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The SCHOOLBOY EXILES!

The Boys of St. Frank's in a Stirring Long Complete Holiday Story
of Perilous Adventure in Africa.

New Series No. 67.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 13th, 1927.



"Look!" gasped Church, and he stared aghast as he saw the canoe hang poised on the very edge of the waterfall. For only a second it checked there, then it went down with a giddy, sickening plunge, taking Nipper and Handy with it!

THE SCHOOLBOY EXILES!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's in an absorbing long complete holiday adventure story.

CHAPTER 1.

The Battle of Kalala Valley!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH gave a whoop.

"Listen!" he shouted excitedly.

"They're starting! Why the dickens can't we go and join in? I'd love to have a slap at those rotten Oturi!"

"We've had enough of the Oturi!" said Church gruffly.

"And enough is as good as a feast, Handy," said McClure.

The chums of Study D at St. Frank's were standing on the veranda of the big bungalow, and the blazing sun of the African morning was beating down relentlessly on the awning. Just beyond the shade patch the flies were dancing in the dazzling rays, and far down the valley, amidst a haze of dust, hundreds of black forms could be dimly distinguished.

"It's going to be a regular set battle," said Nipper, the popular skipper of the Remove. "And I don't think we need fear the result, eh? These Oturi crowds will be practically wiped out of existence."

"Isn't it rather horrible?" asked Irene Manners soberly.

Nipper shrugged his shoulders.

"It's just the way of these African tribes," he replied. "The Kutanas have been the bitter enemies of the Oturi for hundreds of years. Whenever two armies come near one another they fight. It's a sort of unwritten law. And they give no quarter. It's a fight to the death."

"But the Oturi tried to escape!" put in Mary Summers.

"They did!" agreed Nipper grimly. "As soon as they heard that Umlosi and his Kutanas were sweeping in, they fled for their lives. But Umlosi had guarded every road and path. So the enemy was bottled up. But even these Oturi rotters have a certain amount of pride, it seems. K'laba, the chief, accepted Umlosi's challenge, and they're going to fight it out. I think the Oturi know that they'll be wiped off the earth."

"A frightfully priceless prospect," observed Archie Glenthorne, jamming his monocle into his eye and gazing severely down the valley. "I mean to say, I'm not usually a gory sort of chappie. I'm all for peace—absolutely—"

but after what those blessed cannibals did to us, I'm all for seeing them dispatched to the good old happy hunting grounds. Dash it, it's a bit thick when they try to burn the whole crowd of us!"

"With the idea of making a meal of us afterwards!" said Handforth.

For a moment they were silent. The recollection of that ordeal made their hearts beat more rapidly—and that dreadful adventure had taken place only the previous night!

Then they had been near to death. Now they were safe.

Beyond all question, they were safe at last. The stress and agony of the past week or so had come to an abrupt end, and they owed their deliverance to Umlosi, chief of the Kutana tribe.

Umlosi was Lord Dorrimore's staunch friend, and he had arrived in the valley with all his men—a thousand strong—in the nick of time. Otto Lorenzo, the slaver, was beaten.

There were twelve St. Frank's fellows there and Irene & Co., too. And as they took their ease on that shaded veranda, they wondered if the events of the recent weeks had really happened.

Captured by Lorenzo—forced to work in chain gangs as slaves—the revolt and the siege of the power-station—the attack by Lorenzo's allies, the dreaded Oturi—the miraculous escape from the Circle of Fire—and the final refuge in the cavern behind the waterfall!

All that was over.

Umlosi had arrived barely three hours ago, and those three hours had been filled with stirring incident. The Oturis had tried to escape, but had been rounded off, and were now being forced into battle. A picked guard of Umlosi's staunchest warriors had been set aside, and were now acting as Lord Dorrimore's bodyguard. He and his party were now protected.

These Kutana giants were surrounding the bungalow, and at last Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were able to breathe freely. Their youthful companions, after much peril, were in danger no longer.

Otto Lorenzo and his chief overseer, Popodos, had fled at the first approach of the Kutanas. Dorrie had naturally seized the bungalow, and had made it his headquarters. And the youngsters, too excited to sleep—indeed, they had recently had a good spell—were all agog. They had washed, they had tidied themselves, and had fed luxuriously upon the fare that had been plentifully found in the bungalow store-rooms.

Again they were living like decent human beings. No longer were they marched about in chains, and thrust into huts. No longer was it necessary to skulk in the darkness, fleeing from the slaver's murderous myrmidons. They were free again.

Free!

The sensation was so exhilarating that they all wanted to shout. Handforth, as reckless as ever, even wanted to join in the battle. But there was no prospect of that—for even

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore themselves were keeping out of it.

"Let these rival tribes fight it out themselves," Dorrie was saying as he stood with Lee at the other end of the veranda. "Umlosi particularly asked me not to join in. He has selected K'laba as his own particular prize, an' K'laba's chances of surviving are about one in a million. The number of that blackguardly old cannibal is up!"

"Yes, it's better that we should remain here, Dorrie," agreed Lee, nodding. "I rather fancy we've had our share of the fighting, in any case. It has been nothing but one peril on the top of the other for the last week or two. We're infernally lucky to be alive!"

"An' there's a big job for us as soon as the battle's over," said his lordship gravely. "We've got to release every one of Lorenzo's slaves, an' send them back to their own villages. These accursed rubber plantations of Lorenzo's must be wiped out. We set out with that object, didn't we? I'll admit we've had a tidy struggle, but we've won."

"And Lorenzo?" said Lee, musingly. "Where is Lorenzo? While that cunning reptile is at liberty I am uneasy. We must round him up, Dorrie—we must capture him, and hand him over to the proper authorities for summary punishment."

"Far better to put a bullet in him!" said Dorrie gruffly.

"Perhaps so—but it is not for us to administer justice, old man," replied Lee. "Our duty is plain, and we must do it."

Unfortunately, Otto Lorenzo had gone.



CHAPTER 2.

Handforth Means Business!

THE great battle was taking place in the open clearings, a mile or two further down the valley. Fortunately, very little of it was seen from the bungalow. Nelson Lee was glad of this, for the boys and girls had witnessed quite enough horror of late.

The result of the battle was a foregone conclusion. The Oturi were not only inferior in fighting qualities, but they were inferior in numbers. Not that this latter fact counted. For Umlosi was a sportsman, and he had given K'laba an equal chance.

There were between four and five hundred of the Oturi, and Umlosi had contemptuously informed K'laba that he would allow half his own force to stand aside. So Umlosi went into battle with four hundred men only, the rest, much to their disgust, remaining idle.

There was something rather dreadful in this deliberate fight to the death. The Oturi could all have been captured without any battle at all. But that was not the custom. The two forces had clashed, and prisoners

were not taken. This had to be a fight, with no quarter.

And, although it was so shocking at the moment, the subsequent results would justify it. For this battle would utterly destroy the prestige of the Oturi tribe for many generations. Throughout the length and breadth of the Congo region the Oturi would be scorned and laughed at. Their arrogance would be gone, and thus, peace would come to the surrounding tribes, which had for long been terrorised by the raiding Oturi.

So there was much common sense in this grim battle.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie wisely allowed the blacks to get on with it unhampered. It wasn't their concern. True, Umlosi had rushed his army across the Kalala River to the succour of his beloved "N'Kose"—as he called Dorrimore—but he had his own scores to settle with K'laba, too. And he had his own score to settle with Otto Lorenzo! For years the Oturi had raided the Kutana villages at Lorenzo's instigation, and most of the wretched slaves in these plantations were maimed and broken Kutanas. Umlosi had come here for a grim, deadly purpose.

"And we're out of it," said Handforth, as he and his chums discussed the general situation. "We've done our bit, and now we've just got to stand by and look on."

"Isn't it fine?" said Church dreamily.

"Fine!" snapped Handforth. "It's rotten!"

"Aren't you ever satisfied, old man?" asked McClure. "Within a few days we shall be on the march again, and we shall go in state, with the whole of Umlosi's army as escort."

"Think of it," said Church. "A triumphal entry into Zenobu, Umlosi's capital. Congratulations from the British Commissioner, and then the voyage home to England, and back to St. Frank's in time for the new term. Isn't that enough to make your heart throb?"

Handforth grunted.

"We shall have time to think of all that later," he retorted. "I just heard Mr. Lee speaking to old Dorrie about Lorenzo. The rotter has escaped somewhere, and I believe he's skulking in some of his plantations. Why shouldn't we steal off and capture him?"

"Cheese it, you ass!" growled Church. "How can we steal off? The whole bungalow is guarded by Umlosi's men, and they won't let us go through the cordon."

"That's just where you're wrong," said Handforth triumphantly. "The upper end of the valley is safe, and we're allowed there. All the Oturi have been rounded up. And it's my belief that Lorenzo has sneaked off in that direction. So let's be going."

"You hopeless ass!" gasped Church. "You don't mean it?"

"Of course I mean it!"

"Ail right!" said McClure, giving Church a wink. "If you're set on it, we might as well resign ourselves. But we shall have to be back in time for lunch. The girls are

preparing something special. They've grabbed the kitchen, and they're——"

"Never mind the girls!" interrupted Handforth. "The capture of that rotter is more important than lunch. Let's be famous as the captors of Otto Lorenzo!"

"Just a jiffy, then!" said McClure.

He and Church hurried away, and ran into an open doorway. They were looking for Nipper, and they found him almost at once, talking to Gresham and Duncan and Browne.

"Just a minute, Nipper," said Church hurriedly.

They dragged him aside.

"Come and knock some sense into Handy!" urged Mac. "The fathead is talking about capturing Lorenzo on his own, and he means to slip away——"

"Where is he?" asked Nipper grimly. "I'll try persuasion first, and if that won't do we'll call the rest of the chaps and squash him."

"Better call the rest of the chaps now," said Church pointedly.

They hurried round the veranda, but Handforth was no longer in evidence, at least, not at the moment. Then Church gave a gasp, and pointed. A figure was just vanishing beyond the palms at the bottom of the terrace behind the bungalow.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Church. "He's gone! The rotter didn't wait for us!"

"He must have suspected what you went for," said Nipper. "All right—you stay here, and say nothing to the others. We don't want a lot of excitement over nothing. I'll fetch him back."

"We'd better all go!" said McClure anxiously.

"No; the others would smell a rat," said Nipper. "Don't get so excited, you chumps. There's no danger now. You're so used to lurking perils that you can't realise that we're all safe!"

"My hat!" said Church breathlessly. "It does seem a bit of a novelty! Of course, there's nothing to be scared of now, is there?"

"Nothing at all," said Nipper. "Leave Handy to me. I'll have him back within five minutes. Can't have him acting the giddy ox like this."

And he went off without another word. There was no trouble in getting past the grinning Kutanas. They had received no orders to keep the boys within the guarded grounds. There was no necessity for such an instruction. For, after so much danger, the fellows were not likely to deliberately go out looking for trouble.

Handforth, of course, was an exception.

But Nipper anticipated no danger. The battle was going on a mile or two away, and Lorenzo's men had all vanished. His brutal Nubians had probably fled into the bush. The slaves were either locked away in their huts, or hiding in the plantations. But everything would be put right during the course of the day.

"What's the idea, Handy?" asked Nipper grimly.

He had come up behind the leader of Study D before the latter knew anything about it. Handforth spun round, and frowned.

"What do you want?" he asked blusteringly.

"You!" said Nipper.

"Well, you won't have me!" retorted Handforth. "I suppose Church and McClure put you on to this, eh?"

"Never mind about that," said Nipper. "Your idea of looking for Lorenzo is dotty. Leave all that to the gov'nor. You'd better come back with me, and——"

"My idea of looking for Lorenzo is dotty, is it?" hissed Handforth. "Then what do you call this?"

He pointed excitedly, and Nipper started. Just for a glimpse he caught sight of two figures in the distance, flitting between one clump of bushes and another, and he recognised the coarse, ugly figure of Otto Lorenzo, and the slimmer figure of Popodos, the Greek.



CHAPTER 3.

On the Track!

NIPPER was compelled to change his mind.

"Of course, this is different," he said quickly.

"But you're not telling me, Handy, that you expected to spot Lorenzo like this?"

"Well, no," admitted Handforth. "That's just a bit of luck. But there he goes, and I reckon it's up to us to follow him, and find out what his game is. We don't want the rotter to escape, do we?"

"No!" muttered Nipper. "There's no time to go back and tell the gov'nor, or to fetch a force of the Kutanas. But we can easily keep these brutes in sight, and see where they go."

"Come on, then," said Handforth.

They pressed on, cutting straight across a patch of tall grass, and plunging into the shade of a large clump of bamboo. And they caught sight of their quarry some distance away. Lorenzo and Popodos had halted in the shade of a little ramshackle hut, and were talking.

"Good egg!" murmured Nipper. "If we work round, we might be able to get behind that hut—and then we can hear what they're jabbering about. They both use English—mainly because that Greek rotter is a New Yorker."

Lorenzo and his chief overseer had no suspicion that so much interest was being taken in their movements.

The slaver was a changed man.

A great deal of his insufferable arrogance had gone. Even his frame seemed to have shrunk. His bloated face was pasty, his shifty eyes were filled with dread. He knew that he had got to the end of his tether.

"This game is no good, boss," Popodos was saying. "You talk about quitting. But

how's it going to be done? I guess you know that these Kutanas are guarding every road and path? We'll have a tidy job to get out of this valley without being spotted."

"Leave it to me," said Lorenzo. "Have I not told you that I know of a way? These blacks are fighting in the lower part of the valley—and we need not fear them. The battle is in progress now."

"Yes, and K'laba and his murderous gang are just about wiped out," said Popodos harshly. "These other blacks are the best fighters in the whole region. We're finished, boss."

"Don't I know it?" snarled Lorenzo, turning on him like a tiger. "Why tell me? You fool! Why tell me?"

Popodos scowled.

"Well, you don't seem in any hurry," he retorted. "We've got to get out, haven't we? Gosh! If that blamed British crowd gets hold of us, we shall be sunk!"

"Yes, yes," muttered Lorenzo. "They will spare our lives—being fools—but they will hand us to the officials. And then we shall be tried, Popodos."

"And hanged!" said the Greek, with a shiver. "I always thought I was a fool to join up with you, Lorenzo. This game was too risky. It was bound to blow out sooner or later."

The half-breed cursed.

"We have only these boys to thank!" he said hoarsely. "From first to last they have been the cause of the trouble! Why didn't I kill them at first?"

"Because you thought they'd make good slaves," said Popodos sneeringly. "You thought they'd be useful to you. These blacks aren't very quick in picking up electrical stuff. Well, I warn you I told you what would happen——"

"I don't want your jeers, Popodos," interrupted Lorenzo furiously. "We must not quarrel. Singly, we shall never be able to escape. For our own sakes, we must keep together. Everything is lost, and our only possible chance is to get out of the valley now—while the Kutanas are busy at their killing."

"Gosh, that's true enough," said Popodos, taking a deep breath. "When they're through with the job they'll spread all over the valley, and comb us out. What can we do, boss? Every exit is guarded."

"Except one," said Lorenzo softly. "Except one, my friend."

There was a trace of his former gloating in his voice. For a second he looked like his old self. He knew that his great bid had failed, and now his one aim was to save his skin.

Capture would mean death. Not swift death, but a march to Zenobu, then a trial, and afterwards—an execution. There would be many, many witnesses at the prosecution, if it ever came off. Unless Lorenzo escaped now, his fate would be sealed.

The half-breed was more or less stunned.

Only that morning, at dawn, he had assured



In the gloomy tunnel ahead the two could see Lorenzo and the Greek paddling their canoe swiftly into the darkness. "We'll follow them to the bitter end!" growled Handforth grimly.

himself that all his troubles were over. He had driven his white enemies out of their retreat, and the Oturi were ready to massacre them. That would be an incident to smile over in the future.

And then, like a bombshell, had come the intimation that the Kutanas were swarming into his secret territory. Not just a raiding band—not an insignificant company—but the entire Kutana army. The picked warriors of Umlosi's tribe, bent on liberating their brothers, and bent on vengeance.

And now, within a few short hours, was a staggering change.

Lorenzo's plantations were in the hands of his enemies. Even his prized bungalow was now being occupied by the very people he had attempted to torture and massacre. And he himself was a skulking fugitive! Otto Lorenzo was reaping the reward for his many crimes.

Yet he did not seem so crushed as one might have expected. Behind all his stunned consternation there lurked a kind of evil purpose. It almost seemed that he had another card up his sleeve. Yet surely, this was impossible? What could he do now?

Handforth and Nipper, creeping up behind that hut, heard some of the conversation, and they, too, were impressed by Lorenzo's grim voice. Popodos could not understand his employer, and neither could the hidden listeners. What was the half-breed thinking of?

"Yes, my friend," he repeated. "Every exit of the valley is guarded—except one. And that one is unknown to every soul except myself. Even you don't know of it, Popodos. My little secret, eh? Have I not guarded it well? But it will mean that we shall escape."

"That's all you know!" breathed Handforth tensely.



CHAPTER 4.

The Underground River!

PODOS was looking at his companion uneasily.

"Gosh, you ain't well, Lorenzo," he said. "I guess this thing has given you too much of a knock."

"You think I am crazy, eh?" said Lorenzo. "Come with me—and then you will change your mind. I am a man who believes in being prepared, Popodos. Do you think I am to be taken like a rabbit in a net? No, no! When I first came to this valley, I prepared my escape."

"You've got a getaway, eh?" asked the Greek eagerly. "Say, that's something I didn't give you credit for, boss. Where is it? Hadn't we best make a move? Some of those Kutanas may be nosing around at any minute, and then we shan't—"

"Don't get excited," interrupted Lorenzo. "There will be none of the Kutanas nosing round just yet. For two or three hours we are certain of being uninterrupted. None of these invaders can harm us."

He would have been surprised if he had known that two of the invaders were listening to every word he said. But even Handforth had to admit that luck had been very kind.

About time, too! Luck had played them some very shabby tricks lately.

"I have always known that one day I should have to flee," went on Lorenzo slowly. "And

so I prepared. Did you think I was such a fool as to leave things to chance? The others can fall into the hands of the enemy. I care not. But you and I, Popodos, can escape. Come with me and I will show you how."

"Well, this is real good," declared the Greek. "I was wondering how we could make it, boss."

But even now his voice was doubtful. He had a suspicion that Lorenzo was out of his mind, and that this "getaway" was a delusion. But the thing would soon be proved, one way or the other.

They moved off. Nipper and Handforth, from their place of concealment, watched cautiously. The two men were walking across an open patch, and it was impossible to follow yet.

"Come on!" muttered Handforth impatiently.

"No—not now," breathed Nipper. "We must wait until they've disappeared. It's important that they shouldn't suspect that they're being watched. Why the dickens couldn't Lorenzo have said more? I want to know how he means to get out! And now our only course is to follow them."

"Well, that's just what we want," said Handforth promptly. "In fact, there's no reason why we shouldn't dash up, and smash the rotters. We're equal to knocking them out, aren't we? I'll take Lorenzo, and you can have Popodos. How's that?"

"Fine—if you want to die quickly."

"What the dickens——"

"You silly ass!" growled Nipper. "Do you still think that these men would fight us? Lorenzo wouldn't hesitate a second. He'd pull out his gun, and shoot us both down. Don't forget, Handy, that this job is risky. If we're spotted we shall be shot."

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "I suppose you're right! They're a bit desperate, aren't they? Yes, we shall have to go easy."

"No more suggestions for capturing them," growled Nipper. "Let's be content with seeing where they go. Come on—all safe now. But, for goodness' sake, keep quiet—and be ready to duck if they spot us. They'll shoot at the first sight, and they'll shoot to kill."

Even the impulsive Handforth was subdued now. For he realised that Nipper was absolutely right. These two men were bent on escaping, and they weren't likely to allow a pair of schoolboys to hinder them. They would shoot them down without compunction.

So when they crossed the open space they did so with a full realisation of the danger, and were ready to fling themselves flat on the ground.

It wasn't Nipper's way to take unnecessary chances, but he felt that it was highly important to follow Lorenzo. The defeated slaver had referred to a secret exit. If he was lost sight of, he would escape, and none would know how he had gone.

The two men were now above the waterfall, comparatively near to the river, and making their way up the rough jungleland which

bordered the stream. There had been no cultivation here, and the country was as wild as any in the outer bush.

Breaking through a tangle of undergrowth, Lorenzo led the way to the very edge of the river. There were rocks here, and the stream was fairly narrow. Some distance higher up, the overhanging jungle formed a bower completely over the water. The stream seemed to vanish into the tangle of tropical vegetation. And further up there was nothing but jungle, with hills rising in the distance.

"We seemed to have got to a blamed queer spot," growled Popodos. "We can't do nothing here, boss. What's the idea?"

"You must wait," said Lorenzo. "Follow me."

He picked his way over the rocks, and they went carefully and laboriously up the bank, occasionally clinging to the overhanging trees. It was difficult going, and Popodos wondered where it was leading them.

This river was only a small one—a branch of the Kalala, probably. Popodos had always believed that it came through a gorge higher up in the hills—or perhaps down the hillsides in a series of cascades. The jungle up there was too thick to be penetrated.

But there was method in Lorenzo's madness.

For after a little more of this queer progress he halted. They were now in a regular grotto of tangled creepers and overhead foliage. The air quivered with humid heat, and insects flew in their millions. Popodos half-expected to see crocodiles lurking in the shallows.

"Do you see?" said the slaver, pointing.

"Gosh!" murmured the other.

Bending low, and looking upstream, he made a surprising discovery. The stream came out of a low, rocky cavern. Evidently, this little river flowed through the mountains, and not through a gorge. It was a tiny enough stream, and Lorenzo was probably the only man who knew what lay beyond.

He led the way into the cavern, walking along a narrow ledge. And then he paused.

"We must have a light," he said. "The distance is not great, but there are many twists and turns. We must make a torch. Get the necessary material, Popodos, while I float the canoe."

"Canoe?" repeated the other. "But I didn't know——"

"Fool!" snapped the slaver. "Do you think we're going to swim?"

The Greek made no further comment, but plunged into the bush, and proceeded to make a huge rough-and-ready torch. While he was doing this, he knew nothing of the two pairs of eyes that were watching him from the undergrowth.

Nipper and Handforth were still following.

If the truth must be told, they had really lost their quarry, and it had seemed for a time that they would have to abandon the chase. The making of that torch had guided them. For Popodos made no attempt to silence his activities. The two juniors heard

the snapping and crushing of the bushes, and so they picked up the trail again.

At last Popodos returned to the low cavern, and now he found that Lorenzo had floated a small canoe. It was all ready.

"Where does it lead to, boss?" asked the Greek eagerly.

"Never mind," said Lorenzo. "Never mind, my friend. But I am not beaten yet! I shall escape—we shall both escape. And those fools down in the valley believe that they are safe! Safe! They do not know me, Popodos!! The vermin will all be wiped out during the next hour!"

He laughed madly, and even Popodos winced at that sound. Was this man insane, or had he really retained a trump card up his sleeve?



CHAPTER 5.

Sticking to it!

NIPPER frowned.

"I don't like it, Handy," he murmured uneasily. "That brute has got some plan or other. But what?"

We've got to stick to this game, or we shan't know the truth. It's a pity he didn't talk a little more.

"Well, let's move on," said Handforth impatiently. "We've started on this trail, and we've got to keep it up. We can't go back now. We must discover where this river leads to, and what Lorenzo means to do."

Nipper realised the truth of it. To back out now was impossible. And yet he had assured Church and McClure that he would bring Handforth back within a few minutes!

By this time, no doubt, Handforth's chums had told the others, and it was quite likely that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were organising a search party. Well, it wouldn't matter very much. They could easily explain later. They were justified in carrying on.

