

THIS WEEK'S
STORY—

THE MYSTERY OF LAKE THIRTMERE!

THE NELSON LEE

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**THIS WEEK'S FINE
STORY LEADS UP TO
THE GREAT
HOLIDAY ADVENTURE
SERIES,**

**Beginning Next Week!
DON'T MISS IT!**



At close quarters the submarine towered up in a monstrous array of grey steel plates, with tightly-clamped portholes, and numerous other accessories which Handforth didn't understand.



The Mystery of Lake Thirtlemere!

Or, ST. FRANK'S IN THE LAKE DISTRICT.

For the past few weeks the Remove of St. Frank's have been touring England and Wales in motor caravans. It is a novel scheme suggested by Nelson Lee for enabling the boys to improve their knowledge of their own country, while, at the same time, carrying on with their ordinary school work. It is virtually a school on wheels, and it is hoped that readers who are still at school will give as much publicity to these stories as possible, for the idea may commend itself to their own school authorities, and they themselves may later have the opportunity of following the example of the St. Frank's juniors described in this series. Each of the stories is laid in that part of the country visited by the touring school. Last week they were in Lancashire, and the week before that they were in Wales. This week they are doing the Lake District, and their adventures are described in the absorbing story bearing the title above. This is the final story of the touring school series, and leads up to the Grand Summer Holiday Adventure series, which begins in New York next week.

THE EDITOR.

(The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.)

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF LAKE THIRTMERE!

THE three figures wrestled desperately. At times it seemed that two of them would gain the mastery, but the third figure was bigger and

brawnier, and he was slowly but surely wearing down the resistance of his adversaries.

Again and again the trio swayed out into the moonlight from the shadow of the woods, and the tussle was accompanied by gruntings and gaspings, but no actual outcries.

And at last the bigger figure held the other two.

"Do you give in?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Yes, you ass!" gasped Church and McClure. "Pax, you dangerous ass!"

Edward Oswald Handforth grunted again.

"Promise you'll obey orders?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you won't try to bunk back to camp?"

"No."

Handforth released his hold, and Church and McClure were released. They broke away, and stood there, breathing hard. Their hair was tousled, and they looked decidedly the worse for wear.

All three juniors were attired in slippers, flannel trousers and pyjama jackets. And the moon shone down peacefully upon them. The summer night was perfect, and hardly a breath of wind stirred the trees.

"About time you learned sense!" growled Handforth aggressively. "Fancy trying to defy me! Me, you know! I said we were coming out on this jaunt, and I meant it. You can't mess me about, my lads!"

"You're mad!" said Church. "If Mr. Lee collars us——"

"Mr. Lee's asleep."

"If we're found out here——"

"Rats! There's no chance of it," interrupted Handforth. "Besides, what if we are? No harm in a moonlight stroll, I suppose? If we lose our sleep it's our fault."

"Your fault, you mean," said McClure. "Don't blame us. We didn't want to get out of bed. Of all the dotty ideas this is the dottiest!"

Handforth pushed up his sleeves again.

"Want some more?" he inquired grimly.

"Nunno!" gasped McClure. "Don't be an ass! We'll come. And now that we're out, where do you suppose we're going, anyway?"

"Down to the lake."

"What for?"

"To indulge in a row, of course."

"Without a boat?" asked Church sarcastically.

"No—not without a boat," snapped Handforth. "Leave it to me, and everything will be all right. Come on! Don't waste time here."

He moved off through the trees, and Church and McClure reluctantly followed him. Considering that the hour was just after midnight, it was hardly surprising that Handforth's chums objected to the jaunt.

The scene was a glorious one.

The moon shone down upon a vision of rugged hills, with woods and fairy valleys, all bathed in the soft, silvery radiance. Somewhere in the distance a waterfall splashed and tinkled musically.

Quite near the three juniors there were a number of huge motor caravans, and a sturdy tent—all quiet and still and with no lights showing. This was the camp of the Traveling School.

The St. Frank's Remove was in the Lake District.

That was the long and the short of it. Our tour had been going on splendidly, and having passed through Wales and Lancashire, we now found ourselves right up North in the beautiful scenery of the English lakes.

Only the Remove was touring in caravans. The rest of the school was still at St. Frank's, tremendously envious of the juniors. This was not to be wondered at, for the Remove was having a ripping time.

We had made camp that evening, but as it was late we had had little opportunity of exploring the surrounding country. During the afternoon we had come within sight of Lake Windermere, and we had been enthralled by the scenery. It had been a Sunday, and the whole world seemed at rest.

We were now close to the banks of a lesser-known water—but a good big expanse, nevertheless. It was called Thirtlemere, and extended for several miles between steep, well-wooded hills.

Lake Thirtlemere, in fact, was practically hidden from mortal eye. Nobody would have known it was there unless it was deliberately searched for. The hills surrounded it so completely that the whole valley appeared to be inaccessible. But Nelson Lee had brought the caravans through in great style.

We had gone to bed, the majority of us declaring that we should be up bright and early, so that we could do a little exploring. And the camp had soon fallen into healthy slumber.

With the exception of Handforth, however.

For some reason Handforth couldn't sleep. And he had suddenly had one of his startling ideas. For Handforth to get an idea was for Handforth to act. No matter how preposterous the decision, Handforth always acted.

And this present stunt was rather more astonishing than usual.

Handforth, in short, came to the conclusion that it would be rather ripping to go for a moonlight row on the lake. He had spotted a little boat down by the bank, half hidden by the trees.

And he was determined to be the first on the water.

Accordingly, he had compelled Church and McClure to get up. They didn't like it, but they didn't like fighting in the middle of the night, either. It was one or the other.

At first they resisted, and even after they had left the camp they made a desperate attempt to get back. Handforth had soon nipped this insubordination in the bud. He wasn't standing any mutiny.

And thus, just after midnight, the three famous chums of Study D found themselves overlooking the banks of Lake Thirtlemere. Church and McClure were wondering if it wouldn't be advisable to secretly send for a brain specialist. It seemed to them that Handy was getting worse day by day.

This moonlight row business, for example, was absolutely the limit,

"It's all very well to say that there's a boat," grumbled Church. "How do we know the boat's safe? And whose is it? We can't take a boat that doesn't belong to us. Besides, I'm getting cold. The air's sharp—"

"And my fists are hard," said Handforth. "My only hat! I've got a fine pair of chums—I don't think. You traitors! Always wanting to desert me! Haven't you got any sense of loyalty?"

"Oh, go easy, old man," said McClure. "We're loyal enough, but I'm blessed if there's any rhyme or reason in this midnight stuff. Let's get back."

"Not until we've been for a row," said Handforth firmly.

They soon arrived on the edge of the lake, and even Church and McClure forgot to be irritable. The scene here was gorgeous. The moon shining on the big expanse of water made a picture that rivetted the attention.

"My goodness!" breathed Church. "Isn't it lovely?"

"It—it looks too good to be true," said McClure. "You know, it looks like one of those scenes in a fairy book. If only we were poets or artists we should get inspiration from this."

Handforth snorted.

"Don't stand gaping here," he said impatiently. "Let's get on."

"But we want to admire the scene—"

"Rats! There's nothing special about it," said Handforth, giving a cursory glance round. "Just hills and trees and water. I'm blowed if I can see anything to make a silly fuss about!"

Handforth had no idea for beauty. He was practical to the core, and all scenery was lost upon him.

His chums, feeling that there were some compensations for the loss of sleep, followed him down to the bank of the lake, and then walked along until they came upon a small rowing boat.

It was tucked away in a little backwater, snug and cosy.

"Here we are," said Handforth. "Lend a hand."

"But we might get into trouble if we touch this—"

"Rubbish!"

And a few minutes later the boat was floated out, and the three juniors were on board. There were two sets of oars, and Handforth directed his chums to wield them. They were not averse, as the exercise would warm them up.

"Where shall we row to?" asked Church.

"You just row, I'll do the steering," said Handy. "I mean to go right out into the centre of the lake first, and then cut across to the island. Did you notice the island in the middle?"

"Of course we did," said McClure. "Pretty big, too, with tons of trees."

They slid along through the water, with the tiny ripples hissing against the sides.

"Not so bad, eh?" said Handforth com-

fortably. "Well, what about it? Ain't you glad you came? Isn't it ripping to be out here all alone without any of the other chaps bothering round?"

Church and McClure had to admit that it was better than they had thought.

"You see, we shall have the advantage now," grinned Handforth. "In the morning we shall be able to say that we've already been on the island—"

"But we're not going to land, are we?"

"You bet we are!"

"How about getting back?"

"Never mind that now," said Edward Oswald. "The loss of a little sleep won't do us any harm. Now, I suggest that we—"

"Look!" whispered McClure suddenly. "What's that?"

"Eh? What's what?"

McClure had ceased rowing, and he was staring across the water in a fixed, concentrated kind of way.

"Over there!" he breathed. "Can't you see it?"

"See what?" demanded Handforth, startled by the other's tone.

"There's a kind of ripple in the water," said McClure—"just as if some huge fish is swimming under the surface. Why, I even believe there's a kind of fin sticking up— No, it's gone now!"

Handforth and Church stared, but could see nothing.

"You're dotty!" said Handy.

"I tell you I saw something—"

"Rats! Sheer imagination!" snapped the leader of Study D. "Or perhaps it was a water-hen, or something. You see all sorts of things at night on these lakes—"

He paused, catching his breath in, for at that moment a strange, eerie sound came throbbing across the still waters of the lake. It was not animal, not human. There was something uncanny about it. Only for a second or two did the sound continue, then it died away like a moan.

Handforth looked at his chums queerly.

"What—what the dickens was that?" he asked, in a soft voice.

"Goodness knows!" said Church, shivering. "I say, let's get back! There's something mysterious about this lake! It's beautiful and all that, but—but somehow it gives me the creeps!"

"Same here," murmured McClure.

They fell silent, looking about them half apprehensively.

CHAPTER II.

THE MONSTER OF THE DEEP.



HANDFORTH gave a grunt. "Oh, rats!" he said impatiently. "There's nothing the matter with the lake. It's just our nerves—that's all. Or, rather, your nerves. Nothing

wrong with me! You're a couple of imaginative fatheads!"

"You looked pretty scared, anyway," said Church.

"What?"

"Oh, don't use that tone—"

"I looked scared, did I?" roared Handforth. "You—you insulting bounder! By George! I'll teach you to call me a funk! For two pins I'll chuck you out of the giddy boat."

"Oh, don't be silly!" said McClure crossly. "It wasn't imagination at all. We heard something queer, and I saw something too. It was just below the surface of the water—"

"If it was below the surface, how did you see it?" demanded Handforth.

"Ass! Don't quibble!" said McClure. "I saw a ripple—"

"My goodness!" muttered Church suddenly. "Look—look there!"

All three juniors were on the jump, although they didn't like to admit it. Handforth and McClure started as Church spoke, and looked round. They stared across the face of the dark, mysterious lake.

"Where?" breathed Handforth. "Look where?"

Church pointed.

"There, straight in a line with the island!" he whispered. "There seems to be something showing in the water. Look! I've never seen anything like it before!"

"Well I'm jiggered!" muttered McClure.

There certainly was cause for the juniors to be a bit startled. At the point Church indicated, there was a most extraordinary patch on the surface of the dim water. The patch was quite small, and it seemed to be luminous—a pale greenish glow.

And the most remarkable feature about this patch was that it moved! As the juniors gazed over the lake, that greenish patch moved slowly along towards the wooded little island up the lake.

Handforth suddenly jerked his oars.

"Look here—I'm going to row!" he declared firmly. "You fatheads are too lazy—or too scared. We'll find out what this is. I'm always keen upon any kind of mystery."

"But—but—"

"Rats! I'm not funky, even if you idiots are!" snorted Handforth.

He was intensely curious to find out what the luminous patch meant, and his imagination was already forming all sorts of impossible guesses. Handy plied the oars vigorously, and the boat fairly hissed through the water.

Nearer and nearer came that queer greenish patch. The juniors were overtaking it rapidly. And at last they were gliding over the exact spot. The boat was immediately above the glow. All three leaned over the boat's side.

"Can you see anything?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "It's a swindle—"

"There's a light down there—right down in the water!" gasped Church. "Look this

side—quick! But it's impossible! How can there be a light—"

"Lemme look!" said Handforth feverishly.

He nearly upset the boat as he scrambled over to the other side. It was only a matter of luck that Church and McClure were not pitched headlong out. They only saved themselves by clutching wildly at the seats.

"Steady on, you duffer," panted Church.

But Handforth took no notice; he was staring down over the boat's side. And, extraordinarily enough, Church's statement proved to be correct. There, far down below the surface of the lake, a light could be seen.

It was moving slowly, and was almost immediately underneath the boat. It was impossible to judge what this light was, or how deep it lay. It was greenish—a bright, gleaming spot of luminosity which sent rays showering upwards. The reason for that queer patch on the surface was now apparent.

"My only hat!" murmured McClure.

"What can it be?"

"Electricity!" said Handforth firmly.

"That's what it is—electricity."

"Down on the bottom of the lake?"

"Yes."

"But—but that light's moving, you chump!"

"I know it's moving. Haven't I got eyes?" said Handforth. "It must belong to some huge fish—one of those giddy prehistoric monsters you read about."

McClure shook his head.

"I've never read about any prehistoric monsters that crawl about on the bottom of a lake, provided with an electric headlight!" he said sarcastically. "This thing can't be any fish. It must be a submarine."

"By Jove, yes!" breathed Church.

At this juncture the light abruptly vanished. It went off as though somebody had turned a switch. Possibly the origin of the light had passed beyond some thick weeds under the water, or round a projection of the land—for the little wooded island was now in close proximity.

Handforth & Co. found themselves staring at nothing. They seemed to be utterly alone upon the surface of the lake. Scarcely a sound came to them. And they looked at one another with expressions that told of their puzzled state of mind.

"Rot!" said Handforth, with a sniff.

"Eh?"

"Piffle!" said Edward Oswald.

"What do you mean? What's piffle?"

"Why, that twaddle about a submarine!" replied Handforth. "I've always thought that you chaps possessed a few atoms of brains between you, but now I know differently. Whoever heard of a submarine in a giddy lake?"

McClure bristled somewhat.

"What about your prehistoric monster?" he asked indignantly. "My idea is a fat lot more reasonable than yours, and I'll chance it! A submarine is, at least, a possibility; but a prehistoric monster, with an electric

headlight, is only the ravings of a blessed lunatic!"

Handforth nodded.

"I wanted to avoid this, but you've done it now!" he said, with a certain deadly calmness that made his chums uneasy. "You've done it! Goodness knows, I didn't want to biff you about, but there's no alternative!"

"I say, steady on——"

"Look here——"

"Words won't make any difference now," said Handforth calmly. "I've heard you chaps say that my ideas are the ravings of a lunatic. Good! I'll jolly well show you that it's a risky business to insult me!"

While Handforth was speaking he was slowly and carefully rolling up his sleeves. And now, before Church could even attempt to dodge, Edward Oswald suddenly lunged out.

Biff!

Church toppled off his seat backwards, and collapsed into two or three inches of water which swished about among the bottom boards. The boat rocked violently, and Handforth gave a gasp of sudden alarm.

He pitched to the side, and for a second McClure vainly hoped that Handforth was going over. But the latter just managed to save himself in the nick of time. It was a very narrow shave.

"You—you blithering idiots!" hooted Handforth. "You nearly had me overboard!"

"We!" gasped McClure. "Why, you ass, it was entirely your own doing——"

"I'm soaked to the skin!" said Church thickly, as he picked himself up. "You—you dangerous rotter! If you want a scrap, why can't you wait until we get ashore?"

"All right; I will!" said Handforth grimly.

As a matter of fact, he was glad enough to postpone hostilities. In his usual impulsive manner, he had hit out, never dreaming that disaster to himself might result. He came to the conclusion that it would be better to chastise his chums on solid ground.

Church and McClure were pleased with the arrangement, too, because Handforth would have forgotten all about the affair by the time they landed.

"But you chaps had better not insult me any more!" said Handforth darkly. "That idea of yours about a submarine is sheer piffle. What's the good of a submarine in a place like this? A miserable little lake, hemmed in by hills and woods, with the sea three or four miles away. Why, a submarine could only cruise about this little patch of water!"

"Yes, it seems a bit steep," admitted Church. "But what about your prehistoric monster? There must be some explanation, and it seems to me that it's no good making guesses. We'd better get back to camp, and have a look round here in daylight. No sense in remaining now."



Then, with one sweep, they released him. Splash! Handforth descended into the lake rear foremost.

"That's the idea," agreed McClure. "Let's get back."

Church and McClure ought to have known better. By urging a return to camp they were merely making Handforth all the more determined to stay out. If they had suggested a long, elaborate search of the lake, Handforth would probably have postponed it until the morning.

But the mischief was done now.

"Go back to camp?" he said tartly. "Not likely! We're going to land on that island, and we're going to explore every inch of it!"

"But it's past one o'clock——"

"I don't care!"

"It'll begin to get daylight before long——"

"Let it!" interrupted Handy. "You'll never find me chucking up a thing once I begin. We're going to make this investigation, my sons. And if we don't make some queer discoveries, I'm a Dutchman!"

CHAPTER III.

MEN OF MYSTERY!



THE boat dug its nose softly into the earthy bank of the island.

Just near-by there was a small willow sapling, and Handforth deftly secured the painter to it. Then he stood on the grassy bank and looked about

him with the air of one who has conquered.

"Well, we're here!" he said. "Now, to get to work!"

"I don't see what we can do," objected Church. "This island isn't very big, but it'll take us a pretty long time to explore it all. There are so many trees, too. It'll take hours and hours to—"

"To begin with, we'll strike off towards the centre," said Handforth, ignoring his chum's objections. "I think that'll be the best. Then we'll work round along the other shore, and make a complete circle of the island. It's my opinion that there are criminals at work here."

"Criminals!"

"A whole gang!" said Handforth impressively. "I shouldn't be surprised if we've hit upon a coiners' den, or something like that! Either a coiners' den, or else the headquarters of a secret society!"

When there was anything in the nature of a mystery afoot, Handforth's mind always ran to coiners' dens and secret societies. He seemed limited to these two possibilities. Anything that happened in the dark in a strange locality was enough to arouse all Edward Oswald's suspicions. And the fact that he had never actually discovered a coiners' den in no way discouraged him. He was always hoping for the best.

Church and McClure could do nothing except gaze significantly at one another, and follow. Objections, now, would be worse than useless. So it would be better to urge their leader onwards as much as possible. With surprising alacrity, Church and McClure became filled with bubbling enthusiasm.

"It's wonderful the way you figure things out, old man," said Church admiringly. "A coiner's den! By gum! I shouldn't be surprised a bit!"

"Or a secret society," said McClure eagerly. "That's more like it, you know. Let's explore every inch of the place! Let's nose round until we've rooted out the solution of that mysterious light!"

"It doesn't matter if we take hours," remarked Church.

"Time doesn't count at all," said McClure firmly.

"We'll go right on—on and on until we know the truth," added Church.

"Rather!" said McClure enthusiastically. Handforth regarded his chums with open suspicion.

