full minute in that terrible atmosphere.

Lee's worst fears were realised.

Not one room only, but the whole house, was choked with the overpowering gas! The

apartment occupied by the colonel was the only pure room in the building. To mount the stairs, find the front room, and break down the door would occupy fully five minutes—and it couldn't be done.

There was only one course to pursue.

A retreat was imperative.

Nelson Lee turned back, and grasped one of the men who had fallen. Somebody helped him, and the other constables staggered towards the exit. The other fallen man had managed to get to his feet.

With reeling senses the party reached the back yard. Here three or four men fell, their brains numbed and helpless. The gas was of a particularly active kind—for the moment. Fortunately, it had no evil after-effects. It simply incapacitated one for the time being.

Lee tore his scarf off and breathed in the pure air. He had an idea that the wetted cloth attracted the gas rather than repelled it. He was still giddy and faint, but would be himself again before long.

Everything was quiet round here, but there was a considerable commotion proceeding in the front of the house. Even as Nelson Lee stood unscrewing his brandy-flask several shots rang out. Then came some cries.

"Another failure, I'm afraid!" murmured Lee grimly.

He looked out beyond the yard, and saw the river. A small police-boat was moored against the bank, with a couple of constables in charge. The water came very near to the house, and it was necessary to have two men there. Colonel Clinton was allowed no loophole of escape.

Nelson Lee passed his flask round amongst the policemen before taking any himself. Only two of the men were really bowled over; the others were in a similar condition to Nelson Lee—slightly affected.

Meanwhile, as the detective had guessed, events were not progressing satisfactorily on the other side.

Lennard was ready with his men, and they were all armed with their truncheons. The inspector carried nothing; it was his duty to direct. He waited until he heard the crash caused by the smashing down of the back door.

"Now!" he said tensely.

Four men were with the inspector, and five others waited on the other side of the garden. At the word they advanced towards the house; but, being well back, and flush with the front wall, their movements were invisible to Clinton at the window. He knew nothing.

Lennard's batch of men carried a stout ladder which would just reach to the sill of the upper window. Creeping along the face of the wall, the attackers succeeded in getting immediately below the window without mishap.

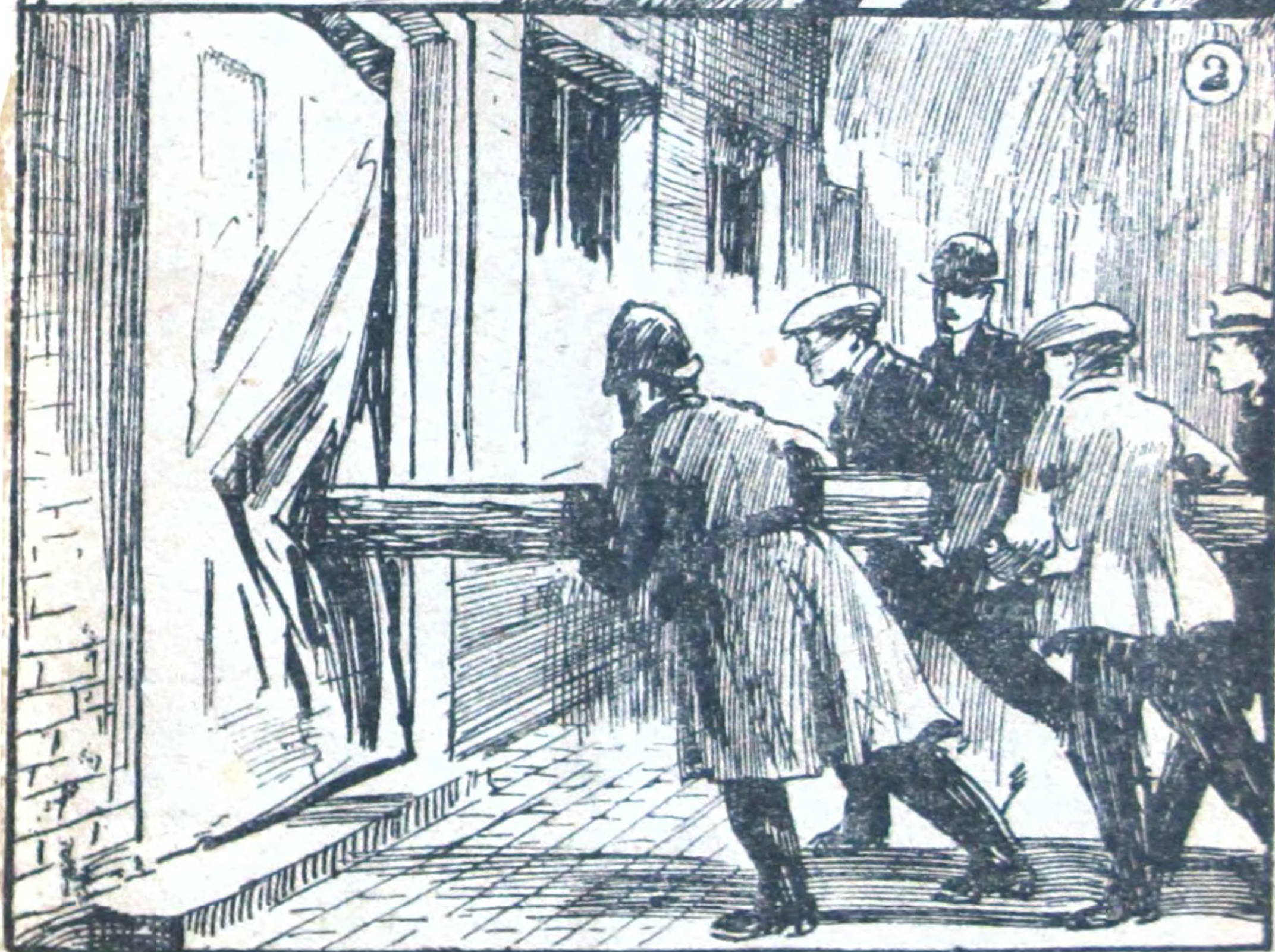
The inspector's hopes ran high. He judged that Clinton would be listening at the door of his room, wondering if the rear assault would succeed. It was just the identical moment to force the window.

Once within the room, the colonel would be defeated.

①



②



1. The launch struck the rope squarely. The rope sagged like a bow, but held, and the next second the launch's occupant was hurled into the water.

2. The improvised battering-ram was a good one, and the men went at the door with a rush. At the second blow the wood splintered to atoms.

There was a chance, of course, that the leading attackers would be shot down; but Lennard did not hesitate because of this, although he would be first. The main thing was to capture this desperate criminal.

"Follow me!" muttered the chief inspector curtly.

The ladder was in position, and he placed a foot upon the lower rung. Then he snapped his teeth. A clatter from above proved that the steel plates were being thrown aside.

Clinton had become aware of the ruse!

Before the inspector could mount a couple of rungs a roar came from above.

"Back!" bellowed the colonel. "Get back, you scum!"

Clinton was leaning out of the window now, and he held a revolver in either hand. Everybody stood stock-still, and Inspector Jameson, who was standing at the fringe of the trees, caught his breath in with a gulp. He expected to see three or four men murdered as they stood.

"Give it up!" he shouted hoarsely.

Lennard frowned as he heard the excited advice, and gazed upwards.

"Now, colonel," he said, "don't be unreasonable——"

Crack!

A bullet tore through Lennard's coat-sleeve, and there was no doubt that Clinton had aimed to injure—perhaps to kill. But he was trembling with agitation, excitement, and alarm. And his hand was unsteady.

The inspector dropped to the ground.

"Get into cover—quickly!" he ordered, in a low voice.

The constables were not wanting in courage, but this was too much for them; they didn't fancy facing an armed man while they themselves were practically unarmed. And Lennard's order was welcome.