But could they carry on?

This was a doubtful point. The two men had vanished into that cave mouth, and there was no further sound from them. Handforth wanted to press on at once, but was it worth it?

If the pair were still there, they would be able to shoot the boys down with ease. And yet if there was any delay the men might escape altogether. The thing had to be risked.

"Come on!" muttered Nipper. "Let's make one rush!"

They leapt from rock to rock, half-expecting to hear shots ring out. But they reached the ledge without incident, and found themselves peering into the depths of the low tunnel. And there, in the distance, they could see a yellow glare. It was reflected eerily on the black waters of the stream. And echoing strangely came the sound of paddles.

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth. "They've got a boat. This river cuts right under the hill. We're dished!"

"Looks like it," breathed Nipper. "There's no way of following except by water. This ledge dwindles away. And we can't swim."

"Why not?"

"Because the current will be too strong for us," replied Nipper. "Besides that, there may be rocky snags. It isn't worth it, old man. I really think we ought to go back."

"Go back!" said Handforth, aghast.

"Yes. What else is there to be done?"

"Why, follow these brutes, of course."

"That's the worst of you, Handy—you're so unpractical," murmured Nipper. "We can't follow without the means of following. That's plain, ordinary common-sense. When you get up a brick wall you won't admit it's a brick wall, and you want to bang your head against it."

Handforth stared.

"There's no brick wall here!" he said blankly.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Nipper. "I was only speaking figuratively, you chump! These men have got a canoe, and we haven't—"

"Then we can swim."

"We can't swim, you impulsive idiot!"

"All right—you see!" snapped Handforth.

He lowered himself into the water, and Nipper groaned. It was just like Handy to act in this way. The next second Handforth gasped.

"Why, it's only four feet deep!" he muttered. "We can wade it!"

He stood there, the water surging round him powerfully. The current was stronger than he had imagined, and it was as much as he could do to keep his balance. But he wasn't going to be beaten.

He plunged on, and then suddenly floundered into a deep hole in the river bed. He was spun round by the force of the current, and he struck the rocky ledge, and but for Nipper's timely clutch he would have been badly hurt.

"Oh, crumbs!" growled Handforth, as he was hauled out by his companion. "What happened?"

"Enough to show you that swimming or wading is out of the question, I should think," growled Nipper. "Why can't you realise the impossibility of continuing—"

He broke off in the middle of his sentence, and he stared at the rocks just ahead. His eyes were growing more accustomed to the gloom now, and he could see things which had hitherto remained hidden.

"What's up?" asked Handforth.

"Nothing," murmured Nipper. "But I rather think we can stick to the trail, after all. My son, there's another canoe here—almost hidden in a crevice."

"What!" gasped Handforth.

It was a fact. Until Nipper had looked closely he had not seen it. A second canoe was concealed, and a brief examination of it proved that it was in excellent condition. Furthermore, it contained two strong paddles.

a water container, and a sealed box. It did not need much guesswork to assume that this box contained food. Concentrated stuff, probably, in airtight containers.

Lorenzo had made every preparation for flight. Perhaps three or four of them would want to escape, and so he had had two canoes in readiness. The half-breed was a man who took no chances.

Within a couple of minutes Nipper and Handforth had floated the canoe, and were aboard. All was pitch darkness ahead now. The glare from the torch had vanished.

"It'll be a bit of a risky trip, but we shall have to do it," said Nipper grimly. "I'll take the forward paddle. Handy, if you don't mind."

"I do mind," said Handforth promptly.

"Well, it makes no difference," said Nipper. "If you don't like it, my son, you'll have to lump it."

"You—you rorter!" said Handforth. "Who's leading this chase?"

"I am," said Nipper calmly.

"Rot! It was my idea," protested Handforth. "Didn't I—"

"We won't argue," grinned Nipper. "Lead, if you want to. What does it matter? The main thing is to get going—and don't forget to keep your head well down. In this darkness we might run up against some snags. The roof's only a foot or two above us even here."

They pushed off, paddling strongly, and even then it was only slow progress. They had to fight their way against the current, and there was something eerie in this penetration of the black depths.

However, these conditions did not last long.

After several nasty bumps against the rocks, and one or two narrow escapes from jagged projections, they turned a sudden bend in the river, and came within sight of their quarry.

Two or three hundred yards ahead that flaming torch could be seen, and it served as an efficient guide. For they could now follow with comparative ease every projection revealed to them clearly.

"We're safe enough like this," murmured Nipper. "We can see them, but they can't see us. Their eyes are blinded by that torch-light, and everything beyond a few yards range is pitch black to them. We've got the best of it."

"And we're going to follow them to the bitter end," said Handforth grimly.



CHAPTER 6.

The Capture of the Valley!

LORD DORRIMORE leapt over the veranda rail, and ran forward to meet Umlosi. The great Kutana Chief halted, and raised his spear in salute. Incidentally, that spear was significantly damp.

"Wau! 'Tis well, N'Kose!" said Umlosi.

"The battle is over?"

"The battle is over, my father," rumbled Umlosi. "These dogs of Oturi are beaten as they have never been beaten before. Most of them have been slaughtered, and the others are fleeing in a rabble for the other forests. Methinks they will never return to their villages."

Dorrie coughed.

"I don't think we'll go into details, old man," he said discreetly. "This was your quarrel as much as ours, an' you have wiped up the enemy pretty effectively. What of K'laba, the Chief?"

"K'laba fell under my own spear," replied Umlosi. "Wau! K'laba is dead."

"And the valley is entirely in our possession," said Nelson Lee, joining them. "Umlosi, old friend, we have much to thank you for. You have saved our lives, and your coming will mean the freeing of many hundreds of slaves. This work of yours is noble."

"And yet, Umtagati, it is work that any man would do," replied the Kutana Chief. "Is not slavery a foul and atrocious abomination? Wau! Now it is my desire to seek this Lorenzo and slay him."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I appreciate your idea, Umlosi, but I am afraid you mustn't do it," he said drily. "You have fought your hereditary enemy, the Oturi. But you must not slay a white man."

"Thou art casting a slur upon thyself, my master, by referring to this jackal as a white man," protested Umlosi. "For is he not as foul as the creatures that crawl from beneath the stones?"

"He's all that," agreed Dorrie. "At the same time his skin happens to be white, and it's for the proper authorities to give him a fair trial, and provide him with a length of rope—with a noose at the end of it. We must capture this brute, certainly, but we must take him away from here a prisoner. The trouble is, it's rather difficult to capture a man who refuses to show himself."

"Every way out of the valley is guarded, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "My warriors shall search, and this wretch shall be brought before thee. Thy wisdom is best, my father. If thou thinkest that Lorenzo should live, then will I curb mine own desire to kill him."

And Umlosi went off to organise his men for a great round-up.

The battle was over, but there still remained a vast amount of work to be done.

The Kutanas had brought hundreds of carriers with them, conveying supplies of all kinds. When Umlosi led an expedition he did the job thoroughly, and at the lower end of the valley a vast camp had been set up. The shaded slopes below were dotted with scores of tents, and here there was ample accommodation for the freed slaves.

And these unhappy people, almost unable to believe in their good fortune, were being led

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towards the camp. For the first time for years they were being treated like human beings. They were partaking of decent food. Their period of slavery was over.

The bungalow still remained in possession of Dorrie's party.

They would remain for a day or two, perhaps, until all was in readiness for the return to civilisation. There was no acute hurry. The boys and girls could do with a period of rest, and if it came to that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore wouldn't say "no" to a peaceful day or two.

"As far as I can see, it's all over bar shout-in' now," said his lordship, as he turned to the veranda. "The Oturi are wiped out, and the slaves are being freed. The valley is in our complete possession, and Lorenzo can do nothing more against us."

"Yes, his wings are clipped," agreed Lee. "But where is he? I should feel far more comfortable if I could lay my hands on him."

"I can't say that it would give me much comfort to handle that dirty blighter!" said his lordship. "Still, I see what you mean. Not that it matters. He's probably skulkin' in the bush somewhere, frightened out of his life. Why bother about him?"

Lee sighed.

"I'm afraid your methods are rather slipshod, Dorrie," he said. "Why bother about him, eh? Do you realise that this man must be nearly mad with rage and chagrin? He can do us no serious harm, I will admit—but he can possibly kill one or two of us."

"That's not a cheery thought," said Dorrie.

"Lorenzo is armed, and he is at liberty," said Lee. "My life and your life are particularly endangered. Wherever we go we may provide a mark for Lorenzo's bullet. Skulking in the undergrowth, he can easily pot at us. And what does he care? He knows that he is a beaten man, and his only lust now will be for revenge. I shall not be comfortable until he's chained up in one of his own noisome huts!"

"That's rather a good suggestion," said Dorrie. "Well, leave it to Umlesi. He'll round up the cur."

Church and McClure came round the veranda. They were both looking so anxious that Nelson Lee regarded them sharply.

"Seen anything of Nipper, sir?" asked Church, in a casual voice.

"Badly done, old man," said Dorrie, shaking his head.

"Eh?" gasped Church.

"That assumed air of carelessness, my lad," said Dorrie. "It's not good enough. What's the actual worry?"

"I don't know," replied Church. "But Nipper hasn't come back."

"Hasn't he?" asked Dorrie. "I didn't know he had gone."

"We didn't mean to say anything, sir," put in McClure, looking at Lee. "But over an hour ago Handy talked about going off to find Lorenzo."

"He talked about what?" asked Lee angrily. "Good heavens! Is there no end to that boy's rashness? I thought he would have had enough excitement for a bit."

"Handy's never satisfied, sir," said Church bitterly. "He always thinks he can do things better than other people, and then gets himself into a mess."

"You'd better tell me just what has happened," said Lee grimly.

"Nothing, sir," replied Church. "That's just it. We told Nipper, and Nipper said he would fetch Handy back. And that was an hour ago."

Dorrie grinned.

"Easy!" he said. "Nipper's still fetchin' him back. You know what Handy is when he sets his mind on anythin'. They must have spent this hour in arguin'."

But Nelson Lee was not satisfied.

"No, Dorrie," he said. "Nipper wouldn't argue for that length of time—even with Handforth. Something must have happened to keep them away."

And he gave Dorrie a look which made his lordship turn pale. Dorrie had suddenly remembered that earlier remark of Lee's. Otto Lorenzo was at large—armed!

It was a disturbing thought.

other juniors were laughing and chatting together.

"Well?" said Dorrie, looking hard at Nelson Lee.

"This might be serious, old man," said Nelson Lee.

"Good glory, isn't it serious?" asked his lordship huskily. "What were you sayin' to me about Lorenzo? Supposin' he potted those kids? Supposin' they're lyin' dead somewhere?"

"We're not dealing with suppositions," Lee pointed out. "And there's really no need to get these alarmist notions. There is a bare possibility that a tragedy has happened, but I refuse to accept that pessimistic view. The boys are probably up to some game of their own."

"But they've been missin' for over an hour!" protested Dorrie.

"What of it?" said Lee. "They might be just wandering about—just looking into Lorenzo's stores, and into his factory. We haven't given any orders that they mustn't leave the bungalow. The obvious thing to do is to organise a search-party at once, and bring the young rascals back. I shall give Nipper a piece of my mind when I do find him. It isn't like him to go off in this way."

"That's why I'm so infernally worried."

"But Nipper is with Handforth," said Lee dryly.

"Yes, that's a big thought," agreed Dorrie. "Handy is a hefty handful when he makes up his mind. Well, let's see about this search-party. I shall be like a cat on hot bricks until I know the truth. Gad! After all we've been through it would be rough luck to leave this valley without those two youngsters."

"There are search-parties to be organised," said Lee thoughtfully. "At all costs, we must secure Lorenzo. The valley must be searched from end to end—and it may take a week—perhaps two weeks."

"As long as that?" asked Dorrie.

"Yes, old man," said Lee. "And I am not going to rest until I have got him—even if I have to trail him half-way across the Congo. That scoundrel shall be made to answer for his crimes. You will leave at once for Zenobu—to-morrow, at the latest."

"This is interestin'," said Dorrie politely. "It's the first I knew of it. Still, you're givin' orders, an' I'm here to obey."

"There's no earthly reason why these boys and girls should be subjected to any further dangers," declared Lee. "I want you to arrange a big escort for them, Dorrie, and you will accompany them to Zenobu, which, after this remote valley, is practically civilisation."

"An' you?"

"I shall hunt for Lorenzo, and shall not give up until I obtain proof of his death or capture him," replied Lee grimly. "A very simple programme, Dorrie, and we must carry it out. We have each our tasks."

"Wouldn't you like to escort the young-



CHAPTER 7.

No Trace!

INDEED, it was such a disturbing thought that Lord Dorrimore became filled with a sudden anxiety.

"All right boys—run along," he said, in such a brusque manner that startled Church and McClure. "Mr. Lee and I will look into this. Don't worry about Nipper and Handy. We'll find 'em."

"But can't we do anything, sir?" asked Church, staring.

"Yes, you can go an' help the girls to get lunch ready," replied Dorrie. "By the way, have you mentioned anything of this to the others? They don't seem to have noticed that Nipper an' Handy are missin'."

"No, sir, we've kept mum."

"Good lads," said Dorrie. "Stick to it."

They went off, and it was clear that the rest of the fellows were unsuspecting. Archie was sprawling in a deck-chair, fast asleep. Browne, of the Fifth, was having a friendly argument with Willy Handforth, and the

sters?" suggested Dorrie casually. "Wouldn't it be better for me to go after Lorenzo?"

"No, it wouldn't!"

"I thought you'd say that," sighed his lordship. "Pity! I might have run across one or two elephants——"

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Lee. "You think more of the elephants than you do of this murderous slaver! You be a good fellow, Dorrie, and take these youngsters to Zenobu. That's the general plan, and now we'll see if we can't find those two boys."

They hurried off, and within a few minutes they were busily engaged with many of the willing Kutanas. Parties of the blacks were sent out in every direction, with instructions to search thoroughly. If they found Nipper and Handforth, they were to bring them back without any delay.

Church and McClure, who were keeping their eyes well open, soon became aware of the activities, and they had no difficulty in guessing what they meant.

"I say, this is pretty significant, isn't it?" asked Church, in alarm. "They're getting up search-parties, Mac! They're afraid that old Handy has got lost."

"Or killed," said McClure unhappily.

"Killed!"

"Supposing he saw Lorenzo, and went for him?" asked Mac, with a catch in his voice. "That brute would shoot him dead. And then Nipper might have gone to his rescue, and have been shot dead, too."

"Good gad!"

They swung round, and found Archie Glen-thorne staring at them.

"Odds horrors and disasters!" said Archie. "You don't absolutely mean to say that poor old Nipper has been absolutely shot dead?"

"No, you ass!" said Church hastily. "It's only Mac's rot! We didn't mean to tell you, but you might as well know now. Handy and Nipper went off an hour ago, and we haven't seen them since. We're afraid that something might have happened."

"Oh, ah!" said Archie. "Happened? I see what you mean. You mean that something might have happened? That something, as it were, might absolutely have happened?"

"Yes, you fathead!" growled Church.

"But what?" asked Archie. "I mean to say, in a place like this all sorts of frightful things can happen. I rather thought that everything was all serene—oh now. But a chappie never knows. Supposing we dash about and do a bit of searching for the dear old lads?"

"The last we saw of them was when they went behind those palms, over there," said McClure, pointing. "Shall we try to track them down? We might as well be doing something."

"Absolutely," said Archie. "What-ho!"

But they were not very enthusiastic. After covering a considerable distance, they came to the conclusion that this search was very much like looking for a needle in a haystack. They were beyond the central part

of the valley here, and most of it was wild. It was an almost impossible task to examine every tangled patch of bush and undergrowth. And they had an uncomfortable feeling, too, that they were easy marks for Lorenzo.

"Oh, rats!" said Church, at length. "I expect we're worrying ourselves over nothing. Let's get back to the bungalow. They might have turned up by now."

When they got back, however, there was still no word from Nipper and Handforth, and by this time the others had begun to wonder. In fact, the truth could no longer be held back. It became general knowledge that Nipper and Handforth had gone off in search of Otto Lorenzo, and had not been seen since.

And the little party was gravely concerned.



CHAPTER 8.

The Great Gorge!

"ASY—easy!" murmured Nipper.

Using their paddles with caution, Handforth and Nipper edged the canoe towards the rock wall, and clung to some projections. They steadied the little craft, and Nipper pulled himself up on to the uneven rocks.

"Good man," said Handforth. "Now tie that bit of rope somewhere. Done it? All right—I'll come up there, too."

A few moments later he had joined Nipper, and they took closer stock of their position. Twenty or thirty feet away there was a dazzling flood of sunlight.

They had reached the end of the cavern: Otto Lorenzo and Popodos had vanished beyond, into the open air. It was impossible to take the canoe out into the open, for it would have been immediately spotted. At Nipper's suggestion, the two juniors had scrambled to the rocks, which were easily negotiable here.

"There's something fishy about this," murmured Nipper. "But we ought to be able to discover the truth, anyway. And we can easily get back into the valley. It'll be something to say that we know exactly how Lorenzo has escaped. The gov'nor will soon get on his trail."

"Pity we can't collar him," said Handforth regretfully.

They edged their way along, and at last reached the spot where the sunlight came in. With extreme caution, Nipper put his head round the rock and stared about him.

"My hat!" he murmured.

The place was wild enough. There were steep rock sides on either hand, and the river took a sharp turn away to the right, and continued its course down a steep, narrow canyon. There seemed to be no reason why Lorenzo and Popodos should not have kept to the river, for the current, even here, was not too strong.

But the men's canoe was only a little way ahead, empty. And, cautiously peering up, Nipper could see Lorenzo and Popodos laboriously mounting the cliff-like ascent. They vanished behind a towering mass of rocks, and did not reappear.

"That's rummy," said Nipper, frowning.

"Eh? What's rummy?"

"Come and look here, Handy—it's safe now."

Handforth came forward, and they both stood staring up.

"Why have they gone up there?" asked Nipper, after he had told Handforth of what he had seen. "It's obvious they're coming down again, or they wouldn't have left the canoe like that. Why make this steep climb? Lorenzo isn't built for it."

"Let's go and see," suggested Handforth eagerly.

Nipper's eyes gleamed.

"By Jove, I feel like being reckless for once," he said. "Yes, Handy, we might as well chance it. There are plenty of rocks here to take cover behind, and if we're spotted we can easily bolt back and jump into the canoe. We're not afraid of Lorenzo while we have cover."

"Good man," said Handforth. "Let's go."

And they commenced the climb—with the advantage of knowing exactly where their quarry had vanished.

As a matter of fact, the two men were nearer than the juniors believed. For, after rounding that pile of rock, it was impossible to proceed further. Popodos felt decidedly nervous.

He was standing on a wide mass of rock, with a sheer drop on his right—the drop into that narrow little river where the canoe lay.

But immediately in front of him there was a scene of grandeur. A great slope of jagged rocks, stretching down for half a mile sheer. And at the bottom of it there was a rugged gorge, filled with tumbling waters. This was a real river—in fact, the Kalala itself.

"What's the idea of coming up here, boss?" asked Popodos.

"Wait!" panted Lorenzo, holding his side.

"Wait my friend. Let me get my breath!"

That climb had almost finished him. The distance was not great, but Lorenzo was a heavy man, and he was in no condition for such strenuous exercise. It was some minutes before he could recover.

Then he stood up, and now his eyes were glittering evilly. There was a light in them which caused Popodos to stare uneasily. Once again he was impressed by the thought that his employer was mad.

"Well?" asked Lorenzo. "You see?"

"Sure I see," said the other. "What of it?"

"Look beyond," said Lorenzo, pointing. "We are now at the extreme end of the valley—at the top, where the ground rises. And yet our canoe is on the same level as the factory. Only this vast barrier of rock prevents the Kalala from bursting right through into the valley."

"I'm mighty glad these rocks are here," said Popodos.

"You should be glad," said Lorenzo. "For if this water came through, the valley would be a valley no longer, but a great lake. Farther up, you can see the swirl where the waters of the Lalaga converge with the Kalala. The force of the water just below here is tremendous. This gorge is almost unknown, but it is one of the most impressive in the whole of Central Africa."

"Darned good," said Popodos sourly. "Some idea, boss! It was a great little notion to bring me up here to admire the scenery! Maybe you don't realise that I don't care for scenery?"

Lorenzo said nothing. He had, apparently, gone into a dream. His eyes were still glittering, but they had a far-away expression in them. His face had become flushed, and he seemed peculiarly tensed.

And only a little way behind, creeping from the shelter of a great boulder, Nipper and Handforth were present. They had made the great ascent in safety, and had no idea that their quarry was so near at hand.

Suddenly Nipper drew back, and held a finger to his lips.

"What the—?" began Handforth.

"Quiet!" breathed Nipper. "They're just round these rocks—not ten yards away!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I'd no idea—"

Nipper broke off, for at that moment Lorenzo had uttered a wild sort of laugh. The sound came without warning, and Popodos was so startled that he nearly took a step sideways towards that chasm.

"Gosh!" he said angrily. "What the thunder—"

"And now, my friend—revenge!" shouted Lorenzo frenziedly. "They think they are safe! They think I am beaten! Well, perhaps I am beaten—for the Kalala Valley will no longer be a rubber plantation. But when they think they are safe, they are wrong! I, Lorenzo, shall win this fight, Popodos! I am going to be the one to gloat!"

"What's wrong with you, Lorenzo?" snarled Popodos, thoroughly frightened. "Have you gone crazy, or what?"

"Yes!" screamed Lorenzo. "I'm crazy for the tremendous spectacle that we shall soon see. I have lost my valley—on which I spent my thousands—but none other shall have it. And all those fools down there will be killed. I'm not such a blockhead, Popodos. I don't build for others to use. If I must abandon this valley, then I shall destroy it. And in destroying it I'll wipe out every one of those interfering dogs who have ruined me!"

"But—but—"

"You think I can't do it?" shouted Lorenzo. "Then I'll tell you, Popodos. I'll tell you a secret. Another secret. Oh, I'm a very careful man. And this secret of mine will stagger you. You're going to see something very splendid soon, my friend. Yes, something very splendid!"

He laughed with such mad abandon that Popodos shook in his shoes. Lorenzo's ravings were awful to witness.

What idiotic notion had he got into his crazed mind now?



CHAPTER 9.

The Awful Truth!

AD!" murmured Handforth. "That's what's wrong with him. He's gone clean off his rocker."

"It seems like it," agreed Nipper, in a whisper. "He knows that he's a beaten man, and his mind must have given way under the strain. He can't do anything to us now. He's a fugitive, and will be lucky enough if he escapes the hand of justice."

They were not frightened by Lorenzo's outburst. It was so obviously the raving of a defeated man. All Lorenzo's schemes had come to nothing. He had been compelled to abandon his slave plantations, and nothing faced him but flight and possible capture. With that prospect before him he had cracked up.

It was all so easy to understand.

Popodos thought exactly the same thing. He was perilously near to his employer, however, and horribly near to that sheer drop. The Greek wasn't feeling at all comfortable.

"Steady, Lorenzo," he said gruffly. "Calm yourself, man! What's the need of this stuff? Gosh! The best thing we can do is to quit, and not hang around here——"

"Yes, I'll quit!" interrupted Lorenzo.

"But not yet. No, Popodos—not yet! There is something to be done first. Have I not told you that I mean to wipe out the valley, and everybody it contains?"

"Yes, you said some junk of that sort," retorted Popodos. "But what's the good of it? You can't push this gorge over, and let the Kalala sweep into the valley. You may be a big man, Lorenzo—or you were once—but there's a limit. I guess you're no more than I am now. We're partners in this get-away."

