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THE VALLEY OF GOLD.

A Story of Holiday Life and Detective Adventure, introducing **NELSON LEE, NIPPER, LORD DORRIMORE**, and the

Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Rustlers' Secret," "Up the Ghost River," "Redskin Cunning," and many other Stirring Tales.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVENTURERS.

L EON ASCARA, the half-breed, pointed.

"Him Indian village," he whispered softly. "All 'sleep, I guess. We com' easy, an' tak' place with'out trouble. Wa! Wa! I moch pleased, so. Red man throw me out, an' I com' back with' you!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Yes, Leon, you have certainly come back with us," he said. "I am only hoping that we shall be able to make immediate peace with these Indians. Bloodshed is the last thing I desire."

Umlosi grunted.

"Thou speakest strange words. O Umtagati!" he rumbled. "Wouldst thou be pleased to defeat these accursed heathens without even a fight? Wah! My blood is flowing quickly through my veins, and I long for the moment when I shall thrust my spear into the bodies of these wretches!"

"It's all very well to have a murderous spirit, you old hooligan, but we're not built that way," put in Lord Dorrimore, with a chuckle. "If it comes to a fight we'll put up a pretty decent scrap."

"But, if possible, we'll do without the fight," said Lee.

"Exactly," agreed Lord Dorrimore.

"Thou art wondrously strange, O N'kose," said Umlosi sadly. "Thou hast disappointed me greatly, for I

thought thou wert a great warrior. I am sick at heart, and my blood runs even as water."

Both Lee and Dorrie chuckled. Umlosi was a fighting man to his fingertips, and any thought of a scrap filled him with delight. At the present moment he considered that he was being ewindled out of a glorious battle which he had been anticipating for days.

But the huge Katana chief need not have worried. The Nassi Indians of this secret valley were not to be conquered so easily as Nelson Lee hoped. So far the redskins had given no sign.

But we all knew that we were in a position of danger, and it might come to a scrap at any minute. If so, we were ready.

The party numbered seven altogether. Nelson Lee, Dorrie, Umlosi, Leon Ascara, Square-Deal Reeve, Ace-High Peter, and myself. Reeve and Peter were two of the cowboys from Mr. Farman's Montana ranch.

They had accompanied us into the Canadian North-West with Mr. Farman himself, and with a whole crowd of St. Frank's juniors. All these fellows were now encamped on the shore of the great Ghost River, on the other side of this mysterious valley. We were the only ones who had entered, and we had come upon this expedition in order to have a quiet look round.

We were all fully prepared for any emergency.

The adventure was one which appealed to us all. We had come right up here, into Athabasca, to search for this hidden valley, which, so we were told, was literally choked with gold.

It had seemed very much like a fairy tale at first, and we had been loth to believe such a story. Leon Ascara, the French-Indian half-breed, had first brought the news, and as soon as Mr. Farman had heard it, he had come north. Several cowboys, and all the St. Frank's juniors came as well.

Leon had founded this strange Indian colony in the valley, his object being to let the Nassi tribe live in peace and quietness, away from white men. Ascara had thought that this would be an excellent plan, but it had turned out badly.

For the Indians, instead of being peaceful, had grown up with something like the spirit of their fierce forefathers. Away from the white man, and the white man's domination, the Redskins had become aggressive and warlike.

And now this tribe, almost forgotten, had been causing trouble among the Indian villages outside the valley. The Nassi tribe considered themselves to be masters, and they had sworn that no white men should ever enter their valley.

Leon Ascara had been thrown over. He had been left for dead, and it was only by a miracle that he had escaped. His escape, however, resulted in this expedition. We had come to the valley with a double object.

Firstly, we wanted to quell these Indians and make them realise that it would be better to live peacefully. Secondly, we had an idea that a certain amount of gold would not come amiss.

We were determined to stake our claims before the news of this amazing "strike" got about—as it was bound to do ultimately. There was no reason why we shouldn't be in "on the ground floor," as Justin B. Farman put it.

And it need not be imagined that we were alone in this desire to be first in the field. A party of rascals, with a man named Jake Crasher at their head, had also come to the valley. We didn't know it at the moment, but Jake Crasher had met with disaster—in fact, he had entered the valley before we even approached it.

It was now nearly midnight, and we had come into the valley by a most extraordinary method, passing along a

ledge beneath a great waterfall. And now, with the quiet countryside all about us, we prepared for any trouble that might arise.

"What's our programme, exactly, sir?" I asked softly.

"Well, Nipper, we haven't got any precise programme," said Nelson Lee. "It is practically certain that these Indians will attack us if we give any sign of weakness. If, on the other hand, we walk in boldly, I believe that we shall have the upper hand."

"Sure!" said Square-Deal Reeve. "I guess I know these durned Injuns real well. Say, they ain't got no in'ards. No Injun that ever breathed can look a white man in the eye and stare him out. I guess we're on dead easy ground."

"Sure!" agreed Ace-High Peter.

"And the Indian village lies just ahead," said Dorrie. "What we must do is to walk boldly in, and inform the inhabitants that we've paid a friendly call. After that it'll be as easy as shelling peas."

"Hold on!" I interrupted suddenly. "Can't you hear something?"

They all stood perfectly still, straining their ears.

The night was calm—so exceedingly calm that from far away came a dull, low murmur. We knew that this was caused by the waterfall on the other side of the mountains. But it was so far away that it seemed disconnected with everything about us.

And then, faintly, we heard a different murmur—a kind of chanting, rising and falling in an extraordinary way. Before any of the others could move, I jumped up upon a knoll, which was much higher than the rest of the other ground.

And, right away in the distance, across the valley, I saw one or two flickering lights. They were very faint at first, but they were coming nearer and nearer. The others joined me on the hillock.

"Methinks blood will be spilled ere long!" murmured Umlosi.

"My hat!" said Lord Dorrimore. "You're always thinkin' of gore, you chunk of coal! I expect this is just a merry makin' party, comin' home with the bally milk! Anyway, we'll soon see."

It was not long before the approaching party came so near that we could hear their voices separately. We could not see distinctly, for a clump of willow-

trees intervened. But, by the sound, I judged that there were twenty or thirty Indians, and each one was doing his utmost to strain his lungs to their fullest capacity.

And then the party rounded the clump of trees.

They were comparatively close, and we could see them distinctly—although, of course, we were not visible to them.

The leading men of the party carried glaring torches. Other torches were carried by those in the rear. And, right in the centre of the Indians, we could see four different figures.

And we stared hard. They were not near enough for us to recognise them. But we could easily distinguish that they were not Indians, for they were all attired in European clothing.

Nelson Lee took out a small pair of binoculars, and focused them. Then I heard him draw his breath in sharply.

"This is extraordinary!" he murmured.

"Why, who are they, gov'nor?" I asked.

"Jake Crasher, Doane, Hara, and Sims," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "It seems that our unfortunate friends have met with further disasters. This is serious, Dorrie. These rascals are in the hands of the Indians."

"Serve them bally well right!" said Dorrie. "They did their utmost to spoil our game, and I suppose they tried to get in first."

"They got in all right," I said. "But they haven't done themselves much good, by all appearances."

"They are all bound securely," said Nelson Lee. "I am seriously afraid that this will upset all our plans."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, Nipper, Crasher and his companions are white men," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I will admit that they are scoundrels, and that they deserve little sympathy. But, at the same time, they are men of our own flesh and blood—they are white. Under no circumstances can we allow them to remain in the hands of these Redskins."

I stared.

"You mean that we've got to rescue them, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

"Yes."

"But they're awful rascals, gov'nor—"

"That may be so, young 'un," put in

Dorrie. "Personally, it would please me to see the whole bunch put in gaol. But we don't happen to have any gaols knockin' about these parts. They may be ruffians, but they're white. We're white—an' it's up to us to lend them a hand."

"Yes, that's right enough," I agreed thoughtfully. "But it all depends what these Indians are going to do. There's no need for us to rush into anything in a hurry, is there? Can't we hang about here and look on—and butt in if we think it's necessary?"

Nelson Lee tapped my shoulder.

"That is the very idea I am intending to adopt, Nipper," he said quietly. "If Jake Crasher and his men are in no danger, we will not interfere. If, on the other hand, they are seriously menaced by these Redskins, it is our duty to go to their rescue. And I fear that the Indians mean trouble."

"They certainly look like it," agreed Dorrie. "By gad! It'll be rather rough on Mr. Crasher if he has his scalp removed—what? We sha'n't let it come to that, though."

Umlosi gripped his spear tightly.

"There is much killing to be done," he murmured softly. "Wau! The red mists swim before mine eyes, and ere long I shall be wielding my trusty spear, and man after man will fall beneath my dripping blade!"

"Oh, my goodness!" I said. "There's going to be plenty of hot work, then?"

"Ay, Manzie, it is even as thou sayest," agreed Umlosi. "Many days have I been waiting for this great hour, Wau! My heart is light!"

It was quite characteristic of Umlosi to be highly pleased at the prospect of a battle. Fighting was the keenest pleasure to him, and he was a warrior in a thousand. Once loose with his spear amidst a crowd of enemies and—Weli, there wouldn't be many enemies left after five minutes had elapsed.

We found that the party of Indians were moving towards the central village, which was perched upon the shore of a gently flowing river. Lights had already appeared in the village, and Indian women were standing about—evidently spectators, waiting for the show to begin.

Torches were flaring everywhere.

Creeping nearer, screened by the trees and bushes, we were able to see every-

thing. No thought of watchers entered the minds of these Redskins—they believed that we were still on the Ghost River. They had no inkling that we had already entered the valley.

At last we secured a comfortable position just on the top of a little hill, with a clump of bushes in front of us. Lying on the ground we could see everything—for the village was only a matter of two hundred yards distant, down in the little hollow.

And the torches were flaring so brightly that not a single item escaped our gaze. Jake Crasher and his three companions were in a sorry plight—and they looked thoroughly scared, too. Bound hand and foot, they were helpless. Their hair was tousled, and their faces pale and drawn.

The Indians were in full war paint, feathers flying, and all the rest of it. They commenced operations by executing a wild war dance—exactly the same as one sees on the films, depicting a massacre in the old days of the Wild West. That such a scene could take place in modern times was extraordinary.

And it was not long before we discovered exactly what these Redskins intended doing. After the preliminary war dance—during which time the prisoners were laid side by side upon the ground—the Indians set to work.

Great posts were brought, and these were hammered into the ground. There were four posts, each of them straight and thick. I couldn't quite understand what the idea was at first.

Then I noticed that immense piles of dry faggots were brought, and placed in a handy position. My blood almost ran cold as I guessed the truth. I nudged Nelson Lee softly.

"Great Scott, guv'nor!" I whispered. "They're going to burn them at the stake!"

"I think not, Nipper."

"But look at those posts—and the faggots—"

"I agree that it is the intention of the Indians to burn their prisoners alive," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But they will never do it, Nipper. We shall appear upon the scene before then."

"Rather!" I said shakily.

For the very first time I felt quite friendly towards Crasher. He and his companions were in a terrible predicament, and even if they had been the

foulest murderers we could not have withheld our aid.

These dastardly Redskins, inflamed by the fact that they had secured white men as prisoners, had decided to celebrate the occasion in a particularly fiendish manner. And Crasher and Co. were to provide the entertainment.

"I say, we can't stand this!" muttered Dorrie. "Let's get busy at once, Leo. We'll butt in now—"

"No; we will wait," said Nelson Lee. "They are in no peril at the moment."

We watched, fascinated by the sight. And Crasher and the other three men were lifted from the ground and carried across to the posts. The Indians swarmed round like so many evil flies.

Hara was already whimpering and half hysterical—for all these four men knew what was coming. Sims contented himself with cursing at the top of his voice. Bob Doane was quiet, stunned into silence by the shock of what was to come.

Jake Crasher, blackguard and bully—a scoundrel to his finger-tips—was proving himself to be the opposite of a coward. His face was set grimly, and he didn't move a hair.

"Say, you blamed Redskins!" he said. "You'd best get it right into your heads that this kinder play won't help you any. You're figgerin' to convert us into four bonfires, ain't you? Waal, you'd best think twice—"

"You no spik!" exclaimed one of the Indians harshly. "You die! White dogs no com' in this valley and live!"

"Waal, see here, Muskis, I ain't the feller to argue," exclaimed Jake. "But I'd jest like to hand out a piece of talk. Outside, on the Ghost River, ther's a hull party o' white men. They ain't figgerin' to come hyar killin'. I guess they're peaceful. But if they get in this valley and discover what you've done to us—waaal, ther' won't be a live red man left within twelve hours!"

Muskis, the chief, laughed.

"You t'ink you scare me?" he jeered.

"White man moch fool! Him trapped same as you. Him com' here soon—all party. Him be burned jus' same lak this. We keep valley for Redman."

Jake Crasher's face flushed fiercely.

"All right!", he shouted thickly. "I'm not saying any more. I guess you don't get me yellin'. Get on with your durned work, and make haste about it. I reckon you're goin' to pay dearly later on."

One of Jake's companions suddenly screamed with terror. A bundle of faggots had been placed at his feet.

"Quit that durned yelping!" snarled Jakē fiercely. "We're white men, ain't we? I guess we don't let these cussed Injuns see us howlin' for mercy. Keep a stiff upper lip, boys. We're up against it proper!"

Nelson Lee tapped Dorrie's arm.

"The man's got courage, at all events," he murmured. "We won't let them be tortured any longer, Dorrie—for it is acute torture to remain bound to these stakes, thinking that a ghastly death is to follow. Come, the time for action has arrived."

"Good!" muttered Dorrie.

"Gee, we'll sure sling a dandy pile of lead around!" said Square-Deal, handling his revolver lovingly. "Say, it's sure goin' to be some elegant picnic!"