There was an immediate rush for cover. The inspector himself was hasty in his movements, for he was not foolish enough to consider his dignity. It was a matter of life and death.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three shots rang out. The gravel was torn up at Lennard's feet; a constable who was running just beside him staggered, and then ran on again, blood spurting from his neck. And another constable uttered a hoarse cry.

"By thunder!" roared the colonel. "I'll show you whether I'm in earnest!"

Crack!

Again the revolver spoke, and the report was four times repeated. The bullets hissed into the trees, but all the shots missed.

"The madman!" gasped Lennard furiously. "By Jove! He'll pay for this!"

At that moment he believed that one constable at least had been badly injured. But it was soon discovered that the wound in the man's neck was not serious—merely a nasty graze. Another constable had been hit in the leg—a flesh wound.

"Better than I thought, anyhow," said the Scotland Yard man, with relief. "What a confounded shame! Just when we were about to get in, too!"

And just then Nelson Lee appeared.

"Oh, Jupiter!" groaned Lennard. "So you've failed, too?"

"The place is choked with gas, and we couldn't live in it," said Lee. "You don't seem to have been very successful, old man."

The actual position was soon known; and the net result of the attack was that three constables at least were temporarily out of action, and Colonel Clinton was as firmly fixed in his fortress as ever.

"I'm not going to be beaten," said Lennard grimly. "I'll draw the hound to the window again by a ruse, and then wing him—or you can, old chap. You're a better shot than I am, and you can manage to smash his revolver arm, perhaps."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"You're feeling a bit raw, Lennard," he said gently. "I think it would be as well to exhaust all other methods before shooting. In a way, it would be justifiable, but by all means capture Clinton whole if we can."

"But we can't——"

"Well, we can try one other expedient, at all events," went on Lee. "There is a big skylight in the room. It is immediately over the staircase, which forms a kind of well. If that skylight is smashed to atoms, and all the windows and doors are smashed, too, there'll be a decided upward current of air, and the gas will drift away within an hour. Then we can walk in freely."

"Jove! It's a pretty good idea," said the inspector thoughtfully. "There's a long ladder just up the road, and we can easily mount to the roof from the rear without interference. It's a queer thing how an obvious trick like that wasn't thought of before."

"You forget that we weren't in possession of the knowledge until a few minutes ago that the whole house is filled with gas," replied Lee, smiling. "But, since that is the case, the obvious thing is to get rid of it by the shortest possible method."

"Well, let's get busy," said Lennard briskly.

The ladder was procured very quickly, and conveyed round to the rear by a route which left Colonel Clinton unaware of the new programme. He was probably congratulating himself that he had beaten back the assault, and that he was secure.

The ladder reached the roof nicely, and Lennard ordered half a dozen men to be ready. They were all armed with their truncheons, which would serve excellently for the purpose of smashing the glass.

While this was going on other men were to open the windows at the sides and back and to smash down the side-door.

"And don't forget the gas," said Lennard grimly, giving final instructions. "You fellows who are coming up with me to the roof must be extra careful, because if you turn giddy up there you'll come down too quickly for comfort."

Lennard himself led the way, and commenced mounting the ladder. Nelson Lee, who was still feeling the effects of his dose of gas and was slightly dizzy, decided to

remain on the ground, in charge of the other operations.

"Hold on, Lennard," he shouted abruptly. The inspector turned, half-way up the ladder.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "I don't see why—"

He broke off—and understood.

For there, at an upper window immediately above, stood Colonel Clinton! He was wearing a gas-mask which covered his entire head, and he raised the sash with a bang.

There was not the slightest doubt as to his intention.

A revolver was in his grasp, and the barrel was pointed straight at Detective-Inspector Lennard, a few feet below.

It was a critical moment!

CHAPTER V.

SUCCESS!

"**T**HANK goodness!" said Tommy Watson eagerly.

Morning lessons were just over, and Tommy was hastening down the Remove passage with Tregellis-West and myself. Other juniors were also eager to get outside, for nothing was known, so far, about Colonel Clinton.

That is to say, nothing further was known. Out in the Triangle, however, we ran into old Miles, the carrier from the village. He was surrounded in a moment, and inquiries were hurled at him by the dozen.

"What's the news, Miley?"

"Have they collared the colonel?"

"Is the siege still going on?"

"Speak up, old son!"

"Let's hear the latest!"

"Steady on, young gents, steady on!" said the carrier, grinning. "I don't know nothin' 'cept that there's a deal of excitement down Holt's Lane, nigh by Stowe Lodge. There never was such goings on afore."

"Hasn't the colonel been arrested yet?" roared Handforth.

Miles shook his head.

"Not as I know on, young gent," he replied. "You don't find me interferin' with them police affairs—not me! Why? They're sayin' that there's shootin' and all manner of things takin' place. I ain't a young 'un, but I reckon I've got another ten years yet—and I don't want to catch no bullets!"

"Come on!" I said, nudging my chums.

It was evident that Miles was not in a position to give any definite information. All he seemed to know was that there was still a sensation at Stowe Lodge, and that Colonel Clinton had not been captured.

"Have we got time to go, old boy?" asked Sir Montie, as I hurried him across towards the playing-fields. "We shall only be fetched back—"

"Plenty of time," I interrupted. "Why, there's almost an hour before dinner, and I want to see how things have been going. Buck up! If you can manage it, Montie, we'll trot!"

Montie removed his pince-nez and held them in his hand.

"I don't mind in the least, dear old fellow," he said. "Of course, my trousers will get into a frightful state, with Tommy's boots splashin' up so much mud—"

"What about Nipper's boots?" growled Watson.

"Well, it really doesn't matter whose boots they are; but I'm gettin' into a shockin' state," said Sir Montie. "But never mind. I'm not the chap to grumble, an' you can run as fast as you like."

We took the towing-path, and presently came in sight of the small motor-launch which was moored against the river bank at the rear of Stowe Lodge. The constable who was on guard at this spot knew us, and he let us pass with a grin and a nod.

The other juniors were not allowed to come near the scene of activity—Stowe Lodge and its vicinity having been temporarily placed out of bounds. But my chums and I had Nelson Lee's permission.

We arrived at a very critical moment.

As we hastened round the house we saw Detective-Inspector Lennard just coming to a halt as he mounted a ladder. And at that very second I noticed Colonel Clinton, wearing a gas-mask, at an upper window.

He raised the sash violently, and pointed a revolver straight at Lennard, who was just below.

"Great Scott!" I gasped.

I expected to see poor old Lennard killed on the instant. A large flint stone lay just in front of me, and I acted on the spur of the moment. I don't know why—but I did it. At the time I had little hope of succeeding.

Whizz!

I had grabbed up the stone, and it shot from my hand with great force. And even as the colonel was pulling the trigger of his revolver, the flint found its mark. It struck the colonel's gas-mask on the left side, ripping it open as cleanly as a knife could have done.

Crack!

The report sounded a fraction of a second later; but Clinton's aim was spoilt. The bullet missed the inspector's head by about an inch and thudded into the ground. There was an instant gasp from everybody.

"Bravo, Nipper!" exclaimed Nelson Lee warmly.

"Oh, rippin'!" panted Sir Montie.

But I was staring up at the window. Just for a moment I thought the colonel was badly hit, for he swayed dazedly, and then backed away from the window with a sound which was almost a choke. Then, in a flash, I realised that the flint hadn't really touched his head, but had ripped open the mask.

It was thus rendered useless, and the colonel had breathed in his own gas!

"He's done!" shouted several voices.

But in the momentary silence which followed we heard a door slam hard within the building, and there could be little doubt that Clinton had managed to get back to the front apartment, which was free of gas. But it had been a near thing.

Detective-Inspector Lennard dropped to the ground.

"I can't thank you now, Nipper, but I suppose you realise that you saved my life a moment ago?" he said quietly. "It was a wonderful shot."