"Fool—imbecile!" snarled Lorenzo. "I have been forced to bolt, but I am still in possession of the trump card. Let me tell you something. You say I cannot let the Kalala River sweep through into the valley? But I can! Do you hear me? I can!"

His voice rose in a screech of triumph.

"You make me tired," said the Greek, his face haggard and pale. "This hot air is no kind of use, you darned fool! The game's up, so why don't you admit it?"

Lorenzo did not appear to hear—which, perhaps, was just as well for Popodos' safety. The slaver was not the kind of man who liked being called a fool.

"Yes, I'll tell you something," went on Lorenzo. "What will you say, my friend, when you hear that this great gorge is undermined? Beneath those rocks," he went on,

stamping his foot to emphasise the direction. "Right beneath us, Popodos! Do you understand me? They are undermined!"

Popodos went green.

"Undermined?" he said huskily. "What with?"

"Dynamite!" shouted the other.

"Dynamite!" panted Popodos. "Good gosh!"

His eyes started out of his head. He half expected to be blown to fragments as he stood. It was not a pleasant revelation. Then, suddenly, a spasm of relief came over him. This man was mad! He was just raving, and there wasn't an atom of truth in his wild statement.

The Greek suddenly became aware that Lorenzo was searching his face.

"You don't believe it, eh?" said the slaver.

"You think I am imagining all this? But you're wrong, Popodos. I tell you these hills are ready to be blown up at any moment. I have only to fire the charge, and there will be an explosion such as you have never witnessed in all your life."

Nipper and Handforth, behind their rock, had heard every word. They were both looking startled—were both filled with alarm. It seemed certain that Lorenzo was raving. But what if his story should be true? The thing was too awful to imagine. If all these rocks were blown away, the full force of the combined Lulaga and Kalala rivers would rush through into the valley like a tidal wave.

"Do you think he means it?" asked Handforth huskily.

"I don't know," said Nipper. "It seems impossible."

"That's what I think," breathed Handforth. "But, by George, if it were true there'd be a terrible flood, wouldn't there? We shouldn't even have time to get back to warn the others."

"Perhaps we'd better get back now," suggested Nipper. "And yet I don't like to go until I know for certain."

Lorenzo was speaking again, and his words were significant. They were words which seemed to clinch the whole matter. For they carried conviction with them.

"You know my work, Popodos," he was saying. "You know that I have been using slaves—and that slaves are not allowed by law. In that valley there are witnesses—men who will speak against me if I am captured and brought to trial. But they won't live, and so they can't tell tales. My plans are complete, Popodos."

"Yes, but this is all——"

"Listen!" continued Lorenzo. "One day I knew that I should be compelled to run, and so I prepared this secret exit. I had these rocks bored and filled with high explosives. Not a pound or two but hundredweights of it. When that water sweeps through it will drown all my slaves, and it will wipe out my entire plantations."

"You mean this?" asked Popodos, aghast.

"Not an atom of evidence will remain," shouted Lorenzo wildly. "Now do you understand my motive? By the time the tumult is

over there will be no building left, and every life will have been battered out. One touch from me, and the whole top of this valley will go up in dust, admitting the full force of two rivers!"

Popodos shifted uneasily.

"Boss," he said earnestly, "I hope we'll be a long way away when you make that touch!"

"Have no fear, my friend," sneered the other. "I have a time fuse in readiness. Every charge will explode at the same moment, and we shall have time to get well out of the danger zone. And then, later, we can climb the hills, and look at the desolation and disaster that will mark the Kalala Valley. It will mean death to them all!"

He suddenly went into another frenzy.

"Now I shall have my revenge!" he said hoarsely. "Those schoolboys will never live to leave my plantations. Dorrimore will perish—so will Lee! So will these scum of Kutanas! All will be swept away before they can know what is going to happen to them. Did I not tell you that I should have my revenge? Did I not tell you that my time would come? I am ruined—yes, utterly ruined—but those who brought about my downfall will perish!"



CHAPTER 10.

Into the Abyss!

THERE was something so utterly convincing about Lorenzo's words that it was impossible to regard them as the ravings of a madman. Nipper realised that this was exactly the sort of thing that Otto Lorenzo would do. He was no ordinary criminal—no paltry adventurer.

This valley of his was a masterpiece of planning and organisation. It must have cost him tens of thousands to develop—and outside he probably had large sums of money stored away in various banks under different names. For years he had been making enormous profits by his illicit trading.

And it was characteristic of the man to be lavish on a matter that involved his own safety. If he had to bolt from this valley he wasn't going to allow anybody else to take possession of it. He had built it, he had developed it, and when he left so it should be destroyed. That was Otto Lorenzo's decision.

"This is a bit thick, Handy," murmured Nipper.

"You think he means it, then?"

"Yes, he means it," replied Nipper. "Unless we do something pretty quickly he'll blow up the valley, and then we shall cease to take any interest in the proceedings. It seems to me that Providence must have sent us on this trip. We might be able to do something."

"Just what I was going to say," muttered Handforth excitedly. "Why not rush out now, by surprise, and collar the pair of them? At least, we could grab Lorenzo. It doesn't matter about the other brute. He's a greasy Greek, and he'll probably bolt at the first move from us. But let's collar Lorenzo, and take him back with us!"

Nipper looked dubious.

"Either that, or we'll bolt back for all we're worth, and give a general warning," he said. "If we're sharp we may be able to get everybody out of the valley in time. And yet we oughtn't to do it. If it's at all possible, we ought to stop Lorenzo from destroying the valley. There's evidence enough to hang him a dozen times. Besides, there's always the chance that we might not be able to get everybody out."

"Let's go for the beast!" urged Handforth.

It seemed that there was no other alternative.

And yet Nipper was wise to hesitate. No good purpose would be served if they rushed out upon Lorenzo, and he shot them both. He was quite liable to do it, too. His revolver was handy, and he would fire on the instant. He was in such a mood that he would not wait. And Nipper knew well enough that two shots could be fired in the space of a second—while they were attempting to cover those few difficult rocks that lay between themselves and Lorenzo.

"No, Handy, we mustn't do it," he said huskily. "It would be suicide."

"But we've got to!" urged Handforth. "It won't take us long to climb over these rocks—"

"Yes, and there's Lorenzo, with murder in his heart," interrupted Nipper. "What difference will it make to him whether he kills two of us now as a preliminary? There's no sense in deliberately committing suicide. The best thing we can do is to get back, to warn—"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "We're not going to give up like that! No fear! If you won't help me to collar Lorenzo, I'll jolly well get him myself!"

He prepared to go, but Nipper clutched him.

"Handy, you ass!" he gasped. "Don't be so—"

"Leggo, blow you!" said Handforth hotly.

He jerked himself away, and leapt round the boulder into the full view of Lorenzo and the Greek. It was a madly-reckless thing to do. Instinctively Nipper dropped, and picked up a heavy piece of rock.

"You rotter!" thundered Handforth. "We've got you!"

Lorenzo spun round, and his face went white for a second. Then, in the next flash, when he saw there were only two boys, his hand leapt to his revolver.

"Again!" he snarled. "Again these boys try to foil me! By Heaven! This one shall live no more!"



Nipper hurled the stone with all his strength as Lorenzo levelled his weapon at Handy. The missile struck the slaver's hand and, an instant later, the weapon exploded, the bullet whizzing past Handy's head. "Good egg!" gasped Handforth.

Exactly as Nipper had feared, Lorenzo levelled his revolver, and there was utterly no chance for Handforth to dodge. Uneven rocks were at his feet, and he was still eight or nine feet away from the half-breed. The man was about to fire at point-blank range.

And, indeed, if Nipper had followed Handforth's example, the pair of them would have been murdered on the spot.

But Nipper, quick to guess the probable turn of events, hurled that stone, praying that his aim would be accurate. It was a sharp, jagged piece of rock, and he hurled it at Lorenzo!

The stone struck Lorenzo on his right hand—a foot below the point where Nipper had aimed at. But that mischance was all to the good—for it was that hand which held the revolver.

Thud! Crack!

The sound of the striking rock and the explosion of the weapon came on the same instant. But Lorenzo's aim was ruined, and the bullet flew past Handforth and thudded against the rock. The revolver dropped from Lorenzo's injured and bleeding hand.

"Good egg!" gasped Handforth.

Crash!

He realised the narrowness of his escape, and he appreciated, too, that Nipper's policy had been the better. But there was no time to draw back now. The mischief was done. And Handforth leapt upon the slaver.

With all his strength, he drove his fist into Lorenzo's face, and for a moment the man staggered. But he was like an ox—full of

brawn and coarse sinew. After one bellow, he grabbed at his attacker, and literally whirled him off his feet.

Nipper came running up to help in the attack, and he noted that Popodos was remaining idle—too startled to intervene.

"You young dog!" snarled Lorenzo. "I'll show you how I'll deal with you!"

With one enormous heave, he lifted Handforth right off his feet, and whirled him in the air. And then, after one dreadful moment of suspense, he released his grip. The junior swung out, and went over the chasm—dropping down sheer into the narrow stream below.

"Oh!" gasped Nipper.

He knew that Lorenzo had tried to cast Handforth more to the left, where he would have dropped on to the jagged rocks. But in his frenzy he had given too great a heave, and the junior had gone clear.

Lorenzo grabbed for his revolver, and Nipper ran to the edge of the chasm. He was just in time to see Handforth plunge beneath the surface of the water. And then Nipper went down—in a clean, perfect dive.

Crack! Crack!

As he went Lorenzo fired, but his aim was shaky, owing to his injured hand. At all events, Nipper was not hit, and the next moment he took the water, wondering if he would strike bottom and kill himself.

Then, after a long interval, he found himself on the surface again—unhurt. He shook the water out of his eyes, and heard two

more cracks. Lorenzo, above, was firing still—aiming down at his bobbing head.

Nipper took no notice. He looked anxiously about for Handforth—and saw a tangle of hair ten yards further down the stream. He swam madly in that direction, grabbed the hair, and pulled Handy's head upwards.

The leader of Study D was gasping, for all the wind had been knocked out of him by that plunge. He was half stunned, and Nipper dragged him along into the shelter of the tunnel.



CHAPTER 11.

At the Mercy of the Current!

NEW danger asserted itself at once.

To Nipper's consternation, he found that the current was too strong.

Although he tried to edge his way to the rock bank, he could not do so. And their canoe was lying there! If they failed to get into it, they would never reach the safety of the valley.

"Steady, Handy—steady!" gasped Nipper.

He felt himself being swept past. His freedom was hampered by the dead weight of his companion. But in spite of this he managed to clutch at the side of the canoe. There was a dreadful jerk of his arm, and then the canoe came away, the mooring rope having broken.

"It's all right—I'm better now!" panted Handforth dazedly. "Can you climb in?"

"I'll try!" muttered Nipper.

It was no easy task, for a canoe is a difficult craft to get into at the best of times. Now the conditions were at their worst, for Handforth was hurt, and they were in pitchy darkness.

Nipper never knew how he did it, but at last he sprawled into the canoe, only shipping a gallon or two of water. And then, as they were carried down by the current, Handforth wormed his way over the side. Twice they nearly capsized, but Nipper saved them from disaster by distributing his weight.

"Thank goodness!" he breathed. "We're afloat, anyhow. How do you feel, Handy? Very rocky? That brute nearly got you!"

Handforth groaned.

"When we get out of this, I want you to kick me!" he muttered. "I ought to have taken your advice! If we had crept away, Lorenzo wouldn't have known anything about us. As it is, he'll probably rush like mad, and fire those explosives at once."

"Yes, that's likely," agreed Nipper gravely. "He saw us float down—and he'll lose no time. The other way he might have waited a bit. Well, never mind—we're both alive, and that's something to be thankful for."

"That stone of yours did it," said Handforth huskily. "Thanks, old man! You saved me that time. I thought it was all

up. Oh, what a howling idiot I was! What a pigheaded, fatheaded cuckoo!"

"I'm glad you know it," said Nipper drily. "Well, never mind, old man. No good crying over spilt milk. With luck we ought to be able to get down this stream in about twenty minutes. We're making pretty good progress. Whoa! Something brushed my head that time."

"Better keep well down," said Handforth, who was now much better.

"Yes, and we'll use the paddles," said Nipper. "Can you find them? We shall want them in a minute. As soon as we——"

"There aren't any here!" said Handforth, in a startled voice.

"What!"

"There aren't any paddles up this end!"

"That's lively," said Nipper. "There aren't any up here, either. They must have got chucked out when we were trying to get in. This is very lively, with a decided accent on the very. If old Browne was here, he'd say we were in the oxtail."

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that we shan't be able to guide this boat at all," replied Nipper. "The current's too strong, and it'll keep in mid-stream. And we shall go right down the valley like it."

"Well, isn't that what we want?"

"I'm not so sure of it, Handy. Perhaps you've forgotten that there's a very tidy waterfall in the way."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth. "You mean we shall go over it?"

"We shall, unless a miracle happens."

"But—but can't we jump out before we get to the falls?" asked Handforth anxiously. "Wouldn't that be better?"

"It'll make no difference at all," said Nipper. "We shall never be able to swim ashore in this current. Or, if we did, we should arrive in a pretty battered condition. We shall have to trust to luck, old man. Never mind about that now. I'm thinking of Lorenzo. The skunk! He means to destroy us all, if he can!"

"I can't believe that about blowing up the end of the valley," said Handforth. "It's too—too ridiculous! I think he must have been raving."

"I'd like to think so, but Lorenzo is a man of determination," declared Nipper. "He's full of ingenuity, too. It would be just like him to make himself safe. No, we shall have to take it that he means to carry out his threat."

"And I was idiot enough to mess everything up!" said Handforth miserably. "If we ever get out of this, I want you to punch me until I'm black and blue."

Nipper made no such promise. Handforth was an obstinate beggar, and he was exasperatingly self-willed. But he had a great capacity for reviling himself when he knew that he had made a mistake. There were no names bad enough that he could use. And it took all the anger out of his companions

in misfortune when he so freely confessed himself in the wrong.

There was no time to talk now, anyhow. The canoe was swaying dizzily, and rocking in a most ominous manner. Without any paddles to steady her, the two juniors could only trust to luck.

They had no fear that Lorenzo would carry out his threat at once. They were safe for half an hour, at least. For it would take the infuriated slaver all that time to get down the rocky gorge, to set his charges, and to get safely away before the explosion.

But what about afterwards?

Even supposing that Lorenzo took an hour over these preliminaries, the situation would still be grave in the extreme. For it would be impossible to evacuate the valley in that short space of time.

On the whole, Nipper was thankful enough that he and Handforth had learned the truth, and were in a position to carry the warning. If only they could get safely ashore, there might still be time to make a rush for safety before the worst of the flood swept down.

But the minds of the two juniors reeled at the actual prospect. If there was any truth in Lorenzo's threat, the entire top of the valley would be blown away. And the combined waters of the two rivers would come hurtling through.

"Daylight!" sang out Handforth suddenly. "We're nearly through!"

"Look out, you ass!" shouted Nipper. "Don't raise your head!"

Handforth ducked in the nick of time, and the canoe swung out into the open. It surged past that congested jungle tract, and then into the broader river, with high banks on either side. But it was travelling so swiftly that the two juniors were dazzled by the brilliant sunshine. It seemed to them that they had only just come out of the blackness of the cavern.

"Can't we swim for it?" panted Handforth. "Come on! Let's make a shot at it!"

"No!" warned Nipper. "It'll be worse than going over the falls. We shall have to swim for it anyhow, I expect. Unless we're marvellously lucky, we shall capsize in another minute or two!"

"Let's hope for the best, anyhow," said Handforth.

But he knew quite well that there was no possibility of getting ashore here. It seemed likely that a tremendous deluge had happened further up the river—a great tropical storm, perhaps. At all events, the volume of water was much greater than usual, and it was coming down with tremendous strength. The force of the current had even increased during the last half-hour. It was coming down with great ferocity.

"It's the falls for us, Handy!" yelled Nipper. "Cheer up! If we don't strike any rocks we shall be safe enough—and the river's easier down there, below the rapids."

He spoke cheerily, but he was very doubtful. True, both he and Handforth were

powerful swimmers, and that was a great advantage. But a test like this was liable to be risky in the extreme.

There were many boulders strewn across the river above the falls—the work of the defeated Oturi. Nipper had expected the canoe to smash itself to pieces against one of these. But by a piece of good fortune it swung round in a side eddy, and swirled along between two of the boulders.

"Look out!" yelled Nipper. "Now for it!"

"We'll do it!" roared Handforth. "Make for the left bank!"

Just for a moment it seemed that a giant hand had caught hold of the canoe from beneath. It was sent onwards with tremendous impulse. The juniors clutched at the sides of the frail craft. Before them yawned the falls, with the roaring masses of spray below.

For a second they seemed to hang poised over the very edge. Their hearts almost stopped beating. Then, with a giddy, sickening plunge, they went over—into that mass of spray and smother!



CHAPTER 12.

The Warning!

McCLURE suddenly halted in his tracks, and pointed with a quivering finger. "Look!" he shouted, in horror.

Church stood stock still, aghast. A canoe was just toppling over the edge of the waterfall. And that canoe contained two figures. Even at this distance, McClure had recognised the figures as those of Handforth and Nipper. And before he and Church could move another step, or take any action, the canoe swept over the edge, and vanished into the spray.

"They've gone over the falls!" roared Church. "Quick! Run—run! They may be able to get ashore lower down. Let's go and help!"

They pelted down stream for all they were worth, vaguely hoping that they might be able to help in some way. And, in spite of their anxiety, they were aware of a certain relief. All doubts were now set at rest, at all events! Nipper and Handforth hadn't been killed by Lorenzo. But just as they had made this discovery Nipper and Handforth were beset by a new peril.

It wasn't so grave as they all thought.

True, both the juniors imagined that their last minute had come. They found themselves thrust beneath the surface, turned this way and that way, and buffeted and battered by the eddies.

But when their heads came above water, they were still close together, although the canoe had vanished. They struck out strongly.

"Not so bad!" gasped Nipper. "I thought it was going to be a lot worse."

"My goodness!" said Handforth. "There was nothing in it!"

They struck out for the left bank—the one that would take them towards the bungalow, and they both realised that coming over the falls had been for the best. For they were certainly losing no time in getting to the others with their news!

As they fought their way to the bank, they saw Church and McClure running behind the clumps of trees, and keeping to the bank as near as possible.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were holding a consultation on the veranda of the bungalow. Nelson Lee was looking very worried, as well he might.

"It's extraordinary, Dorrie," he was saying. "Not a sign! The men can find neither the boys nor Lorenzo. I'll admit the search has only been cursory, so far, but it's very disquieting."

"I hope that brute hasn't collared the pair, and made off with them," said his lordship. "It's a possibility, I suppose? He might be able to make some sort of bargain if he had those two boys as hostages. They'd be of use to him alive, wouldn't they?"

"It's a possible suggestion, of course," said Lee. "Lorenzo is tricky enough for anything. But, somehow, I don't think he was in the mood for any bargaining. In my opinion, Lorenzo is mad—actually insane by this swift series of disasters. His brain has always been slightly unhinged, I believe."

"It's rummy that we shouldn't have any news," said Dorrie, as he frowned at some figures that were approaching. "I can't understand—Hullo! These youngsters seem pretty excited!" he added eagerly. "They're comin' up at the double, anyhow. Perhaps they've heard somethin'!"

Lee glanced round.

"Very possibly!" he said, with a breath of relief. "Nipper and Handforth are with them!"

"Eh?" gasped his lordship, staring. "Why, by gad, so they are!"

They hurried out to meet the approaching juniors, and Church and McClure seemed to be just as excited as the two who had been missing.

"We found them, sir!" shouted Church. "We saw them come over the falls in a canoe, and it's a wonder they weren't both drowned."

"Rats!" panted Handforth. "We weren't in much danger. But when the explosion happens, there's more than a chance that—"

"The explosion?" repeated Dorrie. "What explosion?"

"Lorenzo means to blow up the valley, sir!" gasped Handforth.

"Is that all?" asked his lordship.

"I think you'd better explain, Nipper!" said Lee sharply.

"Lorenzo is going to have his revenge," said Nipper. "The only thing we can do is to clear out. With luck we might be able to escape before the explosion comes."

"This is extraordinary," said Lee. "Explosion? But, good heavens! How can Lorenzo harm us by—"

And then Nipper told the full story, and all the St. Frank's fellows gathered round, open-eyed and full of excitement.

"It's lucky we got back, sir," said Nipper, in conclusion. "The thing is, do you think we can escape in time?"

Lee frowned.

"This story sounds fantastic—and yet I am disposed to believe it," he said slowly. "Lorenzo is a man who would go to almost any length. The Kutanas are safe, and so are the slaves. Ninety per cent. of them are down at the end of the valley, and there is plenty of high ground for them to run to in the event of a sudden flooding. I think we had better lose no time in getting there, too. Just as a precautionary measure, you understand."

"It might be as well," agreed Dorrie. "But I must say I'm doubtful. Hang it, even Lorenzo couldn't do a thing like that! These youngsters seem to have been having all the excitement. I take it that Lorenzo has gone crazy, and that he was having delusions."

"Of course he was," said Watson. "Thank goodness you got back, Nipper!"

"Begad, rather, old boy," said Tregellis-West.

"Don't make too much of it," said Nipper. "The only danger was when Lorenzo got busy with his revolver. The rest was more or less easy. Coming over the falls wasn't half so bad as we thought it was going to be."

Most of the fellows were grinning now. Clearly, they did not take the news with any seriousness, and even Nipper was beginning to have his doubts.

Nelson Lee was going to move the party as a precautionary measure.

"There won't be any explosion," said Church, looking rather sheepish. "I believed it at first, but it's all tommy-rot!"

"Well, anyhow, we found out which way Lorenzo went, didn't we?" asked Handforth. "And the Kutanas can now get on the track, and capture the rotter. That's the main thing. In fact, it's all we went for."

And then, while they were laughing and chatting, the earth shook.

It was a most curious sensation. Beneath their very feet the ground quivered and heaved, and then, following it by only a split second, came a stunning, deafening roar—a shattering crash which rent the air, and which left every ear tingling and singing in agony.



CHAPTER 18.

A Desperate Situation!

BOOM-boom-boom!

The echo came from the far hillsides like the exaggerated rolling of thunder. Again the earth quaked.

The bungalow shook in every timber, and practically every window was shattered by the sudden concussion which followed.

"Good heavens!" shouted Nelson Lee.

"We were right!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "Oh, corks! He's done it! We were right all the time! Lorenzo's blown up the gorge!"

"Good gad!"

"Great Scott!"

"Look!" shouted Nipper, pointing. "Oh, look!"

The others rushed out to where he was standing. It was swelteringly hot in the sunshine, and the African morning was particularly clear. It seemed impossible that there could be any grave peril on such a perfect day as this.

But where Nipper was pointing dense columns of smoke were rising into the clear air—far distant at the top of the valley. Smoke or dust? Both, perhaps. What did it matter? The one devastating fact was clear—Otto Lorenzo had been telling the truth. He had not been raving in a delirium of delusion. His threat had been carried out—and every soul in that valley was in peril. It was a time for swift action.

"Oh, what was it?" cried Irene, as she came running out. "What was that terrible bang? We were just going to tell you that lunch was ready—"

"Lunch!" shouted Nipper. "There's no time for lunch! Lorenzo has blown up the top of the valley, and the full force of the Kalala River is sweeping down on us. It'll come in a tremendous flood within two or three minutes, sweeping everything before it!"

"This disaster will be appalling!" declared Lee swiftly. "You don't know, Nipper, do you, that there is a big lake behind those rocky hills, too?"

"A lake, sir?" gasped Nipper.