"You had better remain behind, Nipper," whispered Lee.

"Right, sir!" I said promptly. "I don't think!"

"But, my dear lad——"

"Look here, guv'nor, if there's going to be a scrap, I'm in it!" I declared. "My hat! Do you think I'm going to stand looking on while you all go into it? Not blessed likely! I'm in this scrap up to my neck!"

"And that's that!" muttered Dorrie, with a grim chuckle.

"Thou art of great courage, O, Manzie!" whispered Umlosi. "And he who hath courage does mighty things, and escapes with no hurt. It is the coward who falls in battle."

"That's right sometimes, old man, but not always," said Dorrie. "The bravest of all get finished up in lots of cases. But we needn't talk like this; we're not going to be finished up. This is simply goin' to be a joy ride!"

I was thrilled with the excitement of the knowledge, and wondered what the Indians would do when we made our sudden appearance. One thing was absolutely certain—we could no longer lay there and watch these four white men being tortured by the cold-blooded Redskins. The position was a peculiar one.

The Indians were our enemies, and Crasher and Co. were our enemies. By pulling them out of this hole we should be siding with them. Later on, perhaps, the whole position would be altered.

Just this one incident might change these four ruffians, and place them on

our side for good. But we could not forget the many misdeeds they had committed, and we were not likely to treat them very gently.

"Now!" muttered Nelson Lee. "All ready?"

"Waitin'!" breathed Dorrie.

"Good!"

With one accord we jumped out of our place of concealment, and charged down at full speed into the torch-lighted zone. The Indians did not know of our presence until we were practically upon them.

And the effect of our appearance was startling.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Every one of us pulled the trigger of our revolvers, but we fired harmlessly into the air, our object being to give the Indians a good scare as a start off. We certainly succeeded.

The Redskins were dumb for a second. Their war dance ceased, and they stared at us as though we were ghosts. Then, with screams of fright, they fled in all directions. Torches were flung down, and pandemonium reigned.

We arrived in the centre of the arena, next to the four stakes, and discovered that we had nobody to fight. The Indians had vanished. Even the women had bolted like rabbits into the tepees, and we could hear them wailing with fright.

"By cripes!" shouted Hara wildly. "White men—Mr. Lee!"

"Gee!" gasped Jake Crasher. "Say, boys, I guess we're saved!"

"You hardly expected to see us, Crasher," said Nelson Lee swiftly. "Your little plan didn't materialise, and we now find it necessary to pull you out of this trouble. Can I trust you to refrain from treachery——"

"Say, Mr. Lee, I guess you've saved us from the worst death a man could have!" interrupted Crasher. "We ain't likely to go agin you. No, sir. We're all white, and these durned guys are red. If ther's any fightin' to be done—waal, we'll get busy and hand out the lead. Guess you can slip me a gun?"

As quickly as possible Crasher and the others were cut free. They were wild excitement and joy. At that moment, at all events, treachery was the last thought in their minds. They were saved—they had been rescued from this

ghastly ordeal. And they were truly grateful to us.

Umlosi was sick with disgust.

"Wau! What kind of fight is this?" he growled witheringly. "Not one man have I touched with my spear! They are not men—they are even as the jackals of the forest! They run at the sight of a spear!"

"You'll probably have your chance yet, Umlosi," said Dorrie. "I've got an idea that this scrap isn't over yet. We scared the Indians to start with, but we're not out of the wood. What's the best plan, Lee?"

The gov'nor looked round him keenly.

"Well, this position is too exposed to be comfortable," he said. "There's hardly an inch of cover, and——"

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Even while Lee was speaking half a dozen arrows came from nowhere. They shot through the air, and one actually penetrated the sleeve of Lord Dorrimore's jacket. And they came with the force of rifle bullets.

"This is what I feared!" said Lee. "It would be insane to remain here a second longer. On our way here we passed a hill, with many boulders on the summit. We cannot do better than retire to that hill until the morning."

It was somewhat undignified, but we beat a rapid retreat. Bending low, we scooted over the ground, reached the cover of some trees, and then bolted like hares. But we were not running from the Indians because we were afraid, but because it would have been madness itself to remain.

However, this fight had started, and it would be carried out to the finish. And there was not the slightest doubt that these Indians would cause us a lot of trouble before we gained the upper hand.

CHAPTER II.

WHITE VERSUS RED!

I AWOKÉ with a violent start.

The sharp crack of a revolver shot still rang in my ears, and I sat up and blinked round in bewilderment for a moment or two. It was broad daylight, and the sun was gleaming down warmly. It was just peeping over the rim of the mountains in the distance, and at first I didn't know where I was, or what had happened.

"Winged him, by gad!" said Lord Dorrimore.

And then I understood.

I remembered everything that had happened, and I looked round with added interest. I brought to mind how we had run swiftly through the darkness after that brief encounter with the Indians.

Nelson Lee's selection of a spot had been a good one. Personally, I had taken no particular notice of the country. But the gov'nor had seen that this little hill provided us with an excellent place where we could make a stand.

We had reached it in the darkness, and had lost no time in preparing a kind of rough and ready stronghold. Then I had fallen asleep, and had slumbered dreamlessly until this minute.

A great change had taken place.

The hill was only a low one, with grassy slopes on all sides. A swiftly flowing stream ran along quite near at hand, and Nelson Lee had taken the precaution to fill all the water-bottles during the hours of darkness.

On the top of this hill there were large stacks of rock boulders lying about in the most haphazard fashion. This, at least, is what I remembered of them. But, as I looked round, I could see that the boulders were no longer haphazard.

They had been collected together. One had been rolled this way, another in an opposite direction, and smaller rocks had been built up. And now, to my surprise, I saw that we were completely surrounded by a thick rock wall, about four feet in height.

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

Jake Crasher and the other three men were lying fast asleep, for they had passed through a terrible time with the Indians, and had had no sleep for a great many hours. Now they lay like logs.

"Somebody's been working pretty hard," I remarked, as I stood up. "Why, this has made a ripping barricade——"

"Get down, Nipper!" shouted Lee sharply.

"Why, what——"

Hiss!

Before I could dodge, an arrow came whizzing past my ear. I ducked like lightning, and felt just a bit scared. Nelson Lee looked at me anxiously, and then frowned.

"You reckless young beggar!" he said severely.

"But I've only just awakened, guv'nor," I said. "What's happened?"

"A good deal has happened," replied Nelson Lee. "This hill, as you see, has provided us with an excellent stronghold, and I fancy the Indians will have some difficulty in reaching us with their arrows—unless, of course, we expose ourselves."

"They're on the watch, then?" I asked.

"My dear chap, we're surrounded," said Dorrie calmly. "They're swarmin' about like a pack of wasps. There's one behind every bally tree. They can't pot us, an' we can't pot them. It's goin' to be great sport!"

"The position is rather difficult, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "At the moment we are quite safe—but how long will it last? How long can we keep it up? Our food is not extremely plentiful, and it will be gone by to-night. These Indians can starve us out if they are patient enough."

"They moch patient," said Leon, shaking his head. "They wait lak wolves round tree. Position heap bad, I guess. But we not give in. We beat them soon. Mus' t'ink of som' good plan."

"That's the idea," said Dorrie. "But you need good brains to think of good plans. I'm a frightful duffer at thinkin'. Give me somethin' to do, an' I'll do it. But thinkin' ain't in my line."

"Leave it to the guv'nor," I said.

I examined all the preparations with great interest. The Indians certainly had no chance of reaching us now. Even if they came in full force we should easily be able to ward off any attack, for we were fully armed.

"I am filled with great disgust, my master," said Umlosi, in his deep voice. "Not once have I used my spear—not once have these jackals come near enough for me to make a thrust. Wau! But I am patient, too—I will wait. Ere long a time will come when I shall get to work."

"Let's hope so, anyway, Umlosi," I said. "Look here, guv'nor, couldn't we go out boldly and show these confounded Redskins that we're not scared of them? They'd probably run away."

"I agree with you, Nipper, but we cannot take the chance," said Nelson Lee. "We will only do that when we are absolutely obliged to. You must not

forget that these Indians are fully armed with bows and arrows, and that they know how to use them. Until necessity compels us to leave this spot, we will cling to it."

"I sure guess we're in a tight corner, pards," said Square-Deal Reeve. "Howsum, it don't worry me any. Guess we ain't scared o' these cussed Injuna. Say, I wish they'd give a guy a chance to pump loose a few doses of lead."

"They're jolly cute, you know," said Dorrie. "They keep well behind cover all the time. Hallo! One of our interstin' friends is wakin' up. I hope he won't ask for a big breakfast!"

Jake Crasher rolled over and sat up. He blinked round dazedly for a moment or two, and then a light of understanding came into his eyes. He looked at all of us in turn, and then addressed himself to Nelson Lee.

"Say, boss, I guess you're a real white man," he said. "I didn't figger on any play o' this kind from you. Guess we're in the same boat now, an' it's up to us to pull together."

"I am not anxious to talk with you, Crasher," said Nelson Lee curtly. "For the moment we must have an armistice, I suppose, and we must fight under one flag, so to speak. But these peculiar circumstances do not give you any privileges. My opinion of you is quite unchanged."

Crasher grunted.

"Say, ther's no call to hand out that talk," he exclaimed gruffly. "I'm real sorry for anything I done to harin you. Say, we'll fight this out, and quit this valley together. I'm guessin' that me and my pards are real grateful."

"Well, that's sufficient," said Nelson Lee. "I don't mind telling you frankly, Crasher, that I don't trust you, and as soon as we get out of this trouble you and your friends will go your own way."

"Waal, you won't find us causin' you no harm," said Crasher. "Say I'd jest like to blow this hull crowd of Indians up with dynamite. The gosh-durned coyotes! Gee! They sure tricked us proper!"

"I presume they brought you into the valley, and then turned on you?"

"Sure," said Jake fiercely. "They reckoned that they were pals, and that they hadn't got no sort of grudge against us. Then, when we was in the valley, they turned on us, and—Waal, I'm figgerin' you know the rest."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, and the position does not seem likely to improve," he said. "Happily, we have chosen a spot where we can hold out. It is merely a question of food, and our supplies are very low."

"Say, that's durned awkward," said Crasher. "I'm jest about as hungry as a starvin' prairie dawg! Say, do you reckon on sparin' some grub fer me?"

Without a word Nelson Lee passed over some dried moose meat and a chunk of stale bannock. It was from the guvnor's own supply. Jake fell upon the food voraciously, and it vanished in next to no time.

"Guess that was a blamed appetiser!" he exclaimed. "Any more grub knockin' around?"

"No, confound you!" snapped Lord Dorrimore curtly. "You've had more than your share now, an' you were lucky to get that."

Crasher fell into silence, and lay back against the boulders. He was sulky, and we were not sorry that his voice was quiet. It grated on us. There was very little doing during the next hour or two, and the sun blazed down hotly. But we knew that the Indians were watching on every side, patiently waiting for any opportunity to cast their arrows at us. But we had done the only possible thing under the circumstances. For the time being we were secure.

And, meanwhile, other events were happening some miles away.

Outside the valley, on the banks of the Ghost River, lay our main base, so to speak—the encampment, where our dug-outs were all drawn up high out of the stream, where our tents were pitched, and where our supplies were stocked.

We had only come into the valley on a scouting expedition, and we had expected to go back after only a brief stay. But the encounter with the Indians, and the rescue of Crasher and Co. had altered all our arrangements.

Mr. Farman and one of the cowboys were in charge of the camp. All the other members of the party were there—Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Handforth and Co., Fatty Little, Farman junior, and the other St. Frank's fellows. They were anxiously awaiting our return.

The scone where the camp was placed was, in some respects, similar to our own

stronghold in the valley. For the camp itself was perched upon a little hill. Any attack made upon that camp would fail, since it was possible to guard it on all sides at once. Not that there was much likelihood of any attempt being made to attack the camp.

Big Jim Farman was getting rather worried towards midday. He and his son were chatting soon after the luncheon interval had passed.

"I can't quite understand it, sonny," said Mr. Farman. "Mr. Lee and the others went into the valley yesterday evening, and they reckoned to be back in good time this morning. It's a mystery to me why they haven't returned."

"Oh, I guess they'll show up soon, dad," said Justin B. Farman. "I don't fancy I'm worrying, anyway. Say, there's not much chance of us seeing any Indians, I fancy. I'd sure like to go into that valley."

The junior looked up at the immense waterfall which came charging down with appalling force, and with a deafening roar. Unseen and unsuspected, the entrance to the hidden valley lay behind that waterfall.

In another part of the camp Handforth and Co. were chatting. At least, Handforth was laying down the law, and Church and McClure were listening. Edward Oswald Handforth generally did most of the talking.

"Of course, the whole thing was dotty!" said Handforth. "I don't suppose we shall ever see any of them again. By this time they're scalped, I expect, and the Indians are——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handy!" interrupted Church. "There's nothing to worry about. They'll all turn up before long."

"Well, I hope they do," grunted Handforth. "But if they're collared by the Indians—well, it'll be their own fault. I've said all along that I ought to have gone. If I'd been with the party everything would have been all serene."

"Oh, rather!" agreed McClure.

"Of course," said Church. "What an astounding thing that Mr. Lee didn't think of it! Just fancy his overlooking it! Just imagine his starting off on this expedition without taking you!"

"Sheer madness!" said McClure.

Handforth looked at his chums suspiciously.

"I don't want any of your blessed leg pulling——" he began.

"Leg pulling!" echoed Church, staring. "My dear chap, you don't seem to realise what a valuable fellow you are. If you'd gone with the party everybody would have been back hours ago!"

"Of course," agreed McClure. "You'd have made such a blessed noise that the whole party would have had to retreat before it started—— Yaroooooh! Ow! You—you silly ass!"