"You've woke up pretty quickly, haven't you?" he demanded tartly. "I suppose you'll admit I was right, eh? It's a good idea to explore, eh? You want to get busy eh?"

"Yes, yes—at once!" said Church impatiently.

"You bet!" said McClure, fairly dancing.

"Well, if you're not jolly careful, I'll postpone it until to-morrow," threatened Handforth. "I don't believe in this eagerness. I'm the detective, don't forget. You've simply got to obey my orders."

For a brief spell Church and McClure hoped that Handforth was going to suggest a return to camp. But he didn't. He decided to press his investigations. And a few minutes later all three juniors were making their way through the trees in the direction of the centre of the island.

They didn't know what to expect, and even Handforth himself had no actual hope of discovering anything important. He fooled himself into believing that there was something very sinister afoot.

But actually, right down in his heart, he had a disappointing feeling that he and his chums would find nothing but trees. If anything exciting turned up, Handforth would be the most surprised fellow on earth.

Church and McClure were equally devoid of any particular hope. They felt rather tired and sleepy, and their main desire was to get back to their caravan as quickly as possible.

The two juniors felt decidedly incensed with Handforth as they thought about the comfortable, cosy, caravan camp. The idea of the whole Remove touring about the country in caravans had appealed to Church and McClure as a fine idea, but they hadn't known that they would be obliged to indulge in night expeditions of this kind.

There would be no making-up for this lack of sleep. They would have to turn out at the same time as the rest in the morning, and, after spending half the night on the lake, they would not be particularly bright. So they hoped very fervently that Handforth would soon get tired.

It was very dim amid the trees on the island.

The juniors could scarcely see five yards in front of them. The trees grew thickly, many of them being proud old monarchs who had occupied this ground for many scores of years.

"Doesn't seem to be much good," said Church in a low voice. "I think we might as well turn back, eh?"

"Yes, that's a good suggestion," said McClure.

"Turn back?" repeated Handforth. "What about exploring this hollow? You fatheads—we've only just started! And don't talk; there's no telling who may be prowling about."

Church and McClure silently groaned. They had reached the top of a little rise, and the ground sloped down steeply in front of them. The centre of the island, in fact, appeared to consist of a deep, mysterious hollow. And the three juniors carefully picked their way downwards.

Handforth, who was leading, suddenly came to a halt.

"My only hat!" he breathed, clutching at Church's sleeve.

"Eh? What's the matter?"

"There's a light—can't you see it?" breathed Handy.

Both Church and McClure strained their eyes.

"Well I'm blessed!" muttered Church. "So there is."

All three juniors were filled with astonishment. Never expecting to find any trace of humanity on the island, this light took them by surprise. But there it was—a clear, steadily burning gleam down at the very bottom of the hollow.

It was impossible to judge where the light came from.

"Look here!" said Handforth tensely. "You chaps are a couple of duds. You're no good when it comes to a careful investigation. You stop here, and I'll go on and work singlehanded. If I don't return within an hour, you'll know that I've met with foul play."

"Good!" said Church absently.

"What?"

"I—I mean, that would be awful!"

"All detectives have to take risks like that," said Handforth. "There's not a moment to be lost. The coiners may be in the middle of a big job. Think how fine it would be if I walked in just as they were pouring the molten metal into the counterfeit casts!"

"Oh, dry up!" growled McClure. "You've got coiners on the giddy brain! I expect there's an old gamekeeper, or somebody, asleep in his cottage—that's where the light's coming from."

Handforth snorted.

"I don't blame you!" he said wittingly. "You've got no imagination—that's your trouble. Stay here and wait for an hour. If I haven't returned by then, go back to camp, and get up a search-party."

"Oh, rather!" said Church, with a suspicion of sarcasm. "We'll bring some drags, too, and drag the lake. Coiners ain't very particular, you know. If you're collared, they'll probably tie a brick round your neck, and chuck you into the water."

Handforth did not attempt to make any reply to this remark. He merely cautioned his chums to remain as still as statues, and then he marched on. Church and McClure waited a few seconds, and then followed him.

"Are we going to desert the ass?" breathed Church.

"Not likely," said McClure.

And they kept just in Handforth's rear, although he was sublimely unconscious of this fact. He took it for granted that his chums had obeyed his orders. It never even occurred to him that they would dare to disobey.

He proceeded down the steep slope for some little distance, pausing every now and again. And on two of these occasions he was aware of a slight rustling. Handforth thrilled within him.

"My hat!" he breathed. "I'm being followed!"

The very thought sent a kind of electric shock through his whole system—by no means unpleasant. Here, indeed, he was

getting into the thick of things! It was better than he had hoped for.

He paused again, after only walking a few feet. Twirling about like lightning, he was aware that a figure dodged behind a handy bush. Yes, there was no doubt about it—mysterious figures were on his track.

"Who—who's that?" demanded Handforth huskily.

Silence.

"Stand out, or I fire!" said Handforth boldly. "No nonsense, my friend! I'm a celebrated detective, and—"

He broke off, wondering. A faint kind of chuckle had come to his ears—a chuckle that seemed strangely familiar. In spite of his strict orders, it seemed that his chums had followed him. That chuckle was certainly uttered by Church.

Handforth silently rolled up his sleeves.

"By George!" he muttered thickly. "So they've been spoofing me, eh? The cads! The fatheads—Eh? What the—"

He broke off, his voice ending in a startled gasp. For a hand, heavy and hard, descended upon his right shoulder. It was so totally unexpected that Handforth was absolutely scared for a second.

He had thought himself to be entirely alone. He had never believed it possible that any human being could be so close to him unseen. He twisted round, and found himself in the grasp of a powerful man who loomed fully six feet tall.

"Great pip!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"I've been waitin' for ye, my lad!" said the man, his voice hard and severe. "You young varmint! Who gave you permission to land on this island? Don't you know it's private property? Don't you know you're trespassing?"

Handforth managed to recover himself somewhat.

"Who—who are you?" he asked, with a gulp.

"Tain't no business o' yours who I am," replied the man curtly. "All I knows is that you ain't got no right on this property. You'll have to come along with me, young shaver—and I'll hand you over to the Chief."

"The—the chief!" repeated Handforth.

"Yes."

"The chief of—of the gang?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"I don't know nothin' about any gang," said the man. "Seems to me you ain't quite tight in the 'ead, young shaver. Mebbe you think there's a gang of criminals on this island, eh? Queer what ideas boys will get."

Handforth clenched his teeth.

"You don't fool me with that bluff!" he said sourly. "I know who you are—I know what your game is! And if you think you can hold me a prisoner, you've made a bloomer! I started on this investigation, and I mean to elucidate the mystery. You can do your worst!"

And then abruptly, without any previous indication, Handforth commenced fighting. He gave one terrific lunge which caught his

captor in the middle of the chest. The man gave a grunt, and staggered slightly. But before Handforth could do any real damage he was held as though in a vice.

Handforth was a pretty good fighting man, and he was quite capable of dealing severely with many a fellow twice his weight. But this mysterious man of the woods was like iron.

Handforth had absolutely no chance. He was held with the ease of a baby—and marched onwards down into the hollow. His struggles were of no avail. But his spirit was as defiant as ever.

"You think you've got me, eh?" he panted. "Well, you haven't! At least, it won't

Church and McClure were just at the edge of the clearing—for they had followed their captive leader, wondering how they could be of assistance to him. They had been very startled when he had first been taken prisoner. Two or three times they had decided to rush to his rescue, but no suitable opportunity had occurred.

Now, however, it seemed that the time was ripe.

"Better make a rush," whispered Church. "In two ticks there'll probably be two or three other men on the scene—and then it'll be too late. Come on! Let's both dash in together!"

"Right!" breathed McClure. "I'm game!"

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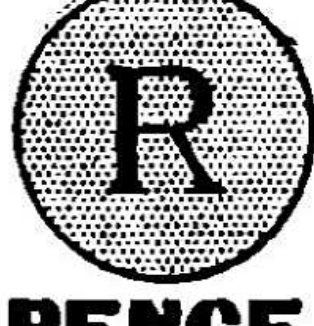
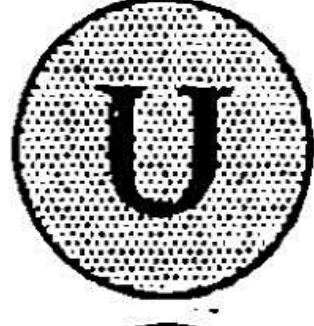
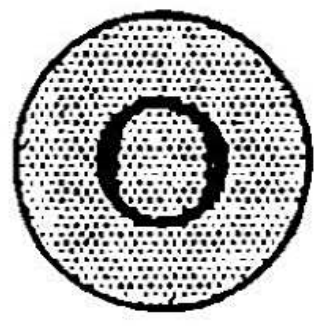
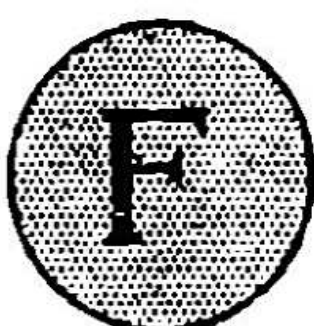
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take me long to escape. I give you fair warning I'm going to fool you! You can't hold me down!"

The big man made no reply.

And Handforth was astonished, a few moments later, to find himself in a kind of clearing. He was now at the bottom of the hollow, and he could see the dark waters of the lake stretching out from the grassy banks.

And just here, in this clearing, stood several big, ugly wooden buildings. The central structure was bigger than the others, and lay in complete darkness. A light gleamed from the window of a small kind of hut.

"Now, young man, we'll see about you," said Handforth's captor in a grim voice.

They did not hesitate, but made a sudden rush towards Handforth and the mysterious stranger. Just at that very moment, however, three other men abruptly appeared from the lighted hut.

And Church and McClure arrived on the spot almost at the same time. If they had only waited a few moments they would not have left their place of concealment. As it was, they realised the hopelessness of their quest.

"Good!" roared Handforth, as soon as he saw them. "Rescue, Study D!"

He renewed his own efforts, and Church and McClure might have effected his release if they had had no other opponents to deal with. But the fight was short and sharp, and soon over.

Much to the chagrin of Church and McClure, they found themselves held by two other men. And a smaller individual, who seemed to be the leader, came hurrying up and looked on with considerable anger. In the gloom it was impossible for the juniors to see very much. But they could tell that this smaller man was attired in a gentlemanly manner.

"What is this?" he demanded harshly. "Who are you? What are you doing on this island?"

"We came to explore it!" said Handforth. "We suspected that crooks were at work, and now we know it for certain!"

"Infernal impudence!" snapped the chief. "Hogan! See that these boys are locked away in the end cabin—bar the widow, and remain on guard at the door. I'll question them later."

"But look here——" began Handforth.

"Enough!" interrupted the chief. "I've no time for you now!"

He walked away, and Handforth and Co. were roughly hustled along towards a small wooden building which stood just a little apart from the others. They were thrust inside, and the door was locked and barred behind them.

And before they could make any move towards the window, a heavy shutter was pushed into position. And the three hapless juniors were in complete darkness, having not the faintest idea of what lay in store.

"My goodness!" said Church, out of the gloom. "We're in a pretty pickle now!"

"Yes, this is what comes of Handy's marvellous investigations," said McClure bitterly. "He ought to be feeling pleased with himself."

Handforth grunted.

"I am!" he declared. "We've hit upon this gang, and it won't take me long to get at the truth. All detectives suffer from reverses now and again, and it's no good being discouraged."

But if Handforth was cheerful, his chums were not. And there was no doubt at all that the whole affair was very mysterious.

CHAPTER IV.

MISSING!



"SOMETHING," said Archie Glenhorne, "appears to be wrong."

The dandy of the Ancient House was standing on the little platform at the door of Caravan No. 1. He gazed about him through his monocle, and slowly shook his head.

"Absolutely!" he declared.

"What are you trying to get at Archie?" inquired Reggie Pitt, strolling up.

"I mean to say, the morning, and all that," replied Archie. "Yards of ripping sunshine and balmy breezes, don't you know. And peace. Possibly you have observed, old top, that the peace appears to be terrific.

In other words, the whole dashed camp is basking in a kind of wondrous silence."

Reggie nodded.

"Yes, things seem to be a bit quieter than usual," he admitted. "I don't quite know what it is, but we don't generally have mornings as peaceful as this. Most of the fellows are out, too."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I'm dashed puzzled, dear old chapple!"

A dawning smile appeared upon Pitt's face.

"I've got it!" he chuckled. "Handforth!"

"Eh? I mean to say—what?"

"Why, Handforth hasn't turned out yet," grinned Pitt. "As a rule he's very much in evidence by this time. But this morning he must have overslept himself. That's why everything's so wonderfully quiet."

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "I believe you're right. But what could have happened to our blithe comrade? It isn't usual for him to slumber on until this hour. I trust the chapple is not unwell?"

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"We'll soon see," he said. "I'll shake him up a bit!"

And Reggie mounted the steps of Caravan No. 2. Handforth and Co. shared this caravan with five other fellows—for eight juniors occupied each caravan. They were enormous motor vehicles, fitted up in the most luxurious style, and within there was every comfort one could think of.

Cecil de Valerie stood at the door of the caravan.

"What's wrong with Handforth this morning?" asked Pitt. "He's so quiet that the chaps are wondering why the camp is so peaceful."

"Blessed if I know," said De Valerie. "We haven't seen any sign of Handy this morning—Church or McClure, either. They must have got up in the wee small hours, because Goodwin awoke at six—and Handforth and Co. were missing even then!"

Pitt whistled.

"Six o'clock, eh?" he repeated. "Do you mean to say those chaps were up and doing before six? My hat! They must have been pretty energetic!"

"That's what the other fellows are saying," replied De Valerie. "In fact, it's a bit mysterious. Why the dickens should Handforth and Co. get up at such an unearthly hour? And why haven't they come back?"

"My dear fellow, it's no good asking me," said Pitt. "There's no accounting for what Handforth does. He'll get a sudden wild idea into his head, and dash off, dragging Church and McClure with him."

There was quite a deal of comment upon the disappearance of Handforth and Co., although nobody was alarmed, and there was never any suggestion of a search being made.

Handforth was so well known as a prize ass that everybody felt it rather a relief to have him out of the way for a time. Breakfast, indeed, was singularly quiet and peaceful.

By the time the meal was over a few of the fellows were beginning to think.

"I don't like the look of it," commented Pitt. "I could understand the fatheads going for an early morning jaunt, but why didn't they come back to breakfast? That's the mystery. Even Handforth isn't ass enough to miss his grub—and by this time they must be starving?"

"What time did they get up?" I inquired.

"Goodness knows," said Dick Goodwin.

"I woke up at six o'clock, and they were gone even then."

I nodded rather thoughtfully. I wasn't at all worried over the missing juniors because it was quite probable they had wandered off into the surrounding woods, and had temporarily lost themselves. They would probably arrive in time for lessons; for, of course, we were all doing our usual school work just the same as though we were at St. Frank's. Nelson Lee himself presided over us during lesson time.

The gov'nor had made one or two inquiries about the chums of Study D, but nothing was done. And when at last time for lessons drew near, a good many of us kept our eyes open for the return of the missing trio.

And then news arrived.

Handforth minor came into camp, grinning.

"They're found!" he said calmly.

"Oh!" said Pitt. "Where? I can't see 'em—"

"You will in a minute," chuckled Willy. "I wonder what the asses have been up to? They're being brought across the lake from that island."

"Being brought across!" I repeated. "Do you mean that somebody else is with them?"

"Three men," replied Willy. "Of course, my major must have been poking his silly nose into somebody else's business—and this is the result. You know what an inquisitive ass he is."

There was an immediate rush for the water's edge. And from this point of vantage we could see right across the lake and over to that wooded island, which did not look at all mysterious in the brilliant sunlight of the summer's day.

And there, sure enough, an old-fashioned rowing boat was laboriously coming across. Handforth and Co. were sitting in the stern, all of them looking towled and untidy and considerably indignant. There were some men, too—rough-looking customers with the exception of one.

This latter—the chief—was attired in a grey flannel suit and a straw hat. He was quite immaculate, in fact.

And just as the boat was drawing near, Handforth stood up and caused the boat to rock somewhat perilously.

"Rescue, you chaps!" he roared. "Collar these ruffians! They're members of a criminal gang!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd on the bank roared.

"Oh, you can yell—but I know what I'm talking about!" hooted Handforth. "We've

been kept prisoners all night—pushed into a rotten spidery shed and left there to starve!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit down, boy, you'll have the boat over in a minute!" said the chief curtly.

"And a good thing, too!" snapped Handforth. "I suppose you think you can bluff this matter out, eh? Well, you can't! I know a crook when I see one! I know—Yaroooh!"

The boat struck the bank rather more forcibly than was necessary, and Handforth naturally lost his balance. Standing up in a boat is not a very secure position. Edward Oswald sprawled forward, and was quite lucky in saving himself from slithering overboard.

The chief jumped ashore, followed by two of the other men. Handforth and Co. came last, looking much the worse for wear.

"Who is in charge here?" demanded the chief curtly.

"Mr. Lee," said Pitt. "He's coming up now—wondering what all the commotion is about, I suppose. Hallo, Handy!" added Reggie, grinning at the leader of Study D. "You look as though you've had a wild night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait," said Handforth grimly. "By George! Somebody's going to suffer!"

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"Judging by the appearance of things, old tulip, somebody has been suffering—what?" he said indignantly. "I mean to say, large supplies of dust, untidy hair, and what not! It appears that you have been in the good old wars!"

Further comment was prevented by the arrival of Nelson Lee. The well-dressed man, looking very annoyed, confronted the school-master-detective.

"Are you in charge of these boys, sir?" he demanded curtly.

"I am," said Nelson Lee.

"Then kindly permit me to tell you, sir, that I strongly object to them trespassing on my property; and I must add that your control appears to be somewhat lax."

Nelson Lee looked concerned.

"If my boys have been annoying you, I can do nothing but apologise," he said quietly. "But I can assure you that—"

"I like that!" interrupted Handforth indignantly. "These men captured us in the middle of the night, sir, and threw us into a dirty old shed! We were treated like prisoners! They're nothing but a gang of criminals—"

"One moment, Handforth," interrupted Lee. "There is no reason why you should get excited. Do I understand that you and your companions have been trespassing on this gentleman's property?"

"Of course not, sir," retorted Handforth.

"At least, we only landed on the island—"

"Oh, indeed!"

"We were exploring, sir," went on Handforth. "We—"

"Again I must interrupt you, Handforth," put in Lee. "When, may I ask, did you go on this interesting exploration trip?"

Handforth hesitated, rather taken aback.

"When, sir?" he said blankly.

"Yes."

"Why—er—last night, sir."

"After lights out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me the exact time last night."

"Why, somewhere about twelve o'clock," confessed Handforth lamely. "You see, sir, I woke up, and it was a lovely moonlight night, and I thought we'd go for a boat ride on the lake. Church and McClure came with me—naturally."

"In that case, sir, I will trouble you no further," he said, with dignity. "I accept your apology, and trust that I shall not be further bothered. I have no great aversion to boys in general, but just at the moment I desire privacy. Will you be remaining in this neighbourhood for long?"