I flushed.

"I did it almost without thinking," I said, with a laugh. "I saw that Clinton was going to shoot, and I chucked the stone—that's all."

"Exactly—that's all," agreed Lennard. "But nobody else thought of interfering—not even your guv'nor. A chap who can act with decision at a second's notice is worth his weight in gold."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I know Nipper's value," he smiled. "But you are somewhat unjust to me, old man. I had my revolver out, and was on the point of firing when Nipper's stone went home. He just forestalled me by a moment."

"Then you're both bricks," said the inspector. "And that stone has served another purpose, too— Well, my man?"

A constable had come running up from the front of the house.

"The colonel's back in his room, sir," said the man. "He's just been arranging the metal plates at the window, and he shouted down that he's going to resist until he's exhausted."

"Well, that won't be long!" said the C.I.D. man grimly. "The best thing we can do, Lee, is to continue with that plan of ours; Clinton can't come out now that his mask is out of action. He's bottled up in that one room."

"And he'll be desperate, too, sir," I put in. "Why, if you try to force a way in he'll probably kill two or three people right off; and there's the gas to consider, too."

"We're going to let that out, young 'un."

"But it'll take hours," I said. "By jingo! I've got a wheeze! Now that the colonel's compelled to stay in that one room—and his mask is useless, remember—why not turn the tables on him? Why not give him a dose of his own medicine?"

"Gas, do you mean?" asked the inspector. "It's a jolly good idea—if you can tell me how I'm going to collect enough of this gas to spurt through the keyhole of his room!"

I grinned.

"There's no need to be funny, inspector," I complained. "Of course, it's cheek for me to suggest anything at all; but what's wrong with throwing a lot of sulphur down his chimney—there's a fire burning—and then blocking up the outlet? He'd be fumigated like a giddy insect in next to no time."

Lennard stared at Nelson Lee.

"Nipper is quite brilliant this morning," said the guv'nor. "It's a feasible idea, old man—and it ought to work, too. It will be far more direct than making an assault—and less perilous, too."

"That's what I thought, sir," I said quickly. "If the wheeze works, Clinton will be helpless when you break in—instead of being able to use his guns."

The inspector didn't waste another minute.

He quickly ordered a constable to dash off for the village on his bicycle and to bring back a plentiful supply of sulphur from the chemist's.

"It seems to me that Nipper's doing everything here," said the inspector genially. "What am I? A detective officer, or a duffer? First of all, Nipper saves my life, and, incidentally, renders Clinton's mask useless; and then he tells me what to do to collar the rogue! I shall have to look to my laurels!"

"Oh, chuck it, inspector!" I grinned.

For some reason they all seemed to think that I had done wonders—which was quite wrong. There's nothing wonderful in throwing a stone, and I just mentioned the sulphur idea because it entered my head as a likely solution.

"Dear fellow, it's a good job we came down—it is, really," remarked Sir Montie. "Just fancy! You doin' all this!"

"Don't shout too soon!" I said. "Perhaps my stunt will be a ghastly failure."

"Rather not!" said Watson. "It's bound to succeed!"

"An' won't the Remove say nice things when they hear that Nipper——"

But I didn't wait to hear the rest of Montie's sentence. I was too modest. The silly ass was making altogether too much fuss over nothing.

The constable soon returned with the sulphur, and then there was no time lost in putting my little plan into operation. Naturally, I felt rather pleased that Detective-Inspector Lennard had adopted the idea.

The inspector himself decided to put the stuff down the chimney, aided by one constable. While they were preparing the sacking to block up the chimney I had a word with Nelson Lee.

"You're looking rather queer, guv'nor," I said critically.

"Am I, Nipper?" he smiled. "Well, I don't feel exactly fresh, I will admit—although I have no doubt I shall be myself very shortly."

"This is what comes of going without sleep last night——"

"Not at all," interrupted the guv'nor. "I had a taste of that gas, Nipper—that's all. We tried to get to the colonel from inside, but it proves impossible. We had quite a little adventure."

"If any chap deserves to be hanged, it's Clinton!" I said fiercely. "Of all the murderous scoundrels! What do you think of this affair, sir? What do you think of the colonel putting up a fight like this?"

"I think he's insane, Nipper."

I stared.

"Do you mean dotty—really off his rocker?" I asked.

"No, I don't mean that—I mean insane!" said Nelson Lee drily.

"Well, it's the same thing," I replied. "Of course, if Clinton's really off his chump, it's easy to understand why he's doing this. And he's really far more dangerous, isn't he?"

"Very dangerous indeed, for he is reckless

of his own safety, and his madness apparently takes the shape of a lust for killing," said Lee quietly. "No doubt his experiences in the war are mainly responsible."

The inspector approached us.

"I've given Jameson instructions," he said; "but I should like you to keep your eye on things, Lee. Jameson's all right; but he's not exactly brilliant. This sulphur ought to have the effect of driving Clinton to the window—and then he'll probably collapse. The ladder's still in position, and Jameson's men have got to rush up as soon as it seems safe."

"All right," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "You can leave it to me, Lennard."

The inspector commenced mounting the ladder almost at once. There was not much danger of a second attack from this window, for, as Lennard himself had said, the colonel was bottled up in the front apartment.

I glanced up at the chimney—a solid, square one. Just behind it, as a background, several top branches of a tree on the other side of the house stood out against the sky. And I noticed that these twigs appeared to be quivering in the most erratic manner.

"That's good, guv'nor," I remarked, pointing. "See the heat up there? There must be a jolly hot fire in Clinton's grate."

"It couldn't be better, Nipper," agreed Lee. "But come."

We passed round behind the trees until we were in full view of the front windows. Sir Montie and Tommy were close behind—although the guv'nor warned them to keep well in the cover of the trees.

From our observation spot, so to speak, we could see both the colonel's window and the chimney. There was no sign just now that Clinton was active. And he, even supposing he was gazing through the holes in the steel plate, was unable to see anything of the movements of the police.

But Inspector Jameson was fully prepared, waiting with three specially picked men to storm the ladder as soon as Clinton was seen in difficulties.

It was really a novel situation. The trapped man couldn't escape through the house, owing to the gas—and in any case he would only run into the arms of other policemen, even if he succeeded in dashing out. Therefore, when the sulphur fumes overcame him, he would be compelled to rush to the window for air.

The little drama was already commencing.

I could see Lennard sprinkling handfuls of sulphur down the wide chimney opening. He continued this gradually and slowly, taking care not to throw down too much at once. He didn't want to deaden the fire with the stuff.

"Will it work?" I asked anxiously. "That's the question. What will you do, guv'nor, if this ruse fails?"

"I shall wait until it fails before I even consider the point, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee. "Personally, I think it will be a great success."

"Begad! I hope so, sir," said Montie.

We continued watching, and we saw the

two men on the roof cover the chimney with the sacking. The first dose had been given; but if this wasn't sufficient there was plenty more sulphur.

"Now we shall see something," I exclaimed tensely. "All the fumes will be pouring into the room within a minute. The only thing I'm afraid of is that the colonel will probably put the fire out."

"Oh, my hat!" said Watson blankly.

"How, Nipper?" asked the guv'nor. "How will he put the fire out?"

"He could rake the cinders out of the grate—"

"A very sensible operation," interrupted Nelson Lee drily. "The fumes would only envelop him the more quickly."

"He might have some water handy."

"That would serve him just as effectively," said Lee. "Clouds of steam would arise, but it wouldn't remove the fumes. No, Nipper. I don't see that the colonel will be able to get rid of the deadly— But see!"

We all looked at the window eagerly. And then I felt my heart jumping with excitement. For Colonel Clinton was hastily pulling down the barricade, and one hand was holding a handkerchief to his mouth and nostrils.