"If the breach is wide enough, the waters of that lake will join with the Kalala River, and the rush of water will be so deadly that nothing can stand in its path. Boys, we've got to act instantly! Don't wait to ask questions. Run! Run down the valley as hard as you can! Make for the high ground—and look after the girls!"

"Leave them to us, sir!"

"Dorrie, you give orders to these Kutanas—tell them the truth as quickly as you can," went on Lee crisply. "And run! This is the main thing to do. Not a second must be wasted."

The urgency of Nelson Lee's tone was a spur to everybody. The bungalow was deserted as though it were a sinking ship.

Everybody ran out, and commenced going helter-skelter towards the open ground, at the bottom of the valley.

But it was a long way before the higher ground could be reached. The nearest slopes were on the other side of the river, comparatively close. The ground rose sharply from the opposite bank, and went up in a series of jungle-covered hills. But the river lay in between—and the river was flowing too swiftly for them to cross.

"Wait!" shouted Nipper desperately. "We shall never do it! It's absolutely impossible!"

"But we've got to run!" cried Doris.

"Look behind!" panted Nipper. "How can we do it? That flood will be on us in less than a minute! We shall all be crushed to death in less than a second, once it hits us!"

They all stared round, and were fascinated.

The disaster was a real one, indeed! In that clear sunshine, they could see for miles. The ground sloped steadily upwards towards the top of the valley—with dense masses of green, gaily-coloured jungle, and with the waterfall sparkling like a silver patch in the near distance. Here and there were Lorenzo's corrugated iron buildings to mar the general beauty.

But right in the distance an extraordinary tumult was taking place.

The jungle was being flattened down—trees were uprooted, and the whole forest was flattened and demolished and wiped out. A murky, foaming wall was sweeping along—a terrible wall of water.

And as it came, it increased in volume. It was like a gigantic tidal wave.

Everything in the path of that all-devouring flood was destroyed. And it was not coming in just one stream, but spreading over the entire valley, widening out like a fan, and incorporating everything in its destructive path.

"Don't you see?" shouted Nipper. "It's over a mile to the nearest slope, down the valley. Even if we run as hard as champions it'll take us two or three minutes. And that flood will hit us within sixty seconds. We've got to do something else."

"But what?" gasped Tommy Watson. "What can we do?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" exclaimed Nipper. "We're trapped!"

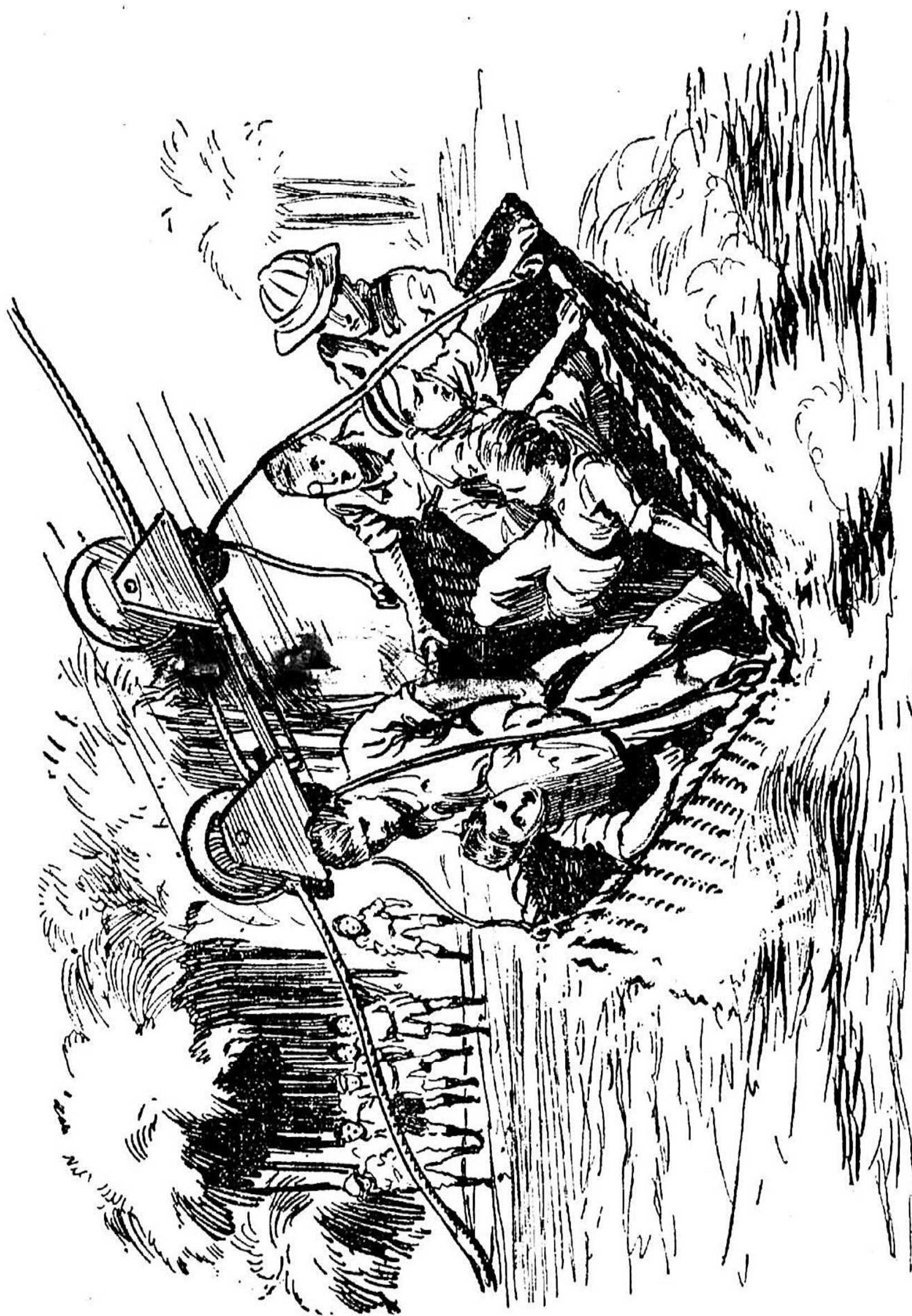
"Good gad!" said Archie. "I mean to say, trapped! It just shows you, we were all safe, and here we are, dash it, jolly well trapped!"

They were fascinated by the prospect.

Only just recently they had escaped a terrible death from fire, and now they were in danger from water! They were certainly meeting with every kind of peril in this valley!

There was something awe-inspiring in that on-coming flood.

They were paralysed by the stupendous might of it. It seemed useless to make any attempt to escape. They could hear the low, ominous murmur of the coming flood, now, and it was increasing with every breath.



As the cable gave, there was a sickening lurch and the cage dropped sheer. It struck the flood with a mighty burst, and then plunged beneath the surface!

The ground itself was quivering beneath that thundering mass of water.

The valley was a death-trap.

Handforth's own thoughts were tragic. If only he had taken Nipper's advice! They might all have had time to get away! But it was obvious that Lorenzo had rushed to his hidden charges of high explosives, and had fired them with all speed, so that the warning would be useless.

"Come on—come on!" shouted several hoarse voices. "We might as well be running! It's better than standing still like this! We shall be caught by the full force—"

"Yes, come on!"

"Listen to it! It's like thunder now!"

They all turned, ready to continue their flight. But at that moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came running up, their faces alight with anxiety.

"Stop!" shouted Lee. "There's no hope! You'll never be able to escape if you run for the slopes!"



CHAPTER 14.

The Only Chance!

THEN we're done for?" yelled Handforth.

"Not yet," replied Lee, as his gaze swept over the group. "We're all here?"

Yes! Our own little party, Dorrie! The Kutanas are running for it, poor fellows. We must make for the factory."

"The factory!" shouted every voice.

"It's the only possibility," replied Nelson Lee. "The factory is here—within twenty yards of us. Quick! All of you!"

"Hurrah!"

"It's a chance, anyway!"

"Run straight up to the roof, and be ready for anything that might happen!" shouted Lee. "Quick—quick!"

It seemed that an hour had passed during that brief minute. Helter-skelter, they ran into Lorenzo's factory—the strongest building of all. It was on brick foundations—and the lower part of it, indeed, was of solid concrete. Massive steel girders formed the angles, with the inevitable corrugated iron for the walls.

But compared to any of the other buildings, it was a massive structure, two or three stories in height. There was one chance in a thousand that it might withstand the terrific onrush of the flood. If not, then none of them would be worse off.

Whatever happened, they might be bettering their position by taking refuge on the roof. For there might be scraps of wreckage to which they could cling. To remain in the open was certain death—to take refuge in the factory might give them a chance of life.

The St. Frank's fellows had done a few quick things in their time, but never before had they run as quickly as they ran now. And the girls were swept along by the twelve boys. They were whirled into the factory,



As the cable gave, there was a sickening lurch, and a burst, and th

and rushed upstairs with such speed that they scarcely had any breath left.

It was fortunate for all concerned that Irene & Co. had worked in that factory as slaves. For they knew exactly where to go. They knew where the stairs were, and the quickest way to them.

Lee and Dorrie were the last to come in. And now they could hear the rushing waters, no longer a murmur, but an ever-increasing roar.

The first calculations were at fault. The flood was not coming down so quickly as they had thought. Nevertheless, they had taken the only wise course, for this was the one possibility of safety.

By a lucky chance, almost all the rest of those in the valley were certain of life. Umlosi's great camp had been built at the very end of the region, actually at the foot of the lower slopes. Down there, the Kutana warriors and the freed slaves would have plenty of time. They would have no difficulty in rushing up the hills, and escaping the surging water.

A few of the other Kutanas were running—all those men who had been searching the upper part of the valley. Even these might



pped sheer. It struck the flood with a mighty
the surface!

have a chance of life, for there was high ground comparatively near.

The bungalow had been the very worst possible spot, for it was situated in the centre of the valley, without a hill for over a mile. To rush into the factory was the quickest method—and the safest.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Church, as they tumbled out upon the flat roof. "We've got up here, anyhow. That's something! Everybody all right? Are we all here?"

"Yes, rather," said Handforth. "What's going to happen now, though? By George! Look at it! Get ready to grab something!"

In fascination, they stared over the edge of the roof.

The flood was practically upon them. It was coming down like an angry monster. On its foaming crest were trees, tangles of foliage, and all manner of flotsam and jetsam.

"Look!" said Nipper, pointing.

The power-station was just a hundred yards away, and the first rush of water had reached it. And that power-station was dear to the hearts of them all. There they had defied Lorenzo for two days, and they had used the place as their headquarters. They knew every

inch of it, for it had been their stronghold—their haven of refuge.

And the way it collapsed was staggering.

The flood struck it broadside, and the whole corrugated iron building buckled up like a piece of cardboard. The roof shot into the air, the sides crumpled and slit, and the flood surged over the wreckage with a thunderous roar.

"Look out, now!" shouted Dorrie. "Hang on!"

They clutched feverishly. It seemed mad. How could this building possibly survive? Surely it would go the same way as the power-station? And that meant that they would go skywards with the roof, to be crushed and battered amidst the ghastly wreckage. What could be more treacherous or more awful than torn corrugated iron? Mercifully, they would not know much, for the flood would stun every atom of their senses out of them.

"It's here!" muttered Nipper. "Oh, goodness!"

And then the surging mass of foaming water struck the factory.

The effect was totally different to what they had feared. The noise as the water hit the end wall was fearful, and the whole building shook from roof to foundations.

But there was one great point in its favour—as Nelson Lee had seen before he had advocated this move. At the top end, the building was fairly narrow, and it was this end which was head-on to the flood. Had it been broadside, like the power-station, nothing could have saved it from destruction at the first onslaught.

As it was, the building stood the strain.

A wave leapt up into the air in a wall of foam and spray, a sparkling picture in the bright sunshine. Then the wave came hissing down upon the roof, the water falling in deafening cascades.

Another one came, and they could all feel the structure shivering and quaking. The noise was terrific. Some of them thought that the building had already been torn from its foundations.

Nipper was one of the first to open his eyes, and he stared across the watery waste, and saw the bungalow lifted clean from its foundations, and tossed into the air like a shuttlecock.

It sogged down on an even keel, and then went hurtling along on the crest of the flood with only the roof a-wash. All round it were masses of wreckage from the veranda, and the outbuildings.

"We should have been in a nice pickle if we had stayed there," said Nipper breathlessly. "You all right, Mary?"

Mary Summers brushed the wet hair out of her eyes.

"All that lovely lunch spoilt!" she said ruefully.

Nipper almost grinned. It seemed strange for Mary to think of that meal in a moment like this. He didn't know that the girls had spent hours on the work—preparing a luncheon that would remind them all of home. Irene &

Co. had got up to all sorts of dodges to make the meal a complete success.

"Never mind," said Mary. "We're still safe, aren't we? I can't understand it, but this building seems to be holding out. I wonder how long it will stand the strain?"

"Not for long, I'll bet," said Doris Berkeley. "Can't you feel how it's trembling and shaking? And look at the water! It must be ten or twelve feet deep already! But thank goodness, we've survived the first rush. Perhaps we shall escape now!"

The others were all staring over the edge of the roof.

Would any escape be possible? The flood was roaring past with the speed of a mill-race, carrying with it every conceivable kind of debris. Now and again a great tree, torn up by its roots, would thud menacingly against the wall of the building. And on every hand there was nothing but ruin and desolation.



CHAPTER 15.

The Changed Valley!

DESOLATION!

That was the only word to describe the dramatic change that had come about. It was terrible, the

swiftness, the shocking rapidity of that alteration.

Three minutes earlier the valley before them had been a fair place, with the rubber plantations, the cultivated fields, the bungalow and its gardens, and all the exotic glories of tropical foliage and verdure. The sun, shining out of a cloudless blue sky, had been enhancing the general beauty.

And now, destruction!

In place of the previous picture there was nothing but sweeping expanses of swiftly tumbling water. The power-house had gone, the bungalow was no more, the store sheds, the long rows of huts—all had vanished. Where trees had proudly stood, there now remained nothing but a stark trunk or two, snapped off, and jagged. The green had given place to a muddy foam. And on the flood rode the wreckage.

Otto Lorenzo had done his work well. But not so well as he had intended. For scarcely any of the human beings in that valley had perished. They had had time to get clear.

True, Dorrie's party was still in a precarious situation. The question of ultimate escape was a grave one. They were safe for the moment, but how long would this security last?

Now and again the watchers beheld a pitiful sight—dead goats floating by, or chickens and other creatures were sweeping down in a relentless procession.

At times, even, they would see a lion, or some other wild beast of the forest. All had been caught in that great onrush.

"Well, old man, you were justified," said Lord Dorrmore, taking a deep breath. "Gad, you were certainly justified! Every other confounded buildin' has gone. This is the only one that's survived the biff. Personally, I thought it was goin' to buckle up an' drop us all into the cart."

"It may buckle up at any minute," replied Lee anxiously. "We mustn't fool ourselves that we're safe. The next thing is to get off this precarious perch."

"Isn't there any way, sir?" asked two or three of the juniors.

"There seems to be no way, at all events," replied Lee. "Swimming, of course, is impossible. This flow is terrific. It's going at such a pace that no swimmer could survive. And then, of course, there is the floating debris. The water is simply choked. So even if the speed of the flood was less we couldn't consider the possibility of swimming. We must think of some other plan."

"But there isn't any other plan, guv'nor," said Nipper. "We couldn't build a raft—"

"A raft!" shouted Handforth. "That's the idea! My hat! All this reminds me of that flood we had at St. Frank's! Do you remember it, you chaps?"

"Of course we do, you ass," said Church. "Weren't we nearly swept out of the giddy school? But that was a picnic compared to this."

"We're isolated here," said Gresham. "And we can't build a raft, either."

"Why not?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Oh, cheesc it, 'Ted," put in Willy. "Why can't you be sensible? How can we build a raft without any materials? There's no wood! All this stuff here is corrugated iron, and steel girders, and concrete. How can we make a raft of this stuff?"

Handforth started.

"H'm! I'd forgotten that," he said frowning. "Just like that rotter of a Lorenzo to build a factory of iron! Why couldn't he have used wood, like any sensible man?"

"You ought to be jolly thankful he did use iron," said Nipper. "A wooden building would have split up like a matchbox. And you know perfectly well why Lorenzo didn't use wood. The white ants are a plague in this part of the country, and they demolish wooden buildings in next to no time."

"The white ants in this valley won't do any more demolishing, anyhow," said Handforth. "It's a pity about the raft, though. As far as I can see, it's the only idea that might save us."

The others were forced to agree. A big raft might, indeed, have solved the problem; for they could have floated down on the flood, hoping to drift across to the higher slopes.

Now and again the factory shook ominously. For the wreckage was tending to form itself into heavy jams, and when one of these masses of flotsam struck the building it fairly heaved. This continuous buffeting

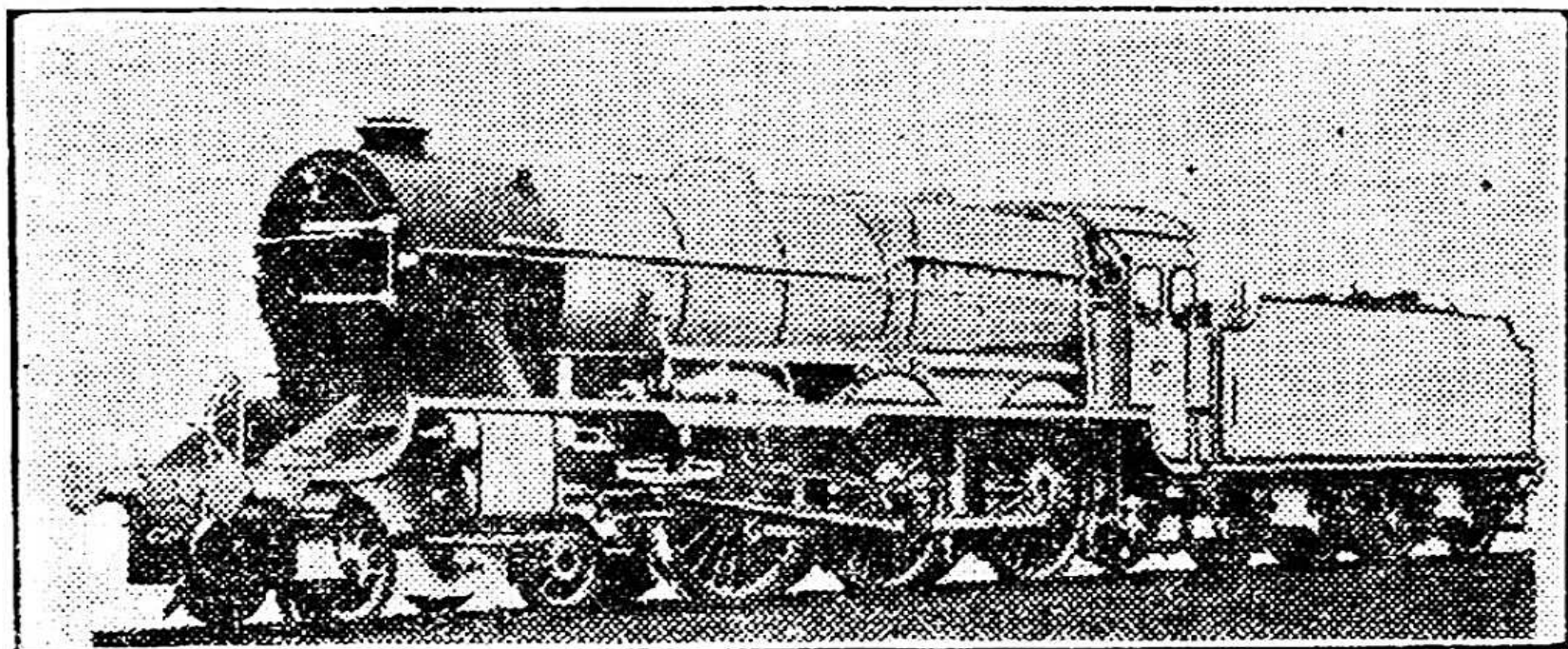
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could have only one effect. Sooner or later the factory would shift on its foundations, and then would come the collapse.

Looking round, the marooned ones were exasperated by the comparative nearness of safety.

Up and down the valley all was desolation. And over to their left there lay a great expanse of swiftly-surfing water. But on the other side, the green jungle-covered slopes were near.

This was on the other side of the river. And the latter was now, of course, utterly obliterated. Those slopes rose sharply, and even towered over the factory at close range. But to reach them was hopeless, for the flood was flowing more swiftly in that direction than anywhere else. There was a regular whirlpool across there—a deadly, treacherous rapid.

Nelson Lee was aware of another danger.

After the first blow, it had seemed to the others that the danger was over. If the factory could stand the original rush, it was safe. But this was not so.

For, in addition to the peril from the buffeting tree trunks and other floating debris, there was the greater danger from the rising flood. Foot by foot it was creeping up.

The water was getting deeper all the time.

And this would spell certain disaster. For the deeper the water got, the less security would the party enjoy. For that building could not stand more than a certain amount.

And once it gave way, there would be no floating.

It would just collapse. It would disintegrate into a thousand jagged fragments, and there would be no chance of life. So if anything was to be done, it must be done immediately.

But what? For once Nelson Lee seemed utterly and absolutely beaten. There seemed to be no way—no remote possibility of helping themselves. To enter the flood was unthinkable, to wait for the collapse of the building was equally unthinkable. There were no materials for building a raft, and there could be no expectation of help from any other quarter.

Umlosi and his men, much as they wanted to assist, were unable to do so. For none could live in that tortuous vortex. For a remote moment Lee wondered if the floating masses of tree trunks and tangled foliage could be collected and trapped so as to form a raft.

But he dismissed the idea as impracticable. There could be no controlling the stuff. And once it got adrift again, it would probably

disintegrate, and allow its human freight to drop through to death.

And the water was rising ominously. The building was shaking and quivering from end to end. What could be done. How could they get themselves out of this alarming predicament?

And then Nelson Lee's gaze became fixed on the cable.



CHAPTER 16.

The Line of Hope!

HE cable!

Nelson Lee's heart gave a leap. Why hadn't he seen this before? Why hadn't he thought of it at first,

before so many precious minutes had passed? It was the one possibility. It was the one ray of hope in all that hopeless turmoil.

"Nothin' stirs," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "I'm hanged if I can get an idea, Lee. As far as I can see, we shall just have to stick up here until the buildin' falls to bits. An' then I suppose we shall have about as much chance of survivin' as— Hallo!" he added suddenly. "You're lookin' different! Have you thought of somethin'?"

"Yes," replied Lee. "And I ought to have thought of it long ago."

"We'll forgive you for the delay," said his lordship. "What's the great idea?"

"Yes, what is it, guvnor?"

"Tell us!"

The others were crowding round, eager and anxious. For the alarm had spread, and everybody felt the consternation that Leo's eyes had revealed. They instinctively knew that they could not last long on this roof.

"Let's know what the wheeze is, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"It may not be so very good," said Lee. "In fact, I doubt if it is practicable. Look at this cable!"

Lee pointed upwards. From one corner of the factory roof—where there was a kind of tower, made of steel girders—a steel cable stretched away across the swirling water. At this end it was fixed to the top of the little tower, and there was a platform beneath it, with a lift close alongside.

The other end of the cable was high up on the hillside, almost half a mile away. And the cable rose at a steep angle, sagging a trifle owing to its own weight.

"But—but we can't get across that, sir!" protested Watson.

"It leads straight to the dry land, anyhow," said Handforth excitedly. "I don't mind having a shot at it. I can go hand over hand—and one of the girls could cling to my back."

Nelson Lee could hardly refrain from smiling.