"Possibly for three or four days, Mr.—"

"My name is Maxwell, sir—Holby Maxwell," put in the stranger. "Am I right in addressing you as Mr. Nelson Lee?"

"That's my name, Mr. Maxwell," said Nelson Lee. "I trust this little incident will not cause strained relations—for it appears that we shall be close neighbours for the next few days, at least."



There, propped up against the wall of the building, were the prisoners — Mr. Holby Maxwell and all his men.

"The poor chaps couldn't do anything else," murmured Pitt.

"This is very interesting," said Nelson Lee grimly. "So you boys had the audacity to leave the camp after midnight, to go for a ride on the lake—and, I understand, to trespass upon the island?"

"We didn't trespass, sir—"

"The island is my property, and quite private," put in the stranger.

Nelson Lee turned to him.

"I hope you will appreciate, sir, that this matter was quite beyond my own control," he said. "You will readily understand that I knew nothing of this foolish escapade, and I can only apologise once more for having caused you any annoyance. I shall give strict orders for the boys to keep away from your property."

The stranger looked somewhat mollified.

Mr. Maxwell bowed.

"I will wish you a very good morning, sir," he said politely.

"Hi! Wait a minute!" said Handforth. "What about keeping us locked up in that shed all night? You don't know what's happened, sir," he went on, turning to Nelson Lee. "We were thrown into a dirty hut—"

"Naturally, the boys are somewhat indignant," smiled Mr. Maxwell dryly. "Not wishing them to run loose over my property, and not knowing exactly from whence they came, I decided to imprison them until this morning. I considered it would be a kind of punishment, too—and I trust, Mr. Lee, that you will not be severe with them," he added, with a twinkle in his eye.

He bowed again, and returned to the boat.

Handforth looked after him blankly, and Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Apparently, Handforth, it did not take you long to get into mischief," he said severely. "I wonder why it is that you always manage to signalise our arrival on any camping-ground by annoying the neighbours?"

Handforth gasped.

"But—buz, you don't seem to understand, sir!" he said quickly. "These men are cfooks! We saw all sorts of funny things in the night. You mustn't be bluffed by that smooth-tongued bounder—"

"That will be quite sufficient, Handforth," cut in Lee. "As, apparently, the three of you were imprisoned for the night, I will not punish you further. But if you trespass upon Mr. Maxwell's property again, I shall punish you severely!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly. "And that's all the thanks I get for making some tremendous discoveries. Why, when I tell you what we saw—"

Handforth suddenly stopped, and closed his mouth like a trap.

"Well, my boy?" prompted Lee.

"Oh, nothing, sir!"

And Handforth walked off with Church and McClure, his eyes gleaming.

"Not likely!" he muttered. "If Mr. Lee hasn't got any more sense than to rag us, I'm blessed if I'm going to let on! We know all about those mysterious things in the lake, but we won't say a word! We'll carry on the investigations on our own!"

Church and McClure looked astonished.

"But we're forbidden to go on the island again," said Church.

"You—you fathead!" sneered Handforth. "What does that matter? When it comes to a real detective case, what do I care about orders? I mean to carry out these inquiries, and expose those criminals in their true colours."

Church and McClure gazed hopelessly at one another, and felt limp. Edward Oswald was impossible. And it seemed that trouble was ahead.

CHAPTER V.

STICKING TO IT.



THE Remove was thoroughly enjoying itself.

It happened to be a half-holiday that day, so everybody decided to see a bit of the wonderful country.

The weather was fine, and the glorious scenery was positively calling.

The fellows divided themselves up into little parties.

Some went exploring round the lake, others decided to go up into the hills, and there was talk of a picturesque water-fall near by. Pitt and several others set off to locate it, armed with a perfect battery of cameras.

In fact, quite a large proportion of first quality film was likely to be ruined that afternoon. Many of the juniors were shockingly ignorant about cameras.

Handforth and Co. haunted the lake. They didn't actually appear in the open, but skulked behind bushes. When they moved from one point to another, they did so in a kind of stealthy manner, like Red Indians on the warpath.

Of course, there was absolutely no necessity for this, but Handforth had his own ideas, and the voices of Church and McClure were like voices in the wilderness. Handforth took no notice whatever of their protestations.

Several times during the first hour there was an imminent peril of Church and McClure deserting. They held one or two whispered conferences, and nearly came to the point of slipping away.

But they were always halted by the thought of what might happen if they left Handforth to his own devices. They were really very fond of their leader—although nobody else in the Remove could possibly understand this. There was a certain bond of union between the three which held them closely together.

Church and McClure regarded this investigation idea as tommy-rot. But to express their thoughts in words would merely result in a deal of unnecessary violence. And to leave Handforth on his own would probably result in Edward Oswald getting himself into fearful trouble.

His chums were, therefore, in duty bound compelled to remain by his side. So they remained, but not without indignant looks. As for Handforth, he was hardly aware of the situation. All his thoughts were centred upon the island, and the mysterious Mr. Holby Maxwell.

Not that Mr. Maxwell was really mysterious—it was only Handforth's imagination that peopled the island with gangs of desperate criminals.

"Strictly speaking, I ought to have a pair of binoculars," said Handforth. "By George! That's a good idea, you know! I could climb up into some of these trees, and look right down into the enemy's camp!"

"How?" asked Church. "You'd see nothing but the fringe of trees on the island. Even binoculars can't penetrate a dense wood."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Handforth reluctantly. "Well, it's no good sticking here—this is simply wasting time."

"Glad you've realised it!" growled McClure.

"What's that?"

"I said what a brainy chap you are, Handy!"

Handforth looked suspicious.

"It didn't sound like it!" he said tartly. "But we won't argue about a trifle—my time's more valuable. Now, the only thing we can do is to make a raft!"

"A which?" said Church, staring.

"A raft!"

"What the dickens for?"

"Oh, to fly to the moon!" said Handforth sarcastically. "You—you chump! What do people usually use rafts for? We're going over to the island!"

"On a raft?"

"Yes."

Church and McClure thought of rushing away for the nearest doctor. It seemed to them that Handforth was becoming beyond control.

"The boat's gone—Mr. Lee was mean enough to hide it," went on Handforth.

"Rats! That chap Maxwell took it away with him," said Church.

"Well, anyway, it's gone!" said Handforth. "Fathead! What does it matter who took it? I never knew such chaps for quibbling over trifles! The only thing we can do is to make a raft and a pole. Then we'll punt the giddy thing across to the island."

"Oh, well, of course—just as you like!" said McClure carelessly. "Naturally, we shan't be seen—three chaps on a raft, poleing their way across the lake, would be as invisible as a speck of dust!"

Handforth stroked his chin.

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," he admitted. "I suppose we should be a bit conspicuous, shouldn't we?"

"Just a bit," said Church dryly. "What's wrong with swimming?"

Handforth started.

"I'll tell you what!" he said brilliantly. "We'll swim across!"

"Eh?"

"We'll swim!" repeated Handforth. "The idea just came to me like a flash. I bring you chaps with me, and you can't do anything except stand there like a couple of stuffed dummies! It takes me to think of everything!"

"My only hat!" said Church faintly.

"Yes, we'll go for a swim," went on Oswald, waxing enthusiastic. "If we get further along the bank, it's only a comparatively short cut across to the island—and we could do it easily. Besides, who's going to suspect us of anything if we simply go in for a swim? There'll be plenty of chaps taking a dip this afternoon, and we can nip on the island without anybody knowing it."

Church and McClure raised no objections. Church, in fact, had really spoken in sarcasm when he had suggested swimming across, never dreaming that Handforth would take him seriously. It was always dangerous to be sarcastic with Handforth.

However, the thing was decided upon now, and there could be no backing out. But both Church and McClure resolved that the swim would be rather too much for their powers.

Within fifteen minutes the trio had prepared for their swim. Taking their bathing-costumes, they selected a quiet, secluded

spot, and were soon ready. They slipped into the cool waters of the lake and struck out towards the island.

As Handforth had surmised, quite a few other fellows were bathing, too. These included Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and myself. We were taking a dip further along the lake, enjoying ourselves immensely.

"Hallo!" I said, as I caught sight of Handforth & Co. "Those fatheads seem to be striking out for the island. I'll bet Handy has got some new idea. He'll only get himself into trouble."

"Is that anything new?" asked Watson.

"Well, no!" I grinned. "But we'll keep the idiot out of mischief if we can. Come on! Let's try to cut 'em off!"

It was quite an easy matter to cut off Church and McClure, for they were swimming with apparent difficulty, and were quite a long way behind Handforth. The latter was forging ahead with powerful strokes, kicking up a terrific amount of splashing, like some swimming rhinoceros. Considering that he was supposed to be making a secret landing on the island, this method of getting there did not appear to be ideal.

"Halt!" I commanded, as we swam up. "Where's that lunatic going?"

"Oh, blow him!" said Church, easing up. "We're supposed to be with him, but we can't swim very well, you know."

"We're off colour to-day," grinned McClure.

I nodded.

"You chaps have got some sense," I said briskly. "Well, we can't allow Handy to disobey the gov'nor's orders—we shall have to go and yank him back."

And we all started swimming rapidly towards the island. Church and McClure were quite agreeable now that they were well supported. In the meantime, Handforth was just hauling himself up. He had selected a spot where the trees grew comparatively close to the bank.

In this way, he would be able to find cover at once. It never occurred to him that it might be somewhat awkward to explore the interior of the island in nothing but a bathing-costume. Details like that never worried the mighty Handforth.

But, as it happened, he did no exploring at all.

Just before he vanished into the trees he started. A series of loud hails and shouts had come from the rear.

"Hi!"

"Wait a minute, Handy!"

"Hold on, Sherlock Holmes!"

"Ease up, Sexton Blake!"

Handforth turned and glared.

"Who the dickens told you to interfere?" he roared. "Clear off! I'm going on this investigation alone. If you follow me, you'll mess up the whole thing! I'll soon be on the track of the crooks!"

And Edward Oswald, with a snort, vanished amid the trees. We were just too late to stop him.

Handforth reappeared dramatically.

About fifteen seconds elapsed, and then the amateur detective of the Remove dived into the lake. At all events, he entered the water. He appeared, struggling and roaring, in the grasp of two powerful men. Calmly, silently, they lifted him up high.

Then, with one sweep, they released him.

Splash!

Handforth descended into the lake rear foremost. And we stood looking on, highly amused. Within Church and McClure surged with a feeling of beautiful satisfaction.

"And if ye come back, ye'll get worse!" said the enemy severely.

The men turned and vanished. And Handforth had only enough breath to splutter. It rather seemed that his investigations were not to be successful.

CHAPTER VI.

STILL AT IT.



"E H? What the——"
"Ss-sssh! Not a word!" breathed Handforth mysteriously.

Church sat up in bed, blinking.

"What the dickens is the idea, Handy?" he whispered. "Everybody's asleep—the camp's all in bed. You—you don't mean to——"

Church paused, a dead weight seeming to descend upon him. An awful thought had come into his mind, and he was filled with vague alarm and indignation. Was it possible that Handforth was thinking of another night expedition?

It was late—the camp had been quiet and still for nearly two hours. And both Church and McClure had believed that they were to secure an honest night's rest. But it seemed that this was not to be.

"Don't argue!" murmured Handforth curtly. "Get dressed!"

"What?"

"Step out of bed and get your things on!"

"But look here——"

"One word of objection, my lad, and I'll pulverise you!" threatened Handforth. "We're going over to the island—and we're going to discover the truth."

Church groaned.

For a few seconds he turned the matter over in his mind. He only had to resist and Handforth would commence the grim business of slaughter. And that, of course, would arouse all the other fellows in the

caravan. And they would make certain that Handforth dropped the idea.

But would it be pally? Church had an idea that the thing would be something akin to sneaking, and he hated that. At the same time, he didn't care for the idea of the other fellows knowing anything about Handforth's insanity. A thing like this was better hushed up.

So the only possible course was to humour him.

"All right—I'll get up!" whispered Church. "But if you really mean to go over to the island, it's the dottiest thing I've ever heard of. It's getting a bit stale, Handy—it's threadbare! We shall only be collared again, and chucked in that shed until the morning."

Handforth gave a scornful laugh.

"Once bitten, twice shy!" he said grimly. "This time we shall be on our guard—and you can bet your boots we'll do the thing properly. Come on—look lively! Mac's nearly dressed."

Again that sinking sensation came to Church. He had been half-hoping that McClure would kick up the dust. But, no. McClure had come to the same conclusion as his unfortunate fellow-victim. It was better to keep a thing like this strictly dark.

Five minutes later the famous trio were outside, under the stars.

"Of course, you chaps think I'm off my rocker," said Handforth bluntly. "You needn't say so—I know it! In fact, if you do say it, I'll biff you! But I've got more sense in my little finger than you chaps have got in your whole carcasses! There's something queer happening on that island, and I'm going to find out what it is. See?"

"Yes," said Church and McClure dully.

"Don't talk as if you're dying!" snapped Handy. "It won't take us long this time—we'll be back within half an hour."

Church and McClure brightened up.

"Of course, you know best, old man," said Church. "This is your show, and, after all, we're only a pair of assistants. But how are we going to get over to the island? Swim it again?"

Handforth grunted.

"Not likely!" he replied. "I was prowling about this evening, in the dusk. I explored the banks of the lake for a good bit. And what do you think I found, tucked away in a little backwater?"

"Goodness knows!"

"A punt!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Yes, my lads—a punt! That's why I resolved on this night expedition. The punt's got a few holes in it, but that won't matter. One of you chaps can keep baling-out all the time!"

Church and McClure did not feel very enthusiastic, but they followed Handforth through the woods, until finally they emerged in a little clear space where they could dimly see the lake stretching out in front of them.

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If the rascally cousin of the late Lord Easington, Professor Mark Rymer, can destroy certain documents hidden inside the silver effigy, known as the Silver Dwarf, he will inherit his cousin's title and wealth. There is a son living by a secret marriage of the late peer, evidence of which is contained in the documents aforementioned. So far, the Silver Dwarf has eluded the clutching fingers of the unscrupulous professor. Nelson Lee, who is determined to frustrate Rymer's evil designs, is also in quest of the effigy. Owing to a fire at the late peer's house, the effigy is lost. News comes of its having been taken to Paris, and thither Rymer proceeds, followed by Nelson Lee on his heels. The professor learns that Nelson Lee will arrive in Paris by the 3.55 train.

(Now read on.)

FIVE minutes later Rymer stood in the Cafe Napoleon.

"Which is Monsieur Delafosse?" he asked, addressing one of the waiters.

The waiter pointed to a fat, prosperous looking individual who was lunching alone at one of the small side tables. The professor hurried across to him and raised his hat.

"Monsieur Delafosse, I believe?" he said. "I have been directed here by your assistant. When you were in Falmouth last week you were induced to purchase a small silver statuette, fashioned in the shape of a dwarf. You were told, I believe, that it had been picked up in the road. As a matter of fact, it had been stolen, and I am trying to recover it. Your assistant informs me that you have sold it. Is that true?"

"Perfectly," said the silversmith. "I sold it no later than yesterday afternoon to a Spanish nobleman named Don Jose de Vadillo."

"Is Don Jose now in Paris?"

"No; he has been here for the past few weeks, but he left for Madrid this morning."

"Does he live in Madrid?"

"Oh, no; his home is in the extreme south of Spain, in the mountainous region between Algeciras and San Roque."

"Is that where he has gone now?"

"Yes."

"Can you give me his exact address?"

The silversmith drew out a pocket-book, and turned over one or two pages.

"Ah, here it is!" he exclaimed at last.

"Don Jose de Vadillo, Torre Eperanza, Province of Cadiz, Spain."

The professor copied the address into his own pocket-book, thanked the silversmith for his information, and once more sallied forth into the fog-enshrouded streets.

"Twenty minutes past one," he muttered, glancing at his watch. "I haven't too much time. Luckily, Laroche's place is close at hand."

He turned up a narrow side-street, threaded his way through a labyrinth of squalid courts and alleys, and finally entered a low, disreputable-looking cafe.

A man was lying half-asleep on a low wooden bench in front of a charcoal stove.

He sprang to his feet when Mark Rymer entered the room, and greeted him with a cry of mingled welcome and surprise.

"Mon Dieu, it is the professor!" he cried. "And I did not even know thou wast in Paris. Hast thou been here long?"

"I arrived but a couple of hours ago," said the professor. "I am in need of thy help, Laroche—in greater need than when last I sought thy aid."

"What is thy need?" asked Laroche, closing the door, and waving him to a seat. "If the pay be as good as it was before, thou hast only to tell me what thou wishest done, and, behold, it is already accomplished."

The professor lowered his voice.

"I have come to Paris," he said, "in search of a silver statuette which is known as the Silver Dwarf, and which contains important documents worth thousands a year to me. I have just learnt that it has been sold to a Spanish nobleman, who is now on his way to the south of Spain. There is only one through-train a day from here to Madrid, so that I cannot follow him until to-morrow morning. Nelson Lee—"

"The detective?" gasped Laroche.

The professor nodded his head.

"Nelson Lee is also on the track of the Silver Dwarf," he said. "He will be in Paris at four o'clock this afternoon, and unless I can prevent him, he will find out what has become of the thing, and will start for Spain by the same train as myself to-morrow morning."

Laroche grinned.

"I understand!" he said. "It is thy intention to prevent the accursed detective discovering what has become of the Silver Dwarf!"

"Not only that," said the professor. "I want to put a stop for ever to his meddling interference!"

"Hast thou a plan?"

The professor bent his head and whispered something in Laroche's ear.

The Frenchman nodded.

"I know the very house for thy purpose," he said. "It is in the Avenue Boulanger. It has been empty these seven months."

Again the professor whispered, and again the Frenchman nodded his head.

"It will be quite easy!" he said.

From his pocket the professor took out a fountain-pen and one of the sheets of note-paper he had stolen from the silversmith's shop. Upon the sheet he rapidly wrote a letter, which he enclosed in an envelope, and, having addressed it, handed it to Laroche.

"Thou hast served me well before," he said. "Serve me well again, and great shall be thy reward. I now return to the Hotel de la Republique, opposite the station of St. Lazare. Report to me there at seven o'clock to-night. Meanwhile, take this as an earnest of what is to come to you if things go well."

He flung a handful of silver coins upon the table; then, without another word, he passed through the door, and was quickly swallowed up in the fog of the street.

THE DECOY LETTER.

THE train was late, and it was a quarter-past four when Nelson Lee reached Paris. As he stepped out of the train, a man in coachman's livery accosted him.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, touching his hat. "Is it not that you are Monsieur Nelson Lee?"

"I am," said the detective, in surprise. "Who are you?"

"I am the coachman of Monsieur Delafosse," replied the man, producing a letter from his pocket. "My master bade me meet you at the station, and give you this."

He handed the letter to Nelson Lee, who broke the seal, and read as follows:

"73, Boulevard de St. Germain,
Paris.