"He's gettin' it, old boys," said Tregellis West softly.

"In large doses," added Watson.

And they were undoubtedly correct. Clinton took no notice of what might be going on below, but drew in several breaths of fresh air. Then he turned and dashed across the room to the fireplace.

We could see him bobbing up and down, and could distinctly hear him raking cinders with one of the fireirons. The deadly sulphur fumes, no doubt, were pouring from the chimney in awful gusts.

Again the colonel came to the window, and this time he glared before him desperately, his eyes expressing terror and rage. He probably knew that he was beaten, and the realisation drove him frantic.

"Hang you!" he shouted hoarsely.

In a sudden access of fury he drew his two revolvers and blazed away wildly and at random.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The bullets all sped harmlessly to the gravel near the gate. Clinton continued firing until his revolvers were empty. Then, swaying dizzily, I saw him load one of the weapons with fresh cartridges.

"Get behind that tree, boys—well in cover," ordered Nelson Lee sharply. "I was expecting something of this sort. This frenzy will soon be over, and then it will be an easy matter to make the capture."

But the revolvers did not speak again. The colonel stood at the window, breathing hard and gulping quickly.

"Oh, I say!" muttered Watson. "It's awful, you know!"

"It'll soon be over, old son," I whispered.

I noticed that Inspector Jameson gave Nelson Lee a sharp, inquiring glance; and the guv'nor shook his head. It wasn't quite safe to approach the window yet—in fact, it would

have been an act of suicide. Clinton would have blazed away without a second's hesitation.

But he was growing weaker and weaker, being unable to obtain sufficient fresh air. The sulphur fumes were pouring out all round him, and he was breathing in the asphyxiating gas continually.

At last he made a move, and we watched expectantly. It was rather horrible to see the man slowly being overcome; but there was no other way for it. And, in any case, he would soon recover if he was promptly attended to.

"Look!" muttered Watson suddenly.

But he needn't have uttered the advice, for Nelson Lee and I were looking intently—and so were all the others. We could see Colonel Clinton in the middle of the room. He was swaying giddily.

And then, abruptly, he fell to the floor in a heap.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTURING THE RUNAWAY.

NELSON LEE hastened forward. "I'll mount the ladder first, Jameson!" he shouted. "This might be a trick on the colonel's part, although I don't believe so."

The local inspector, who had been dashing for the ladder, slowed down considerably. He suddenly remembered that revolver of Clinton's—the loaded one—and the thought that this was a trick was quite an ugly one.

Jameson was not a coward, but he was perfectly willing to allow Nelson Lee to mount the ladder first. Affairs of this kind were altogether too stirring for the worthy inspector, who had been accustomed to a humdrum official existence for years. The most exciting captures he had made had been mainly in connection with poachers and such-like gentry.

Nelson Lee had nearly reached the ladder, when, clear and distinct, came the sharp crack of a revolver from the other side of the house. The guy'nor paused and listened. Jameson and his men paused, too.

And then I observed Detective-Inspector Lennard on the roof.

"He's fooled us!" roared the Scotland Yard man. "Quick, Jameson! Get round to the other side—to the river. Clinton's off!"

"Oh, glory!" I gasped.

I dashed out from cover, knowing that there was no further danger here. And I guessed the truth in a moment. The colonel must have thought of the expedient as a last resort, when he was really collapsing.

And he had probably dashed through the gas-charged passage into a rear room, escaping by that means, while all the excitement was going on in the front. But if he actually had slipped away it would be the fault of the guards at the rear. My scheme had certainly worked out exactly as planned.

Nelson Lee was hastening to the corner of the building, when a breathless constable appeared, helmetless, and with a bleeding hand.

"He's gone, sir!" he gasped excitedly. "Collins and I were on guard by the boat when Clinton jumped clean out of a first-floor window. It's a wonder he wasn't hurt, sir—"

"Which way did he go?" demanded Lee quickly.

"It's no good, sir—we can't follow!" gulped the constable. "Clinton fired on Collins and me, and hit us both—poor Collins has got a bullet in his foot. Before we could stop him Clinton jumped into the motor-launch—"

"What an infernal mix-up!" snapped Nelson Lee impatiently.

He dashed off without waiting to hear any more, and I followed, with Tregellis-West and Watson at my heels.

We all arrived on the river-bank together. And we saw at once that the small launch had drifted out into midstream, but was still fairly close. Blue smoke was coming in puffs from the exhaust-pipe, and it was obvious that Clinton had got the motor going.

And there was no other boat near, except a heavy, old-fashioned punt.

"We're done, sir!" gasped one of the policemen.

Nelson Lee made no reply, but pulled his revolver out and fired. The bullet struck the motor-launch just on the water-line. Clinton ducked down on the instant, and the smoke from the exhaust increased enormously. The little vessel moved up the river at quite a decent speed.

Nelson Lee did not fire again, but turned rapidly to Lennard, who had just joined us.

"There's no need to worry, Lennard," he said crisply. "Clinton's done for now, and it's only a matter of time before we get him. Get some of your men to follow the river-bank on bicycles. Keep Clinton in sight."

"By Jove, yes!" said the inspector. "We've got a car here, and we can head the brute off a mile or two further on—"

"There's no need to go by car, sir!" put in Tommy Watson rather nervously, but extremely eagerly. "The colonel's gone up the river, and it winds right round to the left from here. We've only got to dash across three meadows, and we can head him off nearly opposite the boathouse."

"Yes; but could we get there in time?" snapped out Lennard.

"Easily," said Nelson Lee. "But we must be quick, Lennard; Watson's suggestion is exactly what I was about to put forward myself. But I have a further idea, which we'll discuss as we run."

There wasn't a second to be lost, and the next moment an extraordinary scene took place. Those people who were on the road, being kept at a distance by the cordon of police—and there was quite a big crowd—witnessed the remarkable sight of a number of constables and other people pelting across the road and bursting through the opposite hedge. They streaked across the meadows like cinder-path sprinters. Tregellis-West and Watson and I were amongst the first, just behind the guy'nor and Lennard.

We had every chance of heading the colonel off. For, as Watson had said, there was a hairpin bend of the river at this point. It went right on, and then turned sharply back. The distance by water was quite considerable, but only slight across the meadows. If you'll actually compare it with a hairpin you'll understand what I mean. The colonel had to go all the way round, and we just cut across.

Clinton was probably too desperate and too excited to realise that he could easily be trapped. Besides, once on the move, he couldn't very well turn back. If he did turn back he would find the police near the Lodge ready for him.

We reached the other portion of the river quickly, and Clinton wasn't even in sight. Nelson Lee gave me a sharp look.

"You boys must lie low," he ordered. "There'll probably be some firing, and you mustn't be exposed."

"All right, gov'nor," I said. "Don't you worry."

I wondered exactly how he was going to proceed, but wasn't left long in doubt. There was a small boathouse just here—a private one, and connected with a big house some little distance away.

But in these circumstances Nelson Lee was quite justified in taking one of the boats without asking permission. As a matter of fact, the gov'nor wasn't doing it at all—the police commandeered it.

The boat chosen was a small one, and it shot across the river, carrying Nelson Lee and one constable. The distance from bank to bank was only short at this point, and the trip was accomplished in a few seconds.

And then I understood why one of Lennard's men had been carrying a long coil of thick rope—the gov'nor having instructed him to bring it along. The inspector held one end of this rope on our bank, and the other end was carried across the stream.

The very second Nelson Lee landed he proceeded to secure his end of the line to the very base of a stout willow which grew right on the bank. Then he waved his hand, and the police hauled on the rope until it was stretched as taut as a violin-string.

And this end was treated in exactly the same way—bound round a tree. And the meaning of the dodge was clear to us all. The rope lay across the river, about a foot from the surface—only a few inches above the water in the very centre, for the rope sagged slightly by its own weight, in spite of the tautness.