"Well, you shouldn't rag me!" snapped Handforth. "And I'll punch your nose, too, Church, if I have any of your rot!"

McClure rubbed his nose tenderly, and watched Handforth curiously as the latter strolled over towards one of the great cliffs which rose for thousands of feet towards the sky-line, far above.

"We must do something," said Handforth, turning. "What's wrong with the idea of searching for the bounders? I suggest we climb this cliff, and have a good look round. Come on, my sons."

"Rats!"

"Not likely!"

"Why, you rotters, if you don't come——"

"Mr. Farman wouldn't like it; and, besides, what's the good?" asked Church. "It's hot in the sun, and there's no reason why we should fag ourselves. As a matter of fact, you couldn't climb that cliff, Handy."

"Couldn't climb it!" roared Handforth, glaring.

"Of course not," went on Church, nudging McClure. "It would be absolutely impossible. You're too clumsy to climb rocks like that."

"You bet!" agreed McClure. "It's beyond you, Handy!"

Handforth fell into the trap.

"By George!" he shouted. "I'll show you!"

And, without wasting a minute, he started to climb. Church and McClure, below, grinned sweetly at one another.

"Ripping!" murmured Church. "That's got rid of him for a good hour, at least. Phew! We can have some peace now."

Handforth climbed vigorously, never suspecting that his chums had deliberately sent him on this task so that they

should be relieved of his presence for the time being. And, having started, Handforth was determined to do the job properly.

He went up and up, kidding himself that he was doing something marvellously clever. The climb, as a matter of fact, was an easy one, and devoid of any risk. And, at last, Handforth stood upon a wide ledge of rock three or four hundred feet above the camp. He waved his hand.

"Good old Handy!" chuckled Church. "There he is. Give him a wave!"

They semaphored vigorously with their arms, and two of the other juniors did the same, grinning cheerfully. Then, abruptly, their expressions changed. For, in that second, a startling thing took place.

Two figures appeared behind Handforth—two brown figures with feathers about their heads. With one accord they fell upon Handforth and seized him. A yell came floating down to the watching juniors.

And then Handforth vanished with the two figures.

"Indians!" gasped Church faintly. "Oh, my goodness!"

"He—ho's been collared—made a prisoner!" stammered McClure, turning pale. "Who—who would have thought that—— Quick! We must tell Mr. Farman! Oh, what the dickens can we do?"

The juniors were thoroughly scared, and they certainly had every reason to be. Nobody had suspected that Handforth was in the slightest danger. But, in climbing that cliff, it was evident that he had walked into the arms of two Indians who had been watching the camp.

Mr. Farman was greatly agitated when he heard the news.

"Say, it's bad—infernally bad!" he said anxiously. "And I guess we can't do anything, either."

"But we can go to his rescue, sir——"

"It'll take us an hour to get up there, and by that time there won't be a sign," interrupted the millionaire. "Leon isn't here, and we can't find our way through this secret pass. Say, boys, don't get excited. It's almighty bad, but we sha'n't do any good by getting into a panic."

The whole situation at the camp was changed. Five minutes before everybody had been content and easy in mind. But now Handforth had been captured

by the Indians, and perhaps he would be carried down into the valley and tortured. There was no telling what would result.

We, in the valley, knew nothing of this.

We were hemmed in by the Indians—holding out against heavy odds on that little hilltop. It was impossible for us to move in any direction. All we could do was to wait there—and make all sorts of plans.

Square-Deal Reeve and Dorrie suggested all sorts of ideas—most of them hopeless. Nelson Lee remained silent. He was thinking—he was planning out. And I had not the slightest doubt that the gov'nor would suggest a feasible plan before long. I thought I'd just test him.

"Got any scheme, sir?" I asked hesitatingly.

"Not yet, Nipper; but one or two ideas are taking shape," replied Lee. "In any case, we can do nothing until darkness falls. By then, probably, we shall be in a position to act."

"Good!" I said. "I know what that means."

The hours passed slowly, and we were all hungry, for our food was low, and there was very little to go round. We had not come prepared for a siege. However, it was no good grumbling.

There was very little doing in the way of fighting. Now and again an arrow would fly harmlessly overhead, or strike against the rocks. And sometimes Square-Deal or Dorrie would loose off a bullet. But they couldn't get the Indians, and the Indians couldn't get us. It was a waiting game.

We were thankful that we had a plentiful supply of water, for the sun was very hot, and our thirsts were acute. But we were able to drink liberally, and this was a blessing.

By the time evening arrived we felt absolutely famished. And there was just enough food left to provide a mouthful each. About enough to give us a splendid appetite for more.

And then, when the sun was getting low in the sky, the position became completely altered. For something occurred which took us all completely and absolutely by surprise.

Dorrie was the first to notice any change.

He had been looking through a small spyhole which had been left in the

stones. And he suddenly turned to us with a grin on his face.

"There's somethin' doin' at last," he remarked. "Old Chief Big Feet, or whatever his name is, is marching along with a flag of truce. He's got about a dozen men with him, an' they don't appear to be armed."

"Nevertheless, we must be on our guard," said Nelson Lee. "These Indians are capable of any treachery. However, I'm glad that something is at last being done. I hope these Indians have come to make peace. Nothing would please me better than that."

Dorrie stood upright, and leaned over the parapet of rocks. He held his revolver handy, and kept his finger on the trigger. But no arrows came, and the flag of truce was evidently a genuine one.

We all stood up, and I watched the proceedings with interest. The chief, Muskis, was coming along in full war regalia, and with his head simply smothered with feathers. He held a piece of white rag in his hand, waving it vigorously. Behind him came a crowd of other Indians.

"Keep your eye on the rear," said Nelson Lee. "While we are paying these Indians full attention, there may be an attack from another quarter. It is just as well to be prepared for anything that might occur."

A watch was kept, but we were at last convinced that the Indians were conducting this affair properly. Muskis came up quite close. The Indians with him spread out. And then, for the first time, we saw that a stranger was with them.

They had a prisoner securely roped—a sturdily built young fellow in a Norfolk suit, with tousled hair and cheeks that flamed with indignant anger. I gave one terrific yell as I recognised him.

"Handforth!" I shouted in amazement.

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "Handforth!"

"Handforth!" said Nelson Lee, between his teeth. "This is terrible! Good gracious! What can it mean? How on earth did Handforth get into the hands of these Indians? I don't know what in the world we can do!"

"Say, it's sure a surprise!" muttered Square-Deal.

"Indian mean no good," said Leon Ascara. "Him com' mak' terms. Him moch pleased got prisoner. Wa! I no lak this!"

"Handforth!" I exclaimed, staring at him. "Oh, how did he get captured like this? And what can we do? It's impossible to rescue him——"

"Hi, you up there!" roared Handforth. "Look what's happened to me? These blessed rotters have collared me, you know!"

"How did you manage it, Handy?" I shouted.

"Why, I was climbing the cliff, and they pounced on me!" bawled Handforth indignantly. "Then they brought me down here. You've got to rescue me, you know. Why don't you shoot these rotters down?"

"We must respect the white flag, Handforth," shouted Nelson Lee.

"Oh, yes, sir. I forgot that."

They were all quite close now, and the chief raised his hand aloft, as a sign of peace.

"We want talk," he exclaimed. "We lak pow-wow!"

"Very well; what have you got to say?" demanded Nelson Lee. "If you have come to ask us to surrender you may as well save your breath."

"You will give in?" said the chief stolidly. "You throw fire guns down and com' out. You agree?"

"We do not!"

"I mak' you!" said the Indian grimly. "You tink you beat us, but we got you proper. Plenty mak' you give in!"

"What is your proposal?" demanded Nelson Lee. "There is no reason why we should not be friends, chief. Why this talk of surrender, and fighting? We came to this valley peacefully, and wish to shed no blood."

"Wa! Fool talk!" sneered Muskis. "You kill us. We no let you do that. So we mak' you surrender. If you not agree, we tak this boy an' burn him. We tie him to stake an' burn him up lak firewood!"

"What!" roared Handforth. "You'll burn me? Why, you rotters, if you try that game, I'll punch your beastly noses——"

"Let me do the talking, Handforth," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Now, Muskis, we've had enough of this foolish talk. Why cannot we come to some reasonable

arrangement? We do not intend to harm you——"

"No listen to soch talk," interrupted Chief. "You mus' give up fire guns an' surrender. I give you five minutes to think. You onderstan'? If you no agree—this white boy, him burn!"

Without another word the chief turned away, and stalked off with his braves. Handforth was forced to walk in their midst. His hands were bound up, and he could do nothing but go.

I thought rapidly.

The position was appalling. Under no circumstances could we allow Handforth to be harmed by these fiendish Indians. And I knew well enough that they would not hesitate to burn him at the stake if they were so inclined.

And what was the alternative?

We should have to surrender, after giving up our firearms. The thought was almost an impossible one. In the hands of these Indians, unarmed, we should be helpless. Not only Handforth would die, but all of us.

By capturing Handy, the Indians had played a master stroke. Instead of killing him outright, they held him as a hostage, and were now using him as a weapon to force us into surrender. Nothing worse could possibly have taken place.

Nelson Lee's face was grim as he looked at us.

"Well, old man, what's to be done?" asked Dorrie quietly.

"We must surrender," said Nelson Lee.

"Thou art surely mad, Umtagati!" protested Umlosi. "Thou speakest of surrender? Thou art willing to give thyself up to these accursed jackals? Wau! Thou hast filled me with amazement, my master!"

"It's all very well, Umlosi, but what else is there to be done?" asked Nelson Lee. "Do you suggest that we should leave that boy to perish? Such a thought is impossible. And what if we refuse to surrender? Handforth will undoubtedly be burned—just as these Indians threaten."

Umlosi smiled.

"Thou art mistaken, O, my master!" he replied. "The boy will be saved—and we shall not give in to these dogs. I, Umlosi, will show thee how it is to be done. Never will we surrender!"

"What are you thinking of, Umlosi?" demanded Lee sharply.

"I go, Umtagati!" shouted the African chief. "There is no white flag now, and I go to battle——"

"Stop him!" exclaimed Lee hoarsely. "He'll be killed before we can move a hundred feet! He'll be the target for scores of arrows!"

"It can't be done, Umlosi!" said Lord Dorrmore. "If it could, I'd go myself, by gad! To save Handforth, we've got to——"

"I will show thee, my father!" exclaimed Umlosi, with glittering eyes. "Think ye I care for these foolish arrows? Think ye I hesitate because these pigs threaten? I will show thee what can be done!"

And, before any of us could stop him, Umlosi gave one tremendous leap, and was over the boulders, and down on to the grass. He was exposed to all the fire of the Indians' arrows.

They came whizzing over in a shower, and as I bobbed up to look at Umlosi I narrowly escaped death. The Kutana chief ran like a hare—like a streak of lightning. Before an arrow could touch him he reached the cover of a clump of bushes.

Then, without pausing a second, he gave a series of fiendish yells. With his spear upraised, he advanced towards the Indians, jumping like a champion. Arrows came at him from all sides, but, amazing as it seems, he was not touched.

So it appeared to us, at all events.

Actually, one or two of the arrows grazed Umlosi, but he took no notice of these wounds. He charged on, and the Indians had no chance to fit new arrows into their bows. Before they could turn—before they could be aware of the real truth—Umlosi was amongst them.

It was a sight I shall never forget.

And then he got his deadly spear to work. Right and left he lunged, absolutely thrilling in the joy of the battle. It was the opportunity Umlosi had been waiting for all this time.

He was fighting a battle at close quarters with the enemy. Single-handed, he attacked the whole crowd of Indians, numbering fully thirty.

And the incident was over before we could chime in—before we could rush to lend Umlosi our assistance. He was like a whirlwind, and the Indians fell before him just as hay falls before the scythe.

"Wau! Callest thyself men?"

roared Umlosi. "Thou art but straws that I can knock down with a touch. Fight, thou cowards! Hast thou no strength to wield thy weapons?"

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Right and left Umlosi's spear met flesh and bone. The Indians fell, screaming and writhing on all sides, most of them mortally wounded. They had never in their lives encountered such a man as this—and, indeed, Umlosi was a fighter in a thousand. Once on the go, he could not be stopped.

The enemy was demoralised.

Only for a few minutes did the Indians attempt to stand up to Umlosi. Then, screaming, they flung down their bows and ran like mad. Umlosi was left on the battlefield, with only the dead and the dying round him. So swift had been the fight that we had hardly had time to follow it.

And Handforth picked himself up—for he had been flung down by the Indians when they fled. Umlosi grasped the junior just as a man would pick up a pillow. Then, running like a deer, the African chief came towards our stronghold.

His face was wreathed in smiles, and covered with perspiration. During those brief seconds he had enjoyed himself hugely—and, incidentally, he had instilled a terror into the Redskin's hearts that they would never forget.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Umlosi!"

"Splendid, old man—splendid!" roared Dorrie.

A few stray arrows followed Umlosi as he came charging up to the rock parapets. But the range was too great, and Umlosi was not in any danger. He pushed Handforth over among us, and then came tumbling down himself.

"My only topper!" gasped Handforth breathlessly.

"Thou speakest of surrender?" exclaimed Umlosi. "Surely thou wert joking, Umtagati? Is not this the better way?"

"Upon my soul, Umlosi, you've done a marvellous thing," said Nelson Lee. "I don't think any other man could have accomplished what you have just done. But it was terribly risky."

"I fear not those absurd arrows!" said Umlosi contemptuously. "Wau! It was wondrously fine, my father. It would have been better, only the dogs fled like so many rats!"