"Dear Sir,—It would be waste of your time to come to see me, as the silver statuette to which you refer is no longer in my possession. I had already sold it when your telegram arrived, and it is now in the possession of General Montrouge, 95, Avenue Boulanger. I have seen the general this afternoon, and he permits me to say that he will be pleased to accord you an interview at his house between the hours of four and five to-day. At five o'clock he departs from Paris en route for Algiers. I have, therefore, done myself the honour of sending my carriage to meet you at the station, in order to drive you to the Avenue Boulanger first, and afterwards to your hotel.

"Accept, monsieur, etc.,

"JULES DELAFOSSE.

P.S.—A gentleman called here about one o'clock, and asked if I was the man who had purchased a statuette from a fisherman in Falmouth. In accordance with your instructions, I refused to give him any information whatever.—J. D."

This letter, as the reader has doubtless

guessed, was one the professor had written on the stolen sheet of paper in Laroche's cafe. The coachman was Laroche himself, and the carriage had been hired for the occasion. The detective, however, knew nothing of this, and his only thought was one of gratitude to the genial silversmith, who—as he supposed—had taken all this trouble to facilitate his inquiries.

"He's a brick!" he muttered to himself, as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "I must call upon him before I leave Paris, and thank him for his kindness."

They left the station, and the detective took his seat in an open four-wheeled carriage, something like a "growler" with the hood thrown back. Laroche took his seat on the box in front, and a moment later they were rumbling through the almost deserted streets on their way to the Avenue Boulanger.

After half an hour's drive the carriage passed through an open gateway, and entered the private grounds of a large and important-looking house.

"Is this the general's house?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Laroche, without turning his head.

The detective wrinkled his brow. Owing to the fog he could see little of the house but a dark, blurred mass at the end of the drive, but the little he saw was enough to excite his suspicions.

"But—but the house appears to be empty!" he said, half-rising to his feet.

The words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Laroche pulled up, spun round on the box, and levelled a revolver at his head; whilst at the same time a couple of men sprang out of the fog—one on each side of the carriage—each of them armed with a knife!

One second's hesitation and the detective's fate would have been sealed. But with lightning like rapidity he struck up Laroche's arm. The Frenchman's finger had already begun to press the trigger of his revolver, and even as his arm flew up the trigger came down, the air was rent by a loud report, and a bullet shot upwards in an almost vertical direction.

In the meantime Laroche's two accomplices had leaped upon the carriage steps, but ere they could bring their knives into play the horse, startled by the report of the revolver, suddenly bounded forward, and bolted up the drive at a breakneck gallop.

The effect was electrical, Laroche, who was standing on the box, was flung off his feet, and fell floundering into the body of the carriage, knocking Nelson Lee backwards into the rearmost seat.

One of his accomplices was jerked off the step, and was left behind, lying on his back in the middle of the drive. The other likewise lost his foothold on the step, but managed to save himself from falling by dropping his knife and clinging with both hands to the top of the carriage door.

With a howl of pain the fellow loosened

his hold, and dropped back into the drive. By that time, however, Laroche had regained his scattered wits, and before Nelson Lee was aware of what was happening he was seized by the throat and forced back into the seat.

The next instant the horse pulled up almost as suddenly as it had bolted, whilst at the same moment the two men who had been left behind leaped to their feet, snatched up their knives, and flew to their comrade's assistance.

The detective heard them coming, and nerved himself for a final effort. He had lost his revolver in the sea, when Mark Rymer had hurled him overboard, so that he had only his fists wherewith to defend himself.

Clenching them, he dashed them in Laroche's face with all the strength at his command. Laroche relaxed his grip for one brief instant, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective seized him round the waist and hurled him bodily out of the carriage.

Half-stunned though he was, the Frenchman scrambled to his feet, and whipped out a second revolver. By that time, however, the detective had leaped out of the carriage, and was tearing across the grounds with the fleetness of a hunted hare.

Two bullets in quick succession flew harmlessly over his head, and a moment later, with a parting shout of derision, he vaulted over a low stone wall and vanished in the fog.

SOLD AGAIN!

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later the detective stood in Jules Delafosse's shop in the Boulevard de St. Germain.

"Monsieur Delafosse?" he asked, addressing a fat and prosperous-looking Frenchman behind the counter.

The Frenchman bowed.

"My name is Nelson Lee," said the detective. "I wired to you this morning, from Rouen—"

"Pardon!" said the silversmith, interrupting him. "Monsieur is mistaking me for someone else! I have never received any wire from you, either to-day or any other day."

"You are Jules Delafosse?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I wired you from Rouen, on my way to Paris, asking you if you were the man who had recently bought a small statuette from a fisherman in Falmouth. When I arrived in Paris an hour and a half ago, I was met at the station by a man who represented himself as your coachman, who handed me a letter, signed with your name, in which you stated you had sold the statuette to General Montrouge, and had sent your carriage to drive me to the general's house in the Avenue Boulanger—"

"It is false—infamously false!" cried the silversmith indignantly. "I never received your wire, and I never wrote any such letter as you describe! Show me the letter!"

The detective drew the letter from his pocket and handed it across the counter. The silversmith unfolded it, glanced at it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is a joke, I presume?" he said, somewhat stiffly.

"It is a joke which has well-nigh cost me my life!" said Nelson Lee. "Believing that letter to be genuine, I allowed the man to drive me to an empty house in the Avenue Boulanger, where I was set upon by armed ruffians, from whom I only just managed to escape by the skin of my teeth."

"But—but I do not understand," said the silversmith. "Did you not say that the man who met you at the station gave you a letter?"

"Yes; that letter you hold in your hand."

"But this is not a letter; it is merely a blank sheet of paper!"

"What!"

The detective snatched the letter from the silversmith's hand, and stared at it with an air of mingled stupefaction and chagrin. Jules Delafosse was perfectly right. Except for the printed heading, the sheet was blank. In other words, the letter had been written in what is known as "vanishing ink," and every scrap of writing had absolutely disappeared.

For a second or two the detective was lost in a maze of bewildered conjecture. Then a dim suspicion of the truth began to steal into his mind.

"My telegram was despatched from Rouen a few minutes after twelve o'clock," he said. "It would be delivered at your shop, in all probability, between a quarter to one and one. Were you here at that time?"

"I was here until about five minutes to one," replied the silversmith. "I then went to take my lunch at the Cafe Napoleon."

"Did you lock the shop up when you went to lunch?"

"No. I left the shop in charge of my assistant."

"Then if the telegram arrived whilst you were at lunch it would be delivered to your assistant?"

"Yes."

"Can I see him?"

"Alas, no! He died, or committed suicide, whilst I was away at my lunch."

The detective started. He was more than ever convinced now that his suspicion was correct. Before he could make any comment, however, the silversmith resumed:

"You say that you wired to me from Rouen with respect to a silver statuette," he said. "I have already told you that I never received your wire; but whilst I was taking my lunch, about a quarter-past one, a gentleman came into the cafe and asked me the very same question that you appear to have asked in your telegram. That is to say, he asked me if I was the Monsieur Delafosse who had bought the statuette from a Pal-mouth fisherman named Pennock. I told him—"

"One moment," said the detective, interrupting him. "How did this gentleman know you were at the Cafe Napoleon?"

"He had been to my shop, and my assistant had told him where I was."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "That is precisely what I expected! What was the gentleman like?"

The silversmith described him, and the detective's suspicion became a certainty. The description was that of Professor Mark Rymer.

"I told him," continued the silversmith, "that it was I who had purchased the statuette, but that I had sold it yesterday afternoon to a Spanish nobleman named Don Jose de Vadillo, who had been staying in Paris, but who left this morning for Madrid, on his way to his home in the south of Spain."

"Can you give me Don Jose's address?" asked Nelson Lee.

"That is precisely the question your countryman asked," said Monsieur Delafosse. "I told him that Don Jose lived in the mountainous region between Algereiras and San Roque, in the extreme south of Spain, and that his postal address was 'Don Jose de Vadillo, Torre Esperanza, Province of Cadiz.'"

"I must wire to him at once," muttered Nelson Lee, as he entered the address in his notebook.

"Pardon me," said the silversmith. "You are anxious to recover this silver statuette, I presume?"

"Certainly!" said Nelson Lee.

"And for that purpose you intend to follow Don Jose to the south of Spain?"

"Of course, I shall leave for Algereiras by the Madrid express at eleven-thirty-two to-morrow morning. In the meantime I shall wire to Don Jose and ask him not to part with the statuette on any pretext whatever until I have seen him."

"You will address your wire to the Torre Esperanza?"

"Yes."

"Then it will be useless."

"Why?"

"Don Jose informed me that he was not going straight home, but was going to break his journey at some place, whose name I have forgotten, in order to be present at the wedding of a friend. So if you leave Paris to-morrow morning, and go straight through to Algereiras, you will probably arrive at the Torre Esperanza before Don Jose, and will find your telegram waiting there."

"I will wire, all the same," said Nelson Lee. "Did you tell all this to the gentleman who came to see you at the Cafe Napoleon?"

"No. As soon as I had given him the name and address of the nobleman who had bought the statuette he thanked me and hurried away. Subsequently I returned to my shop and found that the door was locked. I burst it open, and discovered to my dismay that my assistant was lying dead on the

floor. I communicated with the police, and the body was removed to the mortuary."

Having thanked the silversmith, Lee sent off a wire to Don Jose de Vadillo, made inquiries about his telegram from Rouen to Monsieur Delafosse, and found that it had been delivered at the silversmith's shop a few minutes after one o'clock. He asked to see the boy who had delivered it.

"To whom did you give the telegram?" he asked.

"To Monsieur Delafosse's assistant," replied the youth.

"Was there anybody else in the shop at the time?"

Silver Dwarf. He related his adventures in the Avenue Boulanger, and described his interview with Monsieur Delafosse, and his visit to the telegraph-office.

"Now, my theory is this," he said, in conclusion: "Rymer murdered Delafosse's assistant, and robbed him of my telegram. He stole a sheet of the silversmith's notepaper, and wrote the letter which was handed to me at the station. He then arranged that pretty little plot for luring me to the empty house in the Avenue Boulanger. He is now somewhere in Paris, waiting for the news of my death, and to-morrow morning at 11.32 he will start for Spain in pursuit of Don Jose de Vadillo."

"I have not the slightest doubt that what



The detective dropped the reins on his horse's neck, held up his hands and slowly rode forward. The three rifles still continued to point menacingly at his head.

"Yes, monsieur. There was a foreign-looking gentleman, not so tall as monsieur, with a very big head, and a nose like the beak of a parrot."

Again the description was that of the professor.

Half an hour later the detective was shaking hands with the genial prefect of the Parisian police in his cosy private office in the Boulevard du Palais. He told the prefect of Lord Easington's dying confession, and of the subsequent race between himself and Mark Rymer for the possession of the

you say is perfectly true," said the prefect.

"At the same time, from the description of Mark Rymer, I very much fear that he will have covered up his tracks, as you English say, and that we shall be unable to find any evidence to convict him of the crime of which you accuse him."

"I'm sure you won't," said Nelson Lee. "Mark Rymer is far too clever to leave any clues behind him! Oh, no! You will never convict Mark Rymer of any crime; but that need not prevent you detaining him for inquiries, need it? He was

the last person, so far as is known, to see the assistant alive, and that fact alone gives you every right to call him as a witness at the judicial inquiry."

The prefect's eyes began to twinkle.

"I see the idea!" he said. "You start for Spain in the morning, in pursuit of the Silver Dwarf. Unless we interfere, Mark Rymer will start at the same time as yourself; so you want us to keep him in Paris for twenty-four hours so as to give you a clear day's start."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "Will you do it?"

"I will," said the prefect readily. "I would go to greater lengths than that in order to assist so distinguished a colleague."

He touched a bell, and a gendarme appeared.

"Professor Mark Rymer arrived in Paris by the Havre express this morning," said the prefect. "Find out for me at which hotel he is staying."

The gendarme saluted and withdrew.

"I wonder that you English have never adopted our system of hotel registers," said the prefect, turning to Nelson Lee again.

"As you know, every traveller who arrives at an hotel in France is compelled to enter his name, and his profession, and where he comes from, in a book specially provided for the purpose. These entries are copied out and sent to the headquarters of the police every night at seven o'clock. That gendarme will simply have to go and look at—"

Whilst he was still speaking the gendarme returned.

"Monsieur Rymer is staying at the Hotel de la Republique, opposite the station of St. Lazare," he said.

"Good!" said the prefect. "Make out the necessary document, and serve him with a notice that he is to attend at the judicial inquiry on the body of Monsieur Delafosse's assistant at half-past two to-morrow afternoon. Set a watch upon the hotel, and also upon the railway-stations, and if he should attempt to leave the city before the inquiry, arrest him, and detain him in custody."

The gendarme saluted and retired.

"Does that meet your wishes?" asked the prefect.

"Perfectly," said Nelson Lee.

And, after thanking the prefect for his ready help, the detective left the building.

CAPTURED BY BRIGANDS.

AT half-past eleven the following morning Nelson Lee left Paris, and started on his three-days' railway journey to the south of Spain. There is no need to describe his journey in detail, as it was devoid of incident of any kind. Suffice to say that at noon he arrived at Algeciras, where he promptly made his way to the British vice-consulate.

"Do you happen to know Don Jose de Vadillo?" he asked, after the customary greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh, yes!" said the vice-consul. "I dined with him last night!"

"Then he has returned?"

"Yes. He arrived here yesterday. But why do you ask? Surely he isn't 'wanted' for anything?"

"Oh, dear no!" said Nelson Lee, with a laugh. "He has merely been guilty of buying a silver statuette which I want to buy back from him."

"A statuette fashioned in the form of a dwarf?"

"Yes. Have you seen it?"

Don Jose showed it to me at his hotel last night."

The detective positively beamed.

"Where is Don Jose staying?" he asked.

"Oh, he isn't in Algeciras now, you know," said the vice-consul. "He only spent the night here, and left for the Torre Esperanza at ten o'clock this morning."

"Torre Esperanza is the name of the house, I presume?"

"Of course."

"Where is it?"

"Away in the mountains, about thirty-five miles from here."

"How is he travelling?"

"He himself is on horseback. His three servants and the baggage are on mules."

"And he started from Algeciras, you say, at ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Then, if I procure a horse and guide, there's a fair chance that I may be able to overtake him before he reaches home?"

"Certainly."

"Can you find me a trustworthy guide?"

"Half a dozen, if you need them."

"And provide me with a horse?"

"Yes; and with lunch as well."

"Thanks! I'll have the horse, but not the lunch. I want to start in pursuit of Don Jose at the earliest possible moment."

The vice-consul rang for his man.

"Do you know where Pedro Guardiola lives?" he asked.

"Yes, senor," replied the servant.

"Then go to his house at once, and tell him I have a friend here who is about to start for the Torre Esperanza, and I wish him to act as guide. Say to him that he is to bring his own mule, and is to be ready to start in a quarter of an hour."

The servant departed, and the vice-consul conducted Nelson Lee to his stables, where he offered him the choice of a couple of thoroughbred horses. The detective chose a speedy-looking bay, and almost before they had finished saddling him the servant returned with Pedro Guardiola.

Five minutes later the detective and his guide rode out of the consulate grounds, and started on their journey.

For the first five miles their route lay through smiling fields and vineyards; but after that the country grew wilder and more desolate at every step.

By the time they had covered twelve miles they had left all trace of civilisation behind

them, and were surrounded on every side by barren mountain peaks, interspersed with rugged ravines and narrow, rocky gorges.

Another hour passed, then the detective turned to his guide.

"It is now half-past three," he said. "We ought to see some sign of them soon, oughtn't—"

His sentence ended in a shout of surprised delight, for even whilst he was speaking they rode round a turn in the winding mountain-road, and there, not thirty yards in front of them, were the men they were following.

Don Jose de Vadillo, mounted on a milk-white horse, was riding at the head of his little cavalcade. Behind him were half a dozen mules, three of them laden with baggage, and the other three carrying his servants, who were all armed with rifles, slung over their shoulders.

Upon hearing the detective's shout Don Jose swiftly wheeled round, and shouted out an order to his servants. In the twinkling of an eye the three men sprang off their mules, and drew them across the road, so as to form a kind of barricade. At the same instant Don Jose dismounted, and whipped out a revolver. There was another short, sharp order, and the next moment, to the detective's bewilderment, he found himself covered by three rifles and a revolver.

"Halt, or we fire!" cried Don Jose.

The detective pulled up, and turned to his guide for an explanation.

"Have no fear, senor," said the guide. "They mistake us for brigands, that's all. Hold up your hands and ride forward, and all will be well."

The detective dropped the reins on his horse's neck, held up his hands, and slowly rode forward. The guide remained behind. The three rifles still continued to point menacingly at his head.

"Halt!" cried Don Jose again. "Who are you?"

"I am Nelson Lee," began the detective; and no sooner had he mentioned his name than Don Jose lowered his revolver and hurried forward to meet him.

Don Jose signed to his servants, who silently lowered their rifles.

"I trust you will forgive us for receiving you in this somewhat startling fashion," he said, turning to the detective. "The fact of the matter is that these mountains are infested by a rascally band of brigands under the leadership of the notorious Javier Lopez, otherwise known as 'La Navaja,' from his frequent use of the favourite Spanish weapon.

"No less than four separate parties of travellers have been waylaid and plundered by these ruffians at this very spot within the last three months. Consequently, when I heard your shout, and saw you ride round the corner, I mistook you for the advance-guard of La Navaja's band. May I ask if you are travelling far?"

"I hope not," said the detective, with a

smile. "In fact, I trust I have now reached the end of my journey. Let me explain.

"When you were in Paris, a few days ago, you purchased from Monsieur Delafosse, in the Boulevard de St. Germain, a small silver statuette, fashioned in the shape of a dwarf. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly," said Don Jose. "I went to Monsieur Delafosse's shop in order to purchase a wedding present for a friend, whose marriage I attended yesterday at Cordova. In the shop I saw the silver statuette, and, being struck by its quaint design, bought it for one hundred francs."

"Is it still in your possession?"

"Certainly—it is amongst my baggage there. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have every reason to believe that the statuette is hollow, and that within its interior are concealed some highly important documents.

"The Silver Dwarf—as the statuette is called—was stolen from the Cornish residence of the late Lord Easington. But it was dropped by the thief, and afterwards picked up by a Falmouth fisherman, who sold it to Monsieur Delafosse. I traced it from Falmouth to Paris, and from Paris to here. You will, therefore, understand what I meant when I said just now that I hoped my journey was at an end."

"Oh, yes, I see. You wish me to give you the statuette?"

"I wish you to sell it to me if you will," said Nelson Lee. "You gave one hundred francs for the thing, and it is not right that you should lose your money. Will you take that sum for it?"

Don Jose readily assented, and, turning to one of his servants, pointed to one of the pack-mules.

"Unstrap that box," he said.

The servant obeyed, and laid the box on the ground at Don Jose's feet. Don Jose drew out a bunch of keys; but, even as he stooped to insert the key in the key-hole, a rifle-shot rang out, and one of the servants threw up his arms, and pitched forwards on his face.

(To be continued.)