"He's coming, sir!" called one of the policemen.

"Good!" rapped out Lennard. "Get down—the lot of you! Don't let the colonel see that there's anybody here."

I glanced across the river, but failed to see any sign of Nelson Lee. Upon the still air throbbed the sound of the approaching motor-boat. We couldn't see it, and were unable to get up in order to obtain a clearer view.

"Won't he spot the rope?" asked Watson breathlessly.

"He might," I replied.

"Then he'll turn back——"

"No time for that," I broke in. "It's ten to one he won't see the rope at all, but will drive straight into it. Anyhow, it's no good guessing—we shall soon know."

It certainly was time that the colonel succumbed. It was perfectly absurd, all the trouble he had caused. But it was far better to trap him cautiously than to risk the lives of many men by making a blind charge.

Clinton could have been captured at Stowe Lodge within ten minutes—at the cost of three or four lives. But that would have been a terrible price to pay. Even as it was, three or four men had been injured.

"There he is!" I murmured tensely.

The motor-launch had suddenly come into full sight from behind the boathouse, which had hitherto obscured our view. And it was clearly obvious that Clinton was either in ignorance of the rope, or had decided to drive at it full speed, hoping to burst through. The former was the most likely.

"Now for the test!" Detective-Inspector Lennard muttered.

On came the boat, and we all waited in a state of doubt.

And then the climax arrived.

The launch struck the rope fairly just above the water-line, and the tree near us shivered under the sudden pressure. The rope itself sagged like a bow, but held. And the rest was all over in a few seconds. The launch completely heeled over, slithering round against the rope-barrier.

The gunwale went under deeply, and I expected to see the little craft recover. But she didn't. She simply went straight down under the water and completely turned turtle, hurling her occupant out like a stone from a catapult.

As he plunged into the water everybody jumped up and there was a rush for the bank. The boat was bottom upwards, and masses of steam were rising into the air. The water was greatly disturbed, and splashed against the banks noisily.

And the launch, with its keel scarcely showing above the surface, drifted beneath the rope helplessly.

"Begad! Where's the colonel?" inquired Montie anxiously.

There was no sign of the launch's late occupant. But, as we watched, we saw a head suddenly bob up, and then an arm waved wildly and desperately. A choking cry came from the helpless man.

Nelson Lee had already pushed off in the boat from the opposite bank, and he reached Colonel Clinton within a second or two. He and the constable hauled the defeated rogue out of the water, and he collapsed into the boat.

Three minutes later Clinton was stretched full length upon the grass near us. He was conscious, but utterly exhausted—beaten at last. But even now his spirit was not subdued.

"Hang you all!" he muttered savagely.

"You've got it wrong," retorted Lennard, incensed by the imprecation. "You'll be hanged, Colonel Clinton, never fear!"

"I resisted with all my strength—I refused to surrender!" muttered the colonel. "Well, you've won the battle. Perhaps it was an honourable victory, and I must accept my defeat like an officer and a gentleman. I beg of you to take me away and to provide me with fresh clothing. Later I will explain to you what occurred on that dreadful night, many days ago."

The prisoner refused to say any more—and, really, he was too exhausted to do so. But we all noticed one thing. His words were no longer wild, and he spoke almost gently. Had this sudden shock restored his wits, or was it merely the reaction after all the excitement?

At all events, Colonel Howard Clinton was defeated.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COLONEL'S SECRET.

"LUCKY bounders!" said Handforth enviously.

"I don't know so much about that," I said. "We had a lot of rushing about Handy, and we missed our giddy dinners."

"Dinners!" snorted Handforth. "What do dinners count when there's all that excitement going on? I only wish I'd been there, that's all!"

I shook my head.

"You were safer at St. Frank's, old scout," I said solemnly. "You'd have been shot at Stowe Lodge—for the simple reason that you would have blundered into the way——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mind—grin all you like!" said Handforth bitterly. "It's jealousy—that's what it is! As a matter of fact, if I'd been on the scene I dare say Clinton would have been collared in half the time. Mind, I'm not boasting, but I should have acted drastically."

"And so would Detective-Inspector Lennard!" I chuckled. "He'd have acted so drastically, Handy, that you would have been hooped out of the place in about two seconds. But we don't want to continue this argument, do we? The colonel's collared, and he's been taken to Bannington. We can put 'finis' to the whole episode."

I was chatting with a group of fellows in the Ancient House lobby, having been compelled to relate all that had passed during the capture of Colonel Clinton. Afternoon lessons were over, and I was anxious to get away to Study C.

The fact of the matter was, I'd arrived back at St. Frank's with my chums just in time to go into the Form-room. Dinner had been missed completely. By appealing to Mr. Crowell, and getting round the right side of the matron, we could have found some grub all right. But we preferred to wait until tea-time, and then have a good blow-out, as Tommy somewhat vulgarly put it.

And now Handforth and several other inquisitive juniors had collared me, and I couldn't get free until I had recounted the facts.

Tommy Watson was in the common-room, engaged in a similar occupation; and Sir Montie had been calmly marched off to the College House by Christine and Co. It seemed as though our little tea-party in Study C was to be long delayed.

It was only natural, however, that the juniors should be very excited. The events of the day had been extraordinary, and my chums and I were the only fellows who really knew exactly what had taken place.

The gov'nor was away in Bannington, and so was Detective-Inspector Lennard. It was quite likely that we shouldn't see our friend from Scotland Yard any more, for he would hardly return to St. Frank's now that the criminal had been laid by the heels.

Bellton was still very animated, and large numbers of people from Bannington and surrounding villages were still in the district. But now that Clinton had been taken away the chief excitement was at an end.

Three or four police-officers were still on guard at Stowe Lodge—and this was very necessary, for the house was open to any chance pilferers. Moreover, plenty of people went to the house out of a morbid curiosity, just to have a look at it, as the late residence of a desperate criminal who had resisted the police for well over twelve hours.

Stowe Lodge was still out of bounds for the juniors—for all St. Frank's fellows, in fact—and would be until things were normal again.

I had already told the crowd in the lobby all about the siege and the poison gas and the sulphur. I was also obliged to relate exactly what had happened up the river. In fact I was fed up with talking about the business.

"I guess that feller would have been hangin' from a tree by this time, out West," remarked Farman, of the Remove. "He'd have been lynched, sure. I guess he's what our folks would call a real dandy gun-man. Say, Nipper, you've handed out the yarn good. I guess that sulphur stunt of yours was just about the limit. It was a real slick notion——"

"Oh, don't start that game, for goodness' sake," I groaned. "The colonel's gone, so let it drop. If you want any further information, you'll have to wait until the local papers come out, and then you'll get all the lurid details. There were several reporters on the scene, and you can bet they've written up the story with plenty of embellishments."

"Hold on," said Handforth. "I want to know——"

"Sorry—can't stop!"

"But look here, you ass——"

"No, I'm looking somewhere else," I replied over my shoulder. "Montie, my son, you've just come in at the right time. Let's go and rescue Tommy, and then lock ourselves in Study C."

Tregellis West had appeared from the Triangle. He was rather untidy, flushed, and breathless. We managed to get hold of Watson without much difficulty, and then we fled.

"Never knew such a lot of curious bounders in all my life!" I said, as I planted my back

against the door and locked it. "How did you get on with the Monks, Montie?"

"Dear fellow, don't mention it," said my noble chum. "Christine an' Co. insisted upon my remainin' to tea, an' I insisted upon comin' over here. So, begad, there was a frightful argument. I only got away at the finish by boltin'. Shockin'ly undignified, but I couldn't stay over there, dear boys."

"Why not?" asked Watson. "They'd have fed you royally."

Montie shook his head.

"I'm hungry, Tommy boy," he said plaintively. "What chance should I have had of eatin' over there? I should have been answerin' questions all the time—I should, really!"