"Dogs and rats and pigs—they all apply," grinned Dorrie. "I'm hanged if I know how you do these things, Umlosi. I thought it was all up with us—I was just wondering how it would feel to be roasted——"

"That's what the brutes were going to do to me!" said Handforth hotly. "Burn me at the stake! And if it hadn't been for Umlosi, it might have happened. Ho's a brick! Thank goodness I'm with you all!"

The excitement was over for the moment, and the Redskin plan had utterly failed. They had expected to gain the upper hand by their ruse. But, owing to Umlosi's prompt action, they had not succeeded.

Handforth told us exactly how he had fallen into the hands of the Indians. We listened to his story with great attention, and we were rather concerned, too. Nelson Leo shook his head.

"Mr. Farman and the others will be worrying terribly over this," he said. "Do you think they saw what had happened to you, Handforth?"

"Of course they saw, sir."

"They knew that you had been captured by the redskins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we ought to let them know the truth as quickly as possible," said Nelson Lee. "And I'm beginning to be worried about the rest of our party. We are helpless here, and it is possible that Mr. Farman will be attacked——"

"Why, what's this rotter doing here?" demanded Handforth abruptly.

He was glaring at Jake Crasher. Then he looked at the other three rascals, and his face flushed with indignation.

"Crasher!" said Handforth. "Great pip! You—you don't mean to say you've made pals with these scoundrels, sir?"

"Quit that talk!" growled Jake gruffly.

"Under the circumstances, Handforth, we were obliged to call a truce," explained Nelson Leo. "Crasher and his companions were menaced by the Indians, and—well, it was only natural that all we white people should stand shoulder to shoulder against the savages."

Handforth didn't approve of the idea, to judge by his looks. But he realised that it would have been impossible to leave Crasher and Co.—scoundrels, as they were—to the mercy of the Indians.

For the moment the tension was relaxed. Handforth was safely with us, and the Indians had met with defeat.

But how long was this state of affairs to last? When should we be able to do something decisive?

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT SURPRISE.

TWIRLY SAM puffed almost viciously at his choroot.

"Injuns never was no durned good on this airth, an' I figger they never will be!" he exclaimed gruffly. "Gee! I'm guessin' that things are in an almighty bad position, boss."

Mr. Farman nodded.

"You're right, Twirly," he agreed. "Heaven only knows what has happened to Handforth by this time. And the others. Why hasn't Mr. Leo returned. Say, Twirly, I'm sure worried to death."

Big Jim Farman and Twirly Sam were not the only ones who were worried. Church and McClure were practically dotted with anxiety. Several hours had elapsed since Handforth's dramatic capture by the two Indians. It was now evening, and everybody in camp was in a state of nerves.

The juniors were talking together in rather scared tones.

"Goodness knows what's happened to him," Bob Christino was saying. "He's probably been scalped by this time. These Indians are awful savages, you know. Poor old Handy! He was one of the best, in spite of his aggressiveness."

"I wish we could do something," said Church impatiently. "I think it's rot to stick here like this. We ought to get up a rescue party——"

"Mr. Farman knows what he's doing," put in Reginald Pitt. "And he knows that it wouldn't do any good to leave this place. We've simply got to wait until Mr. Lee and the others come back."

"Handforth might be eaten by this time!" said Fatty Little hopefully.

"You ass—you fat ass!" snapped Tommy Watson. "Dash it all, these Indians aren't cannibals, although they may be pretty savage. Strictly speaking, it was Handy's own fault—the silly ass must have been off his rocker to go climbing that cliff!"

"How the dickens was he to know that those two Indians were waiting there?" said Church miserably. "Oh, my hat! I wish we hadn't let him go! And it happened hours ago! I wonder where he is now?"

"Dear old boys, it won't do any good to imagine things," put in Sir Montie. "The position is frightfully awful, I will admit. Things are lookin' appallin'—they are really. But they only seem all the worse if we keep makin' conjectures. Nipper always warns me against that. His motto is to keep calm. Gettin' into a panic only makes everythin' seem twice as bad."

"That's true 'enough," agreed Pitt. "And, after all, there's no reason why we should fear the worst. We simply don't know the facts—that's all. It's more than likely that Handy is safe and sound with Mr. Lee now. And before long the whole giddy party will come back to camp, smiling and cheerful. So don't pull such long faces."

They were all doing their best to cheer one another up. And, to a certain extent, they succeeded. But, all the time, a haunting fear lurked at the back of their minds. And they were really relieved when the time came for them to get into their blankets.

"Sleep's the best thing for us," said Christine. "Once we're asleep the time'll pass quickly, and when we wake up we shall find everything all serene."

Mr. Farman and Twirly Sam had no intention of retiring. They would both keep on the watch, active and alert. The Indians were about, and it was necessary to be strictly on guard.

Certainly, the Redskins had not dared to approach the camp itself, but there was no telling what might happen. And, instead of Mr. Farman and Twirly taking it in turns to watch, they both remained wakeful.

"We've got to keep the fires going continuously," said the millionaire. "The more light we can have, the better, Twirly. I guess Indians don't like the light, and so long as we keep the fires blazing well we needn't fear any attack."

"I ain't figgerin' on any play o' that kind," said Twirly Sam. "These Indians wouldn't dare to get around hyar. Guess they only hanker after swoopin' down when ther's a dead easy job—sech as capturing Handforth. These

all-fired reds kinder fancy their hides, an' they ain't takin' no risks."

"Neither are we," said Mr. Farman shortly.

After another hour had elapsed, all the juniors were sleeping soundly—although most of them had declared that they would not be able to get a wink, owing to their worry. But they were all healthy youngsters, and, one by one, they dropped off. The camp was now quiet and peaceful.

It was rather a nerve-trying ordeal for Mr. Farman and Twirly. They were worried intensely by the non-return of Nelson Lee. And they were obliged to strain their eyes continuously. Their ears were of little use, for all ordinary sounds were drowned in the thunderous roar of the great waterfall.

Neither Mr. Farman nor Twirly actually suspected an attack by the Indians. But they thought it quite likely that something would happen before the dawn—the return of Nelson Lee, in all probability. And the ordeal of watching was a very strenuous one.

The night was dark, except for the faint, silvery light shed down by the brilliant stars. The cliffs and mountains were sharply outlined against the dark sky on all sides. And the foaming waters of the great whirlpool at the foot of the fall gleamed and sparkled with a strange phosphorescent glow.

Two big fires were burning in the camp, and they sent flickering shafts of light in all directions. But beyond this illuminated area all was mysteriously black. What secrets did that darkness contain?

Under ordinary circumstances, this night camp near the great waterfall would have been quite charming and novel. But Mr. Farman and Twirly Sam long remembered that vigil as the most anxious time of their lives.

"Say, boss, I'm kinder gettin' tuckered out!" said Twirly, just before midnight. "Gee! I'm sorter hankerin' after somethin' to happen. My nerves are sure as raw as— By golly! What was that?"

Mr. Farman stared into the darkness.

"I didn't see anything," he replied, "did you?"

"Say, I guess I'm seein' a hull heap o' things that don't really exist," replied the cowboy. "It's the fust time I've ever bin scared o' the darkness—

an', say, I'm plumb scared to death right now."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Farman shortly.

Of course, Twirly was not really scared—it was only his way of putting it. But it was quite true that he saw all sorts of things which didn't actually exist. Straining his gaze into the surrounding gloom, he saw something grotesque in every boulder, in every piece of rock. And it was just the same with Mr. Farman. They were both on edge.

They kept their revolvers handy, and were prepared to use them at a second's notice. And, soon after midnight, they found it necessary to do so. Without the slightest warning the attack came.

Twirly Sam was looking out over the rocks, and Mr. Farman was attending to the fire. Suddenly, Twirly stiffened. Out of the very ground itself, it seemed, a dozen brown, half-naked figures arose.

They were like shadows at first, and so close that Twirly was taken aback. For one brief second he believed that these shadowy objects were figments of his imagination. They had made no sound, and they had appeared from nowhere.

Sam gave one yell, and brought his revolver into action.

Crack, crack!

Two violent screams rent the air, and two of the brown shadows fell back, writhing. But the others swooped down upon the camp—not merely from one side, but from every direction at the same second.

The radius of firelight was filled with the brown figures.

All secrecy was now at an end, and the Indians literally fell upon the camp by scores. Twirly had time to fire his revolver once more, but Mr. Farman did not even find an opportunity to draw his weapon.

Two forms came at him from the rear. A lithe, sinuous arm was flung round his neck, and he was pulled over backwards. Twirly Sam was down, too. Church, McClure and the other juniors sat up in their blankets, befuddled with sleep, and unaware of the true position.

Then they were seized. From first to last the raid had occupied one brief minute—and then it was all over. The Indians had sprung their surprise with all their native cunning. For hours, no doubt, they had been creeping like snakes towards the camp, moving an inch

at a time, worming their way over the rocks, unseen and unsuspected. The average Redskin has the patience of a statue, and these Nassi Indians were no exception.

Confusion reigned in the camp.

Nobody was hurt—with the exception of the redskins whom Twirly had shot. The prisoners were treated roughly, but not cruelly. Their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were placed in a big clump, and surrounded by a guard of twenty Indians.

There was no silence now. Some of the red men were shouting into the darkness, as though calling others. And then came a procession into the camp—a procession which filled Mr. Farman and the juniors with astonishment. Women and children, most of them carrying enormously heavy loads. They came out of the darkness in a long, straggling line.

Tepces were erected, and in less than an hour the whole appearance of the camp was altered. It now became an Indian settlement, almost complete in every way. Children ran about screaming and chattering, and crowds of them stared continuously at the prisoners.

Mr. Farman was in a state of such intense worry that he did not utter a word. Conversation seemed futile. Obviously the worst had happened. This coup of the Indians could mean only one thing. Nelson Lee and the others were already prisoners—indeed, it was more than likely that they had been massacred.

Certainly nothing worse than this could possibly have occurred. And it made Mr. Farman all the more despondent because both he and Twirly Sam had done everything humanly possible to avert such a disaster.

They had nothing to reproach themselves with. From first to last they had kept actively on the alert—they had been prepared for an attack. But they had never anticipated any such move on the part of the Indians as this.

They had made every preparation, even to the length of erecting stone barricades. For they had expected the Indians to send their arrows from a distance. In a fight of that kind the white party would never have been beaten.

But this affair had come unexpectedly.

Surprisingly enough, the Indians did not wish to harm their victims. They had planned the whole thing with the object of capturing the party intact. This was obvious.

But why?

Why were they spared—instead of being killed on the spot? There was some deep reason for it, Mr. Farman told himself. But he did not lower himself by making any inquiries. He resolved to accept the situation as quietly and calmly as possible, and await developments.

The juniors, finding themselves unharmed, soon got over their original scare. But it would be absurd to state that they were not apprehensive. To be in the hands of these savages was a terrifying experience.

"Goodness knows what's going to happen to us now," said Pitt grimly. "The only thing I can't understand is why the Indians have collared us, instead of finishing the job straight off."

Tommy Watson shivered.

"They wouldn't dare to kill us," he muttered.

"Of course not!" said McClure.

"They'd be too much afraid of the consequences," put in Church.

"What consequences?" asked Pitt quietly.

"Why, they'd be punished."

"Who by?"

"The police, of course—or the soldiers—"

"It's no good having those sort of hopes, my son," interrupted Pitt. "The mounted police never come up into this part of the country—it's supposed to be uninhabited. As for the soldiers, there aren't any within hundreds and hundreds of miles."

"Oh, it's awful!"

"Of course it is," agreed Pitt.

"And you can bet your boots that these Indians know how safe they are. Supposing they killed the lot of us, how would the news ever get down to Fort Derwent, or to Graham Settlement, that there had been a massacre?"

"Oh, my hat! Don't talk about it!" said Church uneasily.

"Talking won't make it any different, and we might as well know what we're up against," put in Bob Christine.

"Pitt's right, my sons. If these Indians

kill one of us, they'll kill the whole lot so that nobody will ever know the truth. But we're not dead yet, so there's no need to shiver."

"I wonder if they'll give us plenty of grub?" asked Fatty Little anxiously. "I didn't have much for supper, and I'm frightfully hungry—"

But he was soon silenced. The other fellows were not inclined to discuss grub at such a time as this. Food was a matter of minor importance. And, in any case, very little opportunity of conversation remained.

For it was evident that something was afoot. The Indians had shouldered most of the packs which belonged to the white men. These had been all stowed away in one of the little tents. But the red men appropriated them, although they did not waste any time then in examining the contents of the bundles.

Presently the juniors were marshalled along in a double line. Mr Farman and Twirly Sam were placed at their head. And one of the Indians—who was none other than Muskis, the Chief—regarded the prisoners with evil eyes.

"You com' wit' us," he said briefly.

"Geo! I'd like to smash your durned face—"

"Don't Sam, that kind of thing won't do any good," interrupted Mr. Farman quietly. "Well, we must do exactly as you say, I guess, since we are hardly masters of our own actions," he added, addressing the Indian.

"Me warn you," said the Chief. "You mak' try to escape—no good. You be killed lak' dogs. No spare you. Com' wit' us, an' no try tricks—we not touch you. We no harm!"

Mr. Farman nodded curtly. Then after the Indians had gone he turned to the boys.

"You understood what that red rascal said?" he asked. "We shall be safe so long as we don't make any attempt to escape. I guess there's no hope for it, boys—we've got to do as we're told."

"We'll remember, sir."

The juniors were feeling slightly more comfortable. These preparations indicated that nothing drastic was to be done yet, at all events. It was fairly clear, in fact, that they were to be taken into the valley. Where else could they go?

And the journey started immediately.



With one accord the two Indians fell upon Handforth and seized him. A yell came floating down to the watching Juniors.

With a dozen or so Indians in advance, and a much larger number bringing up the rear, the prisoners were marched towards the great sloping cliff. They knew that this was the route to the secret way into the valley.