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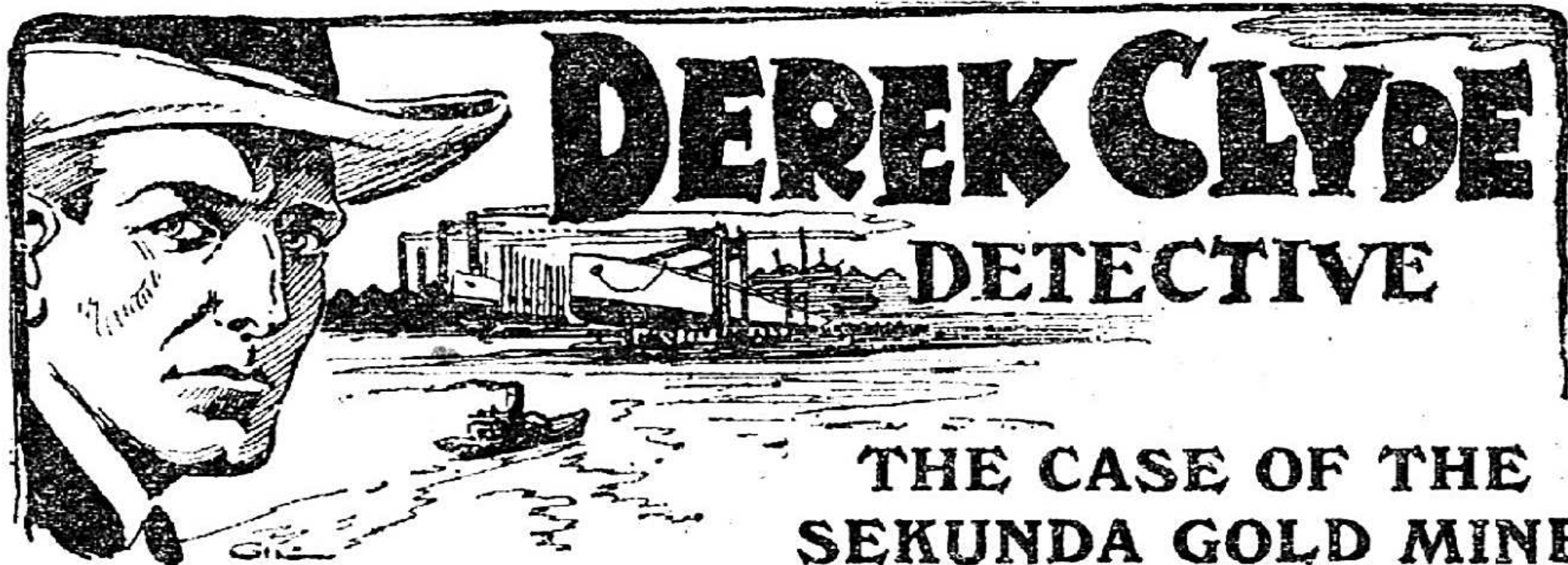
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THE MISSING LETTER.

IT was not quite nine o'clock when Derek Clyde, who had been sent for by Inspector Murdoch, arrived at Park Mansions, Glasgow, and went upstairs to the flat where a tragedy had occurred. John Mayfield was stretched unconscious in a couch in the sitting-room, his head swathed in bandages; and the inspector, who had been here for some little time, was talking to Dr. Elder and the hall-porter.

"Is he dead?" asked Clyde as he stepped in.

"No; he is alive," Murdoch replied. "He has been shot in the head. The bullet entered at the side, and passed out at the front."

"It is a serious wound, but I don't think it will prove fatal," said Dr. Elder, in answer to a question from the detective. "In my opinion he has a strong chance of recovery. I am glad you have come, Mr. Clyde, for I imagine that it is a case for your skill."

Clyde's gaze had been wandering about the room. He now listened to William Ferris, who briefly related what little he knew. Mr. Mayfield had been absent over the week-end, as he usually was. On the Saturday morning he had gone to visit his mother and sister, who lived at the Pines, a place in the country a few miles to the north of the city.

"I wasn't aware that he had returned," the porter continued. "I was on the floor above when I was alarmed by the report of a revolver. I hurried down here as fast as I could. Both doors were open, and Mr. Mayfield was lying on that rug there, bleeding from the head. I noticed three letters on the floor in the hall, and then I hastened downstairs and out of the building."

"I stopped to speak to a constable, and went on to Dr. Elder's place. He couldn't

come at once, and I returned without him. I had sent the constable up here, and he left when he learned that I hadn't telephoned the police office, as I had meant to do. While I was waiting for the doctor, Tom Lambert, the postman, came back with a newspaper which he had forgotten to deliver to a gentleman in another flat."

"I was standing in the open doorway as he passed, and I had a few words with him. The three letters for Mr. Mayfield were still lying on the floor in the hall. Lambert glanced at them, and said he was positive that he had put four letters through the slit in the door. But the fourth letter was missing, and it couldn't be found anywhere. It wasn't in any of Mr. Mayfield's pockets, so it looks as if it had been carried off by the man who shot him."

This was the point on which Inspector Murdoch laid stress. The statement had been previously made to him, and it had led him to think that the case hinged on the missing letter. He glanced at the detective, and nodded significantly.

"That's all I can tell you," William Ferris resumed. "Perhaps you would like to talk to Lambert?"

"That may not be necessary," said Clyde, whose interest had been roused. "Was the postman quite sure that he left four letters for Mr. Mayfield?"

"He was positive of it, sir."

"Did he observe the missing letter closely, I wonder? Would he be able to recall the postmark?"

"No, he couldn't remember what that was. But he said there was a foreign stamp on the letter."

"A foreign stamp? Of what country?"

"He didn't know, sir."

Clyde briefly considered the situation. He had a problem to solve, and he was satisfied that he would not get any more information here. He had a short conversation

with Dr. Elder, who stated that he would have the injured man removed to a hospital, and then he and Inspector Murdoch departed. They passed out of the building, squeezed through a curious crowd that had assembled, and drove off in a cab.

CLYDE'S NARROW ESCAPE.

CLYDE did not waste any time. At a few minutes past ten o'clock, after a swift run of ten or eleven miles to the north of the city, he stepped from his car in front of a detached dwelling that stood in spacious grounds. A servant admitted him. He asked for Miss Mayfield, and was shown into a sitting-room, where he was shortly joined by a slim and pretty young lady, who was perhaps twenty-five years of age. She had the detective's card in her hand, and she looked at him anxiously.

"I—I trust there is nothing wrong?" she faltered.

Clyde had a painful duty to perform. Having gently broken the news, he told the young lady in a few words what had occurred, and then hastily reassured her.

"It is not a dangerous wound," he said. "Your brother will get well. That is Dr. Elder's opinion, and I have no doubt he is right."

Janet Mayfield did not swoon, though she was near to it. She turned very pale, and her eyes filled with tears.

"My poor brother!" she sobbed. "You are sure he will recover? If he should die it will kill my mother! She is in ill-health, and she will be terribly distressed to hear that—"

"You had better not tell her for the present," Clyde interrupted.

"No, no, I won't. Fortunately, she is not at home. She has gone to call on a neighbour."

"Well, Miss Mayfield, it may be in your power to help me. That is one reason why I have come to see if you can throw any light on the mystery."

"I can't, Mr. Clyde. It is impossible. I have no idea who could have shot poor John."

"Yet I think you can give me a clue," said Clyde. "I have told you that the postman brought four letters this morning for your brother just before he arrived. He remembered that one of the letters bore a foreign stamp, and that letter has disappeared. It was certainly stolen by the man who got into the flat, and he was there for that purpose—waiting until the letter should be delivered. What correspondent could your brother have had abroad?"

"Only one that I know of," Janet Mayfield replied.

"And who is that?"

"The man to whom I am engaged to be married. He is a mining engineer, of London, and his name is Ewan Brett. He is an intimate friend of John's, and he has

been writing to him. He has been out in Southern Nigeria for some months.

"Why did he go there?"

"He was sent by a financial company in London to report on the value of the Sekunda Gold Mine, of which you may have heard."

Clyde nodded.

"Have you recently had a letter yourself from Mr. Brett?" he went on.

"Not for three weeks or more," Janet Mayfield answered.

"Has he been in the habit of writing to you more frequently than that?"

"Yes, I have been having a letter from him nearly every week. But I dare say he has been too busy to write."

Clyde was silent for a few seconds, his brows knit in perplexity. He had read of the Sekunda Gold Mine, which was owned by David Openshaw, of Commerce Chambers, Basinghall Street.

Only a day or so ago his attention had been drawn to a glowing prospectus of it in a London paper, stating that a most favourable report had been received from Ewan Brett, the mining expert, and that the shares were on the point of being issued to the public. There was food for thought in all this, and of a sudden a theory of a startling nature flashed upon the detective. He was sure that he had a clue to the mystery.

"I will go now, Miss Mayfield," he said. "Don't worry about your brother. He will have the best of care at the hospital."

Clyde did not stay long. He went spinning back to Glasgow as quickly as he could, and when he had paid a visit to his chambers, and packed a bag, he drove round to the Central Police Office. Inspector Murdoch was there. A constable fetched him out to the pavement, and Clyde briefly told him what had happened.

"I'm off, Murdoch," he added, as he started the car. "You will hear some news from me to-morrow. And meanwhile I would advise you to read the prospectus of the Sekunda Gold mine."

A SINISTER CONSPIRACY.

THE train which Derek Clyde caught at Carlisle, shortly after two o'clock that afternoon, reached St. Pancras between nine and ten o'clock.

Leaving the terminus at once, he hailed a cab, and was driven towards the City. But the vehicle collided with a dray before he had gone very far, and he had wasted minutes by the time he had resumed his ride in another cab.

He left it in Cheapside, and walked round to Commerce Chambers, in Basinghall Street. The hall floor was open, late though the hour was. Clyde hesitated, and then he glided upstairs to the first floor, and paused at a glass-topped door, on which the letters "Sekunda Gold Mine" were painted. The door was open to the width of several inches, and he could see through a lighted

office to the door of an inner room, where also a light was burning.

There was probably someone in there, he reflected, and, on the chance of listening to a conversation, he ventured to slip into the office. He crept warily towards the other door, and he had got half-way to it when he heard approaching footsteps. He had no time to retreat, and on the spur of the moment he darted to a closet to one side of him, and took refuge there, pulling the door shut behind him.

He had hardly more than done so when somebody entered the room from the hall. Clyde peered from a crevice, and saw a portly, middle-aged man with iron-grey whiskers and a moustache. The gentleman was obviously Mr. David Openshaw. He sat down to his desk, and a few minutes later another man came in. He was some years younger, and was tall and clean-shaven. He closed and locked the outer door, and stepped forward.

"Well, Openshaw, here I am," he said, in an agitated voice.

David Openshaw stared at him with an expression of relief, and rose from his chair.

"I am glad to see you," he replied. "I've been worried. You've done a stupid thing, Jordan. How the devil did you come to bungle things? There is an account of the Glasgow affair in the London papers this afternoon. I was afraid you had been caught."

"No fear!" replied the other. "I was too sharp for that. I had a close shave, though. Mayfield returned sooner than I had expected, and took me by surprise. It was his own fault that he was shot."

"And what of the letter? Did you get it?"

"Yes, of course I did."

"Where is it? Give it to me."

"I destroyed it. I was afraid to keep it in my possession. But I read it first, and it was just as we supposed. Ewan Brett wrote to Mayfield blowing the whole game. And now I have more to tell you. That Scottish detective, Clyde, had the case in hand. I was in the crowd on the pavement when he came out of Park Chambers with a police inspector, and I recognised him at once, as I had seen him before."

"And now we'll be off. There is work to be done, as you know, and not too much time to spare. Brett arrives at Southampton by the steamer Biscayan, and we'll have to catch it over to Waterloo to catch the train."

"And what are we to do at Southampton, Openshaw?"

"I've told you before, Jordan. If we can contrive to get into the same compartment with Brett, and have it to ourselves, we'll drug him and throw him off the train. It'll look like an accident. If we don't get the chance we'll wait until we reach London,

and shadow him from the station. Risk or no risk, it is necessary that we should—"

David Openshaw paused abruptly with a startled gasp. Clyde had been leaning against the closet door, and it had yielded to his weight and burst open. He staggered out into the room, to the terror and consternation of the two men.

"By heavens, it's that cursed Glasgow detective!" cried Wilfred Jordan.

Clyde was armed, but he had no opportunity of drawing his revolver. The men sprang at him, one of them dealing him a blow that sent him reeling, and before he had recovered himself his assailants were upon him. Muscular hands were at his throat, and he was unable to shout for help. He fought hard, but after a brief and desperate struggle he was overpowered and borne to the floor. In falling he struck his head with great force. His senses swam, and he remembered nothing more.

A FORTUNATE MEETING.

WHEN Clyde regained consciousness, and recalled what had happened to him, he was bound and gagged, and was stretched on a couch.

By a dim light that was burning he saw that he was in a small room which must be the inner one of the two offices. He had not been insensible very long. He was sure of that. He realised that his life would not be spared if he should be still here in the morning, and that knowledge, and the desire to save Ewan Brett from the fate that threatened him, bade him make strenuous efforts to escape.

At length an inspiration occurred to him, and he wondered that he had not thought of it before. Having slid off the couch, he rolled and wriggled over the floor until he was within reach of the door, when he lifted his fettered ankles, and kicked on the panels with all his strength. He kept this up for some minutes, and he was in despair when he heard steps, and a voice calling.

He had attracted attention. He kicked the harder, and presently there was a shattering noise in the outer room. A moment later the door of the inner office was unlocked and opened, and a constable looked in, flashing the glow of his lantern on the helpless detective.

"Hallo, what's this?" he exclaimed. "How did you get in such a fix, sir?"

He hastily released Clyde, who gave his rescuer a brief explanation and handed his card to him. Then he sped down the stairs, and out of the building to the street; and he had no more than got to the pavement when he ran into Inspector Harkness of Scotland Yard, and a tall, bronzed young man with a fair moustache.

"Clyde!" ejaculated the inspector. "What are you doing here?"

"I've been having a bad time of it," Clyde panted. "That scoundrel Openshaw

and his accomplice Jordan! But I can't stop to talk to you! There is a man in danger! Danger of his life! I must send a telegram to the steamer *Biscayan* at Southampton, warning a passenger of the name of Brett."

"Brett!" cried Inspector Harkness. "This is the very man!"

"No, Ewan Brett, the mining-engineer?"

"Yes, that's quite right. He has been to Scotland Yard with his story, and he brought me here to arrest David Openshaw."

Clyde turned in bewilderment to the young man.

CORNERED.

IT was not until nine o'clock the next morning that David Openshaw and Wilfred Jordan returned from Southampton. They stepped from a train at Waterloo, looking very crestfallen and depressed; and when they had left the platform, and passed out to the roadway, they were suddenly surrounded and seized by half a dozen men, including Derek Clyde and Inspector Harkness, and Ewan Brett.

The two rogues were speechless, dumb with terror, at the sight of Clyde and the young engineer. They knew that the game



Before he could recover himself his assailants were upon him. Muscular hands were on his throat, and he was unable to shout for help.

"Didn't you sail from Nigeria by the *Biscayan*?" he asked.

"I did, sir, but I changed to another vessel," Ewan Brett replied. "I reached Southampton this afternoon, and got to town this evening."

Clyde drew a deep breath. "Come, Harkness, we will go up to the offices of the Sekunda Gold Mine, and have a talk," he said. "I have a lot to tell you. I am very glad that you have eluded the trap which has been set for you, Mr. Brett. As for those two villains, Openshaw and Jordan, there is a very unpleasant surprise in store for them."

was up, and their resistance was as feeble as it was futile.

The whole party were driven in a couple of cabs to Scotland Yard, and there, in the inspector's room and in the presence of the two prisoners, Ewan Brett related a story that in more than one respect proved the correctness of Clyde's shrewd deductions.

He had been employed by David Openshaw to go out to Nigeria and report on the Sekunda Gold Mine, and on his arrival there he had found it to be of little or no value.

The manager of the mine was a man of the name of Mark Driscoll, and there were

two other Englishmen with him. They had proposed to Brett that he should make a false report, and share in the profits; and on his indignantly refusing to do so he had been imprisoned in a hut, and an armed native had been set to guard him.

"I had done a kindness to this native, and he was grateful for it," the young man continued. "When I had been in captivity for a week or so I persuaded him to let me write a letter to my friend Mayfield, in which I told him all, and urged him to have Openshaw arrested."

"The native gave the letter to another, who started down country with the intention of posting it at Old Calabar. A few days later I succeeded in making my escape, and after a long and perilous journey through the bush, I reached the coast, and sailed for Old Calabar by the steamer Biscayan."

"On our way, at a port at which we stopped, we were overtaken by the Rannoch Castle. I came home by that vessel, as it was a faster one, and I am glad that I arrived in time to have these villains arrested. I bitterly regret, though, that I was too late to prevent John Mayfield from being shot."

David Openshaw had been listening in sullen silence, and now, in the hope that he might be dealt with leniently, Wilfred Jordan insisted on making a confession.

"The scheme was to sell the mining shares on the strength of a false report issued by Brett," he said, "and we were warned by a cablegram that the plot was in danger of being frustrated. The native who disappeared from the mine was missed, and Driscoll and his companions suspected where he had gone, and what for."

"They pursued the fellow, caught him at Old Calabar, and learned from him that he had posted the letter, and that it had been addressed to John Mayfield at Glasgow. He

was able to give that information, as he had been educated, and could read English. Driscoll then sent a long telegram to David Openshaw, informing him of all that had happened; stating that Mr. Brett had sailed by the Biscayan, and that the letter had gone by the mail-steamer Liberia."

"Openshaw, rather than be beaten at his swindling game, determined to get the letter, and to murder Brett. He found out that the Liberia would reach England last Saturday, and that the letter to John Mayfield would be delivered in Glasgow on the Monday morning. And he also ascertained that the steamer Biscayan would arrive at Southampton last night."

Resuming his narrative, the man spoke of the means by which he had got the letter, of his struggle with John Mayfield.

Clyde glanced at the man with contempt.

"Your confession won't help you much," he said sternly, "if that is what you hope. You are both equally guilty, and you may consider yourselves fortunate that your crimes have not brought you to the gallows. Take them away!" he said to the officers.

An effort was made to arrest Mark Driscoll and his accomplices, but they had fled from the mine into the wilds of Nigeria, and it would have been useless to search for them. David Openshaw and Wilfred Jordan were convicted, and were sentenced to long terms of penal servitude; and one of the witnesses who gave evidence against them was John Mayfield, who had completely recovered.

Several months later Ewan Brett was married to Janet Mayfield, and amongst the guests at the wedding was Derek Clyde, but for whose efforts the public would have invested thousands of pounds in a worthless gold mine.

THE END.

PRISONER at the BAR.

How do you think a man feels standing in the dock on trial for murder when he knows all the time that he is guilty? Perhaps you have often wondered what are the sensations of the guilty man. You can find out in the "Detective Magazine" by reading the article by J. A. R. Cairns, the celebrated London magistrate, entitled "The Drama of a Murder Trial."

Mr. Cairns, writing from his long experience in dealing with criminals, gives an enthralling description of the sensations of the murderer undergoing his trial.