"I admire your courage, Handforth, but your optimism is colossal," he said. "In the first place, it would be sheerly impossible for you to successfully reach the other end of the

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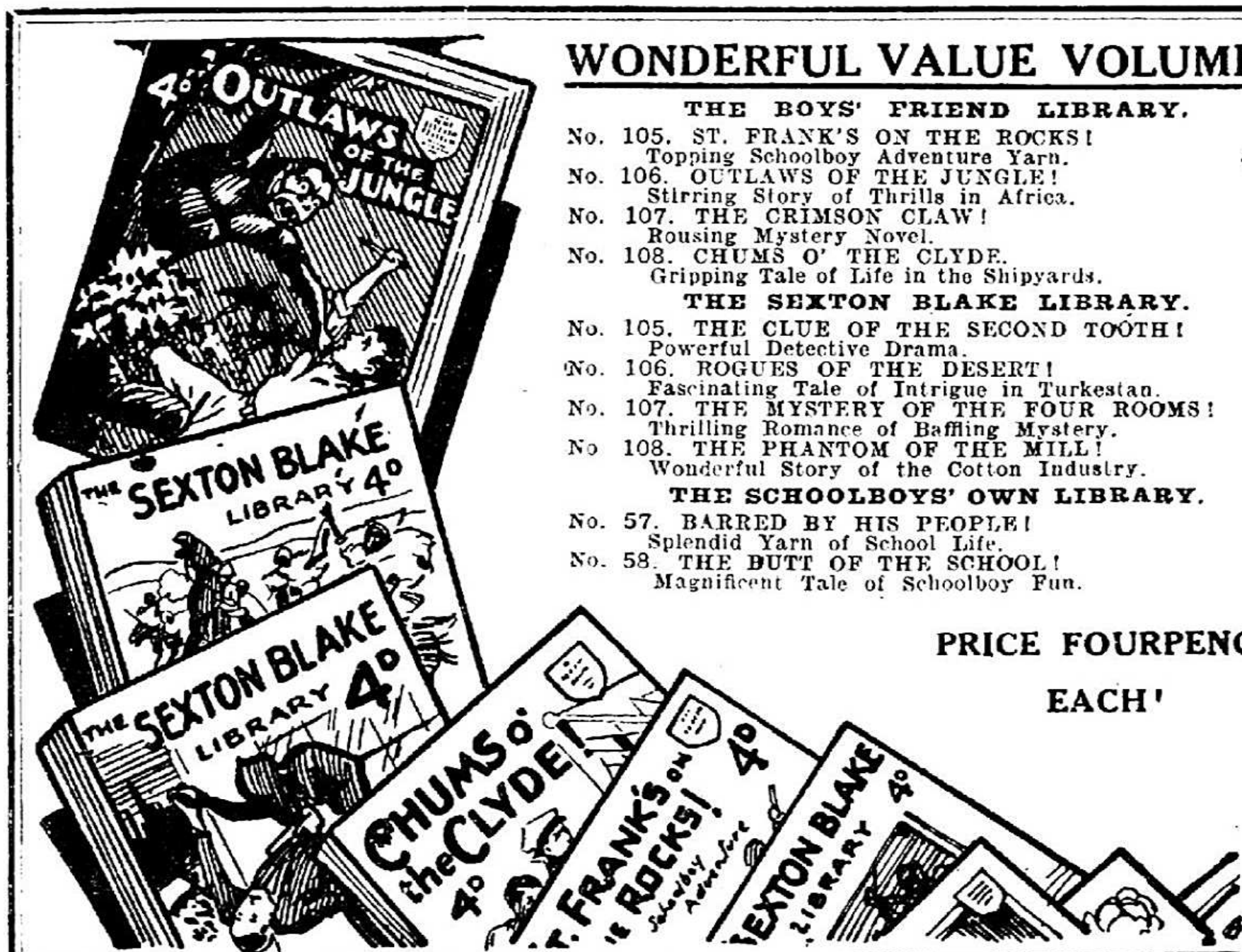
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wire—even without the encumbrance of a young lady on your back."

"I could try it, sir," persisted Handforth.

"We don't want to lose you like that, my boy," replied Lee gravely. "The angle of ascent is fairly steep, and the distance is fully half a mile. Do you realise what that means? Gripping the wire, and pulling yourself along hand over hand, the exertion required would be stupendous. Before you had covered a third of the distance you would drop from sheer exhaustion. It would be very different if the cable sloped away from us. We could then rig up some sort of cradle, and slide down. Unhappily, we can't slide up."

"But there's a cradle to this thing, sir," said somebody. "I saw it working one day. A big sort of cage, slung on a couple of pulleys, and hauled up by means of a winch."

Lee pointed.

"There's the cradle," he said grimly. "And there's the winch!"

"Oh!"

Nelson Lee needed to say no more. The winch, of course, was on the summit of the hill, opposite. And the cradle was there, too.

"Why couldn't that giddy cage have been down here?" asked Handforth disgustedly.

"It wouldn't have made much difference—there's nobody up there to work the winch," said Church. "We should have been no better off."

"I think I can suggest a way," said Tessa Love.

"You!" said half a dozen voices.

"Yes," said the girl.

Lord Dorrimore took her by the shoulders, and led her forward.

"Anybody who can suggest a way must take the place of honour," he said firmly. "Now, old girl, what is it? Silence for the chair!"

Tessa was looking flushed and excited.

"It's impossible for anybody to haul themselves up that cable, hand over hand," she said. "But there's no reason why somebody shouldn't walk up it."

"Walk up it!" yelled the others.

"Why not?" asked Tessa. "It's much easier than any ordinary tightrope, and the angle isn't too great. It would be a hard feat, but I think it could be done."

Irene rushed forward and seized her.

"You mean you could do it, Tessa?" she cried.

"Yes," said the girl.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "That's right. Tessa can walk the tightrope as easily as a man walks down a road!"

There were many shouts of excitement.

"Gad, it's an idea," said Dorrie enthusiastically. "If only you could get to the top, and then let the cage down, the rest of us—H'm! I don't know, though," he added dubiously. "You couldn't do it, Tessa."

"Couldn't do what?"

"Why, even if you performed the tight-rope act—which I think you could manage—you'd never be able to work the winch," replied his lordship. "It would be too much

for you. All the same, go ahead. One of us will be saved, at all events."

"The winch might be geared easily," said Tessa hopefully. "And I could have a good try, couldn't I? Besides, I could run for Umlosi, and tell him——"

Johnny Onions pushed his way forward.

"I'm not going to allow it," he said indignantly. "If anybody's going to walk up that cable, I'll do it. And to save all argument, I'll start now. It's no job for a girl!"

"We're lucky, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We have two tightrope walkers in the party."

"It's amazin' what we've got," said his lordship.

Both Tessa Love and Johnny Onions had been circus performers before they had come to the Moor View School and St. Frank's respectively. And neither of them had forgotten their prowess.

Tessa's was the idea, but Johnny was to execute it. The girl, however, would have been willing enough to make the attempt if she had been allowed her own way.

"It is better that Johnny should do it," said Nelson Lee, smiling at the girl. "He is stronger—he will be able to work the winch with greater certainty. And the feat calls for great endurance."

Johnny Onions was eager enough to make the attempt. And there could be no doubt that the need was urgent. For the flood was rising higher, and the building was getting more and more unstable.

Nobody there was likely to forget Johnny's great effort on that previous occasion, when he had balanced himself on the top of the Oturi Ju-Ju pole. If there was one member of that party who was fitted for this dangerous task, he was Johnny Onions.



CHAPTER 17.

The Walk of Death!

THE schoolboy acrobat lost no time. He was angry with himself for not having thought of such an obvious idea. There was that cable, stretching from this precarious refuge to the safety of the solid ground. And he was confident of his own ability to perform the work.

The angle was steep, and he had no suitable shoes. But the rubber soles of the shoes he wore would serve well. Nipper, Handforth, and many others helped him on to that tower so that he should have a good start. And at the last moment Tessa gave a cry.

"Oh, look here!" she called. "There's a long bamboo pole here. Hadn't you better take it, Johnny?"

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Onions. "I don't want to make any mistake over this job, and a balancing pole will be pretty

useful. I didn't know there was anything here that I could use."

It was handed up to him, and then, with a cheery word, he started.

A dead silence fell as he walked out across the edge of the roof—over the swirling waters. It was a risky business. There was Johnny in mid-air, pushing his way upwards along that cable with confident, purposeful steps.

He seemed to keep his balance with the utmost ease, and not a word was spoken as he went further and further out.

But after the first few moments, Handforth could not refrain from pointing.

"Look!" he muttered.

The cable at the upper end was sagging treacherously, and the watchers began to doubt if Johnny would be able to negotiate the last few yards. For if the cable sagged much more, the angle would become too steep.

And what if the cable came loose? All sorts of possibilities flashed through their minds, and they were in a fever of anxiety.

"He'll never do it!" breathed Church, with a catch in his voice. "Look at the way the wind keeps making him sway! I'm afraid he'll fall! Oh, this is awful!"

The walk of death!

Truly this could be described as such, for if the schoolboy acrobat lost his balance, and fell, he would plunge down to certain destruction. Nothing could live in that flood, with its eddies and currents and everlasting vortexes.

Thud—thud—thud!

The building shook as an extra heavy collection of debris struck it and bumped again and again. For a moment Nelson Lee transferred his attention from Johnny, and looked over the parapet.

"Upon my word!" he murmured anxiously. "It's rising appallingly, Dorrie."

"Yes, so I noticed," whispered his lordship. "Don't let the youngsters know. But we can't last much longer. Haven't you felt the way she's been shiftin'? I'm expectin' her to fall to pieces every minute."

Nelson Lee suddenly became tense.

He was staring down at the water. His eyes grew wide, and then he clutched at Lord Dorrimore's arm. He pointed.

"Look!" he said hoarsely.

His lordship was struck by Lee's strange tone.

"What the—" he began.

"Look, Dorrie—look!" commanded Lee. "Good heavens, man, can't you see?"

"Ye gods an' little fishes!" muttered Dorrie, between his teeth.

They stared for another moment, and then glanced at one another.

"What is it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Nothin'!" said Dorrie. "Nothin'!"

"What did you see, sir?" asked Handforth.

The others had sensed something dramatic, too.

"Don't worry, boys—watch Johnny," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It doesn't matter what

we saw. It doesn't concern our immediate position. Don't say anything further, because I shall not answer."

There was something so inexorable about Nelson Lee's voice that nobody asked another question. Even Lord Dorrimore had frozen up solid. His face was set and rigid, and yet, at the same time, there seemed to be a dim expression of satisfaction and relief in his eyes.

The St. Frank's fellows looked at one another wonderingly. What strange thing had Nelson Lee and Dorrie seen in the flood? And why was it so unspeakable that they would not refer to it?

"Look at Johnny!" said Lord Dorrimore, pointing. "Gad, he's doing well! Bravo, my lad! Bravo!"

Nipper glanced at his lordship. He knew that Dorrie was only acting like that in order to dismiss the other matter. And yet there was every reason for Dorrie's acclamation.

Johnny Onions was more than three parts of the way across. His progress was slower now. He was essaying the most difficult part of his walk. Owing to the slackness of the cable, and the steepness of its angle, that last forty or fifty feet was well-nigh impossible.

Foot by foot Johnny persevered. He made sure of every step before he moved upwards. And once a gasp of acute consternation went up from all—a cry of real horror.

"Oh!" screamed Tessa. "He's slipping!"

Johnny was sliding—backwards! He was unable to check his progress for a moment, and everybody thought that he was going to lose his balance and tumble over. But at the last moment he succeeded in checking the downward glide, and once again he went upwards.

But at that same point he was stopped once more. He found it impossible to gain a hold. With a quick motion Onions threw his balancing pole away. Then, with a deft swing, he dropped on to the cable and gripped it with his hands. He swung down, and went up hand over hand for eight or nine feet, hauling himself along with wonderful agility.

And then, abruptly, he released his grip, flinging himself sideways at the same moment. He dropped sheer, and plunged headlong into a mass of bushes—for by this time, of course, he was well over the wooded slopes, where the drop was not considerable.

"It was the only thing he could do," said Nelson Lee. "Let us hope he has not hurt himself."

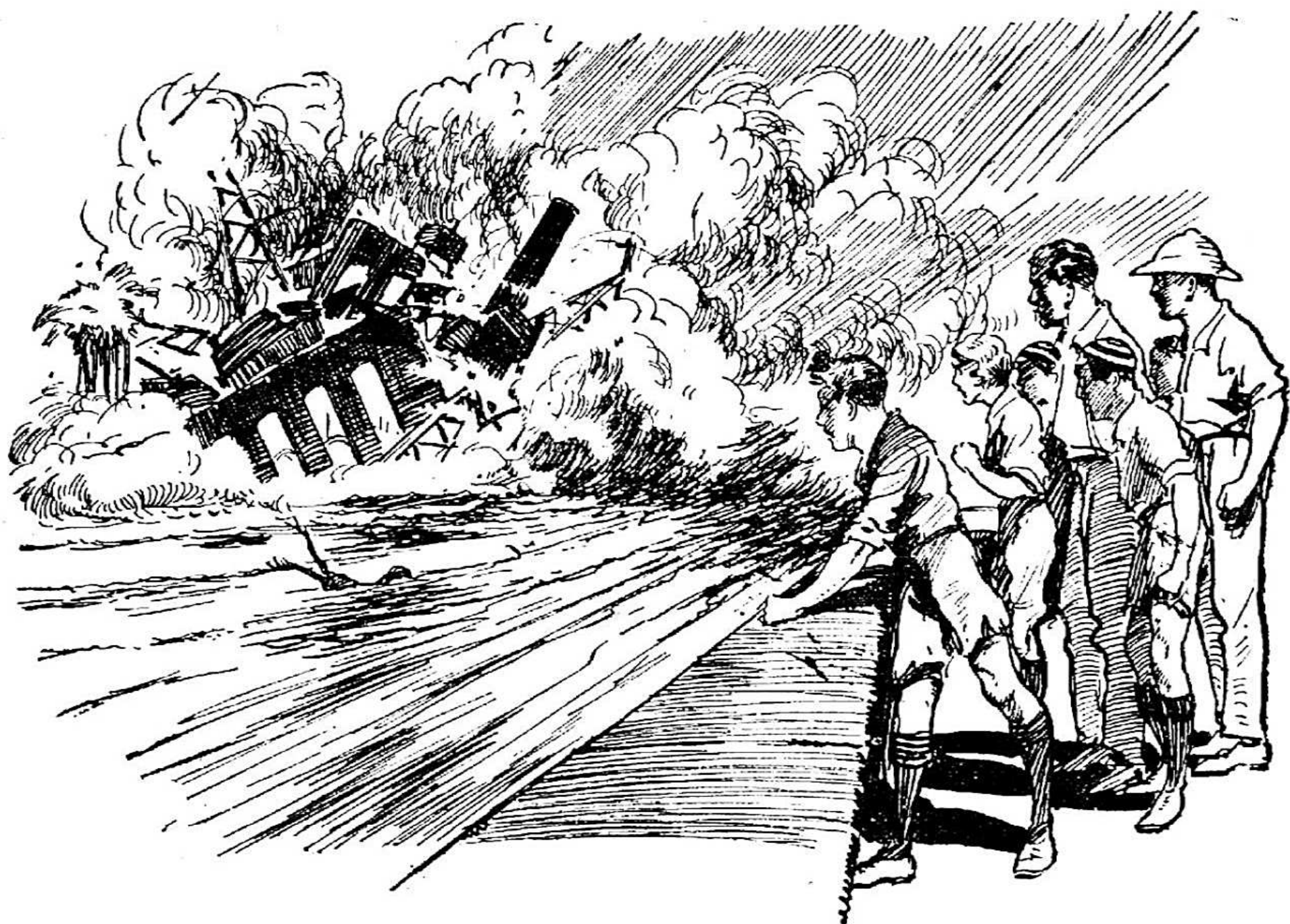
"No!" roared Handforth. "He's up! Look, sir! He's scrambling through those patches of scrub!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Johnny!"

They all danced from sheer joy, for now it seemed that their salvation was assured. Johnny Onions was on dry ground, and he was climbing up the steep hillside towards the winch. He had succeeded in his perilous task, and now it was only a question of time.

Would he be able to send that cage down,



The St. Frank's party watched the power-house buckle up as though it was made of cardboard, as the full force of the water struck it. At any moment the building on which they stood might collapse in just the same way!

and would be able to operate the winch single-handed?

Above all, would this rocking building stand the strain until the refugees had been hauled up to safety?

CHAPTER 18.

Hauled to Safety.



"URRAH!"

This cheer was louder than any of the others, for Johnny could be seen at the winch itself. Now he would send the cage shooting down the cable, and the first load could be hauled up.

But Johnny was not finding his task so easy.

He was bathed in perspiration from the exertion of his tightrope walk. He had performed this in the blazing heat of the sun. He was feeling sick and faint from the long exposure to the sun glare.

And now he was beset with fresh difficulties.

The cage was a crude affair of wicker and cane, and it was slung to the trolley by means of rusty chains. The trolley itself—a contrivance with two great pulleys, one behind the other—was even more rusty.

There was a guide rope—a thinner steel cable—and one end of this was attached to

the trolley and the other end was fixed to the drum of the winch.

It was only necessary to release the winch, and the trolley would glide on its pulleys down the cable to the building in the valley. But it was clear to Johnny that the device had not been used for many months.

Originally it had been constructed for the purpose of lowering the raw material straight from the hillside and into the factory itself, being taken direct from the roof by means of the lift. But presumably Lorenzo had adopted new methods, and this cable trolley had been allowed to get into disuse.

For the winch was stiff and hard, and at first the junior could scarcely move the handle. He was in desperate anxiety, for he began to fear that his journey had been for nothing—except to save his own life. But he saw, with great satisfaction, that nothing seemed to be missing. The chains were rusty, and the pulleys were jammed. But everything was in working order.

"Why doesn't he send the cage down?" asked Handforth, as he stared up. "Can't he work it?"

"I rather think the winch is too difficult," said Lee. "No, he seems to be getting it going now. Yes, by James! He's doing it, boys! The trolley's on the move!"

By dint of hard exertion Johnny had shifted that rusty mass. It was a heavy contrivance, and once on the move it freed its clogged

mechanism. In the nick of time Johnny Onions grabbed the handle of the winch and checked it. Otherwise it might have got beyond his control, and then the trolley would have wrecked itself on the girders below.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I thought I'd done it that time. Thank goodness it's free now. She creaks a bit, but she's working! I wonder if I shall have strength enough to pull her up again?"

"Hurrah! It's coming!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The good old basket of deliverance, what? Girls, kindly get ready to enter the lifeboat. I mean to say, women and children first, what?"

"Yes, you girls first," said Lee promptly. "But I must examine this cage before you get into it. I'm none too sure of its strength."

With the pulleys shrieking the crude basket came down, and at last it was seized by eager hands and drawn upon the platform. Nelson Lee swiftly examined it.

"The basket work is strong enough, and I think the chains will hold," he said. "Come along, girls—hurry up."

"How many of us?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"Only two to start with," replied Lee. "I think the thing is strong enough to hold four or five, but we must remember poor Johnny. You two girls will be able to help once you get up there, and a bigger load can be taken."

It seemed that there was going to be an argument as to which should be the two girls to go. But Nelson Lee settled it by bundling Tessa Love and Dora Manners into the basket without any further ado.

"Haul away, Johnny!" roared every voice.

"Stand clear—so that he can see we're ready," said Nelson Lee.

They did so, and the cage immediately began to move. But it seemed a dreadfully slow process. In a series of jerks the trolley travelled shriekingly over the rusty cable.

And Johnny, at the winch, breathed a sigh of thankfulness that no more than two passengers had been taken aboard. Even as it was, the task was almost beyond his powers.

Nobody knew—or ever would know—of the terrible struggle that Johnny Onions had. With his arms nearly pulled from their sockets, and his breath coming and going in painful gulps, he struggled at that rusty handle. More than once he thought that the winch would beat him. He set his teeth, and remembered that those two girls would be dashed to death if the cage got free.

At such a distance none of the others could appreciate Johnny's fight. They could tell that he was having a hard time of it, but they never dreamed the actual truth.

Dora Manners and Tessa suspected it when they were getting near, although Johnny grimly fought to hide his agony. And Tessa, with her heart beating rapidly, knew that there was only one thing to be done.

"Don't be scared," she said quickly. "I'm going to climb out after we've gone another

five or six feet, and jump into those bushes—the same as Johnny did. He'll never get the cage up this last lap unless I do."

And, indeed, that action of Tessa's saved both her own and Dora's lives. For just as Tessa released her weight from the cage, Johnny knew that he was beaten. By a hair's breadth the tragedy was averted. With Tessa's weight gone, the task was still heavy but possible.

And at last Dora climbed out on the dry ground.

"Oh, Johnny!" she exclaimed. "How did you do it?"

Johnny, clinging to the winch, swayed dizzily.

"I'm all right," he muttered. "It's—it's the heat, you know. Thanks, Tessa, old girl," he added, as she came up. "That was topping of you! You jumped out just at the right minute."

"We're all right now!" said Tessa thankfully. "Lower away! Come on, Dora! You flop down in the grass for a minute, Johnny. Poor chap, you're nearly finished!"

But Johnny wouldn't admit himself beaten. He helped, and the cage went down for its next load. And Nelson Lee was glad to see it arrive. There were still seventeen of them to rescue, and that would mean three journeys at the very least.

The rest of the girls were bundled into the cage—four of them—and this was considered sufficient for the next journey. Lee's anxiety was increasing, for the waters were continuing to rise, and the ferocity of the current showed no sign of abating.

"By jingo!" said Watson. "There's a difference now! Look at the way she's skimming along over the wire. That's more like speed!"

There was certainly a big difference. With two helpers Johnny's task was easier, even with the addition of two other girls in the cage. And at last they were safely landed, and hopes were running high.

"Thank Heaven those girls are ashore," said Lord Dorrimore fervently. "Now for the boys! Even if anythin' happens to us we can trust Umlosi to escort them to Zenobu, and deliver them into safe hands."

"But we're all saved now," said Handforth enthusiastically. "Another two or three journeys, and we shall be right as rain. Yes, and I expect this giddy building will stand here for ages, and we're expecting it to collapse every minute."

"Yes, silly, isn't it?" said Dorrie lightly.

He took a glance over the parapet, and the expression in his eyes belied the lightness of his tone. During the past few minutes an ugly crack had developed in the wall immediately beneath him. The girders were cracking and bending—the corrugated iron sheets were buckling open. Already the building was on the point of collapse. At any second it might crack up with a series of snaps like the exploding of guns.

And only one of the St. Frank's fellows had as yet reached safety!

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"THE FEUD OF THE FOURTH!"

The Remove *versus* The Fourth!