And they were soon all prespiring freely. For the climb was a strenuous one—not dangerous, but arduous. And they were kept at it without a pause for breath. The Indians themselves made much lighter work of this climb than the boys, and, consequently, the juniors were being hurried all the time.

But, at last, when they were nearly ready to drop, they arrived upon a wide, rock ledge hundreds of feet above the level of the river. Conversation here was very difficult, for the roar of the waterfall was deafening.

It was quite close to them, and this rock ledge seemed to lead right into it. The starlight was sufficiently strong for them all to see their surroundings. It was a most imposing spectacle; but in their present predicament, the juniors did not pay much attention to the scenery.

Far below two or three spots of light indicated the camp fires. They seemed very remote from this lofty ledge.

Several of the juniors believed, for a moment, that rain had commenced falling. But they soon found that this was only the spray from the waterfall. And as they went nearer they were soaked.

A feeling of alarm was aroused when the Indians walked straight along the ledge towards the tremendous mass of falling water. There seemed no way out from this ledge—it ran right into the waterfall.

But just before the fall was reached, the prisoners found themselves passing down a kind of rock stairway. The Indians had gone in advance, and flaring torches were lighted. And now they were in a curving tunnel, which proved to be much shorter than it seemed.

And, within a minute or two, the party were right beneath the waterfall itself.

At first it seemed like a continuation of the tunnel. One side was of rock, but the other wall was the waterfall itself—a smooth, solid mass of

descending water. And the spray here was like heavy rain.

For the time being all the prisoners forgot their troubles. The marvellous nature of this ledge enthralled them. The stupendous might of nature held them in a kind of spell.

But then, after a while, a wide tunnel was entered, and the dull, booming roar of the waterfall died gradually away. This tunnel did not proceed for a very long distance, but came to an abrupt end in a kind of cavern, the front of which was screened by dense bushes.

Beyond this screen lay the mysterious valley. Mr. Farman guessed this at once—he felt sure that they had now entered the unknown region. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and all the others were here—but in what position?

Contrary to the prisoners' expectations, the journey did not proceed. A halt was called, and all the captives were placed on the outside rim of the cavern with half a dozen Indians squatting near to keep guard. The air was somewhat chilly, and a cold, greyish light was appearing through the foliage. Dawn was breaking.

"Say, boss, what's the durned game?" asked Twirly Sam.

"Well, I think it is fairly easy to understand the plan these Indians have adopted," replied Mr. Farman. "We have been brought here in the darkness possibly to escape attention. But I guess these savages don't want to descend into the valley until full daylight. So we're resting awhile. Say, I'd give a hundred dollars for a good drink right now."

As it happened, Mr. Farman obtained a drink for nothing. For three or four Indians came round with roughly made water bags, and each prisoner was allowed a good draught. Food of a very rough order was distributed, too. This was comforting—for if the Indians had meant to kill their prisoners they would hardly have provided them with food and drink.

Some of the redskins lay down in their blankets and went to sleep. Others retired into the tunnel entrance, where several torches were blazing, and whiled away the time by rifling the white men's packs.

These bundles were very neatly made, and contained all sorts of articles—food, such as tea, sugar, flour, condensed milk.

In other packs there were ropes, cooking utensils, and almost every portable article that could be of use to an up-river expedition.

These Indians were different from the ordinary redskin of to-day. Most of them were young men—they had been children when Leon Ascara first introduced the tribe into the valley. And so they had grown up with practically no knowledge of white men and the white man's ways.

The task of examining these packs, therefore, was exceptionally interesting. The redskins looked over every article with child-like curiosity. They tasted the tea, and the sugar—they crushed up the sugar with great relish. They went through all the other articles, turning them over in their hands just as children will play about with new toys.

And all the time the Indians chattered to one another in Cree—their own language. In one of the packs they came upon a large stock of tobacco. This was seized upon with avidity—for Leon Ascara had taken a big stock with him many years earlier, and he had taught the tribe how to smoke.

Many of the articles which were turned out of the packs were of no interest to the Indians, and these were cast aside contemptuously. Cooking utensils, and such like, were carefully re-packed.

One of the Indians came upon a metal box. This was secured by extra strong clamps, and when finally the lid was raised, it was seen that the metal box was a water-tight one, and of special construction.

It contained some very curious-looking packages, all of them covered with writing, which, of course, the Indians could not understand.

The Indian who opened the box took out one of these packages, turned it over curiously in his hands, sniffed at it, and came to the conclusion that it was not of an eatable nature.

He gave a contemptuous shrug, and hurled the package down the tunnel—an indication that the object was of no value. The result of that little action was positively staggering.

There was a blinding flash, a booming, appalling explosion; like the report of a siege gun.

Indians, packs, pieces of rock, and dense volumes of smoke, were hurled

out of the tunnel like so many stones flung from a gigantic catapult. The air was filled with shrieks and screams.

Mr. Farman and the boys, fortunately, were on the edge of the cavern, and protected from the blast of the explosion. But the detonation was so appalling that everybody was knocked sideways. Portions of rock came spattering down. When the juniors picked themselves up, dazed and thoroughly frightened, their ear-drums were singing agonisingly. Many noses were bleeding, and chaos had control.

But it had all happened in a second. Out of the tunnel rolled great masses of choking smoke and dust. Indians were staggering about drunkenly. Many lay on the ground groaning, and others were quite still.

"By jumpin' rattlesnakes!" gasped Twirly Sam. "What in blazes happened? Say, wher' did that draught come from?"

"Heaven only knows the explanation," said Mr. Farman huskily. "I can't think—By glory! I guess I've hit it. Sam! These Indians must have been fooling with those dynamite charges! They were in Square-Deal's pack—"

"Gee!" said Twirly. "You've sure hit it, I figger!"

And this, as a matter of fact, was the real truth. Those packages which the Indian had examined so carelessly had been nothing more nor less than prepared blasting charges—high explosives!

The fellow had flung one of these charges down the tunnel without knowing the effect it would have. There had been one chance in about fifty that the dynamite charge would explode, but it had probably caught upon a sharp projection, and this had caused it to detonate.

The result was even more staggering than the explosion itself.

Two Indians were killed outright, three others were injured, and the rest escaped with only a few bruises. The casualties were so light because the force of the explosion had been in the other direction.

For some time the Indians were frightened almost out of their lives. Then, when everything remained quiet, they came back. Cautiously they entered the tunnel. On the floor against

the wall the metal box lay containing a dozen similar blasting charges. If these had exploded the whole party—white and red—would have been blown to atoms.

Beyond, the tunnel had ceased to exist.

That explosion had caused the rocks to cave in from all sides. There was no longer any way out—the passage was barred by thousands of tons of rock. In fact, the exit from the mysterious valley was closed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIAN CHIEF'S ULTIMATUM.

NELSON LEE wormed his way through the coarse grass as silently as a shadow.

For over half an hour he had been going forward inch by inch, and now he was only separated from the Indian village by a little rising hillock. He kept close to the ground, in case the sharp eyes of any watchers should see his figure outlined against the night sky.

Lee, in fact, was on a scouting expedition.

Things had been very quiet in our little camp—in our stronghold. Since Handforth had been rescued from the Indians, the latter had made no move. Darkness had fallen with the situation unchanged, and for some hours we had been expecting a night attack. But this did not take place.

Nelson Lee and I and Umlosi had left the stronghold shortly before midnight, and had refilled our water containers without meeting with any adventure. We had half expected trouble, but it appeared that the Indians were not even on the watch. And this caused us to think.

The question of food was a worrying one, for we were all hungry, and there seemed no prospect of obtaining any reasonable supplies. However, the position was eased to a certain extent by the fact that we stumbled upon a cultivated patch of ground near the little stream. And, to our great delight, we found a considerable quantity of potatoes, carrots, and other vegetables. When Leon Ascara had founded this valley colony he had brought in every kind of vegetable seed, and they had been produced yearly ever since.

We managed to take a respectable

quantity of vegetables back with us, and some of the carrots and turnips were disposed of then and there, in their raw state. Another visit to the cultivated plot secured us sufficient supplies to last two or three days. We were now better prepared for a siege.

Certain peculiar sounds had come through the darkness from time to time. We had glimpsed moving figures—clearly indicating that the Indians were active. But what they were doing remained a mystery.

Our idea that a fresh attack was to be made on us turned out to be wrong. And, by two o'clock in the morning, the whole valley was silent. The enemy was no longer in evidence. Had the Indians gone to sleep, or were they planning some deep game?

The suspense was somewhat trying. And, at length, Nelson Lee decided to go out on a scouting trip. He was taking no chances, and progressed so slowly that he only moved a foot or so every minute.

However, there was no hurry. He had at least two hours before the dawn would break, and there was no reason why he should take unnecessary risks. His main object was to get to a position where he could look right down into the Indian village.

Truth to tell, Nelson Lee was greatly concerned regarding the whole situation. He could not see any clear way out of the trouble. And he was constantly haunted by the suspicion that the Nassi Indians would, sooner or later, swoop down upon the main camp.

Things had not turned out as we all expected. The Indians, for one thing, were altogether more aggressive than we had believed—although Leon Ascara had told us that we should meet with grim resistance. Again, Jake Crasher and his companions had complicated matters, causing our plans to be altered.

However, we could only face the facts, and do our best. The governor's chief aim was to establish peaceful relations with the Indians—against whom we had no grudge, and whom we had no desire to injure. But if they persisted in attempting to injure us, we were compelled to defend ourselves.

Would it be possible to make peace? That was the principal question, and Nelson Lee wanted to come to terms without any blood being spilled—much

to Umlcai's disgust. For the African warrior was all for drastic action—he wanted to see us engaging in a big battle, and defeating the Indians by force.

Nelson Lee knew well enough that if we all fell into the enemy's hands now we should meet with short shrift. And he badly wanted to know what the Indians were preparing. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The detective had discovered nothing so far, but now he was nearing the top of the little rise. Once on the ridge, and he would be able to look down upon the Indian tepees. And he was so accustomed to the thick gloom that he felt confident he would be able to see with a fair amount of distinctness.

Foot by foot he crept on. And, at last, he arrived at the top of the ridge. As he did so he became aware of a slight movement only about twenty yards away, on his left. He lay like a log, being practically certain that an Indian was on the watch—or perhaps two or three.

And he was conscious of the fact that his own position was by no means secure, since he lay on the very brow of the hill, and formed a clear target for any arrows. Quite near to him lay an irregularly shaped slab of rock, and Lee wormed his way towards it for cover.

Again came the sound of movement, from that same spot. Lee grasped the rock to haul himself along. He felt the rock give slightly, although it had seemed too cumbersome to be moved. It had probably been lying there, undisturbed, for countless years.

Lee pulled hard on one of the projections. If he could only raise the rock slightly it would protect him from all the arrows the Indians cared to send. The rock rolled over, just as he had desired.

At the same second there was a quick scuffle, and then an unmistakable yelp. Nelson Lee almost chuckled. The sounds, after all, had merely been caused by a dog—which was probably at a rabbit hole.

The detective lay quite still, taking a short rest.

Then, curiously enough, he became suddenly dizzy, and his brain felt numbed. This sensation was most extraordinary, and Lee hardly knew how to explain it. He shifted to one side—

and then he uttered a choking gasp, staggered back, and rolled to the foot of the hillock.

He lay there, perfectly motionless.

If I had been watching I should have feared that an arrow had struck the gov'nor. But nothing had touched him. He was unscratched and uninjured. Yet he lay there, face upwards, one arm twisted beneath him, in a state of complete unconsciousness.

What had happened?

The minutes passed, and Nelson Lee would have been an easy victim for any enemy who happened to come along. But it seemed the enemy had gone, for the whole valley was silent and still. And then, after about fifteen minutes had elapsed, Nelson Lee moved slightly. He rolled over, breathing heavily. Another minute or two elapsed, and he opened his eyes. He became aware of a throbbing, racking headache, and a feeling of nausea assailed him.

Gradually, however, the full use of his wits returned. He realised where he was, and he knew that a certain amount of time had elapsed since he rolled down the hillock—half an hour, he reckoned.

His first action was to feel in the breast-pocket of his jacket. He took out a compact pocket medicine case. A minute later he unscrewed the stopper from a tiny flat phial, and sniffed at it. Then he placed the phial to his lips, and touched his tongue with the liquid. The effect was rapid, for within a few minutes Nelson Lee felt almost himself again, and the sickness had gone.

His expression was grim, and he felt somewhat startled. And now he was filled with a great curiosity—he wanted to know what had caused that unexpected spell of unconsciousness. He already had a suspicion, but he was determined to make that suspicion a certainty.

"By James!" he muttered. "If it turns out that my idea is correct, there is just a chance that——" He shook his head. "But I mustn't hope too much. I shall know the absolute truth within two or three minutes."

Very cautiously he edged his way up the hillock again—until he was within a foot or two of the stone slab. Taking a deep breath, he suddenly moved his body forward. Only for about thirty seconds did he examine the spot. Then, with gleaming eyes, he retreated.

Less than a quarter of an hour later I was momentarily startled by the

guy'nor's abrupt appearance over the edge of the rock parapets of our stronghold. He tumbled in, and I crept up to him.

"Well?" I asked swiftly. "What's the news?"

"Nothing much, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee softly. "My report, I am afraid, is barren. I have seen no Indians, and I abandoned my project—I did not carry out my complete plan."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because a better idea occurred to me," said Lee calmly. "No, Nipper, you needn't question me—I have nothing further to say at the moment. The best thing you can do is to get some sleep."

"Do you think we shall be attacked, sir?" I asked.

"No; I fancy we are quite safe."

There was something in the guy'nor's tone which told me that it would be useless to question him. I knew his moods, and his ways. Obviously, something had happened—but what this something was I could not imagine, and Nelson Lee would certainly not tell me.