This issue of the "Detective Magazine" also contains nineteen splendid detective stories and articles on the romance of crime detection. Price 7d., at any newsagent or bookseller.

(Continued from page 14)

"Where's the punt?" asked Church, looking round.

"Just over in this corner," replied Handforth, pushing his way under some bushes. "There's a pole, too—all complete. You can always trust me to find a way of doing things. And don't forget, we shall be absolutely unsuspected."

"Rats!" said McClure. "Mr. Maxwell and his men will be on the watch."

"Fathead!" said Handforth witheringly. "They'll believe themselves absolutely secure—because they took the boat away. And we shall act so cautiously that nobody will be able to guess that we're on the scene."

Church and McClure had their own opinion about this, and made no comment. And Handforth proceeded to dig out the punt. The very fact of this craft being there indicated that the lake was not so very deep. And a boat of any kind was very useful just now. Handforth's chums could not help admitting to themselves that their leader was a bit smarter than they had supposed.

The punt proved to be a ramshackle old craft, with several small holes. But it was fully capable of conveying the juniors across to the island. The moon had not yet risen, and the night was dark, so there was not much danger of the adventurers being spotted.

At last they were aboard, and they pushed off.

Then, with Handforth wielding the pole, they commenced their trip. Church and McClure were not feeling so reluctant now. There was a certain mysterious feeling in the air—a spice of adventure. And, being human boys, they did not fail to succumb to it.

And, after all, there certainly was something mysterious about Mr. Holby Maxwell. Even the other fellows admitted that. And now that Church and McClure were out on the lake, bound for the island, they felt that the enterprise was worth while.

Handforth, too, was more serious now. He didn't talk about pursuing his investigations, and nabbing the crooks. The glamour had worn off a bit, and he was merely determined to find out what Mr. Maxwell's game actually was.

Even Handy no longer believed that Mr. Maxwell was a conner. He knew well enough that he was breaking all orders by landing on the island—but Handforth never troubled about rules and regulations.

After a fairly successful voyage, during which the punt had only been on the point of collapse twice, the three juniors cautiously climbed up upon the grassy bank of the island.

They had chosen a totally different spot this time, and landed where there was a little bay, half hidden by projecting banks on either side. The punt slipped into this little backwater without a sound.

"Good!" muttered Handforth, as he got ashore. Now, what we've got to do is to

make our way down to that little hollow where the buildings are."

"If we do that we shall walk right into trouble," said Church doubtfully.

"Yes—if we allow ourselves to be seen," agreed Handforth. "But we shan't allow ourselves to be seen. Don't say a word, once we get started; we'll creep forward like Red Indians on the trail. It's quite likely that some of those chaps may be on the watch."

Church and McClure needed no urging. They were not liable to cause any disturbance; Handforth was quite capable of making all the noise.

But for once he was silent.

He seemed to know that this was a serious business, and he didn't act with his usual ramheadedness.

He knew, in fact, that if he and his chums were hauled up before Nelson Lee, they would receive a severe punishment—probably a flogging for disobeying orders, and a sentence which would possibly include confinement to camp for a week or ten days.

So it behoved the chums of Study D to act with caution.

Creeping along in single file, the juniors finally came to the spot where the ground sloped downwards. There, below them, lay the hollow—where they had been captured on the previous night.

Still in the same formation, they proceeded, and, more by accident than design, they came to a spot where it was possible to peep through the bushes, and look straight down the slope into the clearing itself.

They could also see the lake, with a neatly constructed landing-stage jutting out. From the other shore this was almost invisible, for the landing-stage was built within a winding inlet, cunningly screened by trees and bushes.

One or two lights were showing among the wooden buildings, and as Handforth & Co. paused, they saw some figures walking about, busily going backwards and forwards between the landing-stage and the central building.

"My hat!" murmured Handforth. "This is a bit of luck, you know. I'd no idea we should be able to see as clearly as this. We can crouch down here and watch the whole giddy shoot!"

"By jingo, rather!"

Handforth was greatly encouraged by the interest his chums were now showing. He could always tell when they were with him, or antagonistic. But although he pretended that it was a matter of indifference, he liked them to share his own interest.

"Do you blame me for coming?" he breathed. "I tell you, my sons, there's something big going on here."

"My goodness!" whispered Church.

"What's that thing?"

"Which thing?"

Church pointed towards the landing-stage. And his chums watched without speaking. Two men had now stationed themselves upon

the little quay, and a big black object was slowly and deliberately rising from the lake. Within a few minutes it resolved itself into a vessel of some kind. Two other men appeared, emerging from a hatchway.

"There you are!" muttered Handforth tensely. "What did I tell you?"

"Eh?"

"It's a submarine!" said Handforth.

"Yes; but you didn't say so before!" whispered Church. "In fact, you scoffed at the idea——"

"Dry up! This is no place to argue," interrupted Handforth gruffly. "There it is—a submarine. My only hat! What do you think of it? A submarine in this desolate, out-of-the-way lake!"

"It's more than I can understand," declared McClure. "I suppose Mr. Maxwell is making experiments. It must be a new kind of invention of his, and that explains why he won't have anybody nosing about on the island."

"By jingo, yes!" said Church. "That's about the size of it! Maxwell isn't a criminal at all—merely the inventor of this submarine. I suppose we oughtn't to be here—it's—it's like spying, you know."

Handforth grunted.

"I'm not convinced yet that everything is straight and above board," he said. "As soon as I satisfy myself that there's no crooked work going on, I'll clear. Goodness knows, I don't want to spy on honest people!"

Handforth had very strong ideas upon spying and eavesdropping. If he was dealing with crooks he would peep anywhere and listen anywhere, and consider that he was engaged in pure detective work. But if the people were honest citizens, he would never dream of interfering.

As the trio watched, another figure came along to the landing-stage, and in spite of the gloom the juniors recognised him as Mr. Holby Maxwell. The night was so still and quiet that they could easily hear his brisk footsteps upon the planking, and they heard his words, too.

"Everything in order for the new trial, Tom?" he asked crisply.

"Yes, sir," came another voice.

"Good!"

Mr. Maxwell descended through the hatchway, and a few preparations were made. Then the submarine boat slid away from the landing-stage. Scarcely a sound could be heard—just a ripple or two of the water. There was no clugging of machinery.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" murmured Handforth. "That was pretty smart, you know. She went off as easily as a motor-boat."

"Yes, and she's submerging now," whispered McClure.

The juniors were thoroughly astonished by the ease and rapidity with which the secret submarine submerged. It was almost as though something had gone wrong. She simply gave one gurgling suck of the waters, and dived below.

The lake became still and silent. But two men remained on the landing-stage for a few minutes. Then, talking together, they walked off, and went to a portion of the grassy bank where there were no trees. They stood there, looking out over the lake, as though waiting for something.

"Now we know the meaning of that light," said Handforth. "I expect the submarine has got all sorts of windows in it—and probably searchlights, too. I'd like to get a closer view——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Church. "If we go any nearer we might be spotted. And that would mean fearful trouble."

"H'm! I suppose it would," admitted Handforth.

He didn't suggest going any nearer. Indeed, he had very little opportunity, for a somewhat startling thing occurred.

Without any kind of warning, there was a swirl and a swish of the surface water. This occurred just at the bottom of the slope, immediately opposite the spot where the chums of Study D were crouching.

They could see everything distinctly, for by this time their eyes were thoroughly accustomed to the starlight, and it was surprising how well they could see. They stared down, wondering.

And they saw something which amazed them.

The submarine re-appeared.

But instead of coming to the surface in the normal way, the extraordinary craft was literally walking out of the lake! There it came, almost silent and sinister-looking—a great lumbering thing, like a monster of the deep.

Further and further out of the water it came, and, not content with this, the vessel actually pushed itself against the solid bank, and commenced to crawl calmly out on to dry land!

CHAPTER VII. THE ATTACK!



"GREAT SCOTT!" said Church dazedly.

"We—we must be dreaming!" exclaimed McClure.

Handforth made no remark—he was too busy watching.

But he was just as much astounded as his chums. A submarine of this kind was something new—something startling and wonderful. There it came, walking out of the water as though it were something living—something that possessed lungs and muscles and brain-power.

And, finally, after hauling itself completely out, the vessel proceeded to climb over a billy prominence, smashing several bushes en route. And it came to a halt at length upon level ground. And during this

performance there had been very little noise of machinery—just a mere whispering hum.

A door in the side opened, and Mr. Holby Maxwell stepped out.

"Splendid!" he said delightedly. "Even better than I had hoped for, men! I think we can assure ourselves that the trials have been absolutely successful."

"Ay, they have, sir," said one of the others.

"And now it only remains for the Admiralty officials to come and see her," said Mr. Maxwell. "They'll be down here next week, and by then we shall be even more proficient in the handling of our baby."

Church gave Handforth a nudge.

"What about your crooks?" he whispered. "You were wrong, old man. These people are as honest as the day—merely experimenting with this new submarine. We'd better get back to camp."

"That's what I think," breathed McClure. "We're nothing better than spies!"

Handforth grunted.

"Don't rub it in!" he growled. "Now that we've discovered the truth we needn't waste any more time. Of course, these people ain't crooks. I must have been mistaken. Jolly queer, too, because I'm nearly always right."

Church and McClure were on the point of fainting, but manfully refrained.

"We can't go just yet," went on Handy. "These people are only just below, and we shall be heard. We've got to wait until the coast is clear. It would be awful to be collared again."

"By jingo, rather!"

"We couldn't risk that."

And the chums of Study D remained perfectly still, waiting for the opportunity to slip away. But it seemed that this opportunity was not to come just yet, for Mr. Maxwell and his men remained near-by.

And Handforth & Co. were compelled to be hidden watchers.

After a while Mr. Maxwell re-entered the submarine, the door was closed, and the wonderful craft commenced to perform some new evolutions. It went round in circles, smashing down bushes, and mounting hill-locks with the greatest of ease. Then, like some prehistoric monster, she lumbered down to the water, and plunged in.

The craft went straight down, and pursued her course along the bed of the lake. After a few moments no sign of her remained, except for an almost imperceptible ripple on the surface of the water.

"It's—it's almost staggering," said Handforth, in an impressive tone. "I mean, when you come to think of it! Just imagine what a submarine like that could do. Just think of how a whole fleet of them could attack a city!"

"Attack a city?" repeated Church.

"Yes, rather," said Handforth. "My dear chap, can't you realise the possibilities? Why, that submarine is like a tank."

"Well I'm blessed!"

"Didn't you see the guns?" went on Edward Oswald. "They were sticking out like spikes from every side. Of course, the vessels got caterpillar wheels, after the same fashion as the tanks that were used during the war."

"We didn't see any," said McClure.

"No; they must be hidden up," agreed Handforth. "By what I can see, this submarine is a huge improvement on anything that's happened before. I expect it's just an experimental model—really, a toy. The real thing will probably be twenty times as big."

Church and McClure were impressed; for once Handy was talking sense.

"And it makes a chap feel pretty scared when he thinks of the possibilities," continued Handforth. "For example, imagine five hundred submarines of this kind—but enormous things—crossing the North Sea. They could go under water, and nobody would know anything about them. Then they could calmly walk up the beach on the other side—in Germany, say—and proceed to attack any city. Why, the possibilities are enormous. Submarines that can travel over the land as well as under the water are something new."

To a large extent Handforth's remarks were correct. There were, indeed, astounding prospects for such a vessel as this. And any Government would be only too delighted to get hold of it, for the ship was a deadly war weapon.

And the juniors could now easily understand why Mr. Maxwell had been so anxious to keep them clear of the island. With such a secret as this hidden there, he naturally wanted no schoolboys butting in.

Mr. Maxwell undoubtedly held the view that the boys would talk if they got to learn of the submarine, and once there was any talk, the news would spread, and the result would be that rumours would get about. And publicity would follow. Mr. Maxwell's anxiety for secrecy was understandable.

Even after fifteen minutes Handforth & Co. were not able to leave, for several men remained just below, at the bottom of the slope. And the night was so still that they could make no movement without being heard.

"Well, this is getting serious," whispered Church at length. "It seems that we're not able to move at all."

"I think we'd better try and get away," said Handforth. "I'll go first, and you chaps can—"

"Don't!" hissed Church. "We shall only be copped!"

"Rats! Leave it to me—"

But before Handforth could make any move his attention was attracted by some big ripples near the edge of the water. And then the submarine-tank crawled out of the lake once more. Again the door opened, and Mr. Maxwell stepped out.

"We have been over to the south side,"

he said in a pleased voice. "After all these demonstrations there is not the slightest doubt that the boat is thoroughly safe and seaworthy."

"But she hasn't been in the sea yet, sir," said one of the men.

"No, I intend to give her a sea-going trial either to-morrow night or on Friday," replied Mr. Maxwell. "We shall, of course, take the vessel overland under her own power. The distance is only three or four miles, and the country is entirely deserted and barren—heath and marshland, in the main. Why, I have not the slightest doubt that we shall be able to get to the sea and back again without a soul being the wiser."

Mr. Maxwell turned as one of his men came hurrying from amid the trees at a sharp run. There was something about his attitude that commanded attention. The inventor looked at him curiously.

"Quick, sir—there's men coming!" panted the new arrival hoarsely.

"Men coming!" repeated Mr. Maxwell sharply. "What on earth—"

"Twelve or twenty of them, sir—and they're all armed!" shouted the man. "They are right behind me—"

He broke off, for at that moment there came a crashing and shouting from the thick trees near by. Mr. Maxwell started forward, uttering an exclamation of anger.

And then the climax arrived.

Handforth and Co., watching with thoroughly startled eyes, saw about twenty men rush down on the party. The leader was shouting encouragement. And for a moment all was confusion.

"Surrender!" he commanded harshly. "The first man who resists will be shot down like a dog!"

"You infernal ruffian!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell hotly. "Who are you? What do you want here?"

The leader pointed.

"We want that ship," he replied, "and we're going to have it!"

"Never!" thundered Mr. Maxwell. "Men—men! Resist these scoundrels—"

But Mr. Maxwell's men needed no bidding. Already they were fighting with all the strength of their muscles.

And Handforth and Co., hidden, watched with bated breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISONERS.



THE fight was short and intense.

— Mr. Maxwell and his men were completely outnumbered, and although they put up a magnificent fight, it was hopeless right

from the very start. One by one they fell into the hands of the enemy.

These men appeared to be young men, for the most part—all of them armed with sticks, to say nothing of revolvers. And

they fought with keen determination. Within five minutes the battle was over.

According to what Handforth and Co. had seen, there were at least two dozen men in the enemy party. And as Mr. Maxwell's group only consisted of about six or eight, capture was inevitable.

Nevertheless, several of the invaders were rather badly knocked about before success came to them. Mr. Maxwell's men fought gamely. But at last they were all held down. And, one by one, they were securely roped up. There had been very little commotion—just grunting gasps and thuds as the men fought. Shouting for assistance was quite useless, since there were no habitations of any kind within call.

The attack had come upon the island quite by surprise. The inventor had believed himself to be absolutely secure. And a raiding-party of this nature had never seemed possible.

And who were they?

Handforth & Co. were soon to learn.

But at present they were completely mystified. And they continued to watch, scarcely daring to breathe.

"By George!" muttered Handforth tensely. "If it hadn't happened so quickly, I should have joined in! I don't know who these rotters are, but they're a set of miserable cads! Didn't you notice the way they used those beastly sticks?"

"Yes, they're brutes!" muttered Church.

"And I was right, too!" said Handforth triumphantly. "Didn't I say there were some crooks here? These chaps are crooks, or I'll eat my hat! They've come here to pinch that submarine."

"Can't—can't we do something?" said McClure eagerly.

Handforth looked very alert.

"I'll tell you what!" he breathed. "Now that all this noise is going on, you chaps can slip away. There may not be an opportunity later."

"Slip away?"

"Yes."

"But where to?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth tensely. "Where to! Haven't you got any sense? Back to camp, of course!"

"To warn Mr. Lee and all the chaps?"

"Yes."

"But what about you?" asked Church.

"Never mind about me—I'll stay here," said Handy. "I'll remain on the watch—I'll see what these rotters do. You buzz off, and fetch Mr. Lee and all the fellows. It's just possible that we may be able to turn the tables. I'd give anything to be able to rescue Mr. Maxwell from this gang."

Handforth's change of front was somewhat startling. When he had come to the island, he had nursed a great animosity against the unfortunate Mr. Maxwell. But now that the inventor was obviously open and above board, Handforth was wholeheartedly with him.

And the famous leader of Study D was all

agog to get into action. He wanted to do something big—something on his own account. In fact, he cherished the hope that he might be able to recover the submarine single-handed while his chums were away.

"By George!" he murmured. "What a surprise for 'em when they get back!"

"Eh?" said Church.

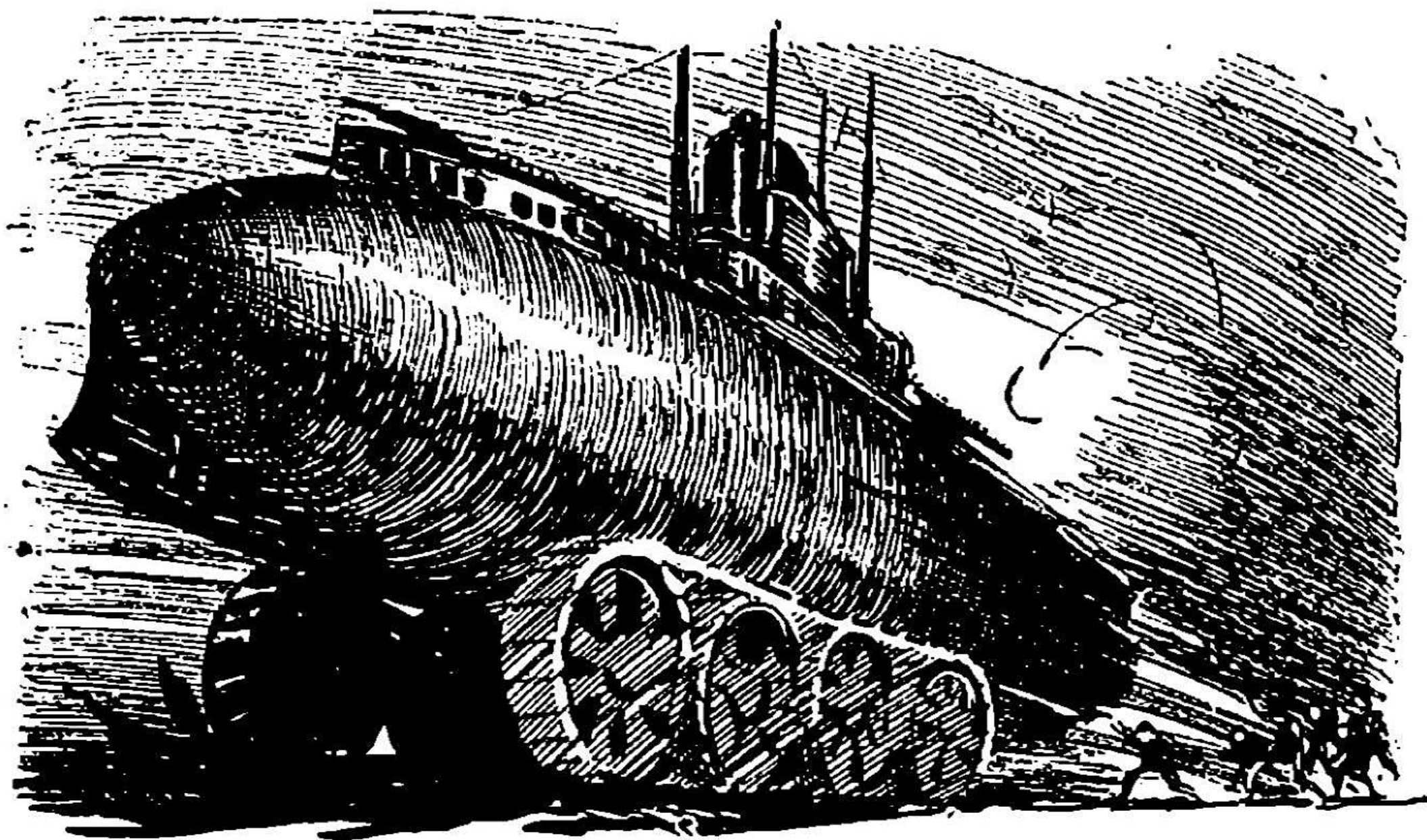
"Nothing—don't ask silly questions!" said Handforth. "And why the dickens don't you go? My goodness! I would have been half-way there by this time. You're as slow as a giddy funeral procession."