Numerous thumps sounded upon the door, and indignant voices demanded that we should open it. However, we didn't, but prepared tea with all speed. Fortunately, there was a large and varied stock of provisions in the cupboard, and when we finally sat down to a hearty meal we attacked it with great gusto.

Half an hour later we were feeling lazy and comfortable. Well filled, and with a cheerful fire before us, we didn't feel inclined to stir.

"Of course, we don't know what the colonel's game was yet," I remarked, as I sipped my final cup of tea. "I expect the guv'nor will be back later on—perhaps he's back already—and then he'll tell me what's been happening at Bannington."

"Tell you?" repeated Watson. "What about us?"

"Well, on a special occasion like this, I suppose the guv'nor will have you in his study, too," I said. "We've had a good bit to do with this queer business, and it's only fair that we should know the truth about it."

Later on in the evening I went to Nelson Lee's study, and found that he had returned. He was, in fact, lolling in his easy-chair before the fire, half dozing.

"How long have you been back, sir?" I asked.

"Not long, Nipper—and now you come blundering in to disturb me," said the guv'nor. "It is quite unnecessary for me to ask why you are here. You are anxious to learn what took place in Bannington, eh?"

"Rather, sir; but I don't want to disturb you—"

"It doesn't matter, my boy," said Nelson Lee, sitting up and taking out his cigarette-case. "Colonel Clinton made quite an interesting statement, and I will give you the chief points of it if you like."

"Thanks awfully, guv'nor," I said. "But—but—"

"But your chums would like to hear my story, too, eh?" broke in Lee. "Very well—run off and fetch them."

I was back with Tregellis-West and Watson within three minutes, and then we settled ourselves comfortably and prepared to listen. Tommy and Montie were always at their ease in the presence of Nelson Lee. The same couldn't be said of any other masters at St.

Frank's. The guv'nor seemed to make a fellow comfortable right off at once.

"Now, boys, I know you're keenly interested—and with an excellent reason," said Nelson Lee, as a commencement. "We have had quite a number of little adventures together in connection with Colonel Clinton and Stowe Lodge. Originally, we believed that something of a very sinister nature was occurring at that lonely house. But we were all wrong."

"Wrong, sir?" I repeated wonderingly.

"Quite off the track."

"Begad! Then what about the poison gas, sir?" asked Sir Montie. "Nipper had a dose of that gas weeks ago—long before the colonel was murdered—I mean, before we all thought he was murdered."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Quite so, Montie," he said. "I was present when Colonel Clinton made his statement at Bannington Police Station this afternoon, and I have no reason to suspect that it was a false story. The colonel had recovered quite remarkably, and was able to give us a well-connected narrative. His ducking in the river did him a great deal of good, for it sobered him wonderfully."

"Did he confess to the murder, sir?" I asked.

"He confessed that he was responsible for Hardy's death," replied Nelson Lee. "But listen, boys, and I will tell you the story as the colonel told it to us. It appears that Clinton had been engaged upon the invention of an entirely new design of gas-mask. He had nearly completed it when he came to St. Frank's as Housemaster."

"He had not experimented with the mask, however, and was very nervous that somebody would steal his idea before he could actually perfect it—an absurd fear, of course. But I am telling you the actual story. Clinton brought the man Hardy to Belton, and installed him in Stowe Lodge secretly—that is to say, nobody knew that Hardy was connected in any way with the colonel. This was another quite unnecessary precaution."

"I won't go into the details of the colonel's extraordinary antics at St. Frank's, because you know them," continued Nelson Lee. "I will merely deal with the 'mystery' aspect, as we may term it. Hardy, under Clinton's orders, obtained large supplies of the poison gas we have recently experienced. That gas was obtained for the sole purpose of testing the mask thoroughly and under drastic conditions."

"Then the colonel wasn't up to any villainy?" I asked in surprise.

"Not at all," replied the guv'nor. "The secret of Stowe Lodge was by no means sinister, as we imagined. But Clinton departed from the honest path after he had received his dismissal at the Headmaster's hands. The man was simply mad with a great rage when he left the school in disgrace. He was ready to perform any base action in order to obtain his revenge upon Dr. Stafford. For, in his unreasoning hatred, he blamed the Head entirely, and swore to take a terrible revenge."

"An unlucky chance favoured the colonel's plan considerably. He and Hardy meant to leave the neighbourhood at once—at all events, Clinton was determined upon this. Hardy perhaps would have followed later."

"So far as I can gather, the colonel prepared to leave by car—he owned an old-fashioned touring car, which is even at this moment at the garage at Stowe Lodge. It was while preparing his departure that night that the tragedy occurred."

"The murder, you mean, sir?" I asked.

"No, Nipper—not the murder," was the gov'nor's astonishing reply. "There is every reason to believe that there was no murder at all."

"Begad!"

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"No murder!"

We were all very astonished.

"I cannot tell you what view the police hold just now, but I certainly believe in the colonel's own story," went on Nelson Lee. "The death of Hardy was actually a most remarkable accident. The motor-car, it seems, was standing on the gravel just outside the garage at Stowe Lodge. The colonel was anxious to be off, but some adjustments were necessary."

"Well, the tragedy was mainly due to the fact that Clinton had recently fitted an electric starter to his motor. Hardy was beneath the car, making adjustments, when the colonel accidentally touched the electric-starter switch."

"Oh, my hat!" I breathed. "And—"

"Whether the colonel lost his head or not, I don't know; but it is most probable," said Nelson Lee quietly. "He became confused, I should judge, and slipped the clutch, in unintentionally, the reverse gear being in mesh at the time. The result was that the car gave a violent jolt backwards, and the unfortunate man underneath was killed on the instant, his face being crushed by the gear-box."

"How—how awful, sir," muttered Watson, horrified.

"It was, indeed; and I shall certainly go into no further details," went on the gov'nor. "You may, I dare say, well imagine the rest. The shock unnerved Clinton completely, and, I believe, drove him out of his mind. And one mania was acutely developed—to take revenge upon the Headmaster."

"Here was a chance to exact a terrible punishment upon Dr. Stafford and get rid of the body at the same time. In short, the colonel took advantage of the fact that poor Hardy was so terribly battered as to be unrecognisable. Clinton was rendered doubly cunning, and he actually returned to the school calmly, as though nothing had happened. His madness took one form, and he was apparently sane in all other respects. As you already know, he pretended to burn his moustache by accident, but did so deliberately, afterwards clipping it off. He faked up a quarrel with Dr. Stafford—for the sole purpose of making evidence. He knew that when the body was found in the morning sanatorium would instantly be cast

upon Dr. Stafford in consequence of that violent quarrel."

I breathed hard.

"I've never heard of such a horrible, deliberate plot!" I exclaimed. "It's awful, gov'nor! I didn't think any man could perform such a ghastly piece of trickery as to fake up so much evidence——"

"You must bear in mind, Nipper, that Colonel Clinton was undoubtedly insane at the time," Nelson Lee put in. "Otherwise I do not think he could have carried out his appalling programme. It was a mania with him, and he considered nothing else. During that night he brought the body to the school, after attiring it in his own clothing. Then he manufactured a considerable amount of evidence which seemed to point conclusively to the fact that the Head committed the crime. It appeared as though the colonel himself had been killed."

"You will remember that a tramp happened to meet the colonel in the road—this came out at the inquest—and it was owing to that fact that I was able to establish Dr. Stafford's innocence. Clinton must have possessed iron nerves to carry through his gruesome plan."

"Having made all his preparations in this way, the colonel retired to Stowe Lodge, living there in secret, and evidently meaning to watch how his plot progressed. Meanwhile, he took precautions in case things went wrong—another example of the cunning mind of the insane. As you are no doubt aware, a lunatic is the most cunning of mortals. Clinton must have had an idea that his plans would go wrong, and so he prepared that room at Stowe Lodge—prepared it so that he could flood the rest of the house with gas, and thus prevent a surprise attack. That, I think, is really all that I need tell you. You know the whole truth of the affair now, and any little details which I have failed to fill in you can easily imagine for yourselves."