Most of the others were asleep. Square-Deal Reeve and Umlosi had been keeping watch with me. But now that Nelson Lee had returned they lay down.

I fell asleep at once, but awoke again within a minute or two, it seemed. But I knew it must have been much longer than this, because the clear sky was already becoming grey, and the stars were looking pale and insignificant. In one quarter the sky was ruddy with the glow of dawn.

"Hallo! Awake?" asked a voice near me. "There's no need for you to wake up, Nipper, my son."

Dorrie was now on watch, and he smiled at me amiably.

"Drop off again, and I'll give you a shake when breakfast's ready," he went on. "It's going to be a swell affair—roast potatoes, baked turnips, with grilled carrots as a side line. What could be more enticin'?"

I yawned.

"When there's nothing else, a breakfast like that sounds ripping," I said. "I see the guy'nor's asleep—"

Bo-oom!

I broke off abruptly in the middle of my sentence, for I had been interrupted by a sound which resembled the discharge of a powerful bomb, or a heavy piece of artillery. It came from right across the valley—from the mountains.

Unthinkingly. I jumped up, exposing myself beyond the parapet, and I stared out across the valley.

"What the dickens was that?" I asked huskily.

"Get down, you young ass!" snapped Dorrie. "Do you want a volley of arrows sticking into you?"

I took no notice of him, and no arrows came. Nelson Lee had been awakened by the boom, and the others were alert, too.

"Can you suggest any explanation?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"Well, there was undoubtedly an explosion," replied Nelson Lee. "An explosion cannot occur without explosives."

"Your reasonin' powers are marvellous!" said Dorrie calmly.

"But the guy'nor's right," I put in.

"We know for a fact that these Indians haven't got any explosives, Dorrie. I wonder if Mr. Farman could have done anything? We brought some blasting charges with us, you know—in case we found it necessary to break a way through the rocks."

Nelson Lee looked grave.

"I don't mind admitting that I'm very much concerned," he said quietly. "We only know that the explosion came from the direction of our camp. A dozen explanations present themselves. For example, if our camp had been set on fire those dynamite charges would undoubtedly explode."

"But that can't be the case, old man," protested Dorrie. "The explosion came from this side of the mountains—I'll swear that. By gad! Perhaps Big Jim has come through, and is on the way to rescue us."

"That's about it!" said Handforth excitedly.

But it was no good conjecturing, and as there were no further unaccountable sounds we decided to wait. It was, indeed, the only thing we could do. The sun came up, and the valley looked wondrously beautiful in the early morning light. The place was a perfect paradise.

It was not long before we made a strange discovery. In order to test whether there were any Indians watching, a dummy figure was faked up, and this was exposed time after time. But no arrows came. After that we became more venturesome, and exposed ourselves.

Still there was no sign of an attack. Umlosi, impatient at this sort of thing, leapt over the rocks, and went in search of somebody to fight, serenely indifferent to any possible danger.

He vanished altogether behind the trees but returned about five minutes later, looking positively ferocious.

"Wau!" he shouted, whilst still some distance away. "We have been tricked, my master! These red-skinned dogs have gone! I have searched in vain, and not even a single enemy have I found!"

"There must be some trick about it," said Dorrie. "What about the village?"

But we soon found out that the village did not exist any longer. The tepees had vanished, and nothing remained of the Indian encampment except a few discarded odds-and-ends. In the darkness of the night the whole tribe had slipped quietly away—leaving us in sole possession.

It was very nice to feel that we could walk about in safety, and we were soon dotted over the valley in twos and threes. Our first idea that the Indians were lurking about turned out to be wrong. The enemy had certainly disappeared.

"I don't like it, Nipper," said Nelson Lee gravely. "For the moment we are in a better position, but I cannot help feeling that something bad will happen before long."

"Wouldn't it be a wise move for us to get out of the valley now we have the chance?" I asked. "We can easily go by the waterfall route, or by the way that Jake Crasher and his lot came."

"The exits are bound to be well guarded," said Nelson Lee. "And, in any case, such a move cannot be attempted. For I can see a big force approaching even now. The Indians are coming back."

Nelson Lee pointed, and I looked with interest. Down the hillside in the far distance a big column of men could be seen, like so many ants. They were moving down into the valley.

As a matter of precaution, we retired into our little stronghold, and waited there for developments. It was not long before we knew the truth. For, while the Indians were still a long distance off, Nelson Lee was able to distinguish them individually through a pair of powerful binoculars.

"It is exactly as I feared," he said

grimly. "Mr. Farman and all the boys are captives."

"Jumping coyotes!" muttered Aco-High Peter.

"Prisoners—eh?" said Dorrie.

"Well, that's better than I anticipated, if you want to know the truth. I had a ghastly fear that Big Jim and all the boys had been killed. If we're all alive we stand a good chance of getting out of this hole intact. We've been in worse corners than this, Lee, old man."

Nelson Lee nodded absently.

"Perhaps so, Dorrie," he said quietly. "But this corner will probably become tighter before long. There is just a chance that something may be done. At all events we'll hope for the best."

Half an hour later the whole party approached, the Indians taking good care to place their prisoners well to the front—so that we should not dare to fire. They were all there—Big Jim Farman himself, Twirly Sam, Church, McClure, Fatty Little, and all the rest. They looked worn, tired, and dishevelled, but they were all alive and uninjured.

Before they could get into earshot they were brought to a standstill, and several of the Indians came forward alone, the leader being Muskis, the chief. His eyes were glittering evilly—for he knew that he held the trump card.

"I mak' bargain," he said, as he halted. "No want kill. You do lak', I say, and nobody hurt. You listen?"

"I will listen," replied Nelson Lee, "but I will not guarantee that I shall agree to your bargain. What do you suggest?"

"We got your frien's—they plentee helpless," said the Chief. "You no agree lak' I say, they all die. Black man, him no do lak' he did before. We want Leon Ascara. You on'erstan'? You give Leon, and you go from valley. We no kill any of you. We no want hurt white man. You agree?"

"If I will hand over Leon Ascara, you will allow us to leave the valley unharmed?" asked Nelson Lee.

"You say lak' I mean," replied the Chief, nodding. "You promise not com' back, we let you go. But we mus' have Leon Ascara."

Nelson Lee turned to the rest of us. "You hear what the terms are?" he asked.

"It's deucedly awkward," said Lord Dorrimore, frowning. "These beggars

want Leon because they've got a grudge against him. I suppose we couldn't agree, and come back at some later date——"

Dorrie broke off, and shook his head.

"No, that would be impossible," he added. "We couldn't leave Leon in the hands of these confounded savages."

"But we shall all be killed if we don't agree, sir," put in Handforth.

"White boy spik truth," said Leon Ascara quietly. "Red man moch savage—him kill you all if you no do lak' him say. You bes' agree—I give myself to red man. Him kill me plentee, but you saved. I willing."

But Nelson Lee would not agree to this.

"No, Leon, we will all stand together," he said firmly. "And if it comes to a fight we will go under gamely. I will certainly not bargain with these redskins, or come to any terms."

In curt sentences the gov'nor informed the Chief of our decision. Muskis was filled with rage, and he shouted in broken English that we should all die by nightfall. This piece of information, curiously enough, seemed to cheer Nelson Lee up considerably.

Somehow, I had an idea that the gov'nor had got hold of a scheme. Something deep was working in that acute brain of his.

CHAPTER V.

NELSON LEE'S STRATAGEM.

GLOOM had settled down heavily upon our little stronghold. Whichever way we looked we could see no hope of escaping from this perilous position. The Indians were in larger numbers than we had expected, and they had more than half our party prisoners in their hands. This was a handicap which simply ruined any chances that we might have had.

For example, there was a possibility that we could make a dash for freedom. But such a move was impossible under the present circumstances, for we should be leaving our friends at the redskins' mercy.

An hour or two had elapsed and

nothing had been done. We had expected all sorts of dramatic events to take place—we feared the worst. But the Indians took no action. Having heard our decision, they made camp and settled down for a rest. Mr. Farman, Twirly Sam, and all the boys were still bound, and they lay within view of our stronghold, a very miserable-looking clump of humanity.

But it was a great deal to know that they were still safe and sound. The Indians did not come near to us—they gave us no chance of fighting. And we were all idle and uneasy—with the exception of Nelson Lee.

The gov'nor, for some extraordinary reason, was whiling away the time and amusing himself in a way which seemed almost childish. Hardly any words were spoken, since we were so depressed that conversation seemed an effort.

I watched the gov'nor idly for some little time, and wondered what on earth he was doing. He had already spread out a curious assortment of odds and ends on a big boulder in front of him—a rubber tobacco pouch, a big pad of cotton-wool, a box of wax vestas, Dorrie's patent cigarette-lighter, and several other items.

"What on earth are you doing, gov'nor?" I asked, at length.

"Merely amusing myself, Nipper," said Nelson Lee, smiling.

"My hat! At a time like this!" I protested.

"What else is there to be done?" said Lee. "We are simply waiting for the Indians to make a move, Nipper, and it is far better to have one's mind occupied. Why shouldn't I make a few harmless experiments?"

"Yes, sir, but what's the idea?" I asked. "The cotton-wool—the matches—the petrol——"

"You will understand perfectly later—if I am successful," broke in Lee. "At the moment I would prefer you not to bother me, young 'un. The little problem I have set myself needs careful attention and concentration."

I was puzzled, and I did not receive much enlightenment as I watched the gov'nor work. Dorrie was looking on, too, smoking idly and half amused. Nelson Lee was cutting the tobacco pouch into sections, and after this he busied himself with the petrol and the cotton-wool and the wax vestas.

I went to sleep watching him, and I didn't wake up until two or three hours had elapsed. The position was unchanged, and the day was swelteringly hot, with the sun glaring down upon us fiercely.

Nelson Lee had finished his task—whatever that happened to be. And now he was sitting by himself looking very abstracted and thoughtful. I yawned, stretched myself, and looked at Lord Dorrimore.

"I wish something would happen," I said. "There's nothing worse than this suspense, Dorrie."

"You're right, lad," agreed his lordship. "As a matter of fact, I'm thinkin' of gettin' up a stunt. Attack is the finest form of defence, I reckon, and it would be just as well if we swooped down on these confounded Indians and took them by surprise. That's my idea, but Lee won't hear of it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, he says that he's got to think of the boys," replied Dorrie. "He's pretty sure that the Indians will kill some of the juniors as soon as they find that we're on the offensive."

"Well, I think the gov'nor's about right," I said slowly. "After all, Dorrie, we've got to think of every point. And it would be too awful for words if Montie and Pitt and Fatty Little and some of the others were killed."

"But what's the good of waitin'?" persisted Dorrie. "This fight has got to come sooner or later, and when there's somethin' unpleasant to be done I believe in gettin' it over as soon as possible. Why on earth Lee spent his time messin' about with matches and cotton-wool fairly beats me!"

"Oh, what did the gov'nor do, then?" I asked.

"Goodness only knows—I don't," replied Dorrie. "He was frightfully busy with a needle and thread. He made half a dozen little packages, as big as walnuts, out of that tobacco pouch. They're full of petrol soaked cotton-wool, and goodness knows what else. He sealed 'em all up with rubber solution, to make 'em air-tight, and faked about till I got quite confused. And each of the blessed things has got a kind of tail to it—a rudder, by gad!"

"You must have been dreaming," I said. "I can't make head or tail of this yarn."

I asked the gov'nor to explain to me, but he didn't even reply. And so the time passed with everybody inactive until evening drew near. We half believed that the Indians would make a move now, but they didn't attempt to do so.

It was not until the dusk was quite deep, and the mosquitoes were getting busy that any sign of activity appeared. Fires had been lighted in the Indian camp, and we were all in a state of expectancy. We had a horrible feeling that the captives were to be tortured in some unspeakable manner. And we were ready to take desperate action if necessary.

And then we saw that a party of the Indians was coming towards us headed by the Chief. Mr. Farman, 'Twirly Sam, and two or three of the juniors were also included in the party. We knew why they had been brought—to prevent any possibility of our firing.

The Chief approached quite close to our stronghold, and raised his hand.

"We have giv' you whole day," he said. "You agree lak' I say?"

"You have our answer," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "But it is possible that we may come to terms, my friend. You have no reason to kill us, and we have no reason to kill you. Why should there be bloodshed?"

"We mus' have Leon Ascara," said the Chief doggedly.

Nelson Lee left the enclosure and walked down among the Indians. I watched with tremendous interest, for I had an idea that Nelson Lee was not quite so helpless as the others imagined. That the gov'nor had some scheme in his mind was morally certain. Dorrie and I ventured out after him.

"We will discuss this matter calmly," said Nelson Lee, to the Chief. "Come, we will walk into your camp in a friendly way. I want you to understand, Muskis, that it is not my desire to injure you or your companions, although, if I chose, I could kill you with one wave of my hand. I could destroy this whole valley—I could cause the mountains to fall!"

"You spik big words, white man," said the Chief contemptuously. "You

think we believe your boasts? You lak' ot'er men—you no do soch things as you say. If I lak' I kill you now."

The Chief turned to the other Indians and spoke rapidly in Cree. He was evidently telling them what Nelson Lee had said. They laughed in derision, like so many children.

"You are amused?" said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Let me tell you, Muskis, that I am a great medicine man—a worker of magic such as you have never seen. It is in my power to do things that will stagger you. You must beware of my wrath. You must agree to what I say, or the sufferings of your tribe will be bad."

"You spik idle words," said the Chief.

By this time they had gone well over half way to the Indian encampment, for they had been walking slowly while they talked. And now Nelson Lee came to a halt. Dorrie and I were quite near by, and there was a feeling of electric expectancy in the air. Yet nothing had happened so far. I don't know how I knew, but I was positively certain that we were on the verge of something big.