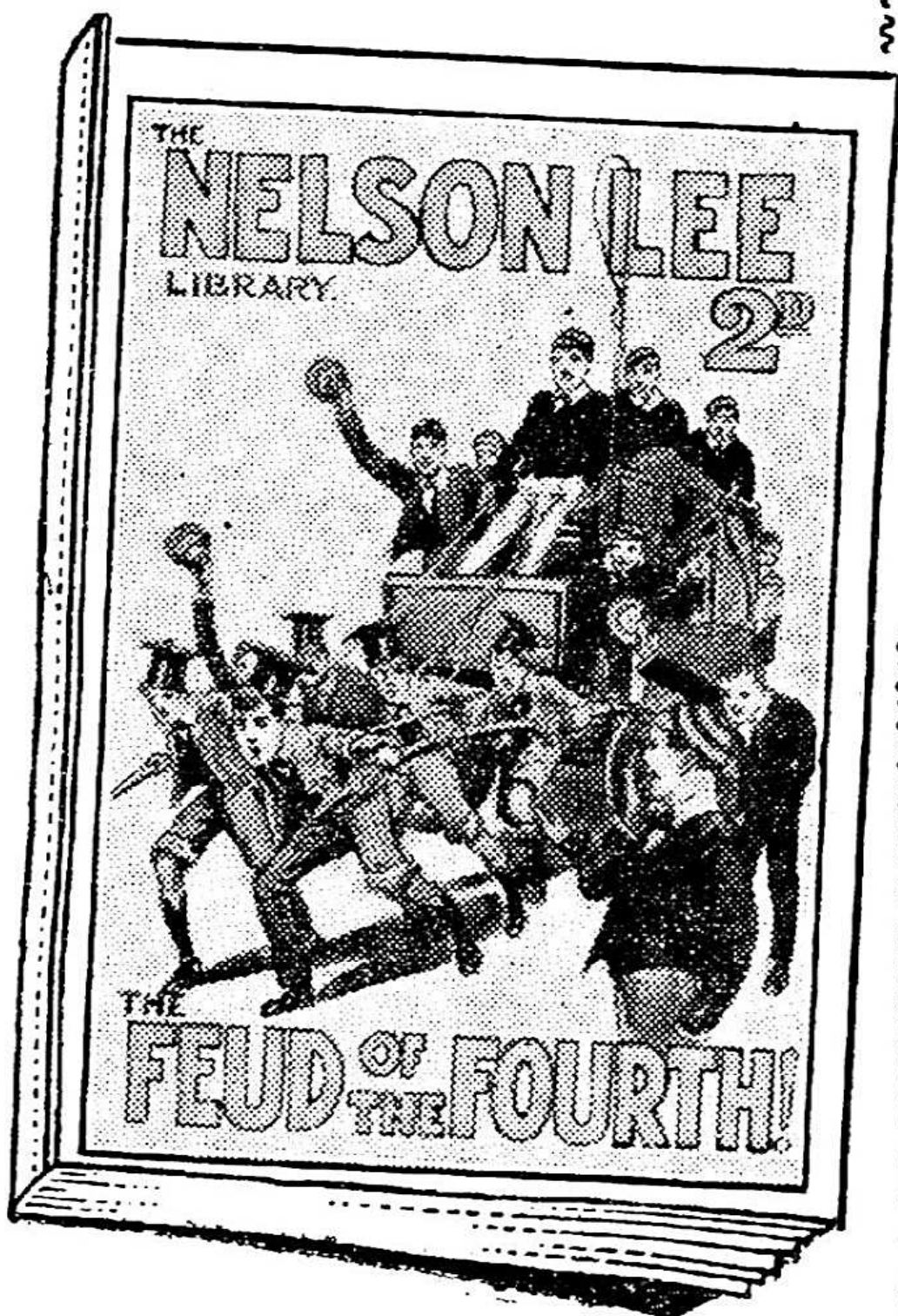
The feud starts in a very small way, but it grows swiftly. It increases from rivalry almost to warfare.

There is an Unknown in the background, fanning the growing flame of hatred between the two Forms.

Who is this Unknown? How can the deadly feud be stopped?

From the epic fight between Nipper and Boots—the captains of the rival forms—to the mysterious appearance of the strange Unknown, this grand story is a whirl of excitement—and fun! There's plenty of fun in this yarn, especially when Handy begins to get REALLY warlike!

Look out for this story—it is the first of one of the finest series that the Old Paper has ever offered you.



ORDER IN ADVANCE!

CHAPTER 19.

A Close Call!



RACK—crack—crack!

"Glory!" gasped Lord
Dorrimore. "It's hap-
pened!"

His voice was fraught with consternation. In quick succession a number of sharp cracks had come, followed by the shrieking and grinding of raw metal edges. The girders at one end of the building were sagging drunkenly, and the whole roof seemed to sway. A mass of flotsam came barging violently against the side of the factory to the accompaniment of rattling iron and grinding, shrieking metal.

"We can't last much longer, Dorrie," exclaimed Lee. "Here comes the cage again. Boys, you'll have to pack yourselves in like sardines. How many are there? Eleven, eh?"

"Thirteen with you and Dorrie, sir?" said Nipper quickly.

"Unlucky number!" said Dorrie. "This is shockin'!"

"Never mind about us," said Lee. "Six of

you must make the journey this time—and seven if possible. The cage is here! Pile in, boys—don't lose a second!"

"Better chuck them in!" said Dorrie quickly. "They'll only argue as to who's goin' first. Come on, Gresham—you, Mae, and you, Handy! No arguin'! Show some speed!"

"Wait a minute, sir!" roared Handforth. "Those girls can't haul seven of us up!"

"Yes, they can," put in Nelson Lee. "They're strong and healthy enough—and that winch has got two handles. Three can operate each now. Unless we take drastic steps like this we shall be too late."

And so they piled into the cage without any further argument.

It was a tight squeeze for seven of them. But nobody minded being squeezed. The only worry was whether the cable would bear the weight, or whether the cage would stand the strain.

Up on the hillside Johnny and the girls fully appreciated the terrible need for speed, and they worked at the winch with all their strength and with hearty wills.

And so the next load of precious freight was conveyed up to safety, and now, when

the rescue work was so far advanced, crowds of the Kutana warriors were hurrying up from the lower end of the valley. No doubt they had seen the operations from afar—and had just realised that the boys and girls were still living. Indeed, as Umlosi afterwards said, he had believed that all of them had perished in the wreckage of the bungalow.

"They've done it!" yelled Nipper enthusiastically. "They're up, guv'nor! There's only six of us now. I think we can all go on this last load, can't we?"

"I think we can," said Nelson Lee. "It'll be death for anybody who is left behind, at all events. Come and look here, Nipper—you might as well know now!"

He bent over the parapet and pointed.

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper. "Why, the whole building's coming to pieces! The bottom of it is caving in!"

"Do you wonder that I'm anxious?"

"No, fear, sir," muttered Nipper. "I say, is this what you were looking at some time ago—when you wouldn't explain?"

"No, Nipper," replied Lee. "That was something else."

"What, sir?"

"I'll tell you later," said Lee quietly.

"Here she comes again!" shouted Dorrie. "We'll be all right now, you fellows. Well, we've had some more excitement, just to round things up nicely, but I rather think we're out of the wood now!"

Nipper took another glance over the edge. His heart leapt. The factory was in a terribly precarious condition. He could not understand why it still stood. One side was almost carried away, revealing a jagged mass of raw edges and ghastly broken ends. To get mixed up in any of those metallic deathtraps would be too awful for words.

And the danger of the roof suddenly caving in was by no means imaginary. It might happen at any moment—it would happen at any moment. Nelson Lee was expecting it all the time.

It seemed to him that the cage came down the cable at a mere crawl; it seemed that the fellows on the hillside were deliberately dawdling at the winch. But actually the pulley wheels spun over the cable faster than ever before.

"Now then—all aboard!" shouted Lee.

Nipper, Browne, Archie and Tregellis-West tumbled into the rickety cage, and Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee exchanged a significant glance as they followed. Never had they believed this possible. The last of them were going off, and the miracle had happened.

Dorrie waved his hand, and the pulleys rattled. In a series of jerks, the cage moved upwards on its last journey.

"Absolutely topping," declared Archie. "Here we are, laddies, all alive and kicking when we expected to be all dead and so forth. I mean, it only shows that everything turns out all right if you leave things to these brainy coves who know what to do."

"I never thought we should get off, guv'nor," said Nipper.

"We're not saved yet," said Lee under his breath.

Far below them was the raging water, with its whirlpools and its deadly current, and now they were well clear of the doomed factory, and could see the gaping cracks in the walls, and the dreadful list which the roof had taken.

And at that second, as Lee looked, the expected happened.

Exactly like a house of cards, the factory disintegrated into a thousand fragments. With a shattering, screaming roar, the building buckled up, flew apart and burst. If it had happened earlier, not a life would have been saved.

The rescuers on the hillside saw it all—but the six last passengers in the cage only caught a glimpse of the commencement, for the end of their precious cable was attached to that collapsed building!

They hardly knew what had happened!

They felt a sickening lurch, and then they dropped sheer, with an awful sensation at the pit of their stomachs. For with the cable snapped there was no longer any support.

Splash!

The cage hit the flood with a mighty burst of water. For a moment it rolled over and then plunged beneath the foaming surface.

On the hillside the girls screamed in terror, and the St. Frank's fellows shouted hoarsely in their horrified anguish. The last load had gone into the flood! Those six precious lives were lost!

CHAPTER 20.

The Lost Valley!



DISASTER!

It was the irony of fate—the height of misfortune—that tragedy should mar the success of that wonderful rescue effort. All safe except the last load!

"They've gone—they've gone!" sobbed Tommy Watson. "And Nipper's in there—and old Montie!"

"They haven't gone yet!" roared Handforth fiercely. "Work, you lubbers! They're still at the end of this control cable! That hasn't broken, thank goodness! We can still haul them in!"

"Come on—all hands to the pumps!"

And the winch was forced round as never before.

In the cage, the six victims felt that their last moments had really arrived. They went under the surface, and they were stunned by the shock of the concussion. In a hopeless mess, they were toppled this way and that, crashing into one another as the cage rolled.

And then the water came pouring through the canework, blinding them, and getting into their very lungs.

But just as suddenly as they had plunged beneath the surface, so they rose again. The top of the cage came out of the water, and the sunlight poured upon the soaking victims. They were enabled to get a long breath.

"Gad!" gurgled Dorrie. "We've come up again!"

"Yes, and they're hauling on the line!" panted Nipper. "We're still being pulled! We're still on the cable!"

"Odds wetness and gargles!" said Archie. "I've swallowed a tree trunk, you chappies! Absolutely a dashed tree trunk! I can feel the branches tickling the good old tonsils!"

And then Archie subsided, for the cage rolled, and he went under the surface. The water was swirling just over their heads, and then they were allowed to come up for a moment and obtain another breath. And all the time the fight went on.

It was a battle—a grim struggle for life between the demons of the flood and the strength and determination of the workers at the winch.

The flood had carried the cage down as far as the cable would allow, and then the cage had swung inwards, towards the slopes, where the bush was tangled up with incredible masses of torn and twisted debris. Tree trunks, creepers, branches, and all sorts and kinds of rubbish that had come floating down on the surface of the water.

At last the cage became jammed in all this kelter, and it was hauled inch by inch over the horrible mass. For the most part it was crawling with live things—pitiful creatures which had managed to survive. But those in the cage took no notice. They were not certain, yet, that their own lives were saved.

For if this thin winch-cable should snap under the now terrific strain they would inevitably float down in the current, and would be beyond aid.

But, mercifully, the cable held, and at last the refugees were hauled to a spot where Umlosi and a hundred of his warriors were waist deep in the edge of the flood. Willing hands seized the cage and hauled it in—hauled it upwards to the dry ground.

"N'Kose, my father!" shouted Umlosi. "Wau! Thou art alive!"

"I believe so," said Dorrie dazedly. "I'm not quite sure yet, but I think I am. Give me a bit of time to find out."

"'Twas ever thy way, N'Kose, to jest when on the point of death," rumbled Umlosi. "And thou, Umtagati? Did I not think that all of ye were dead? And yet did my snake not tell me that such a tragedy could not be? Wau! All is well! For thou art living!"

And all the other Kutana warriors gave shouts of welcome. One by one the bedraggled six were pulled out, and by this time the rest of the St. Frank's fellows and the girls were forcing their way down the hillside, and hurrying round, cheering frantically.

"Oh, you—you bounders!" parted Tommy

Watson. "We thought you'd all been killed!"

"Impossible, brother," said Browne, removing a few leaves from the inside of his shirt. "I think it has been definitely proved that we cannot be killed. We are proof against it. I might even go so far as to say that we bear charmed lives."

"An' there's a great deal of truth in that," said Lord Dorrimore. "When that buildin' fell in I thought we were goners. Oh, well, we're only a bit bruised. What about your men, Umlosi? What about the slaves, and don't tell me that lots of you have been drowned."

"N'Kose, the Great One has been truly merciful," replied Umlosi solemnly. "Of all the hundreds of my men, but six have perished. The rest are saved, and none of the victims of the accursed Lorenzo have suffered."

"Lorenzo tried to murder us all," said Nelson Lee quietly. "He meant to wreck this valley, and to wipe us out at the same time. But the murderous hound only succeeded in destroying himself and his handiwork."

"Himself, sir?" said Nipper. "But we don't know that he's dead!"

"He can't be dead," said Handforth. "He and Popodos planned to escape in that canoe——"

"Whatever Lorenzo and Popodos planned, Handforth, it did not materialise," replied Lee. "Do you remember a little incident on the roof of the factory? Do you remember when I refused to explain something that Dorrie and I had seen?"

"Yes, sir!" went up a chorus.

"The object we saw was Otto Lorenzo's torn and mangled body," said Lee quietly. "I wanted none of you to see—it was too awful. Lorenzo must have miscalculated. In his mad anxiety to destroy us, he failed to give himself enough time to escape. So he met death by his own hand, and his tool, Popodos, is doubtless dead, too."

"Well, that's that," said Dorrie, as he waved his hand over the stricken valley. "Gad! I'm glad that everythin' has been wiped out. This is no longer a valley, but a lake—an' it will always be a lake, I suppose. A plague spot eradicated, Lee."

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "A plague spot eradicated."

• • •

Otto Lorenzo had gone to his death, and everything that he had created in the Kalala Valley was destroyed. Retribution had descended upon him for his many crimes.

Two days later, after resting, and after recovering from the effects of these strenuous days, the whole party moved off through the Congo forests, and commenced the long trek to Zenobu.

In due course, this chief town of the Kutanas was reached.

News had gone in advance, and there were great rejoicings and big celebrations. It was a time of joy for the whole Kutana

tribe. For practically all the liberated slaves were Kutanas, and now they were restored to their villages and to their families, who had never expected to see them again.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore felt that they had performed a good work, and Umlosi, too, had played his own great part in the drama. But it was all over now, and the time for rejoicing had come.

The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls could hardly realise that they had passed through such exciting dangers. Zenobu was so hospitable, and the Kutanas were so civilised that cannibals and savages seemed too remote to be true.

By the time Zenobu was left, all those youngsters were fit and hale, eager to get back to good old England, and looking forward, indeed, to the prospect of returning to school.

Lord Dorrimore had one plaintive grumble.

"You know, boys, there's somethin' radically wrong," he said, as he stood outside the Residency in Zenobu, resplendent in spotless white drill. "I rather thought we came to Africa to hunt elephants."

"That's what we all thought, Dorrie," grinned Nipper.

"An', hang it, we didn't even spit an elephant!" said Dorrie indignantly. "If you ask me, the whole thing has been a frost.

We haven't had a smell of big-game hunt-in'!"

"Does this mean that you're thinking of staying behind?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, Nipper, old man—yes," said Dorrie confidentially. "I'm rather keen on those elephants, an' Umlosi has told me of a district where they're fairly swarmin'. So if Lee doesn't mind, I think I'll stay behind."

"Well, we've had plenty of excitement, Dorrie," remarked Handforth. "I'm not grumbling, anyhow. I'm a chap who likes a bit of adventure, but for once I've had enough of it."

"Absolutely, old cheese," said Archie. "In fact, absolutely with prickles! I mean to say, enough, dash it, is as good as a merry old feast! And I rather think that we're now due for a decent slab of rest!"

All the other members of the holiday party were in agreement with him. Their trip to Central Africa had been packed with thrills from beginning to end, and they felt that the new term at St. Frank's would be mild and tame by comparison.

But if they thought this they were very wide of the mark!

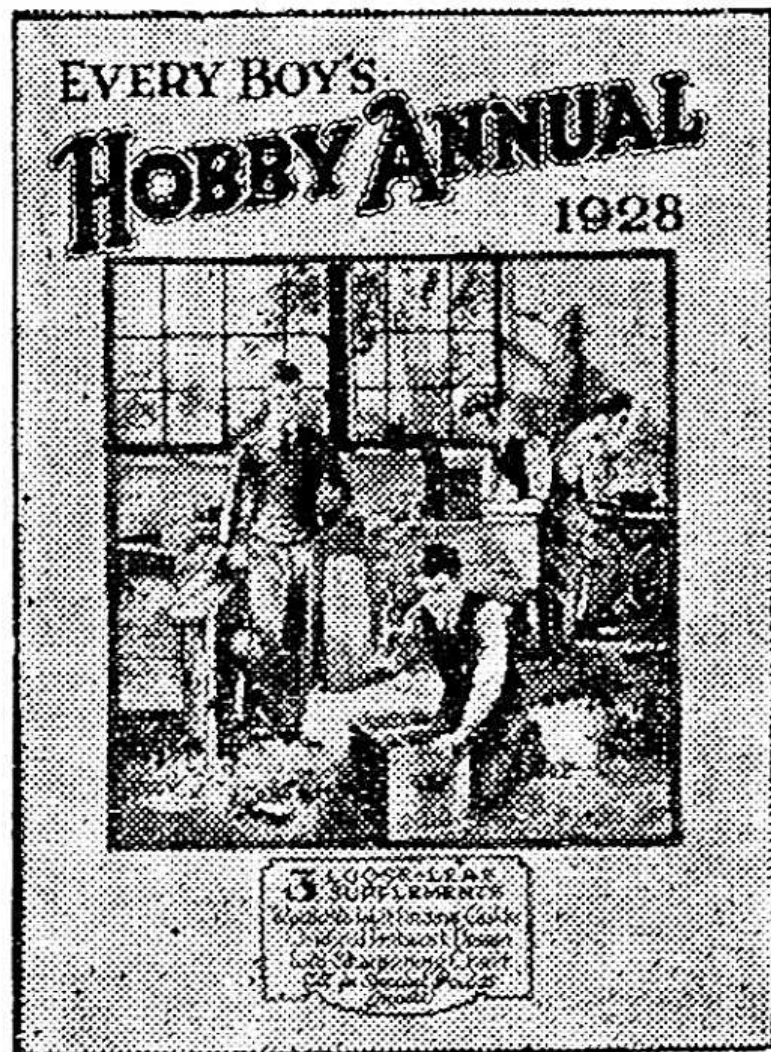
THE END.

(Don't miss the opening story of a stunning new series of school-life yarns: "THE FEUD OF THE FOURTH!" Coming next Wednesday!)

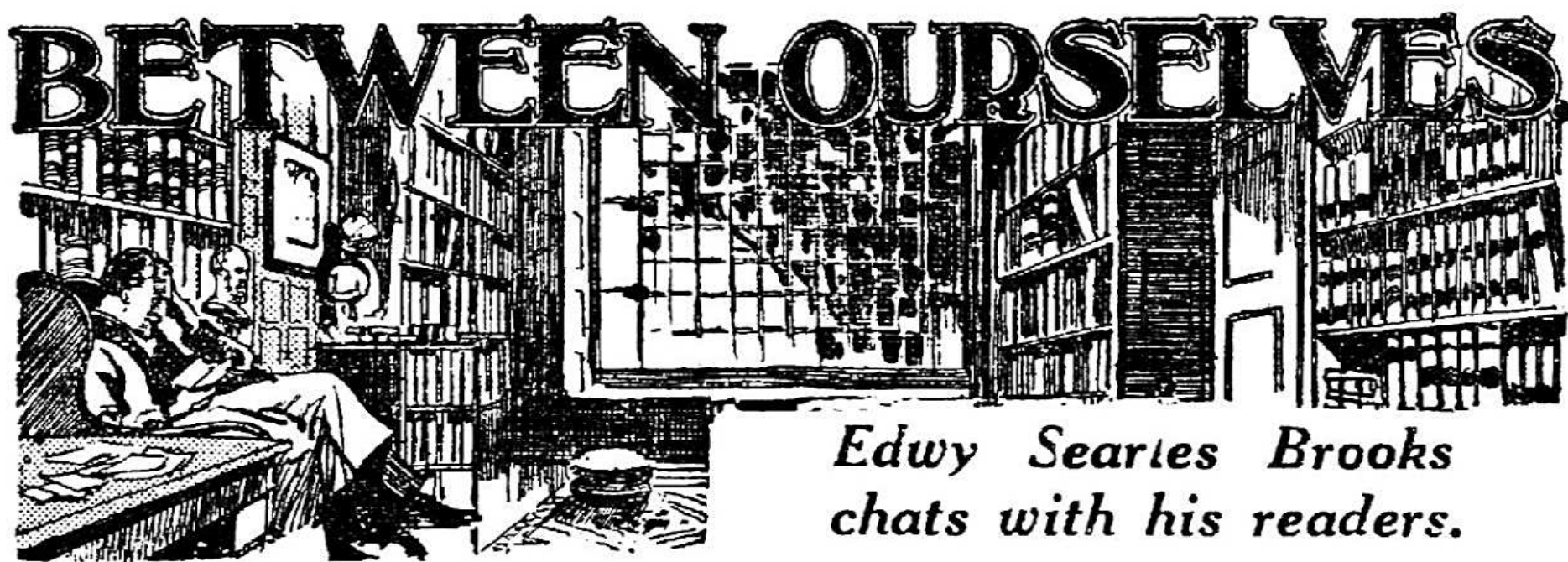
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*Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.*

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention, and all will be acknowledged in these columns. But please note that the acknowledgments cannot appear until at least five weeks after the letters reach my hands. Those of very special merit will be distinguished by *star—thus**—against the sender's name. Communications which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer. My photo exchanging offer (mine for yours—but yours first, please) is still open.—E. S. B.

YOU'VE got the right idea, Terence Sullivan, but you seem to express yourself in a rummy way. You say: "What's this rotten idea of publishing parts of readers' letters? I hope you're not going to continue with it. Of all the dud ideas I ever struck—" And thus you leave me to imagine the rest of your thoughts. And then you calmly tell me that I have your full permission to publish any of your letters, and to make copies of them, and give them away as free gifts, if I am so minded! But I think I understand you, old son. And I appreciate your willingness to let me print any parts of your letters that I choose.

This is what Ralph Sewell, of St. Ives, tells me in a letter: "Personally, I don't consider your tales are stories for young people at all, but as tales for *anybody* possessed of the necessary intelligence to appreciate them." Well, this, of course, is very satisfactory. For it stands to reason that all readers of the Old Paper are intelligent. If they weren't, they wouldn't be reading it! I very much like Ralph Sewell's point. He says that my stories appeal to *anybody*, and that, as a matter of fact, is what I have always hoped. I try to please fellows of all ages—from eight years of age to eighty. After all, what does age matter? Some readers write to me saying that they're seventeen or eighteen, and that they're afraid that they're too old for the St. Frank's tales. I shall have something more to say on this subject later on, I expect.

If you wish to get in touch with that Australian reader, James Reginald Warren, you had better make haste and join the League. Then you will have the full benefits of the Correspondence Exchange.

The previous paragraph also applies to you, Frank E. Bond. Wait a minute, though—I see that you are already a member of the League, and that you want back numbers. You'd better send your letter, stating just what your requirements are, to the Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League.

Very many thanks, Mr. Riley, for your letter, and for your intimation that I may use it in print. Such letters as yours will probably be a great help to many readers whose parents are opposed to my simple tales: "126, Albert Street, Seddon, Victoria, Aus. Dear Mr. Brooks, I was once prejudiced against the NELSON LEE, but I have now reversed my decision. For once I picked up a copy of the NELSON LEE, entitled 'Jack Grey's Temptation,' and found it most alluring, and written in a wonderful strain. If you wish, Mr. Brooks, you may publish this letter for other parents who have been the same as I. I remain, yours sincerely, ERNEST DONALD RILEY." And thank you, Donald Augustine Riley, for your share in the good work.