Thus reprimanded, Church and McClure hastened away. They did so rather reluctantly, for they had qualms regarding their

The invaders, by this time, had finished the roping-up process. And Mr. Maxwell and his men were helpless. Those who had remained in the submarine were routed out and roped up like the others. There were three of them, and they had absolutely no chance.

Mr. Maxwell and his men were not armed in any way—otherwise there might have been some serious bloodshed. For the submarine was only captured after the defenders had fought to their utmost.

All the prisoners, with the exception of one man in overalls—who was apparently the engineer—were hurried off into one of the wooden buildings. Mr. Maxwell himself was included in this bunch. The engineer



A dark object could be seen lumbering across a meadow—slowly and deliberately, like some crawling creature out of a nightmare. And, with yells of triumph, the pursuers raced onwards.

leader. They half-suspected that he would get up to some game of his own as soon as their backs were turned. But, after all, the most important thing was to get back to the camp, and give the warning to the rest.

So Church and McClure hastened away.

And Handforth remained—still gazing down upon that scene.

He attempted no action yet—for the time did not seem ripe. And although Edward Oswald was usually the most reckless of fellows, he now became surprisingly cautious. It was as though he instinctively knew the seriousness of the whole position. In a tight corner, Handforth was to be relied upon. In a real emergency he was valuable.

And he remained on the watch—awaiting his opportunity.

was ordered back into the submarine, escorted by several members of the enemy.

Handforth became more and more interested.

For one thing, the coast was becoming clear. The crowd no longer occupied the space immediately at the bottom of the slope. Handforth began to wonder if he could venture down.

He had been puzzled, wondering who these men were, and why they had planned to steal Mr. Holby Maxwell's secretly constructed vessel. They were not foreigners—they were not emissaries of any hostile Government. They spoke English well, but with a kind of brogue.

And then at last Handforth received the clue.

Two of the enemy, talking, made some

remark concerning a little bay on the coast of Wexford. Handforth started as he heard the name—and then, suddenly the explanation of that brogue came to him.

"My only topper!" he muttered. "They're Irish!"

Handforth nearly jumped out of his skin. All sorts of memories came to him—things he had seen in papers, stories he had heard concerning the Irish Revolutionaries, and the daring, dramatic coups which the Irish had effected.

It mattered nothing to Handforth that Ireland was now a Free State, and that all warfare was supposed to be at an end. Handforth knew only too well that there were certain elements in Ireland absolutely opposed to the Free State Government—men who were out and out Republicans.

And in a flash Handforth came to the conclusion that the men on this peaceful little island were members of some fanatical revolutionary group. And Edward Oswald was absolutely right in his surmise.

These men were, indeed, some wild spirits who loved the game for the very sport of its adventure—for the Irishman is a born fighter. Handforth saw no reason why he should lend his services to the Irish Free State, but that was a mere detail. He was thinking mainly of Mr. Maxwell. But it also occurred to Handforth that it would be as well to prevent this disaster.

For if these reckless fools succeeded in getting the submarine over to Ireland, they might cause much death and destruction before they were captured. With that vessel in their possession they could cruise round the Irish shores, and attack any town or village they selected. On land the vessel was a kind of super-tank, and nothing short of heavy artillery could succeed in destroying it. The craft would become a menace to many a peaceful coast town.

And these Irish fanatics, no doubt, had seen the possibilities. Quite unexpectedly, they had swooped down, and now the craft was actually in their possession. Once they got clear away, it would be impossible to frustrate them.

Handforth, therefore, became fired with tremendous enthusiasm.

And now he saw that the coast was clear.

CHAPTER IX.

HANDY ON THE JOB.



TAKING everything into consideration, Handforth was a wonderful optimist.

To ever think that he could defeat these men single-handed was nothing more or less than cool cheek. And to make the actual attempt to do so was real, genuine pluck.

It was just one of those enterprises that in actual warfare would be set down as an episode deserving of the V.C. And although

Handforth didn't quite realise it, his danger was very real indeed.

For these men, accustomed to bloodshed, were not likely to deal lightly with him if they discovered his project. The leader of Study D gave no thought to these details. He never considered the odds in any scrap.

Here were these men, about to steal the submarine, and the only prospect of help lay in the fact that Church and McClure had gone off to the camp. Handforth had no real faith in his chums, which was rather unkind of him. He told himself that they would certainly end by getting captured. And this, of course, meant that all the work was thrust upon his own shoulders.

And the sooner he began it, the better.

So, as soon as the coast looked clear, Handforth acted. Mr. Maxwell and the others had been hurried away into the building. And the engineer had now disappeared into the interior of the vessel, escorted by two members of the enemy. There was nobody in sight.

Handforth left his place of concealment, and gradually edged his way down towards the scene of action. Exactly what he was going to do, he had no idea. He had formed no plan, and couldn't imagine how he could turn the tables on these daring robbers.

But he did know that he would never do anything by remaining idle. And the first preliminary was to have a look round. Like the celebrated Mr. Micawber, Handforth was hoping that something would turn up.

He succeeded in getting right down to the side of the submarine. And then he was astonished to find that it wasn't such a small craft, after all. Viewed from above, it seemed comparatively squat. But at close quarters it towered up in a monstrous array of grey steel plates, with tightly clamped portholes, and numerous other accessories which Handforth didn't understand.

There was a door in the side—a door which stood open, with two or three iron steps leading to the ground. These steps automatically folded up as the door was closed. Within, some electric lights were gleaming. There was a kind of passageway, leading into the very bowels of the ship.

The door was enormously thick—like the door of a strong-room in a bank. For, at sea, this part of the vessel was completely under water, and had to be hermetically sealed.

Handforth hesitated. He didn't know what to do. Then, somewhere near by, he heard some twigs crunched under foot. He heard low voices. And he knew that men were approaching.

He looked round quickly. There was practically no time for him to get into cover among the trees—he felt that he would be spotted if he attempted to do so. In his eagerness, he had come rather too far into the open.

There was only one thing to do.

Handforth did it. Hesitation would have

been fatal. He ran forward like a deer, reached the doorway of the submarine, and entered. Even as he did so he knew very well that he might run into the enemy.

But he didn't care.

He felt ready to fight a dozen. By George! He'd show them something if it came to a scrap! Irish, eh? Huh! He'd let 'em see a thing or two! And, with these valiant thoughts, he arrived inside.

He found himself in a kind of steel passage. It was narrow and low, and straight ahead there was a little room with all sorts of tubes and dials showing. He didn't go that way, for it looked to him like a section of the engine-room. And that's where the enemy would be.

There was a little doorway to the left, with everything dark beyond. Surely, this would be the best retreat. The very darkness indicated that nobody was there. Later on, perhaps, he would be able to escape. And there was no telling—he might be able to recapture the submarine.

He entered that dark doorway, and a moment later nearly did himself an injury by walking full-tilt into a steel wall. He had banged his nose fiercely—for this organ on Handforth's face was not insignificant.

"Yooop—oooh!" he breathed, with a gasp. "Oh, corks!"

It was rather surprising that Handforth didn't make more noise, but instinct told him that such a thing would be very unwise.

He groped his way into a kind of alcove, and nearly barked his shins on some hard, metal projections. And here he came to a full stop, realising that he wouldn't be safe in going further.

The voices were now very clear and distinct, proving that the Irishmen had come on board. Handforth remained there, straining his ears to catch anything that was said. And he was enormously startled when the little cupboard place became flooded with light.

He was dazzled for a moment. This was the very last thing he had expected, and he was bewildered. The electric lights had been switched on from the other passage.

And there Handforth stood—in full view.

Escape was impossible, since in this cupboard-like place, with steel walls, there was scarcely room to turn round. And two men were looking in at him from the doorway.

"What the— Who's this youngster, here?" said one of the men sharply.

"Never seen him before," said the other man. "He's not one of Maxwell's crowd. Quite a kid, too."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"A kid, eh?" he roared. "All right—take that!"

It was never Handforth's policy to wait for somebody else to start the fighting. He always opened the ball, so to speak. And he hurled himself forward, and his fist crashed into the face of one of the men. The fellow reeled back, howling with surprise and pain.

"Now then—come on!" yelled Handforth. "I'm ready, you—you rotters!"

Again he lunged out, but this time his fist was caught in mid air. And at the same moment a heavy foot was hooked round his ankle. He tripped, and crashed against the steel wall. Then he found the two men upon him like a couple of wolves. In that confined space he was done.

Out in the open he might have been able to vanquish these two, for Handforth was a master fighter. Without room to swing his arms round he was at a terrible disadvantage.

He went down, still struggling, and then two other men came on the scene. There was a good deal of talk, but nobody seemed to know what to do.

"Better lock him up until Dugan comes along," suggested one of the men. "There's a little place just along this passage. Push him in there."

"You—you'll pay for this!" snorted Handforth. "If you think you can mess about with me—"

"That's enough, kid," snapped the man.

Handforth was hustled along, and thrown into a little store-room. It was provided with a steel door, and this door was slammed-to and bolted. Escape from this prison was a matter of impossibility.

Even if Handforth had been provided with a sledge-hammer, he would never have succeeded. He had some matches on him, and, by striking one or two of these, he found that his prison was quite small and bare.

He wondered why he had been kept here, instead of being hustled off with Mr. Maxwell and the others. The explanation was simple. The men who had taken him were not in authority, and they had merely placed Handforth in this storeroom as a temporary measure.

Edward Oswald looked round him by the light of a match, and then grunted.

"The beasts!" he muttered. "So they think they've got me, eh? Well, perhaps they have—but I'm not finished yet! Not likely! Before I've done, I'll make these chaps sing small!"

But even though Handforth buoyed himself up with these remarks, he instinctively knew that his position was bad. He had started out with such high hopes, such big ideas.

And this was the result

It hardly seemed that the leader of Study D was destined to be very successful in his big enterprise. But the night wasn't over yet!

CHAPTER X.

REMOVE TO THE RESCUE!



"MAD!" said Cecil de Valerie.

Clean off their silly rockers!" exclaimed Fatty Little, with a yawn.

"Dotty as March hares!" agreed Dick Goodwin.

Church and McClure breathed hard.

They were standing in Caravan No. 2—their one home, so to speak—and they were glancing at the various occupants of the beds. The electric-light was on, and De Valerie, Somerton, and the others were looking at Church and McClure as though they had just escaped from Colney Hatch.

"I tell you it's true!" insisted Church.

"Tell that to the marines!"

"We saw it with our own eyes——"

"Rats!"

"These men swooped down like a set of giddy hawks," declared McClure. "Fifteen or twenty of 'em—and they captured the submarine——"

"You've been dreaming," said De Valerie. "That's what it is. I expect you must have read some penny dreadfuls, and——"

"You—you unbelieving asses!" yelled Church. "Do you think we should all dream the same thing? Handforth was in this, too—we left him there, on the watch. You all go and eat coke!" he added abruptly. "I'll tell the others—I'll bet they've got more sense!"

And Church stalked out of the caravan, with McClure at his heels. They went next-door, to Caravan No. 1. This was occupied by Nelson Lee himself, to say nothing of Tregellis-West and Watson and Archie Glenthorne and a few more. I adorned Caravan No. 1, too.

Before Church and McClure entered I sat up in bed, knowing that something was going on. I could hear the voices from next-door. And I saw the gleam of the lights, and wondered what could be wrong, for it was well past midnight.

Then Church and McClure entered. They did so with a great deal of noise, thus proving that they had no fear of Nelson Lee becoming annoyed. The giv'nor, let me explain, occupied a kind of private compartment in the front of the caravan—a dear little place which might have been called the Captain's cabin.

"What's wrong with you chaps?" I asked, as the two juniors entered. "What do you think you're up to?"

"Get dressed, all of you, and come down to the lake," said Church crisply. "There's trouble there."

"Handforth got collared again?"

"No! But Mr. Maxwell has," said Church.

And he explained the situation in tense, short sentences. By this time all the other fellows were awake, including Archie Glenthorne, Singleton, Brent, and my own chums. We listened in astonishment.

"Is this true—honour bright?" I asked keenly.

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Church. "More sceptics!"

"All right—keep your hair on—I believe you," I exclaimed. "Well, the best thing we can do is to tell the giv'nor straight away——"

"That will be quite unnecessary, Nipper," said Nelson Lee, from the little communicat-

ing door. The statement made by these two boys is very interesting, and I shall look into the matter at once."

Church and McClure turned, startled to find Lee there.

But he was not angry, and, after hearing all that there was to be heard, he nodded. In the meantime the rest of us had been getting our things on as quickly as possible. Indeed, the whole camp was now in a kind of uproar. The story had spread from caravan to caravan, and the whole Remove was aroused.

"Well, boys, I think we shall have to give Mr. Maxwell all the assistance we can," said Nelson Lee at last. "It appears that he has been brutally attacked by a gang of would-be thieves—men who desire to steal this valuable property—the experimental submarine. We must make all haste."

"Good!" I said heartily. "That's the stuff!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Remove to the rescue!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "This, as it were, is where we dash about like anything. I mean to say, we've got to whizz hither and thither, and do all sorts of dashed, priceless things!"

"I think you'd better stay in camp, Archie," said Watson.

"What? I mean, eh?" said Archie. "Absolutely not! Kindly allow me to remark, dear old fruit, that your suggestion is dashed ridic. I mean to say, this is where I've got to produce large supplies of the famous Glenthorne dash! In other words, this is where we make history!"

Archie was quite enthusiastic, and had no intention of being left behind. Within ten minutes everybody was ready, and the rescuing force, with Nelson Lee at the head, started out for the island. The juniors cared nothing for the loss of sleep. Here was a wonderful night of adventure—an adventure which Nelson Lee himself entirely approved of.

The juniors were thrilled and excited. Even Fullwood & Co., the cads of the Remove, entered into the spirit of the thing and desired to do their bit.

But there were difficulties.

For example, the only means of conveyance across the lake to the island was that single, leaky punt. A few of the fellows could have swum the distance, but Nelson Lee wouldn't allow anybody to enter the water. Moreover, he had cautioned us all to remain completely quiet.

And he gave his orders sharply.

The bulk of the fellows were to remain behind for the time being. Nelson Lee himself and two others—Church and McClure—were to go across in the punt and scout out the lie of the land. If possible, they were to return with any boats they could find, so that the complete rescue force could get on to the scene.

We watched them go, fuming with impatience.

"What's the good of this?" growled Pitt. "Might as well have stopped in camp. We can't be of any use here—"

"Don't worry," I interrupted. "They'll soon be back with two or three boats. Anyhow, it was the only possible thing to do, and it's no good kicking."

But we were all exasperated and impatient. It seemed such a pity that we should be on the spot, ready to help, and that there should be no means of our getting over.

And while we waited there, Nelson Lee and his two guides reached the island.

Everything was absolutely still and silent. It hardly seemed possible that any living persons occupied the island, or that there had recently been fighting.

At length the little party reached that hollow in the centre of the island. Here everything was just as still as could be. No lights were showing, and even the buildings were only just visible.

Nelson Lee approached cautiously, with Church and McClure just behind.

The juniors were rather alarmed. All sign of the enemy had vanished. Even the submarine had gone—the lights were out—Mr. Holby Maxwell and his men were not in evidence. It really seemed as though the whole story was invented—a freak of the imagination.

Indeed, a terrible thought came to Church for a moment that he had dreamed it all. But a moment's consideration assured him that the thing was genuine enough. But the enemy must have acted swiftly.

Nelson Lee approached the main building, and stood listening intently for a time. Church and McClure had been ordered to remain silent. And, sure enough, the sound of voices came from one of the smaller buildings near-by.

Nelson Lee crept up, and discovered that the door was bolted on the outside. Furthermore, heavy props of wood were placed against it. And the windows were heavily barred.

Nelson Lee made no further attempt to remain quiet.

He knew exactly what had happened. Mr. Maxwell and his men were imprisoned here, and the enemy had gone, taking their booty with them. There was no necessity for any further secrecy.

"Mr. Maxwell!" called Lee sharply.

"Thank Heaven!" came a husky shout from within. "Who is that? Quick! Break down the door, and release us! Every moment is of importance. Who are you?"

Lee made no reply, but he attacked the door with a vengeance. And two minutes later he entered the shed, with Church and McClure at his heels. Lee was flashing a powerful electric torch, and the bright beam of white light revealed a curious sight.

There, propped against the wall of the building, were the prisoners—Mr. Holby

Maxwell and all his men. The only missing one was the engineer of the submarine. He had been taken along by the enemy.

"Why it's Mr. Lee!" said the inventor thankfully.

"Yes, and you must thank the boys for my prompt arrival," said Lee. "It seems that three of them came over to the island again—suspecting that you were not quite what you seemed to be, Mr. Maxwell. And, luckily, they were on the spot when the attackers got hold of you. The boys saw everything, and lost no time in bringing me the information."

Mr. Maxwell was overjoyed at being rescued so promptly. But, at the same time, his anxiety was very real. As quickly as possible he explained the situation to Nelson Lee.

"And, you see, these wild Irishmen have taken my craft overland to the sea," he concluded. "Once they actually get afloat, there will be no possibility of recovering the vessel. It is imperative, Mr. Lee, that we should recapture it before it can reach the sea."

Lee thought for a moment.

"I think we ought to manage it," he said briskly. "The distance is four miles, and they can only have gained a half-hour start. And the vessel, you say, can travel at three miles an hour?"

"Yes—although my larger models will be able to accomplish treble that speed," said Mr. Maxwell. "You will understand that this is simply an experimental boat, and—"

"Yes, yes, quite," interrupted Lee. "All the better. By hurrying, I think we shall be able to overtake the rascals before they reach the coast. We have a strong force here, and we ought to be able to succeed."

"Perhaps Handforth will be able to tell us something, sir," suggested Church.