"But why was the colonel so jolly mysterious even before Hardy's death took place?" I asked.

"Well, Nipper, I have more than an idea that his mind was affected in a lesser degree even before he came to the school. You well remember his queer military notions of discipline; you remember how strangely he behaved on many occasions. The shock of Hardy's death merely completed the destruction of his mind. Now, however, he seems to have reverted to his former state, for he told his story to Mr. Lennard and myself quite rationally."

Very shortly afterwards we left Nelson Lee's study, very much impressed by what we had heard. We were very thankful that the whole business was at an end, and that normal times at St. Frank's would soon be resumed.

Only ten days later an item of news arrived which proved to be of great interest. Colonel Clinton had been examined by several eminent brain specialists, and they all pronounced him to be quite insane. It was their opinion that

he had been more or less unsteady in his brain ever since a severe dose of poison gas had overpowered him on the battle front.

He could not be held responsible for his actions. All his wild ideas were the outcome of his madness. His "military discipline" schemes were undoubtedly caused by the bad condition of his sanity. The same also could be said with regard to his fears concerning his invention—and this invention, by the way, was an extremely valuable one, as all military experts agreed.

Seeing that he had been certified insane, he was not even detained by the police, who, moreover, accepted his account of Hardy's death. Clinton was taken away to an asylum, and everybody at St. Frank's could hardly feel anything but pity for him.

We were all glad that he had passed out of our lives for ever.

"Heard the news?" shouted Bob Christine excitedly.

I was crossing the Triangle with Sir Montie when the leader of the Monks came rushing up. A week had passed since we learned that Colonel Clinton had been pronounced insane, and he was only a memory at St. Frank's. Everything was now going on as usual, except that Christine and Co. were still without a Housemaster.

"Heard the news?" repeated Christine.

"No," I replied. "What news? Another war starting?"

Christine snorted.

"Blow war!" he said. "I've just heard from Fenton, of the Sixth, that old Stockdale is coming back."

"Begad! That's splendid, old boy," said

Sir Montie. "You'll be frightfully pleased to have your old Housemaster, won't you? Is Mr. Stockdale quite recovered from his illness?"

"He's well enough to take up his duties again, anyhow—and that's all we care," said Christine joyfully. "Good old Stocky! After that nightmare time with Clinton, Mr. Stockdale will be like an angel!"

I grinned.

"Wait until he's been here a fortnight," I remarked calmly. "You'll be wishing him boiled in oil, or something! If I remember right, Stocky was an unreasonable old bird very often, and not so easy to get on with, either."

"Why, you silly ass!" roared Christine. "Stockdale may have his faults, but he's a jolly fine Housemaster—and better than any beastly stranger. We've had enough of strangers in the College House!"

"I can quite believe you, dear boy," said Tregellis-West, nodding wisely. "You don't want to take any more chances, eh?"

Christine nodded and rushed off, to take his news to other quarters. There was general satisfaction throughout the College House, and when Mr. Stockdale returned, a day or two later, he was accorded a rousing reception.

But, although things became as usual at St. Frank's just then, some fresh mystery and excitement would soon become manifest—in fact, to tell the honest truth, it was brewing up even then.

That's all I can say just now; but you can take my word for it that I shall soon get busy, and describe the stirring events which followed.

THE END.

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THE GERMAN'S REVENGE.

"**W**HAT'S wrong, Conrad?" asked Captain von Furst in a drowsy tone, as he lifted his head.

"I thought I heard a shout in the distance, Max," the other replied. "I dare say it was only imagination."

They sank into slumber again, not observing the black Askari sentry, evil and sinister of face, who was seated on a stone with his rifle across his knees. He, too, had just heard something, though he was not sure what it was. He rose to his feet, listened for a few seconds, and resumed his languid, indifferent attitude.

There was no need for him to be alert and watchful now, for the dark night, with its many perils, was at an end. The fire that had been kept blazing for hours had burnt to a handful of glowing embers, and the prowling wild beasts, craving for the human flesh which they had not tasted, were slinking back in hunger and silence to their lairs.

The welcome dawn was breaking. Noxious mists were hovering above the neighbouring swamp, and the chill, grey light was spreading over the little camp that was far to the north-west of German East Africa.

A circular enclosure in the forest, fenced in with a palisade of sharp-pointed bamboos, and with a massive gate built into it, both of them less to afford protection from savages than from marauding lions, which were absolutely fearless in this region.

In the middle of the open space the fire, smouldering beneath the low-drooping boughs of trees, and around it small huts of woven wattle, in which lay asleep two German officers, five German soldiers, and a dozen black soldiers of the Askari race, which Germany taught to bear arms for her before the year 1914.

Amongst them slept also a young Englishman of twenty-three, a prisoner, dreaming of his native land, and of his home and his mother. And by his side slumbered a wizened, impish little Hottentot, Jan Swart by name, who, though he was the body-servant of Captain Max von Furst, was devoted to the English lad, and would have readily given his life for him.

How came they all here? A few words will suffice to explain. They were the remnant, the last survivors at large, of the German troops that had been in possession of East Africa.

Numerous defeats and hammering blows from Driscoll's Scouts had broken the force into scattered units, all of which had been compelled to surrender to the gallant South Africans, with the exception of the meagre column commanded by Captain von Furst and Lieutenant Hoffner.

Rather than submit to the humiliation of capture, doggedly resolved to keep their flag flying until the end of the war, they had led their white and black soldiers hundreds of miles into the unknown and unexplored interior, to a country that teemed with bold and ferocious wild animals. And from malice, from sheer hatred, they had dragged with them on their long journey Alan Carne, the young scout who had fallen into their hands north of the Victoria Nyanza.

It was months ago that they had trekked into the wilds, and since then not a word had reached them from the outer world. A native runner, a Bushman of the name of Swartkop, had been sent south for news; but he had been gone for many weeks, and hope of his return had been abandoned.

"Another day of this cursed existence!" Captain von Furst grumbled half aloud, as he awoke again and sat up, rubbing his heavy eyelids. "What's the use?" He gazed bitterly, moodily about him. "What's the use?" he repeated. "I've had enough. It will be death for all of us if we stay here a month longer."

The pale glow on the sky was becoming brighter, throttling the lingering shadows of the night. The Prussian standard that hung motionless from its staff, with its arrogant black eagles embroidered on yellow silk, was stirred by a faint breeze.

A bird chirped, and a crocodile splashed in the swamp. The rippling echoes ebbed to silence, and the silence was broken by a husky shout that brought both officers and the sentry to their feet.

Roused from slumber, Germans and Askaris swarmed out from the huts, followed by Jan Swart and the English lad. With

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sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, their uniforms in raggs and tatters, and their bodies worn to leanness by the privations they had endured, they looked at one another while they strained their ears.

"Can it be the Bushman?" said Lieutenant Hoffner. "Is he coming?"

"I believe he is," Captain von Furst answered. "Somebody is coming, Conrad."

There was another shout. The patter of naked feet could be heard, drawing nearer and nearer. The gate quivered to a thumping blow, and as the sentry flung it wide open there staggered into the camp, panting and breathless, the native runner who had been so long absent; a wiry, little man, lightly clad, and almost as thin as a skeleton. His rifle was strapped to his back, and at his side was slung by cords a thick, hollow section of cane.

"I am here, baas," he gasped, saluting the captain. "I have been to the town of the white people with the big kraals. Many days they kept me, but at last they let me go. And this is what I bring back to you."