Raeburn J. Harvey (Marton, N.Z.), Rev. Clive Robert Beresford* (Camden Town), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), Wm. G. Marsh (Islington), Ralph Sewell** (St. Ives), Jas. Reg. Warren (Nuneaton), Frank E. Bond (Southend-on-Sea), "Two Leagueites" (Heckmondwyke), F. J. Davis* (New Malden), Ernest Donald Riley* (Melbourne), Donald Augustine Riley* (Melbourne), Arthur J. Miles* (West Croydon), "N.L.L. Reader" (Bow), Harold G. Scott (Walthamstow), Wm. H. J. Knight (Dover), Ernest Adambery* (Gibraltar), Albert Anderton (Liverpool), Richard Irvinger (Croydon), H. Tomlinson* (Birmingham), "All-Round Sportsman"* (Swindon), Clifford G. Leavy* (Brisbane).

No, H. Tomlinson, that isn't a genuine photograph of me at the top of this page; but you can obtain a genuine photograph—duly autographed, too—if you send me one of your own photos first. Any snapshot will do, you know—big or little; and it doesn't matter if other people are in it, as long as you're there. And this applies to every other reader.

"All-Round Sportsman" says this: "I am eighteen years old, but instead of thinking myself too old to be a reader of the 'N.L.L.,' I become more and more eager for every Wednesday morning to appear." That's the style! As I said before, what the dickens does age matter!

I don't think it would be a wise policy, Terence D. Hewlett, to go back to the old style, as you suggest. You say this: "I think your stories inspire the real spirit of sportsmanship. It is impossible not to take example from Nipper and Reggio Pitt, and even impulsive, blundering old Handy. At the same time, I think you rather spoilt your stories, comparatively recently, by not allowing Nipper to tell them." That's where we differ, Terence, old man. I think the present style is very much better—since, when you come to think of it, Nipper cannot be in two places at once, and if there is a secret meeting of the rotters, or anything like that, Nipper cannot very well be there. Besides, when the yarn is told in the first person, the storyteller is apt to appear as a braggart if he does anything praiseworthy. I really think the present style is the better.

* * *

P. Young, the President of the Edgehill Branch of the St. Frank's League, of 9, Wrayburn Street, Edgehill, Liverpool, tells me that I can use any part of his letters I like. So I am going to quote the following: "It is very strange the view some people take of things. In fact, regarding the NELSON LEE, it reminds me of the days of the martyrs—'condemned without trial.' People who are against the paper hear of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, then they seem to look on it in this way—it is a weekly paper, it costs 2d., therefore it must be like other boys' papers, and is classed as a twopenny blood. I dare say if it was in magazine form, and cost a shilling, and was issued every month, all these sceptics would make one rush to the nearest bookstall for a copy. All I can say to anybody is: 'Be fair, and give a thing a trial before you condemn it.'" That's very nice of you, P. Young, and I hope a lot of other readers, who know prejudiced people, will show them your letter. Of course, I don't agree that all other boys' papers are "bloods," but we needn't enter into that discussion, need we?

* * *

Leslie Walters (Newcastle, N. Aus.), Fdk. Francis Chesterton (Hereford), "F. W."* (Sunderland), Thomas Jones (Wolverhampton), G. Hurst (Teignmouth), Terence D. Hewlett (Acton), W. Parker (Pretoria), P. Young* (Liverpool), Allen Neilson (Harris Park, Aus.), Miss E. Mather* (Oldham), J. Roy (Collingwood, Aus.), Geoffrey Harrison (Leicester), "A Delighted Reader"* (Bournemouth), Fred Cryer (Leeds), Alec Bird (Chelmsford), Mrs. Kathleen A. Chandler* (Caversham), Bernard Cooke* (Holloway), Richard Dunn (Clapton), Eileen Mingay (Balham), Angus Murray** (Glasgow).

* * *

I hope this letter will be of some use, too, and the writer has my best thanks: "Dear Mr. Brooks, I have been meaning to write to you for some time, but something else has always cropped up, so that the letter has had to take a back seat. I have read NELSON LEE for some years now, in fact, when it was the detective stories of Nelson Lee and Nipper before they came to St. Frank's. I thought, perhaps, you might be interested to know that I am married, with three kiddies, and still enjoy reading it. Also that my mother used to get very cross with me at one time for spending my money on rubbish, as she then called it. Then she started to read my books one day, and now she is one of the first to ask for the NELSON LEE on Wednesdays. I chipped her about it the other day, but she says she soon altered her mind about the books after once reading them. She is now sixty-four, and enjoys reading them as much as I do. I think the NELSON LEE is a clean, wholesome, and enjoyable book,

and I do not think it can be bettered in any way. It comes fresh and laughable to me every week now. I hope this hasn't bored you, but I am only taking you at your own word.—Yours sincerely, KATHLEEN A. CHANDLER." I greatly appreciate your letter, Mrs. Chandler, and I feel sure that it will do quite a lot of good—since it is yet another evidence that age doesn't matter. I want everybody to be boys and girls when they are reading my yarns.

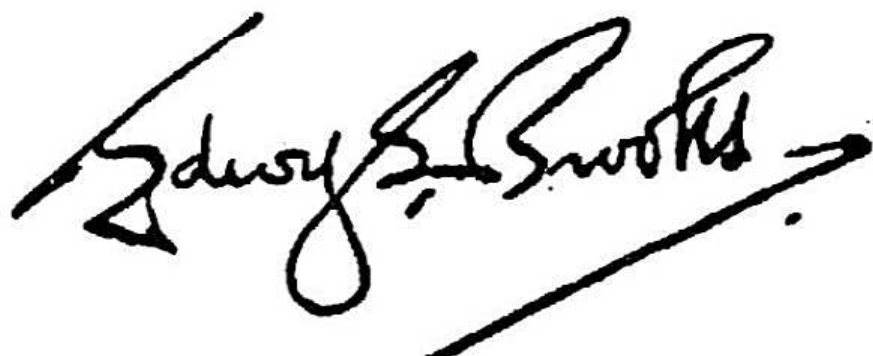
* * *

Arnold McClure is of Scottish stock, Angus Murray. So I suppose it will be quite correct to call him Scotch.

Tom Rhodes (Ashton-under-Lyne), R. T. Hammond (Birmingham), Edwin Cowie Brooks (Aberdeen), "Squibs" (Inverness), G. W. Mitchell (East Ham), "X. Y. Z." (no address), Albert Anthon (Manchester), Robert S. Silver (Montrose), J. J. Hoser-Cook* (Poplar), Frank H. Palmer (East Grinstead), Ruby C. M. Bond (Bexley Heath), F. M. Ambler (Dulwich), Norman Carter (Darlington), Geo. F. Bishop* (Lambeth), R. F. Chipperfield (Dublin), C. C. Janeway (S.E.16), Daniel Hyland (Athy), Leonard Robins (Colwyn Bay), Terence Sullivan* (Tufnell Park), Hugh R. Holmes* (Regent's Park), "Unter Den Linden"* (Walsall).

* * *

Whoa! Steady on, Norman Carter! I would very much like to oblige you with the details you ask for, but haven't you given me a pretty tall order? You say that you are making a fret-work model of St. Frank's (more power to your elbow, old man!), but at the same time I rather think you'll have to fashion this model out of your own head, more or less. I could not possibly give you a scale drawing of the boat-house, and a detailed description of the path round the Triangle, and exactly how many feet the arches are, and how wide the bicycle-sheds are, and all those little details. The fact is, I don't know them myself! And I am quite sure that you wouldn't want me to go round the school with a tape-measure and obtain all this information. It would take weeks of hard work, old man! I always do my best to describe these various places accurately in my yarns, and I am afraid you will have to get your information from these descriptions.



JOIN THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE.

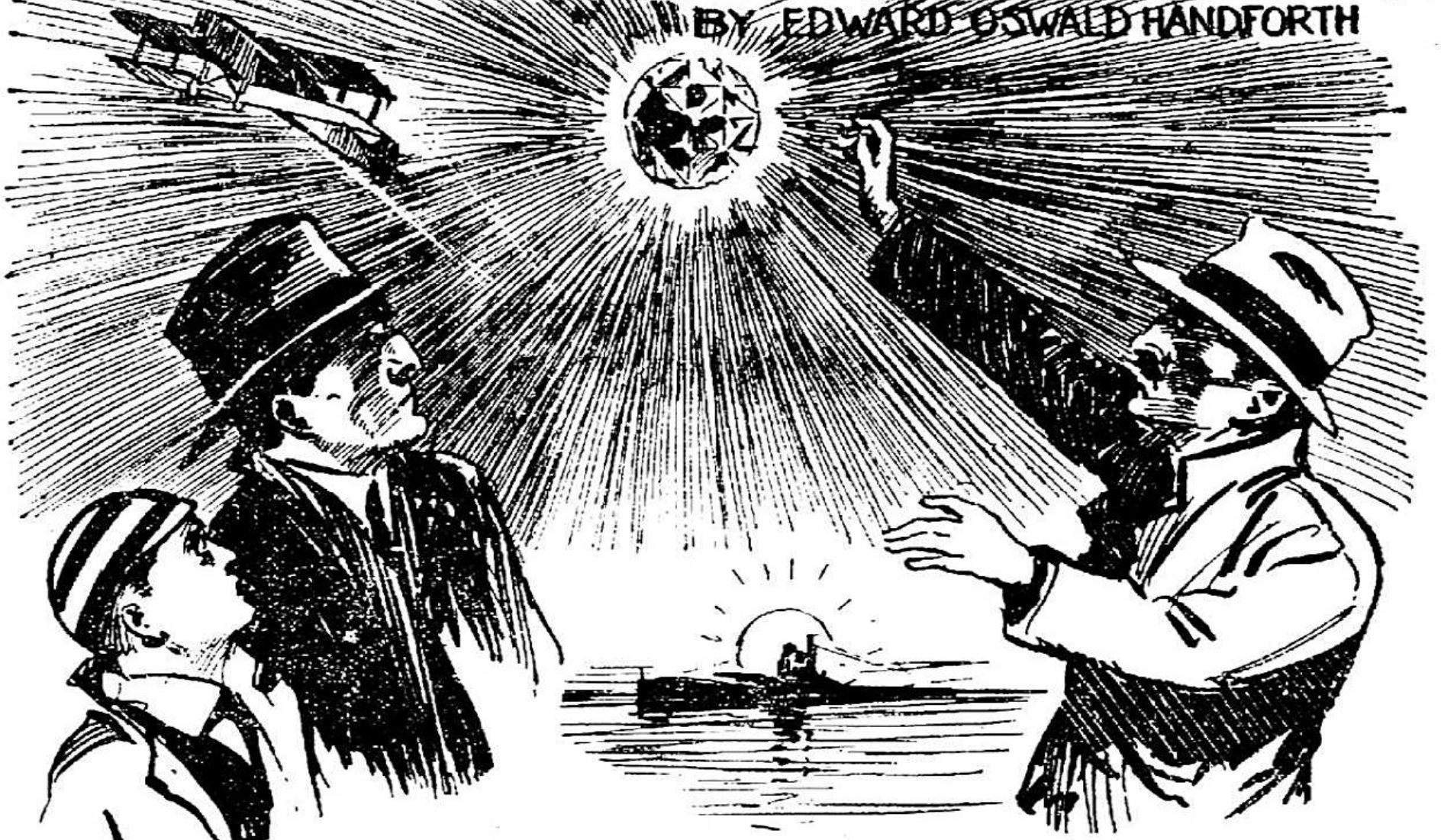
The Chief Officer will answer any questions about sport, holidays and hobbies. So if you are in any difficulties and want advice, qualify for membership of the League, and you can write to the C.O. about it.

PARTICULARS ON PAGES 41 AND 42.

Written by EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.

TRACKETT GRIM'S GREATEST CASE!

BY EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH



NOTE.—Handforth flatly refused Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks' offer of assistance in the writing of this story, and insisted that it should be published exactly as he wrote it. The story now appears as it came from Handforth's pen, with the exception that certain errors in spelling and punctuation have been corrected by the Editor.

CHAPTER 1.

The Mystery of the Missing Lens.

TRACKETT GRIM, the world-famous detective, looked up with a frown as the door of his consulting-room opened. He waved his hand impatiently to Splinter, his young assistant, who looked in at the doorway.

"Clear off!" said Trackett Grim curtly.

"Just a minute, sir——"

"Buzz off, you young fathead!" roared the celebrated incriminator. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

Trackett Grim was seated at his desk, examining clues through a magnifying glass. He looked jolly fine in his dressing gown and slippers, and his lean, athletic figure was shown off to full advantage. Even Splinter, accustomed as he was to his celebrated master, quailed under the glint of those steely grey eyes.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," said Splinter. "But there's a client waiting. He says his case is very urgent."

Trackett Grim twirled round in his swivel chair.

"Very well, Splinter, show him in," he said briefly. "I can ill afford to be disturbed, but clients must not be kept waiting. Why the dickens didn't you bring him in?"

Splinter retired and, a moment later, he returned, ushering in a tall, upright old gentleman with white hair. Trackett Grim gave the client a swift, comprehensive glance as he advanced into the room. The great detective's eyes missed nothing. He saw the bent figure, the care-worn face, the worried eyes behind the big spectacles.

"I observe, sir," said Trackett Grim courteously, "that you have travelled up from the Kentish coast this morning."

"Good gracious!" said the client, staring. "How did you know that, Mr. Grim?"

"Furthermore, you have not breakfasted to-day," went on the great detective. "And, on such a wet morning as this, it is always advisable to take a taxi. Walking may be faster—probably is faster—but it has many disadvantages."

The client sat down in his chair, and gazed at Trackett Grim, dumbfounded.

"But this is marvellous, Mr. Grim!" he panted. "How do you know these things?"

Trackett Grim waved his hand.

"It is my business to know things," he replied carelessly. "And now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I am in great trouble, Mr. Grim," said the old gentleman. "My name is Sir Esau Starrs——"

"Ah, the great astronomer?" murmured Trackett Grim.

"Then you know me?"

"Who does not know the name of Sir Esau Starrs?" said the detective. "Pray state your case, Sir Esau."

"It will only take a few moments, Mr. Grim," said Sir Esau Starrs, leaning forward in his chair, and gazing at the famous criminologist.

with terrific anxiety in his eyes. "My lens has been stolen."

"Your Len has been stolen?" said Trackett Grim, with concern. "I presume you mean your son, Leonard?"

"I did not say Len—I said lens!" corrected Sir Esau impatiently. "My famous lens—the lens from my wonderful telescope, Mr. Grim. During the night my observatory was burgled, and that valuable lens—without which my telescope is useless—has been stolen!"

"Kindly let me hear the details," said Trackett Grim, pulling a writing pad towards him.

"I know no details, Mr. Grim," said the client. "This morning, I got down at my usual hour, and went into the observatory. And then, with a gasp of horror, I saw that the lens had been taken out of the telescope. I searched everywhere, but could not find it. Then I discovered that one of the windows had been smashed, and it was perfectly obvious to me that some miscreant had been in, and had removed the lens from the telescope. I want you to recover it, Mr. Grim, I am exceedingly anxious that you should get on the trail of the crook without delay."

"A very singular case," said Trackett Grim thoughtfully. "Indeed, a remarkable case. In all my great experience of crooks, I do not know of one who would go to the trouble of boning a common or garden lens from a telescope."

"But this is not a common or garden lens, Mr. Grim!" said Sir Esau Starrs. "It is a marvellous lens, and it cost me no less than five hundred pounds. A very splendid prize for any burglar."

"But you must let me point out, Sir Esau, that no burglar would be able to dispose of such a lens," said Trackett Grim, with all his extraordinary shrewdness. "But tell me more! Is there anything else missing?"

"Nothing!"

"What other valuables have you in the house?"

"There is, of course, the great Blue Ruby," said Sir Esau. "But that is still intact."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Trackett Grim, starting to his feet. "The Blue Ruby? Do you mean the world-famous Blue Ruby, worth a hundred thousand pounds?"

"Yes, Mr. Grim," replied the astronomer. "The Blue Ruby has been in my family for many years, and at present it is in my charge. But you need not worry about that precious stone. It is safely in my observatory now—locked away in the safe. I made sure of its presence there before I came away."

Trackett Grim waved his hand.

"Very well, Sir Esau," he said swiftly. "I will accept this case. Go out, get some breakfast, and cease to worry. From this moment, I am in charge of your case, and you may be absolutely certain that everything will be all serene. Good morning, Sir Esau."

"Yes, but—but—"

"There is nothing more to be said," declared Trackett Grim.

"But you don't know my address!" protested the astronomer. "You don't even know—"

"I am aware, Sir Esau, that you live at Starview Observatory, Little Moonford, Kent. I will be on the scene in less than an hour, Sir Esau. Again—good morning!"

Sir Esau Starrs was showed off the premises, and the poor old chap was looking very dazed, as he walked away down Baker's Inn Road. Trackett Grim's methods were very bewildering.

CHAPTER 2.

Trackett Grim on the Trail.

AS soon as Sir Esau Starrs had gone, Trackett Grim threw aside his reserve, and he paced up and down the consulting-room with agitated strides.

"What's up, guv'nor?" asked Splinter. "It's

not a very serious case, is it?"

"Not serious, you young chump?" roared Trackett Grim. "It looks like being one of the biggest affairs that I've ever handled! What's more, Splinter, I fear the worst!"

"But I don't see—"

"You are not required to see, young 'un!" broke in Trackett Grim. "Get on the telephone at once to the aerodrome. Tell them to have my 'plane ready within twenty minutes. We are flying down to the Starview Observatory at once!"

"Yes, sir!" said Splinter eagerly. "But look here—there's something I can't understand. How did you know that Sir Esau Starrs had come from Kent this morning?"

"Tut, tut!" said Trackett Grim. "A very simple deduction, Splinter. Did you not observe the chalk on Sir Esau's boots? And where is chalk most prevalent? On the cliffs of the coast of Kent!"

"Marvellous, guv'nor!" said Splinter admiringly.

"Rubbish!" retorted Trackett Grim. "Elementary!"

"But you also knew that Sir Esau hadn't had any breakfast this morning, and that he had walked from Charing Cross—"

"I am astonished, Splinter, that you should be so dense!" broke in Trackett Grim impatiently. "Did you not observe the hungry glance which Sir Esau bestowed upon the sandwiches and biscuits on the sideboard? Did you not notice the mud splashes on his trousers? Proof enough that he was hungry, and that he had walked along the muddy streets, instead of taking a taxi-cab. Do not waste my time with these trifles, Splinter!"

"Right you are, sir," said Splinter, gazing at his famous master in wonder and awe. "But why do you fear the worst?"

"Because there is a very obvious significance in this case, and one that Sir Esau Starrs has apparently overlooked," replied Trackett Grim tensely. "He believes that the burglar only broke into the observatory in order to steal a paltry lens. But that was a ruse, Splinter or I'm no detective."

"A ruse?" panted Splinter.

"What else?" rapped out Trackett Grim. "The criminal knew that Sir Esau would go dotty when he discovered the loss of that lens, and the criminal knew, too, that he could not break open the safe without being disturbed at his nefarious work. So he just took the lens, and then waited in ambush. He saw Sir Esau leave the premises and take the train for London. I have not the slightest doubt that the crook is at work, even now, breaking open that safe, in order to obtain the great Blue Ruby!"

"Oh, my only topper!" gasped Splinter. "What a brain you have, guv'nor!"

"Am I not the world's greatest detective?" retorted Trackett Grim simply. "If we are quick, Splinter, there is just a chance that we shall arrive at the observatory in time to prevent this dastardly robbery. But everything depends on speed. See about the aeroplane, and then be ready for departure within three minutes."

Splinter was well accustomed to his master's quick-fire methods. And, sure enough, three minutes later, the great detective and his assistant were emerging into Baker's Inn Road. It was a glorious morning, dry and sunny. The roads were clean and spotless. And there, against the curb, stood Trackett Grim's famous car—the Streak of Lightning. The pair leapt aboard, and the next moment they were shooting through London, en route for Croydon Aerodrome.

It was a hair-raising ride.

With Trackett Grim's steady hands on the

steering wheel, there was no fear of skidding on any treacherous, greasy roads. And as they went through the West End and the City at forty miles an hour people halted in their tracks, and stared—filled with awe at the sight of the great Trackett Grim going off on one of his cases. For everybody in London knew Trackett Grim and Splinter by sight, and it was impossible for the pair to venture out without being recognised, and mobbed. Even the dogs ran after them.

No sooner did the police recognise the famous Streak of Lightning than they halted all the other traffic, and made a clear way for Trackett Grim. It was an eloquent indication of Trackett Grim's immense popularity and fame. Not one policeman during the whole of that journey failed to recognise Trackett Grim as he approached, and never once was there a hold-up in the traffic. All the way through London—right through Brixton and Walthamstow and Chiswick and Stratford—all the way to Croydon, the road was clear. Trackett Grim, of course, had selected the shortest route, and was making a bee-line for the aerodrome.

And at last, with a throbbing roar from her great engine, the Streak of Lightning came to a standstill just within the aerodrome.

Trackett Grim and Splinter leapt out, and there were shouts from many of the officials. Like a couple of hares, Trackett Grim and Splinter sprinted across the grass, to the spot where the aeroplane was waiting.

She was a very special machine—Trackett Grim's own invention. She was a monoplane, and she was named the Vulture. With one leap, Trackett Grim and Splinter were in the cockpit, and the next second the powerful engine roared, and the monoplane shot across the turf, and rose into the air.

The chase was on—Trackett Grim was on the trail!

CHAPTER 3.

Face to Face With the Master Crook.

"**T**HERE it is, sir!" shouted Splinter, pointing.

Trackett Grim looked up from his desk, and frowned.

"Don't worry me, Splinter!" he rapped out. "I am making notes, and I must not be disturbed!"

"But we are within sight of the observatory, sir!" said Splinter.

"Eh? Oh, yes!" said Trackett Grim, rising to his feet. "Perhaps you are right, young 'un—I hardly thought that we should arrive so soon. We only left Croydon twelve minutes ago!"

The detective passed forward into the navigation room. The Vulture was no ordinary aeroplane. She was not only able to control herself—to fly to any spot that Trackett Grim desired by merely setting a certain course, but she was provided with a little living room, to say nothing of sleeping quarters at the rear. When Trackett Grim liked, he could fly to any part of the world, and the Vulture had never failed him.

Passing into the navigation room, Trackett Grim stared through the plate glass windows and saw the bulk of Starview Observatory ten thousand feet below. There was the sea, too, stretching away in rolling, billowy masses. The vast, illimitable expanse of the Atlantic. And there, too, was the Kentish coast, with its white chalk cliffs.

"Are we going to land, sir?" asked Splinter eagerly.

"Of course we are," replied Trackett Grim. "But we don't want the crook—or crooks—to know that we are approaching. So we will shut off the engine, and drop like a feather into Sir Esau's garden."

And, true enough, this plan was carried out.

The Vulture, swooping down without a sound, dropped like a feather into Sir Esau Starrs' tennis court. Trackett Grim and Splinter leapt to the ground, and raced off towards the observatory.

It was a fine looking place, a big building, with a dome at the top of it. Sir Esau lived all alone, without any servants, for he could never be bothered with them. That was why Trackett Grim had been so alarmed when he had heard about the Blue Ruby. The observatory was all to itself now—quite unguarded. What a chance for the thieves!

"How are we going to get in, sir?" asked Splinter breathlessly, as they approached.

"It will be easy!" replied Trackett Grim. "If the door isn't open, we'll smash a window, and—"

But at that moment, just as Trackett Grim and Splinter were about to make for one of the doors, a shattering explosion rent the air into a million fragments. It was like about four hundred big guns going off all at once, mixed with a lot of cannon crackers.

Boom-boom-oom!