"Trust the gov'nor," I muttered, to Dorrie. "He's got some wheeze on here—that's why he's been looking so thoughtful all day."

Dorrie nodded.

"Yes, I saw the signs myself," he whispered. "But will it pan out all right, young 'un? I can see the stunt—he's trying to spoof these Indians that he's a heap big medicine man."

"It might work," I said tensely. "They're not like ordinary Indians, Dorrie—they've been bottled up in this valley since they were kids, and they don't know much about modern ways. They're raw savages."

"Perhaps so, but they're deucedly cunning," said Dorrie. "And unless Lee can do somethin' to prove he's a magic worker—well, we don't stand an earthly. By gad! I wonder if—" He looked at me intently. "Yes, by the Lord Harry!" he added softly.

"What do you mean?"

"Those queer things he was makin'—cotton-wool and petrol and the rest of it!" said Dorrie. "This is where they come in, my son! Just you watch! You can always rely upon Lee to do

somethin' brainy when things are in a bad way."

We looked at the gov'nor with eager anticipation.

"You think my words are idle," Nelson Lee was saying to the Chief. "You are wrong, Muskis. No Indian tribe has a medicine man as clever as I. I have been waiting until this moment. Unless you allow us to live peacefully in this valley, without harming us in any way, I shall exert my magic powers and bring disaster upon you and your kind. Beware of your actions, my friend."

The Indian Chief snapped his fingers.

"Words are nothing," he said sneeringly. "You not do magic. White man all talk. Him only use fire gun. Fire gun heap dangerous, but we got arrows, and they kill jus' same."

"I can cause disaster without the aid of weapons," said Nelson Lee curtly. "Wait! I will give you proof of my magic powers. Could you pick up one of these stones, Muskis, and cause it to burst into flame?"

Nelson Lee kicked some loose stones at his feet, and the Chief grunted.

"No man do that," he said. "Wa! You mak' big talk. I not fool, me. You no mak' stone burst into fire lak' you say. Soch thing not possible."

"I have already told you that I am a worker of magic," said Nelson Lee. "I will show you. See!"

He bent down and picked up a stone. I nudged Dorrie, and held my breath. I knew what was coming now, and I was thrilled by the idea. Would Nelson Lee's home-made little petrol bombs prove effective? The gov'nor held the stone in his fingers, and placed it under the Chief's gaze. The light was not strong, but even if it had been, the Indian would never have seen the other little object concealed in Nelson Lee's palm.

"That is an ordinary stone?" asked Lee shortly.

"Wa! You mak' me angry!" said the Chief. "We waste time—"

"Watch!" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply.

He flung up his hand, and it was impossible to see his movement as he substituted the tiny fire bomb for the stone. He threw the thing away from him with all his force, and it struck the ground thirty feet away.

There was a sharp pop, and then a bursting flare of fire, which died down within a few seconds. The effect upon the Indians was immediate. They burst out into various exclamations, and their eyes rolled with sudden fright. The Chief looked at Nelson Lee with mingled doubt and wonder.

"That is something you could not do," said Lee calmly.

"You not scare me!" said the chief. "You mak' stone into flame; I do same."

He picked up a stone, and flung it savagely. But, of course, the result was disappointing. No burst of flame appeared. The Indian scowled at Lee angrily.

"You do it once—but no more," he said. "You not magic man—"

"You need a lot of convincing," broke in Nelson Lee. "Once again I will show what I can do."

He picked up a second stone, and threw out his hand. A sharp pop followed, and another quick flare of flame. It looked for all the world as though the stone itself had become alight.

And Nelson Lee did not give the Indians any time to doubt.

"You think I am an ordinary man?" he asked contemptuously. "You have made a big mistake, my friend. I can make fire come into my own mouth! Watch! Perhaps this will make you wonder."

He put his hand to his mouth, and, instantly, his cheeks became red with fire—a bright light was glowing within his mouth, making his cheeks almost transparent, and fiery red.

Lee withdrew his hand, and held it up. "I made the fire come into my finger," he said calmly. "Can any man hero do such things?"

The majority of the Indians were shrinking away in fear. The chief was made of sterner stuff, and he still had lingering doubts. He remained quite close to Lee, looking at him half fearfully. It was quite obvious that he found it necessary to bring all his courage together to stay there.

"Now I know why Lee wanted my electric torch," muttered Dorrie, in my ear. "He took the lamp out and connected it up with a piece of wire. By gad! All he did was to slip that lamp in his mouth and press the switch in his

pocket. But I'm hanged if I could see the wires."

"That's why the gov'nor waited until it was nearly dark," I breathed. "This kind of thing has more effect in the darkness. Oh, Dorrie, I believe the gov'nor's going to work the giddy trick!"

"No matter what I say I will do, it shall be done!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Nothing is beyond my powers. At one word I can make this whole valley into a raging mass of fire. You, Muskis, will be consumed and all your tribe with you. But we shall not suffer."

"You do strange things, white man," said the chief. "You great magic worker. But these things not harm us—they moch small. You no do big thing, as you say. No set valley on fire."

Nelson Lee raised his hand.

"I will show you!" he shouted. "You do not believe me, Muskis, but I will prove that I am capable of anything. Let this be a warning to you that worse things will happen if you do not obey my orders!"

Nelson Lee took a deep breath, and I could see that his face was drawn with anxiety. What he was about to do I couldn't imagine. I guessed that he meant to fling another little fire bomb—but it would not scare the Indians any more than the others.

The thing left Nelson Lee's fingers, and whizzed through the air towards some rocks on the top of a hillock fully sixty feet away. I expected to see a little burst of flame.

What actually happened staggered me even more than it staggered the Indians.

There was a roar, a blinding flash, and then a sheet of flame rose up sixty or seventy feet into the air—a great, roaring column of fire like the flame from a gigantic blow-lamp. And then, before I could regain my breath, the roar increased to a deafening thunder of sound, and the flame broadened out, and rose even higher.

"Do you believe me now?" shouted Nelson Lee triumphantly.

But the chief, shrieking with fear, was running as though a thousand demons were after him. And every other Indian was already on the move. They fled like so many scared rabbits—scurrying helter skelter across the valley towards that one exit—the gorge through the mountains.

Within five minutes not an Indian remained.

"Oh, guv'nor!" I shouted, rushing up to Nelson Lee. "How—how did you do it?"

"For goodness' sake tell us the truth!" exclaimed Dorrie.

Nelson Lee was trembling slightly, and I knew that the ordeal had been a heavy one for him. So much had depended upon the result of his bluff. It had worked, and the reaction had left him somewhat unnerved.

He didn't explain at once. Instead, he hurried over to the spot where Big Jim Farman and Twirly Sam and all the juniors were standing. In next to no time their bonds were cut, and they were free. And by now the other members of our party had left the stronghold, and we were all together.

Jake Crasher and his three scoundrelly associates stood aloof, uncertain and filled with wonder. But we did not give them much attention just now. The whole valley was brilliantly lit up by the glare from that column of fire, and the heat from it was fierce.

"Hurrah!" roared Pitt. "We are all saved!"

"Rather!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"We are still waiting to hear how the trick was worked!" I shouted.

"How was it done, guv'nor?"

"Very simply, after all," said Nelson Lee. "Last night, when I was out on that scouting expedition, I happened to pull a piece of rock out of position. I was choked for the second, and became unconscious. Then, when I made a close examination, I discovered something of great interest. A powerful jet of gas was shooting up from between two of the rocks—like the open end of a gas main."

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "But—but how could that be—"

"I can only assume that far beneath

this valley there are undreamt of quantities of oil," replied Nelson Lee. "Or it may be something quite different. At all events, through some natural cause, this volume of gas was pouring upwards. I set my wits to work, and decided to make use of the discovery. That is why I made those little petrol bombs. My only fear was that the Indians would discover the gas before I was prepared; but the crevice is on an isolated hillock, and so I took the risk. And there was still a doubt as to whether my aim would be true, and whether this gas would ignite."

"Well, there's no doubt about it now," I said, gazing at that column of fire. "My only hat! It's enough to scare anybody!"

"I never dreamed that the flame would reach so high," said Nelson Lee. "I gather that the opening in the rock was enlarged at the first burst of exploding gas, and so the whole force of the hidden power has been released. There is no reason to be alarmed—it will probably exhaust itself before long."

As a matter of fact, it did, dying down to a weak, flickering flame before two hours had elapsed. But it had served our purpose. The Indians had fled from the valley, and it was morally certain they would never return. They had received such a fright that they would never dare to come near us again.

And there was great rejoicing among us all.

In spite of all our perils and excitements, we had come out unharmed. We were all together again, and the wonderful Valley of Gold was ours. We thought that our trials and troubles were over.

If we had only known of the amazing events which were soon to take place, we should not have been quite so easy in mind!

THE END.

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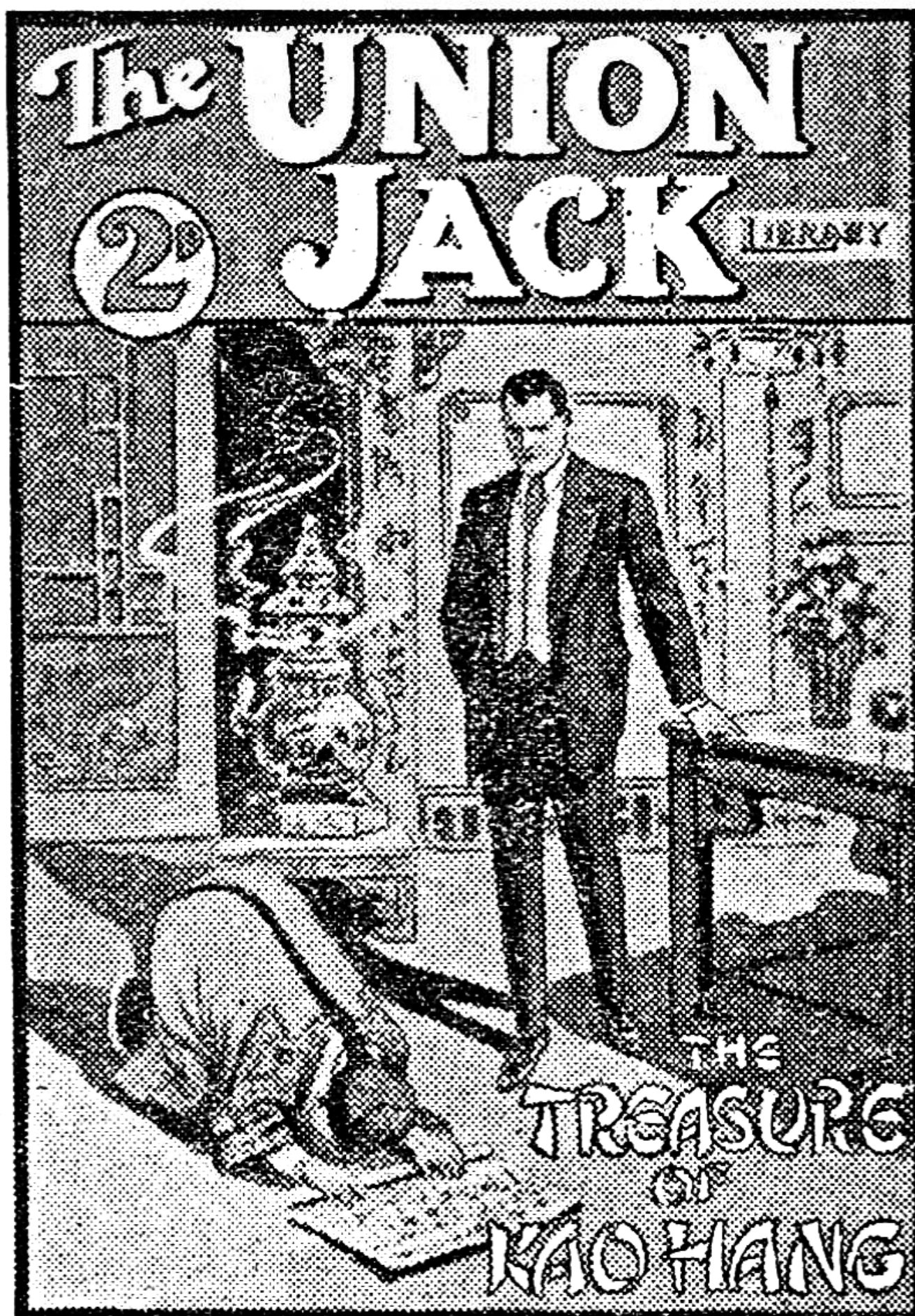
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The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



INTRODUCTION.

Under the name of Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A., NELSON LEE secures an appointment as games master at Marsh Manor School for the purpose of laying a ghost which is causing trouble at the school. NIPPER, his boy assistant, assuming the name of Barton, comes to the school as a backward boy.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER V. (Continued.)

A Visit to the Hostel.

"**M**ONSIEUR is surprised!" laughed Adolfe Malines. "We owe this advantage to our kind landlord Monsieur Ingleby Charteris. He paid for all the plant to be put in. Look!"

And, turning to a board with half a dozen switches, he manipulated them one after another, bringing various groups of lamps into play in different parts of the room—one over the table, another which lit up a hand-press in a corner of the room, a third illuminating a glazed photographic sink, where prints were slowly revolving under a jet of water.

"You have found a good friend in Mr. Charteris, without a doubt," said their visitor, and, if ever gratitude showed itself in the human face, it did so then in the refined features of Professor Felix and his fellow refugee.

"He is indeed a man of men!" said the professor, leading the way into another room. "Here is another evidence of his good heart. That camera cost him very nearly three hundred pounds, and there are others, as you see, not perhaps so costly, but not to be picked up by the roadside."