As he spoke he drew from the hollow tube and handed to the officer a copy of a weekly newspaper that was published in Nairobi. On the front page of it were flaring headlines and columns of large print; and as Captain von Furst glanced down them, reading the tidings that had been flashed for thousands of miles under the sea, with the eager gaze of his companions bent on him, his eyes flashed and he went white with consternation and fury.

"By heavens, the war is over!" he declared, grinding his teeth in a passion. "Germany has been beaten, crushed, brought to her knees, forced to yield!"

"Germany beaten?" exclaimed Lieutenant Hoffner. "It is incredible! Impossible!"

"It is the truth! We must believe! It is all here, by cable from Europe! Our country, our proud and mighty country, has been utterly defeated! She has had to beg humbly for peace, promising to accept the most shameful and degrading terms! The last shot has been fired! An armistice has been granted!"

"Max, my brain reels! Never could I have expected this! What of the Kaiser?"

"He has fled to exile in Holland! The Crown Prince has fled, too, and there is talk in Berlin of a republic!"

"But how? How can it be, Max? Had we not nearly beaten the British?"

"What a catastrophe! And the terms of the armistice! Germany to withdraw her troops from Alsace and Lorraine and from Belgium, to surrender her navy and her submarines, to let her territory be occupied by the Allies! Incredible, Conrad; and yet there is no doubt! Our glorious, invincible empire has ceased to exist! We have fallen from the highest place in Europe to the lowest!"

The little Hottentot furtively grinned, and Alan Carne tried hard to hide his rapturous delight. The Askaris, who had grasped the meaning of the captain's statements, showed the indifference they felt.

Lieutenant Hoffner passed his hand across

his brow in bewilderment and looked helplessly at his senior officer. Captain von Furst was in a towering rage, stung to the quick by the humiliation, his temper beyond all control. He invoked curses on England and America.

Dashing the offending journal to the ground, he tore the Prussian standard from its staff and trampled it under heel. And then, as if ashamed of his burst of fury, he picked up the soiled flag and threw it into one of the huts.

"Well, Conrad, there's one consolation," he cried, with a bitter laugh. "We needn't hide here like rats any longer. We can march down to the coast and return to our stricken land. We have done our best. We have kept the flag flying to the end of—" He paused and called sharply: "Carne!"

"Yes, sir!"

The English soldier stepped forward, a tall, handsome young fellow, fair and bronzed.

"You English pig!" snarled Captain von Furst, his voice tremulous with anger. "It is your people who have dragged Germany to the dust! But you sha'n't live to enjoy your triumph! Your bones will rot in the swamp yonder, while—"

Breaking off, he whipped a revolver from his belt and levelled it.

The Askaris were unconcerned, and Lieutenant Hoffner merely shrugged his shoulders. Murder was nothing to him. The Hottentot was crouching on quivering limbs, prepared for a leap. But Alan Carne, face to face with death though he was, betrayed no fear save for a slight pallor. He was silent, calm, disdaining to plead for his life. The officer hesitated for a moment, and lowered his weapon.

"No, I won't shoot you," he said, with a fiendish smile. "I'll have a sweeter revenge than that. You are free." He pointed to the open gateway. "There's your trail. You will take it, Carne, and you will stick to it. If you come back I will feed you to the crocodiles. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand too well," the lad quietly replied.

"Go, then. Be quick about it."

"Will you give me a rifle and ammunition, and some food, sir?"

"No, you pig, I will give you nothing! You will go as you are, with empty hands and pockets."

It was the equivalent of a death sentence. It meant to a certainty a fate worse than shooting. The trail that had been indicated, a mere thread beaten by animals, ran westward through dense and impenetrable thorn-scrub, in which ferocious beasts lurked and bloodthirsty savages prowled.

There would be no chance of Alan Carne meeting with friendly natives or with any white men, no matter in which direction he went. He was in the wild, lonely heart of Africa, hundreds of miles from the nearest outpost of civilisation.

A hungry lion would soon pounce upon him, or, should he escape that peril, he would

(Continued overleaf.)

ultimately die of starvation. There was brief silence again. Captain von Furst patted his revolver.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked, in mocking irony. "Don't you want your freedom?"

"You refuse my request?" said the English lad.

"Yes; you get nothing from me. Be off at once, Carne. I'll be glad to see the last of you."

"Very well, sir. But perhaps a day will come when you will wish you had given me a chance."

His head erect, defiance in his blue eyes, Alan Carne stepped by the grinning Askaris and German soldiers, and, with a word of farewell to Jan Swart, with the captain's laughter ringing in his ears, he passed out from the stockade gate into the boundless solitude of the African jungle, now dimly lit by the first rays of the sun.

He did not look back. In his tattered uniform of khaki and his ragged boots, with no weapon of defence, and without a scrap of food, he struck along the narrow, winding path that cleft the jungle of tangled scrub. His face was to the west, towards the remotest regions of the Dark Continent.

"The merciless brute!" he said to himself. "It's the nature of the Hun—ruthless, barbarous, and revengeful. I would like to live to be even with him. There isn't the ghost of a chance of it, though."

Life was sweet to Alan Carne. He had a mother in England who must be in great distress, wondering if he was dead or alive. He wanted to see her again, and to share in the triumphs of the sons of Britain who had fought the good fight against the German dragon and slain the fire-breathing monster. But it was not to be.

A sort of a mental numbness gripped him. In utter despair, yet dully resigned to his fate, he plodded on for an hour or so, heedless of the dangers to right and left of him, forgetting what dread things were hidden in the thorn-scrub. The heat was intense. He sat down on a stone to rest, and as he resumed his journey a twig snapped behind him, and he whirled round in alarm.

"Jan!" he exclaimed in surprise.

It was the little Hottentot, his black, shiny face dripping with perspiration. He carried a rifle on his shoulder, and slung at his sides were a belt of cartridges and a small bag of woven grass that was filled with mouldy biscuits.

"See what I have for you, baas!" he panted. "I stole them from the bad men and ran away. I hate the captain, and you I like. Where you go I will go, too."

"You can't come with me," Alan gravely replied. "It would be to your death."

"Then we will die together, baas, if it

must be so. Yet why should we not live? I have brought you food and a gun and cartridges."

"The food would not last long, Jan. And such a gun as this would not kill the ferocious lions, which would devour you and me. So you must go back to the camp, taking with you what you have stolen from the Germans."

"But if I go back the captain will beat me to death for what I have done. You know that he will."

"Yes, Jan, I dare say he would. He is a cruel man."

"And I want to be with you, baas. I am not afraid. I will be your servant, your slave. Don't send me back!"

The Hottentot's willingness to share his fate, the devotion he had shown, were deeply touching to Alan Carne. A choking lump rose in his throat. He must accept the situation, and he did so with a feeling of relief, glad to have a companion.

"Come along, then, Jan," he bade. "There is no help for it."

Shouldering the rifle, and strapping the cartridge-belt across his chest, he set off with the wizened native by his side. His mood had changed. The grim spectre of death weighed less heavily on him now. There had crept into his heart the vague hope that, desperate though the odds against them were, he and Jan might survive the perils of the wilderness and live to reach civilisation.

A NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE.

WHAT little shade there was afforded no protection from the sun, which beat fiercely down on Alan and the Hottentot, sapping their strength. But they dared not stop. The fear that the Germans might be in pursuit of them spurred them to steady and rapid travel.

There were no small creatures in the scrub through which their course led, nor did they see any vases. Now and again they heard the floundering, crashing sounds of some huge beast that was in flight, startled by their approach, but for the most part they were shrouded in silence, save for the languid droning of insects.

At noonday, guided by the sound of rippling water, they swerved aside to a swampy stream, where they slaked their thirst and ate some of the biscuits. Then they trudged on their way again, when suddenly a big lion slipped into the path a dozen yards ahead of them.

(To be continued).

(Another long instalment of this gripping new serial will appear next week.)