But Handforth was not in evidence.

Church and McClure went about, calling his name anxiously. There was no sign whatever of the leader of Study D. He had completely vanished. And no time could be wasted in looking for him.

Nelson Lee shouted the news across to the rest of us that Mr. Maxwell had been rescued, and he also gave instructions for us to spread ourselves out round the lake, and locate the spot where the submarine had landed. For, of course, the marks of the heavy vessel would be plainly visible. And it would be easy enough to follow the tracks made by the submarine.

It was Reggie Pitt and I who found the spot.

After scouting about a bit, we came to a place where the bushes were smashed and beaten down, and where the marks of the submarine tank's caterpillar wheels were clearly impressed in the ground.

Five minutes later we were in hot pursuit.

It was an extraordinary chase. A whole crowd of us, with Nelson Lee and Mr. Maxwell leading, running at full speed across

country, following that wide, clearly defined trail.

Many of the fellows were startled at the thought of this daring robbery. It seemed impossible to them that the Irishmen could reach the seashore without being interrupted and stopped. Even though the countryside was sparsely populated, people were bound to be aroused.

But if the fellows had thought for a moment they would have realised how safe the enemy was. The whole party had locked themselves within the vessel—for she was capable of accommodating a hundred passengers, if necessary. And what did it matter to the enemy if the secret was out?

On the morrow the truth would be known throughout the land, in any case. For Mr. Maxwell himself would make the facts public. The thieves were quite indifferent about publicity now. They had got their prize, and they could snap their fingers at everybody. All need of secrecy had passed.

So they didn't care what noise they made as they went towards the sea, or how many people were aroused. They were safely within that travelling fortress, and could snap their fingers at the whole army. A regiment, armed with machine-guns, could not have stopped them.

And this was the thought that was worrying Mr. Maxwell very intensely. At first he had not realised it. Freedom, and the knowledge that he could chase the enemy had given him fresh hope. But now that he had had time to think, he was sorely troubled.

For the life of him, he could not see how his precious craft was to be recaptured.

He even began to think that he would never see it again. For they were now getting nearer and nearer to the sea, and there was no sign of the craft. But at length one of Mr. Maxwell's men gave a yell of triumph.

Dimly, in the distance ahead, a dark object could be seen lumbering across a meadow—slowly and deliberately, like some crawling creature out of a nightmare. And with yells of triumph, the pursuers raced onwards.

The St. Frank's fellows were the first to get there. Lee and Mr. Maxwell and the others were soon with us, however, and now that we had actually reached our quarry, we realised the hopelessness of our task.

The sea-shore lay within half a mile. There were no cliffs just at this point—merely a kind of rocky slope which led straight down to the sands. And the submarine kept straight on, taking no notice of the shouts which Mr. Maxwell and his men hurled at him.

The situation was terribly exasperating.

Maxwell himself had made his vessel impregnable. On the land it was a super-tank, and nothing but a direct artillery hit would have stopped it. How, then, was it possible for a crowd of unarmed pursuers to do anything? At the most, we could keep pace

with the vessel, and watch it crawl nearer and nearer to the sea.

Mr. Maxwell was nearly frantic.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE'S MANY A BLIP.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave a gulp of amazement.

Two minutes earlier he had thrown himself against that steel door.

He had done so several times before during the course of that nightmare-like trip. And it had been impossible for him to move that door a fraction of an inch.

And yet, without warning, he was free!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Handy. "Who—who did it? I'm blessed if I can understand this! It's almost uncanny!"

Yet the thing had a very simple explanation.

Handforth had been thrust into that steel store-room, and the door had been bolted upon him. And in the general excitement of departure his very existence had been forgotten.

The men who had placed him there had not reported to their chief, and so Handforth was left—bottled up in that confined space, with scarcely any ventilation. He was perspiring from every pore, and during the last fifteen minutes he had experienced difficulty in breathing.

In desperation he had attempted to get free—he had thumped upon the door in an effort to attract attention. But all in vain. The noise of the craft, as it lumbered along, drowned the sound of Handforth's thumping.

That door was bolted, but not locked. And every jolt, as the craft progressed, edged the bolt a fraction of an inch out of its socket. And now, when the submarine was practically on the beach itself, the steel door swung open. An extra heavy jolt, caused by a collision with a boulder, had wrenched the bolt completely free from its socket.

Handforth had been released by Fate—not by human hands!

In the water, gliding smoothly along, such a thing could not have happened. It was only the continuous jolting that had brought about this effect. And it was easily understandable, too.

Handforth was a fellow of action.

And, finding himself free, he lost no time in getting busy. Above all else, he was infuriated with his captors. For all they cared, he might have suffocated to death in that confined space. And he was resolved to slaughter somebody just as quickly as he could get his fists to work.

After opening the door for a few moments, and filling his lungs with comparatively fresh air—although it did smell pungently of oil—he felt a great deal better.

And Handforth sallied out, his jaw set, his fists clenched.

He didn't care how many of the enemy he met—he was going to fight the lot! That was how he felt just then. And his fury was so great that he was really capable of doing tremendous damage.

The jolting of the craft was so great that he found it difficult to walk along the narrow passage which led towards the engine-room. And, in spite of the general din, Handy was faintly aware of shouts from outside—boyish shouts, too. And then he

busy! I reckoned to do the job single-handed, and, by George, I'll do it!"

Without waiting another moment, Handforth dashed through into the lighted apartment. The first glance showed him that there were three men. That is, three members of the enemy force. Mr. Maxwell's engineer was also present, presiding over the machinery. He was compelled to do his work at the point of a revolver, and he had been told that if the engine stopped—by accident or design—he would be shot down like a dog.



"Stand back!" he shouted hoarsely. "The first man who advances a step will be shot."

heard some voices from the room just in front of him.

"They can't do any harm at all," said one of the voices. "There's a whole crowd, but we needn't worry."

"Those infernal boys must have released Maxwell and his gang."

"Yes, of course."

Handforth glowed with pride. Of course, Church and McClure had warned the camp and had brought assistance to the inventor. And now they were all outside, unable to do a thing. They couldn't stop the lumbering vessel, and so it was up to Handforth.

"All right!" he muttered. "I'll get

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth, in a great voice.

The three men turned, startled. If Edward Oswald had hesitated for a second, he would never have stood an earthly chance. But he didn't hesitate. Even as he uttered the words, he flung himself forward, and lashed out.

Crash!

The first man received the full force of Handforth's fist—a driving, smashing blow that lifted him clean off his feet, and sent him crashing back against some hard metal-work. He collapsed, insensible.

In a flash, Handforth whirled round and attacked the next man.

Biff!

It had all happened so suddenly that the fellow had no chance to resist. Handforth gained another direct hit. He caught the man on the point of the jaw, and knocked him flying.

And at the same second the engineer seized his opportunity. The third man was about to fire point-blank at Handforth—and that would have been the end of the unfortunate junior. The engineer had a spanner in his hand, and he let fly on the flash.

The spanner whizzed to its objective—and struck the fellow on the side of the neck, inflicting a nasty gash. He staggered back, and collapsed, the revolver exploding harmlessly in the air.

"My hat!" gasped Handforth.

The engineer said nothing, for just then other members of the enemy crew appeared. The engineer, his face aglow with hope, reached down and grabbed up the revolver that was lying near his feet.

"Stand back!" he shouted hoarsely. "The first man who advances a step will be shot!"

There was something deadly in his voice—and the engineer meant it, too. He had already thrust over the lever, and the vessel was now stationary, her engines dead.

In that confined space there was very little room for fighting. And Handforth found it impossible to use his fists any more. But there was not the slightest doubt that he had turned the tables. It was solely owing to Handforth's efforts that this change had come about.

"Quick, lad—open that hatch, above!" commanded the engineer. "No—better still! Open that door at the side—the one straight in front of you."

"By Heaven—never!" shouted one of the enemy.

He whipped a revolver from his pocket.

Crack!

It was the engineer's weapon that spoke. The other man collapsed to the floor, shot through the shoulder. And the rest, having received this grim demonstration of the engineer's determination, cowered back. When everything was in their favour they were brave enough—but they had no stomach for fighting of this kind.

Handforth leapt to the door, as directed.

He shot the bolts back, and manipulated a great lever. The heavy door swung open, admitting a flood of cold night air. And Handforth found Mr. Holby Maxwell close at hand, with many others near by.

"Come on!" roared Handy. "We've got the rotters whacked!"

A rousing cheer went up from the Remove.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"On the ball, you chaps!"

And the excitement was intense.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REWARD.



EXACTLY fifteen minutes later the affair was over.

All the members of the enemy had been disarmed and roped up. The whole party, in fact, was captured with extreme neatness and dispatch. And, without any delay, Mr. Maxwell sent a party of his own men with the prisoners to the nearest town—so that they could be handed over to the authorities.

The Remove was left on the sea-shore, together with the submarine. Mr. Maxwell was bubbling with enthusiasm and delight. And everybody, in fact, was feeling distinctly good.

"My boy, I have to thank you mostly for this wonderful rescue!" exclaimed the inventor, wringing Handforth's hand. "Upon my soul! And you are the boy I was greatly angered against. Well, well! I can only say that my gratitude is intense, and I should like to do something to reward you—"

"Oh, rats, sir!" said Handforth gruffly. "There's no need to talk about any reward. I'm always keen on detective work, and perhaps the chaps will appreciate me after this!"

"Handy, you're a wonder!" I grinned.

"Hear, hear!"

"He's left Sherlock Holmes in the shade!"

"Every giddy time!"

Edward Oswald beamed.

"After all, I only did a trifle," he said modestly. "But, anyhow, we dished those blessed Irishmen, didn't we? I suppose they'll be handed over to the Free State Government, won't they?"

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Maxwell. "They will have to pay the penalty in their own country."

Mr. Maxwell thoroughly examined his craft, and was delighted to find that it had come to no harm. The journey from the lake, in fact, had been valuable, for it had thoroughly tested the mechanism, and had come through the ordeal with flying colours. Furthermore, Mr. Maxwell really wanted the craft by the sea. So, in a way, the enemy had assisted.

The Remove, of course, returned to camp at once. Now that the excitement was over there was no longer any need for us to be present. But we learned something which gave us intense satisfaction.

Mr. Maxwell fully realised that he had to thank the St. Frank's fellows for the recovery of his vessel. And, as a slight recognition of this fact, he promised us all a trip in the submarine.

Nelson Lee was rather dubious about allowing this, and declared that we could only go after he had thoroughly satisfied himself that the vessel was seaworthy.

Nelson Lee was responsible for us all, and he could not take any risks.

However, on the morrow, the trial was made.

It was a calm, clear summer's day, with the sea as smooth as a lake. But, first of all, we were all taken for a land trip. The submarine was plenty large enough to accommodate all of us. To our astonishment, we found that there were all sorts of compartments within that steel grey hull that held many fellows.

Mr. Maxwell had designed the craft for war purposes. A bigger vessel of the same type would be able to carry large numbers of troops—convey them under the sea, and land upon enemy soil, acting as transports.

And these compartments in the vessel were all provided with windows, so that we could look out. At sea these windows would be tightly closed and sealed.

We had a really wonderful trip.

The whole Remove took part in it, and Mr. Maxwell revealed the capabilities of his craft. We climbed steep rocks, descended into gullies, and assumed all kinds of seemingly impossible positions.

The vessel had all the existing tanks beaten. And, most wonderful of all, she was capable of crawling along the sea-bed, or floating on the surface of the water.

But we were not allowed to go to sea—yet.

We had been safe enough on land, and should probably have been safe at sea—but the gov'nor would not give his permission. As a preliminary, he insisted upon going on a trip himself. For it was most imperative that he should be satisfied that there was no danger.

So, during the afternoon, the trip was made.

The submarine was away for three or four hours. She went on a long cruise, during which Mr. Maxwell demonstrated her powers to Nelson Lee. He came back delighted—convinced that the Remove would be in no danger.

But it was too late that day.

"It's all right, boys—you needn't look worried," smiled Mr. Maxwell, as he saw the disappointed expressions. "Mr. Lee is agreeable to a cruise with all of you on board—"

"Hurrah!"

"This will be a partial reward for your splendid services," continued Mr. Maxwell. "We shall set out to-morrow—"

"Oh!"

"Why not to-day, sir?"

"Because I have resolved upon a fairly ambitious cruise," replied the inventor. "It is my plan to start out early, and pass through the North Channel into the open Atlantic. There we shall have the ocean to ourselves, and I can promise you an enjoyable trip."

"Oh, ripping!"

"It'll be fine!"

"Shall we have plenty of grub with us, sir?" asked Fatty Little.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You need not worry about food," smiled Mr. Maxwell. "We shall have ample supplies on board. We shall probably rest upon the sea-bed where the water is fairly shallow, and then some marine wonders will be shown to you."

The fellows were tremendously excited, and could hardly wait for the next day to arrive. They wanted to set off at once. But, of course, Mr. Maxwell was right. As the cruise would be an all-day affair, it was better to start off good and early.

And Handforth claimed all the credit.

"Don't forget you've got to thank me for this," he said that evening in camp. "If it hadn't been for my detective ability, you'd never have seen the giddy submarine at all!"

"We're not denying it, old man," chuckled Pitt.

"We realise that you're a wonderful chap, Handy," said De Valerie.

"Well, that's all right, then," said Handforth. "But I don't want you to overlook the fact that I'm the chap who's providing this treat. Mr. Maxwell may own the submarine, but where would he have been if it hadn't been for me?"

Handforth needn't have worried. All the juniors handsomely admitted that he was a wonder. In fact, they were astounded that he had done so well—for, as a rule, he made a mess of things.

But, as I have always said, whenever a crisis was really serious, Handforth was to be relied upon.

That night we went to sleep looking forward eagerly for the morrow. For we were off on that cruise of adventure. We were going in Mr. Maxwell's wonderful submarine, and we were to have some wonderful times.

Little did we realise what the outcome was to be! Little did we guess that that cruise was to lead to amazing and startling consequences!

THE END.

Grand Summer Holiday Adventures begin Next Week with:—

**ADRIFT ON THE ATLANTIC
OR
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EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

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The adventures of the St. Frank's juniors on Mr. Maxwell's submarine-tank, the wonderful craft of which you have just read, will form the chief events in next week's story, "ADRIFT ON THE ATLANTIC; or, the Remove at Sea!" As the guests of Mr. Maxwell, the Remove, accompanied by Nelson Lee, go for a trip in the submarine-tank. Here they see some of the wonders of the deep, wonders that few people have an opportunity of studying. For miles and miles they travel under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean. They are just about to rise to the surface when, without any warning, they crash into a derelict. The submarine-tank is badly damaged and flooded with water. In the nick of time, all the boys, Nelson Lee, and Mr. Maxwell succeed in clambering on to the derelict. Their position is perilous, but eventually they are picked up by a passing liner on its way to New York.

BOUND FOR AMERICA!

Although unprepared for a trip to America, the Remove are delighted at the prospect. By means of wireless, Nelson Lee is able to arrange for the boys to land and spend a holiday in the United States. However, further adventures take place on the liner before New York is reached. By this time, the story comes to an end, and the account of the juniors' experiences in the great City of Skyscrapers will be reserved for the week following.

THE AUTHOR'S SPECIAL JOURNEY TO AMERICA!

As I said last week, the author has made a special journey to America in order to make the stories of this series absolutely true to life. New York will be presented to you, my chums, exactly as the author sees it, and when you have read these stories you will feel as though you had crossed the "herring pond" yourselves.

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THE EDITOR.

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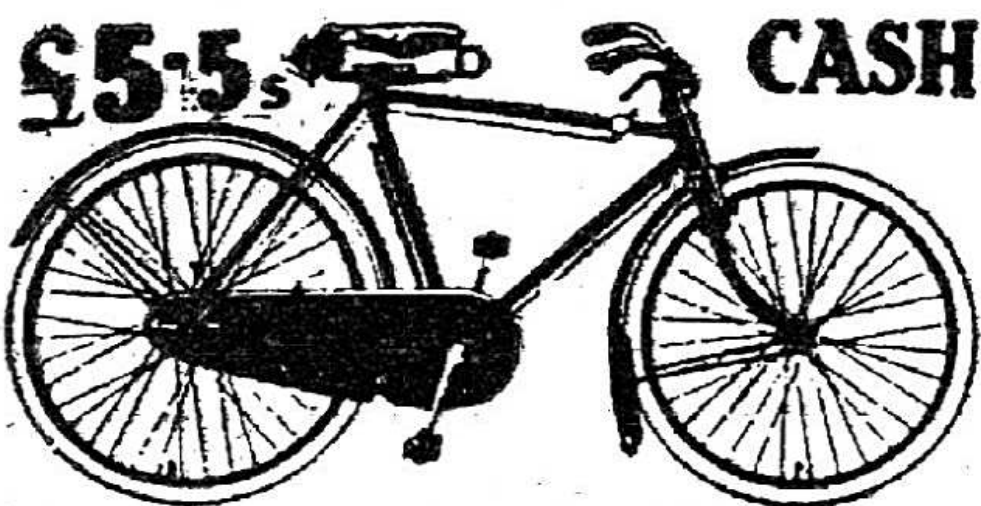
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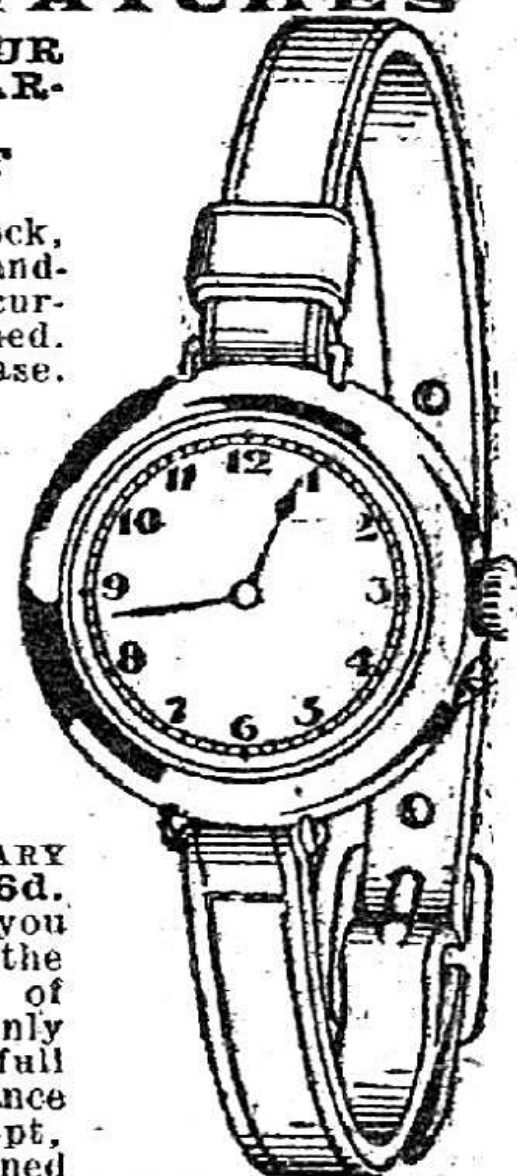
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