Adolfe Malines gave vent to a curious sound.

"I beg your pardon!" said Nelson Lee, thinking he had spoken.

"I said nothing," murmured the Belgian, with a profound sigh. "I was only thinking of the things the Germans left by the roadside when they pillaged my house outside

Louvain. Ah, Monsieur, you in England little know!"

"Which camera do you propose to use to-night?" said Nelson Lee quickly, feeling that the conversation was drifting into painful channels, and Malines looked inquiringly at his companion.

"I should recommend this one," said Professor Felix. "It should give the best results with the shutter set at the three-hundredth part of a second. Ah, I hear those young rascals! They have come in." And, as Malines went back into the laboratory, the professor whispered: "The poor Adolfe! He has suffered more, perhaps, than any of us. They burned his house, his wife lost her reason, and his only brother was killed at Termonde. Now he is trying to kill himself by overwork, and he is not strong."

"You would like to see over the house?" said Malines. "It is quite curious."

And over the house they went, into every room and on to the battlemented roof, which commanded a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

Nor was that all, for when they descended it was to find the table spread, and madame would take no denial.

"You will not be so hard-hearted!" she laughed, "as to rob the boys of their cake! And I will show you that I can make tea quite well in the English fashion."

It was quite a merry little party, with the old professor in his armchair, and madame's genial giant of a husband handing round the cake, that was all the sweeter for being rare. And the only fly in the ointment was the fact that Adolfe Malines cut the bread-and-butter with those dirty hands of his—which really were not dirty at all, if you only gave it a thought.

"Monsieur, our house is always open to you," said Professor Felix, as they made their adieux.

"You will come again, won't you?" cooed madame.

"Oh, yes! I will tell you all about Dixmude any time you care to smoke a pipe in the garden!" laughed her large husband.

And the great detective went away, feeling

that he had spent a very pleasant hour with very pleasant people; and that he had imbibed a deeper contempt for the cynical Vilotte.

"What do you think of them, Barton?" he said on the way back.

"Stunning! I should like to go again!" was Nipper's reply. "And, I say, Seymour, wasn't that cake top-hole?"

CHAPTER VI.

Called Away.

AS they reached the gate of the Manor House the aggressive blast of an electric horn warned them that a car was coming out, and they stood on one side to let it pass, but as Seymour doffed his cap the driver of the magnificent Rolls-Royce pulled up in the gateway itself and held out his hand.

"Hullo, youngster! So you're still in the land of the living! Are you going to make my arm ache again next prize-day?" said the owner of the car.

"I hope so, sir!" laughed Seymour, colouring.

"Well, I hope you may. Won't you introduce me to your friends?"

Seymour was only too delighted.

"This is Mr. Drake, our new games-master," he said. "And this is Barton, who's only just come to the school. Mr. Ingleby-Charteris, who gave the prizes away last time."

Mr. Ingleby-Charteris was a large man, clean-shaven, with a high colour, wearing a tweed suit of loud pattern, a fat cigar in one corner of his mouth, an eyeglass screwed into his right eye, and a pair of huge bear-skin driving-gloves.

The two men saluted one another, but the wealthy stockbroker did not recognise Nelson Lee, to the latter's secret satisfaction.

"Will you try one of these, Mr. Drake?" he said patronisingly, producing a gold cigar-case. "Unless it is setting the boys a bad example."

"No, thanks!" smiled the games-master. "I am a confirmed pipe-smoker myself."

"Yes? Must say I like a good cigar," was Mr. Ingleby Charteris' comment. "I have these Havannahs specially made for me. They work out at four bob apiece, getting 'em five thousand at a time. Good stuff! Sorry you won't have one. And how do you like Marsh Manor?"

"Very nice little village, and remarkably fine house," replied Lee.

"I should rather think it is! Shouldn't mind living there myself," said the stockbroker. "Offered to buy it, you know, but the old girl won't part—sentimental attachment to the place, or some such rot of that kind. Poor as a church mouse, and yet refuses eight thousand pounds. Can you understand such folly? If it weren't for inconveniencing Chard, who's a capital chap, I should be tempted to make the offer ten

thousand, and would probably get it. By the way, the reverend gentleman seems rather down in the mouth. Just been drinking tea with him, and I gather the old ghost trouble's cropped up again—what?"

Seymour turned scarlet, and glanced furtively at the games-master.

"I think we shall catch the scamp one of these nights, and lay the ghost for good and all, Mr. Ingleby-Charteris," said Lee quietly.

"Wish you luck, I'm sure. Take it myself, ghost and all, if I could. Finest house in the county, bar none. Pity to see all that original furniture, too, stowed away in a top attic. If you're keen on old stuff, I've got stacks of it. Very happy to show it you if you're ever Peterborough way. Well, I must push along. Toodle-oo!"

And, dropping in the clutch, the splendid car glided, with scarce a sound, out on to the high road.

"What a fearful snob!" said Nipper.

"Do you think so?" That's because you don't know him," said Seymour. "He's really awfully decent. He gave no end of cups for the sports, and had the whole school over to his house in charabancs. Mr. Chard thinks a lot of him."

Nipper smiled, and Nelson Lee's memory went back to a very sad page in Mr. Ingleby-Charteris' life, for, snob or no snob—and he undoubtedly was one—there had been a terrible tragedy in his home, which at one time had promised to exercise Nelson Lee's powers of investigation to the uttermost.

The stockbroker's niece, who kept house for her uncle, had been engaged to be married to a Major Rogerson, of the Artillery, and had suddenly disappeared three days before the wedding was to have taken place.

The facts were simple and woefully tragic. Miss Ingleby-Charteris had drawn fifty pounds from her private banking-account and gone to London. She had passed the barrier at King's Cross, and from that moment had not been seen again, and everybody's sympathy had gone out to the distracted fiancé and the grief-stricken uncle.

The five thousand pounds reward which Mr. Ingleby-Charteris offered for any clue that should solve the mystery brought no response. Portraits of the missing girl were circulated in all the papers, and Scotland Yard did its best, supplemented by the efforts of Nelson Lee himself, to whom the major had applied when the police reluctantly abandoned the search.

There was no reason for her going. Every one knew her as a bright, happy girl, looking forward to the marriage with the man she loved. And there the matter rested until, at the end of several months, a detective called at the stockbroker's offices, with the worst news of all.

The body, recovered from the Thames below bridges, had evidently been weighted down, for there was a rope still round the waist, which confirmed the impression of foul play, and, though the features had gone, every detail of hair and measurements, even

to a gold-stopped tooth, enabled Mr. Ingleby-Charteris to identify the remains as those of the missing girl.

Not so Major Rogerson, who clung tenaciously to the belief that she was still alive. He even declined to be present at the burial, and, though Nelson Lee did his best to bring him to reason, the poor fellow persisted in continuing the search; and, though the funeral had taken place a year ago, scarcely a week passed without the great detective still receiving a pathetic letter from him, reporting the numerous false clues that ended, as Lee knew they would, in nothing.

Although he shared Nipper's estimate of Mr. Ingleby-Charteris to the full, he could not forget the almost paternal tenderness which had prompted the marble tombstone he had placed over the poor battered body of the murdered girl, or the cross of white arum lilies—"To Evelyn, from Uncle Gerald."

"Ah," he thought, as he followed the boys into the old house, "even money will not buy everything in this world, much less happiness."

When darkness had fallen Adolfe Malines arrived with his photographic apparatus, and was smuggled up into "Mr. Herbert Drake's" study unseen by anyone.

The games-master had already borrowed a brace-and-bitt from Boyle, and a round hole, the size of a five-shilling piece, in the panelled door, showed that he had not been idle.

"Nothing could be better!" chuckled the photographer, rubbing his dirty hands together in anticipation. "It is the identical size of the lens and the proper height from the floor. And here you have made another peep-hole. Oh, monsieur, it is admirable! But there is only one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Why, we are here. We see the ghost. We can squeeze the bulb and release the shutter, but how are we going to illuminate the corridor at the exact moment?"

"Yes, I know," said Lee. "I have thought of that, and this is the conclusion I have arrived at. You see that door on the other side of the passage?"

"I do," said Malines, squinting through the observation-hole.

"Very well. The new boy, Barton, I brought to your house this afternoon, sleeps just inside that door, and he is a lad of remarkable intelligence. I propose that for the next two or three nights, from ten minutes to nine until, say, ten minutes past, which is the only time the ghost has ever been seen, Barton has the pistol, and stations

himself with the dormitory door ajar. If we see the apparition, I will ring a bicycle-bell in this room, and, the instant I do that all he has got to do is to thrust his arm out into the corridor and press the trigger."

"Monsieur, you are a positive genius!" cried Adolfe Malines delightedly.

"You are quite sure that the machine fired from there would be sufficient to illuminate the whole corridor?"

"Why, yes. For two seconds the whole place would be light as day."

"Then everything's settled," said Lee. "If you will be good enough to fix up your machine, we shall hear the big fellows come upstairs just before the hour. I have arranged with Mr. Chard, who knows what is going on, and I think we ought to nab my gentleman. What do you say?"

"My dear friend, it is as good as done!" said the enthusiastic foreigner.

"That being the case," laughed Lee "let us make ourselves comfortable. Will you try some of my tobacco, or do you still prefer your herbal mixture? And, I say, do you play chess?"

Adolfe Malines did play chess, and loved it. It was, as he said, the only game for scientific brains; but he was obliged to admit at the end of an hour and a half that he was no match for his opponent.

"You shall have your revenge to-morrow," said Lee, with a smile, as his wristlet watch told him that it only wanted a quarter to nine. "Let me have the pistol. I have told Barton to come up before the rest, and I think that is his tap on the door now. Come in!"

Tinker turned the handle and presented himself, and Adolfe Malines explained the mechanism. It was quite simple—a little iron trough, which contained the illuminating powder, with an attachment of hammer and trigger, to ignite it.

"You will put it somewhere where the others will not see it, and where it will not get spoiled?" he said.

"I will take care of it, sir. Mr. Drake has already told me exactly what I am to do."

And, backing out, he closed the door behind him.

"A nice boy, that!" said the Belgian. "Mr. Chard is very fortunate. They are all nice boys here. Have you no idea who is playing the tomfool?"

"Not the remotest," said Nelson Lee, as they heard the big fellows troop up.

And he took his stand at the observation-hole, the bicycle-bell in his hand.

The lamp at the head of the staircase had been purposely turned very low, and the dark passage stretched before him.

The muffled clamour of voices gradually died away in the dormitories, and all was still. And even Nelson Lee, accustomed as he was to unusual situations, felt his pulses quicken as he watched and waited.

(To be continued.)

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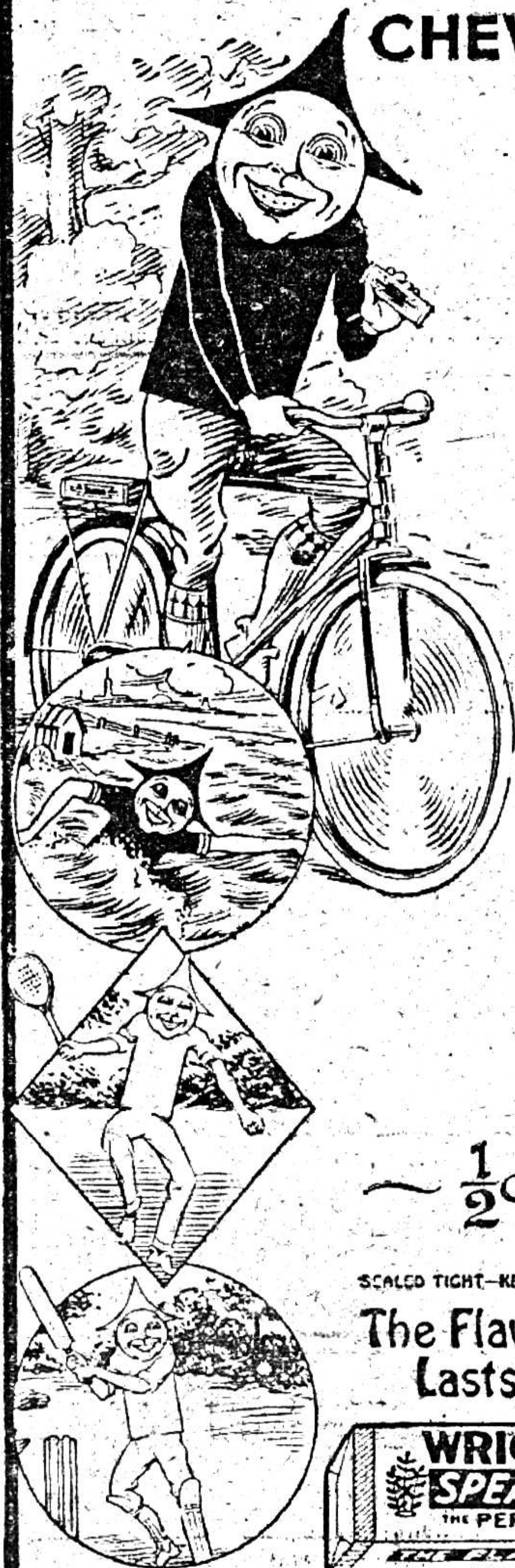


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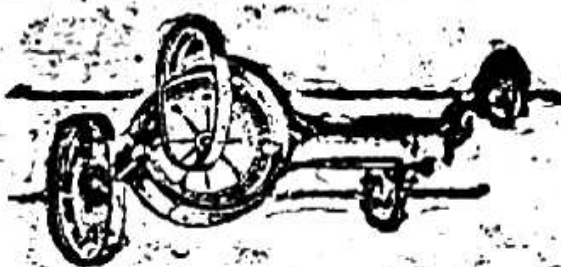
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