As Trackett Grim was hurled over backwards, caught in the full blast of that terrible explosion, he saw the top of the observatory disappearing into the sky. And he knew, instinctively, what had happened. The great detective's keen brain was not deceived for a moment. The crooks had fired a charge of dynamite!

Such were Trackett Grim's great powers that he was in no doubt as to the reason for this explosion. The safe had been blown to fragments, so that the Blue Ruby could be stolen!

"Too late!" shouted Trackett Grim, in a great voice, as he picked himself up. "We are too late, Splinter!"

Splinter was just extricating himself from the top of a hedge, into which he had been flung. But he was by his master's side in a moment. Perils of this kind were nothing to the great pair. Their lives were made up of thrills—of hair-breadth escapes.

"Too late, sir?" echoed Splinter, in a hollow voice.

"I fear so!" replied Trackett Grim. "The safe has been blown open, and the Blue Ruby, by this time, is in the pocket of the burglar! But come, Splinter, there may still be time—"

At this moment, a man came running out of the ruins. He was a big, powerful man, with a face that looked like nothing on earth. And as he caught sight of Trackett Grim and Splinter he halted in his tracks, frozen to the spot. His face changed to the colour of chalk, and his eyes bulged out with fear.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Trackett Grim!"

"Armand Rocke!" said Trackett Grim, pulling out a revolver with one hand, and catching in his breath with the other. "Armand Rocke—the Master Crook."

Without hesitation, Trackett Grim strode forward, and came face to face with the Master Criminal.

"At last!" said Trackett Grim, his voice rising high with triumph. "At last we meet again, Armand Rocke! We are facing one another in a deadly battle of wits once more! Many times have you crossed my path—many times have I desired to meet you, and now my life's ambition is gratified! For the first time, Armand Rocke, I am face to face with you! You are my prisoner!"

The rotter gave a snarl of rage.

"Fool!" he hissed, between his set lips. "If you dare to cross me, Trackett Grim, I will strike you down like a dog! I am not to be thwarted by you, or by any other man!"

"Put your hands up!" roared Trackett Grim. "Put them up, or I'll drill you with holes until

"You look like a Gruyere cheese! Up with them, I say!"

But Armand Rocke, the Master Criminal was not the kind of man to admit defeat. Quick as a flash, he twirled on his heels, and bunked into the observatory. He was gone in a jiffy, and a peal of mocking laughter rent the still air of the morning.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fight in the Observatory.

BUT Trackett Grim was not beaten. He was pretty wild about it all, but he wasn't the kind of man to stand any rot. With a couple of jumps, he was through that window, and Splinter was hard on his heels. They dashed into the observatory, and then Trackett Grim pointed to the floor.

"Footprints!" he shouted exultantly. "Come, Splinter! We are on his track!"

The place was thick with dust—smothered in dust, in fact. And there, on the floor, were the distinct footprints of Armand Rocke! They led off into the interior of the building—right up into the observatory itself.

"We've got him now, Splinter!" roared Trackett Grim. "He went up these stairs—and they only lead into the observatory. He can never escape from there, for there is no other exit!"

"What about a window, sir?" panted Splinter. "Ah, yes, the window!" frowned Trackett Grim. "I had overlooked the window, but we may still be in time to prevent him getting away!"

And they found themselves in the observatory. It was a wonderful sort of place, full of telescopes and things like that. And there, in one corner, was the safe, with its door standing wide open! The explosion had been successful, then, and the door had been conquered!

"Ah!" shouted Trackett Grim exultantly.

He had only given one glance at the safe, and then his eyes, sweeping across the room, had fastened themselves upon Armand Rocke, who was crouching near the window—foiled in his attempt to escape.

"Now, you rotter, I've got you!" yelled Trackett Grim victoriously.

He flung himself across the room, and Armand Rocke stepped deftly aside, so that Trackett Grim went hurtling out of the open window.

It was a dreadful moment!

For as Trackett Grim went out he saw that there was nothing beneath him but a void—a great chasm stretching downwards for two thousand feet! The observatory was built on the very edge of the cliff, and down there, thousands of feet below, were the cruel rocks of the Kentish coast! Jagged rocks, beckoning Trackett Grim down to his doom!

But at the crucial moment, when all seemed lost, Splinter dashed forward, and seized his famous master just as he was about to go hurtling down! With a great effort, Splinter pulled him back, and Trackett Grim patted him on the shoulder.

"Good lad!" he said. "That was smart work, Splinter!"

And then Trackett Grim twirled round, and hurled himself at the foiled criminal. The next moment they were fighting madly, swaying from side to side of the observatory. And Splinter stood by, fascinated by the ferocity of that fight. It was a terrific mill—one of the most glorious scraps that Trackett Grim had ever had.

And, without doubt the great detective was

getting the better of it. Twice he sloshed Armand Rocke on the nose, and before many minutes had elapsed both the crook's eyes were bunged up. And then, just when Trackett Grim was on the verge of victory, a great shout came from the doorway!

"My lens—my lens!" came a shout. "Have you recovered my lens, Mr. Grim?"

It was Sir Esau Starrs! He had just arrived, and he was bubbling with excitement. The next moment, before Trackett Grim could answer, Sir Esau gave a whoop of joy. For he had caught sight of his lens in a corner of the room, and he pounced upon it like a tiger leaping upon its prey!

In that moment Armand Rocke saw his chance. He gave one leap towards the open window, and jumped upon the sill. And as he did so he thrust a hand into his pocket, and when he pulled it out again there was a glitter of dazzling blue! There, in his fingers, was the Blue Ruby—scintillating, sparkling, alive with fire!

"I've got it!" snarled the crook. "Now, Mr. Trackett Grim, try to get it from me!"

And with those dramatic words Armand Rocke leapt into space!

With a shout of horror, Trackett Grim rushed across the room, and leaned out of the window. Armand Rocke was falling—falling like a stone, towards the sea, far below! It seemed that he had committed suicide! There was no other possible explanation! And Sir Esau Starrs gave vent to a wild shout of anguish and horror.

"My ruby!" he wailed. "My ruby has gone! It will be at the bottom of the sea, and it can never be recovered! You have failed, Trackett Grim!"

For a moment the great detective was stuuned by the enormity of this catastrophe! And just then Armand Rocke struck the sea and went under! Just a bit of foam, a few splashes, and then—nothing!

"He's gone down, sir!" murmured Splinter. "He's sunk!"

"Have I failed?" muttered Trackett Grim hoarsely. "Have I failed for the first time in my life?"

And then he gave a great cry of triumph!

"See!" he went on, pointing. "I knew there was some trickery in this! Look! Don't you see, Splinter? The periscope of a submarine!"

And it was true! There, far below, a submarine could just be seen, and it was now speeding out to sea! Even as Trackett Grim and Splinter and Sir Esau Starrs watched, the Master Criminal appeared on the deck of the submarine, and waved a defiant hand. He was escaping, and he had the Blue Ruby with him!

"Fear not, Sir Esau," roared Trackett Grim. "This is a challenge to my supremacy! Armand Rocke has thrown down the gauntlet, and I accept! It will be a fight to the bitter end!"

And Trackett Grim meant every word of it! Armand Rocke had escaped with the famous Blue Ruby, but Trackett Grim was a man who never gave up the chase! Then and there, he vowed that he would track Armand Rocke and the Blue Ruby to the very ends of the earth!

(Well, how's that for a first instalment, you chaps? But just wait until next week! Trackett Grim finds himself in the tropics, hard on the heels of Armand Rocke, the Master Crook! This week's instalment has been pretty exciting, but next week's will be so packed with thrills that—that—Oh, well, just wait until you read it! E.O.H.).



All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

In Search of a Brother.

Fred Poynton asks for news of his brother, who is believed to be in Melbourne. My chum's address is, c/o Mrs. Davies, 4, Regis Place, Holt Street, Wrexham

What Is London Like?

B. Stevens asks me to send him a description of London. His address is 22, Queen's Avenue, Auburn, Melbourne, Australia. I am afraid this is rather too much of a job. There are upwards of seven million people in London, and it would take too much space to give anything like a description of the world's greatest city.

Harsh Words From Hove.

A chum at Hove has some mighty severe things to say about good old Handy. But he goes too far. Perhaps some action of the ever popular E.O. may have displeased this reader, though I can't for the life of me make out what all the pother is about; but there was no need for our merry Hoveite to wax angry. Handforth's all right

Keeping a Cricket Bat.

Old Father William never got tired of answering questions, and I am in the same boat. Here is a query about how to keep a bat. Of course, the best way to do this is to see strictly to it that the bat does not make any runs on its own. Then, if you are too generous about lending a bat there is no telling what may happen. The cat comes back, but the bat not always. I can assure the South Woodford chum who writes to me that he need not worry about the fine new bat which has been given to him. He should oil it regularly. All mud, dirt, and old oil should be removed. The bat should be wiped over every week with pure raw linseed oil, to which has been added best quality petroleum—half pint of linseed oil, one tablespoonful of petroleum. The oil must be kept clear of the splice.

Burying the Hatchet.

A South African chum has been much bothered by a feud, but, thank goodness, the trouble has blown over, and he is friends again with the people with whom he had fallen out. Which is just as it should be. Few things are worse than quarrelling. Often enough it is about just nothing at all. Of course, there are folks who make a hobby of rows. They are regular pepper castors—and they aren't popular!

Going Great Guns.

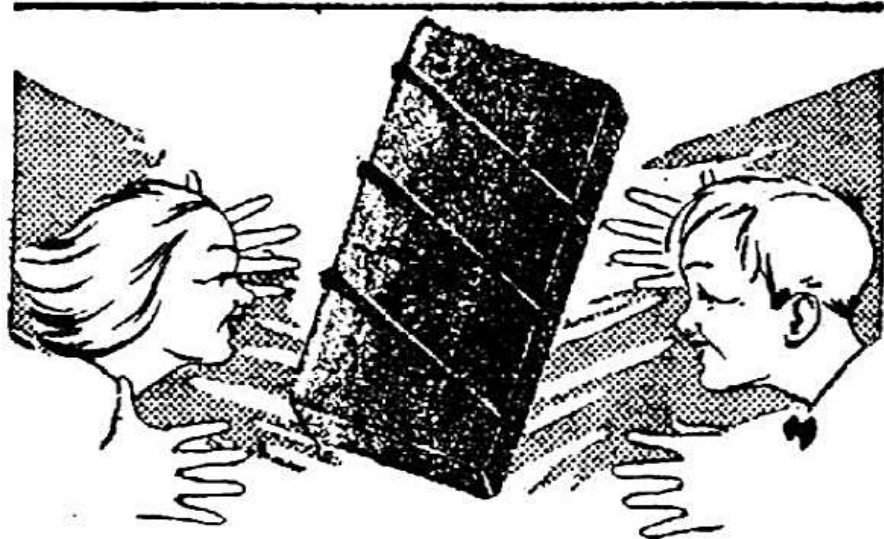
Congratulations to Sydney Smith, of May Bungalow, Penfold Lane, Scartho, nr. Grimsby. Lines, on the success of his "S. F. Magazine."

This is duplicated, and has 32 pages. It gives Club Notes, Club News, Bright and Breezy Happenings, Cycling Notes, Readers Sale and Exchange, and some topping stories.

By the way, I want to thank this correspondent for what he says about the League. He has got the friendship motive of the S.F.L. well in his head, and he cites cases where the League has done immense service.

A Bunch of Questions.

A Haswell correspondent wants to know which is the biggest bridge in the world. This is the Yat Bridge, two miles long, and the Forth Bridge has next place, one and a half miles. My chum also asks if the Germans are the greatest inventors. They are generally credited as such. Then he says, "Is Napoleon the best general?" Well, the honour usually goes to the illustrious Corsi-



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can; but, after all, Wellington beat him in the end!

Work in the Territorials.

A Manchester reader wants to get military training either in an O.T.C., or by serving in the Territorial Army. As there is a Territorial depot near to where he lives, all he has to do is to trot along and ask to see the sergeant in charge.

A Fractured Wrist.

H. G. S. (Cardiff) fractured his wrist some time ago, and though nominally cured, he finds he can still hardly write; the pen won't remain steady. He must go carefully about this business. A leather wristband would be of use, and the sufferer should ask a doctor whether massage would not be advisable.

Kites.

R. P. (Southport) wants to make a kite. He will require some strips of cane, and light calico for covering the framework. By experimenting he will get a type of kite to suit him. The kite is really on aeroplane lines, but not power driven. It provides a very fascinating hobby.

Passing the Time.

A. Horton writes from Manchester Royal Infirmary about the way to estimate the speed of a train when one is in it. All you want is a watch, a pencil and a bit of paper. The telegraph poles are 44 yards apart. Ascertain the number of seconds it takes the train to pass eleven poles. Divide the number of seconds into 900. The answer will give the number of miles per hour travelled—e.g., if it takes twenty seconds:

	900.	45
M.P.H. at which train is travelling:	—	20

A very respectable speed, too, though I see that the newest Great Western locomotive, which is paying a visit to Baltimore, can do 100 when it likes!

Amateur Journalism.

Mr. W. A. Downes, of St. Kevin's Park, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin, sends me word of the annual convention of the British Amateur Press Association. This was held on August Bank Holiday in Birmingham, and many members of the S. F. L. who reside in the Midlands attended. The League has numerous amateur journalists on its roll, and some of the periodicals produced show any amount of skill.

Camping Outfit.

Several campers have written to me asking where to get rug-sacks, light-weight ground-sheet, and hike tents. They cannot do better than write for prices to the Lightweight Tent Co., 70, High Holborn, W.C.1.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

John McDonald, 262, Oxford Street, **Swansea**, wishes to get in touch with members in his district, and also with the nearest Organising Officer.

Hugh Skillen, 2, Homewood Road, Church Road, **Mitcham**, Surrey, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

George Hodgson, 70, Scalby Road, **Scarborough**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; all letters answered. He has back numbers of the 'N. L. L.' for sale.

A. Cooper, 10, Fairlawn Road, **Wimbledon**, **London, S.W.19**, wishes to hear from readers.

William Waller, 3, Effra Mansions, **Brixton**, **S.W.**, wishes to hear from readers.

Stephen Hanman, Church Street, **Knysna**, **South Africa**, wishes to hear from readers interested in amateur shark fishing.

K. Hanman, Church Street, **Knysna**, **South Africa**, wishes to hear from readers who are Girl Guides.

Peter R. Klen, c/o Customs, **Knysna**, **South Africa**, wishes to hear from readers who are interested in wireless and stamp collecting.

Albert Broughton Jun., 104, Warmsworth Road, **Balby**, **Doncaster**, **Yorks**, wishes to hear from someone who is willing to sell a pair of second-hand boxing-gloves. He is eager to form a Sports Club.

Mervyn E. Stephens, 14, Lansdown Place, **Clifton**, **Bristol**, wishes to hear from readers in his district and in Weston-super-Mare. Wants back numbers.

Frank George Rolfe, 100, Euston Road, **London**, wishes to hear from fretworkers.

J. Reeve, 33, Parchmore Road, **Thornion Heath**, **Surrey**, wishes to obtain NELSON LEE (old series) from the start.

Ronald Johnson, 59, Rosemount Viaduct, **Aberdeen**, wishes to hear from cigarette-card collectors.

Joseph Carter, 12, Hamshire Street, **Southsea**, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia and Africa.

F. W. Williams, 15, Cotterell Street, **Hereford**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere—England, Canada, Australia, or America.

J. S. Roper, 17, Dane Park Road, **Margate**, wishes to hear from readers in that town.

J. J. Hoser-Cook, 21, Rook Street, **Poplar**, **E.14**, **London**, wishes to hear from readers in Equatorial Africa (including the Belgian Congo), the South Sea Islands, Iraq, Dutch East Indies, Indo-China, and elsewhere, who wish for information concerning London's Chinatown. All letters answered.

T. Williams, 117, Portman Buildings, **Lisson Grove**, **Marylebone**, **London**, **N.W.1**, wishes to hear from readers in Australia and Egypt.

Ernest E. Evans, 75, Rook Lane, **Dudley Hill**, **Bradford**, wishes to hear from readers.

Alec Singleton, 18, Nelson Square, **Castle Croft**, **Egremont**, **Cumberland**, wishes to correspond with readers interested in back numbers "N.L.L.", stamps and racing pigeons.

John Harold Richmond, 2, The Willows, **Chorltonville**, **Manchester**, wishes to hear from readers in India, Africa, and Tasmania, who are interested in stamp collecting.

W. Matthews, 173, Junction Road, **Holloway**, **London N.19**, wishes to hear from readers in France, Belgium, Australia, and Canada; he is a keen stamp collector, and wishes to exchange.

L. Bentley, 41, Wainhowse Road, **King's Cross**, **Halifax**, **Yorks**, wishes to hear from Organising Officers, and editors of amateur magazines.

Ernest Adambery, 23, Flat Bastion Road, **Gibraltar**, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors in West Indies, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonies, South Sea Islands, Central and South America, Hong-Kong, Seychelles, St. Helena, Ascension and East Africa.

J. R. Wilkinson, 10219, 99th Avenue, **Edmonton**, **Alberta**, **Canada**, would like to hear from readers interested in his great candy enterprise.

William A. Coombes, 46, Waldo Road, **College Park**, **Harlesden**, **N.W.10**, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors, also with readers interested in outdoor sports.

Geo. Archibald Petersen, **Maitland Street**, **Riversdale**, **Cape Province**, **South Africa**, wishes to hear from readers who take an interest in the Church.

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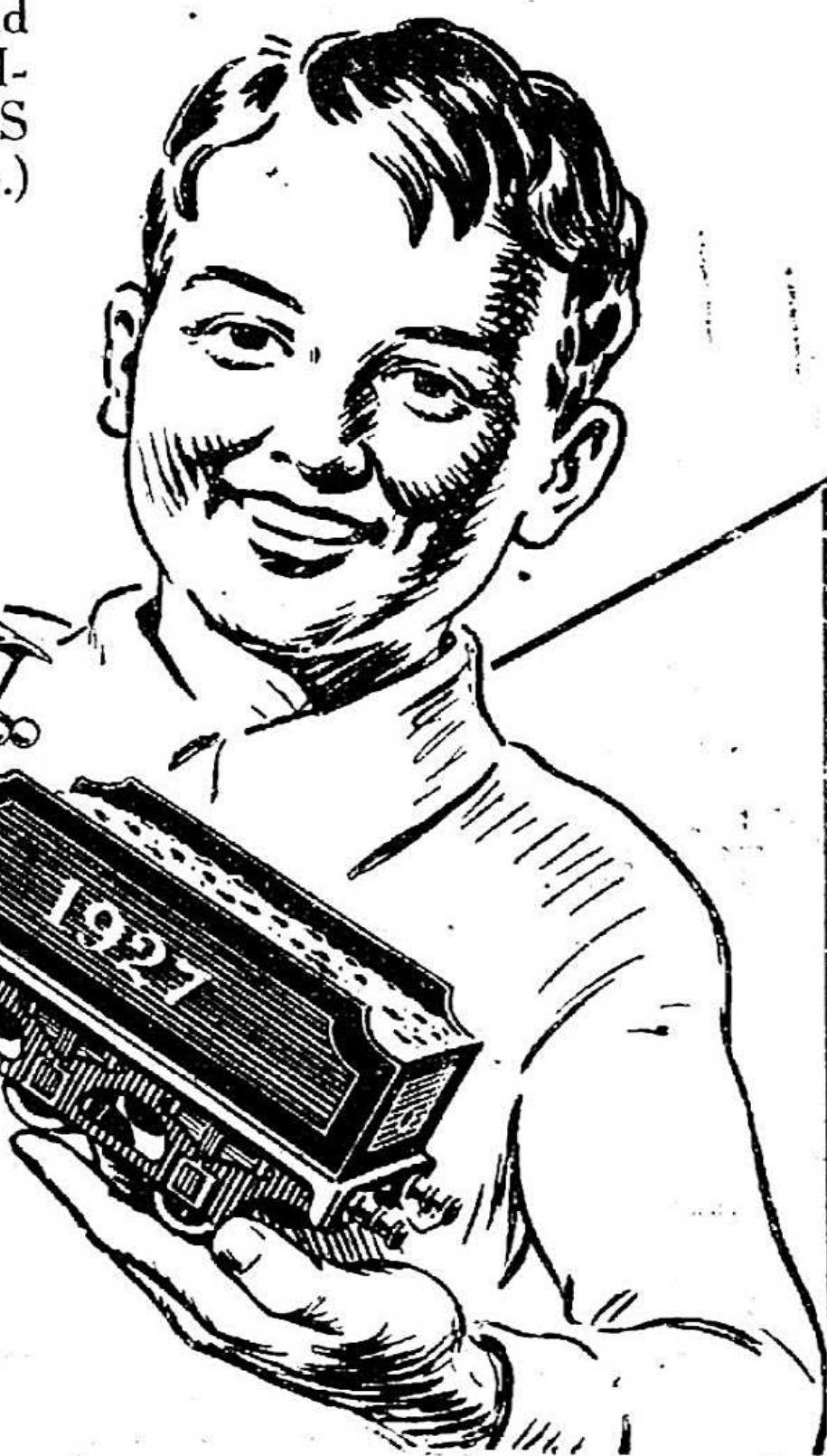
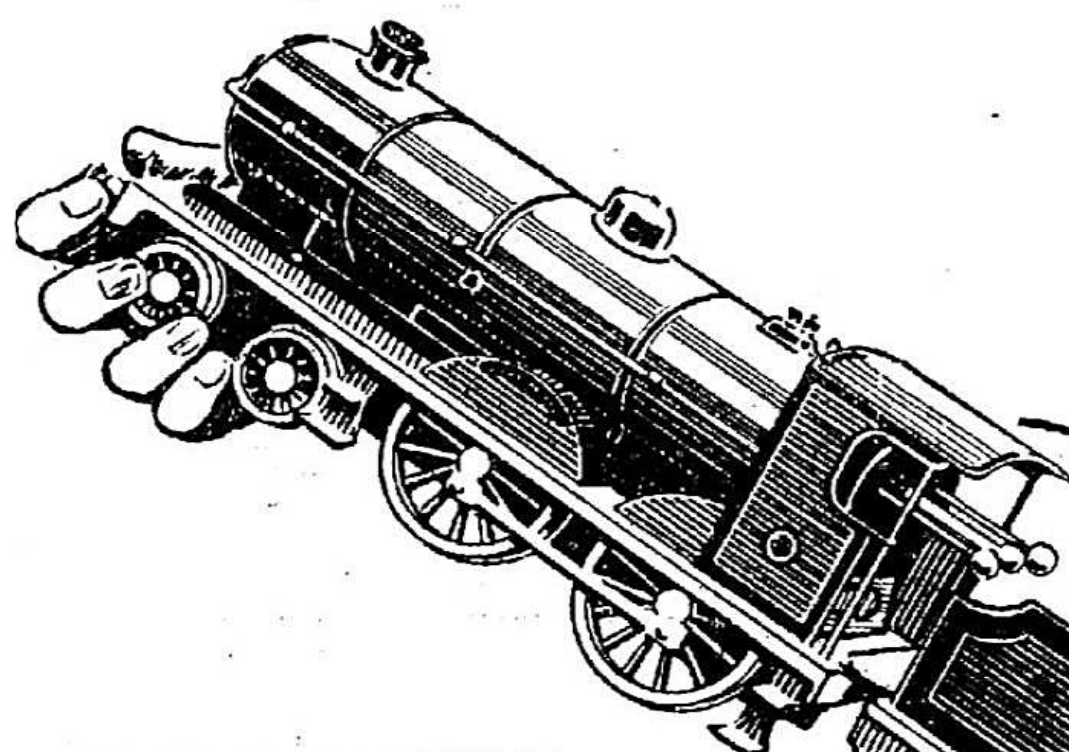
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