

ST. FRANK'S ABROAD!

Thrilling Holiday-
Adventure Story—
Inside.

THE NELSON LEE

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PRISONERS
of the **PASS!**

New Series No. 82.

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All-thrilling Complete Story of Breathless Adventure Abroad!

PRISONERS of the



CHAPTER 1.

Slaves of the Bandits!

DORIS BERKELEY looked fed-up as she and three or four other girls of the Moor View School plunged into the shadows of the wood.

"I'm sick of this!" said Doris bluntly.

"You needn't think you're in a minority," murmured Irene Manners, with a sigh. "Aren't we all sick of it? But

if you're going to start grumbling again, Doris——"

"Who's grumbling?" interrupted Doris. "But why can't we do something? I vote we try to escape."

"You give me a pain," said Ena Hatforth, with a sigh. "In fact, you remind me of my brother Ted—and that's enough to give anybody a pain. Here we are, prisoners in a bandit camp, in a mountain gorge, and you talk of escape!"

PASS!

"Let's gather that wood," suggested Irene. "Old Mother Onda is a fairly decent sort — for a bandit woman — but she'll get suspicious unless we gather the wood pretty quickly."

"Think of it!" she
breathed. "We're

"Well, you must admit you're doing your share of grumbling," retorted the fair-haired Irene, with some asperity. "What about poor Ted, and Nipper, and Archie and Travers and all the other fellows? We, a t



"Easy compared with theirs, I mean," said Irene. "Washing up and scrubbing is our main occupation; but the boys are being used as labourers all day. Didn't you see them going off this morning, at dawn? Gangs of them, with those horrid, black-bearded men in charge. Going off to work on the roads. Lord Dorrimore, too!"

"I'm not sure that old Dorrie doesn't deserve it," said Ena.

"That's not fair," cried Irene. "For goodness' sake let's be gathering some sticks. We've got to whistle and drive. How can you say that Lord Dorrimore is to blame, Ena? He told us exactly where he was bringing us, and he said we should fall into the hands of the bandits. He warned us that there would be some excitement and trouble. He even suggested that we girls should stay behind in Galvarad, and we kicked up such a fuss that he let us come."

"Yes, I dare say you're right," admitted Ena. "It isn't quite fair to jump on him, is it? Still, he did give us the impression that these Kazatovian bandits were more or less harmless, and that even if we were collared we should be treated like lords and ladies!"

"He thought he had only the bandits to deal with," explained Irene. "This man, Miklos Keiff—this mighty king of the mountains, as they call him—would have treated us royally enough if things had gone as Dorrie had expected. Negotiations were to be opened for the paying of ransom, and Dorrie would have paid it, too. In the meantime, we were to find King Victor and rescue him."

"We know all this," said Doris impatiently. "Prince Zeno pops along, takes command, squashes the ransom stunt, and gives orders that we are to be treated as prisoners of war. But isn't that all the more reason why we should try to escape?"

"But there's no earthly chance——"

"And there never will be unless we look for one!" interrupted Doris pointedly. "The boys couldn't escape—they're watched too closely. But we're only girls—we scarcely count. We're allowed to move about without any escorts or guards. We're supposed to be gathering sticks for the fires now. But what's to prevent us slipping off into this wood, and making a bolt for it?"

Some of the other girls were looking excited and flushed; but Irene, who had always been their leader, shook her head.

"There are lots of things to prevent us," she replied quietly. "For one thing—hunger. We've had no breakfast, and it would be madness to start off on such an adventure without food. As soon as we're missed, don't forget, they'll send out search parties. How far do you suppose we'd get?"

"Mr. Lee escaped, didn't he?" asked Doris.

"Mr. Lee possesses all the skill and cunning of a Red Indian when it comes to

dishing pursuers," retorted Irene. "We may be Girl Guides, but we're not as clever as that! So don't let's get any silly ideas into our heads. The only exit from this gorge is through narrow mountain passes—with armed guards constantly on duty. And unless we can escape completely there's no point in escaping at all. Do be sensible, Doris, and drop this wild idea."

"Oh, all right!" said Doris resignedly. "I suppose you know best."

THE whole of Lord Dorrimore's party was in an unenviable position.

Although prisoners within this mountain fastness, they were not actually under lock and key. These Kazatovian mountain men knew that the gorge was inaccessible. There was no escape from it. Therefore the English boys and girls were only casually guarded.

There were more important things to occupy the minds of Miklos Keiff and his fiery supporters. They were on the eve of a great and revolutionary change. Prince Zeno, the half-brother of young King Victor, was plotting to seize the Caronian throne.

He was relying upon the help of Miklos Keiff, who ruled the Kazatovian Mountains and the bandit tribes who lived in them. In other parts of Caronia, too, Prince Zeno had been stirring up trouble, and "The Day" was near at hand. Lord Dorrimore and his party of schoolboys and schoolgirls had been more or less drawn into the intrigue by force of circumstances. Young Victor Orlando and his chum, Paul Maddox, had been guests at Dorrimore Castle when Prince Zeno's agents had seized Victor and carried him off.

Lord Dorrimore felt that the responsibility was his. He had known of Victor's danger, and he had promised that no harm would befall him at his house-party. And now there was a danger of Victor losing his throne—of the Grand Duke Rudolph, the Regent, being compelled to succumb to the threats of the plotting revolutionary prince.

Zeno's plans were cut and dried; his supporters were ready for action; and with King Victor a prisoner in these mountains, Zeno held all the master cards in the game. For he had threatened death to Victor unless the Grand Duke made a complete surrender. It was a bitter pill for Caronia's masterly ruler. During the past five years, Rudolph had converted this little country from a sleepy, backward territory into an industrious minor

power. Nine-tenths of the people were content. The rest, fired by Prince Zeno's campaign, were ripe for revolution. And in such a situation as this the minority too often wins. It would be a tragedy for Caronia if these power-seeking firebrands were to prevail.

Lord Dorrimore had brought the boys and girls to Caronia as holiday tourists—his real object being to rescue King Victor. But things had gone wrong. Dorrie could easily have dealt with Miklos Keiff, whose chief thought in life was gold.

Unfortunately, Keiff was now playing second fiddle to Prince Zeno; and the prince had given strict orders that these English people were to be kept prisoners until he had brought off his coup. Their lives were in no danger, and, later, they would be allowed to go free without paying a penny of ransom.

But it galled Dorrie and his young friends to realise that while they were being bottled up like this the Caronian throne was being seized by the rascally prince.

Even Nelson Lee had taken a hand in the game; he had gone so far as to impersonate Miklos Keiff, after the latter had been captured. Everything might have been satisfactory, but for the fact that Keiff, owing to the carelessness of his guards, had escaped. And Lee had only got away in the nick of time.

So the situation was by no means pleasant.

The hour of the coup was near at hand. Miklos Keiff's main forces were in the Grod Valley, ready to be moved at the word of command. This gorge, in which the boys and girls were held, was of vital strategic importance. Keiff's army must pass through it in order to descend upon the peaceful provinces beyond.

It was little more than a military camp at the moment. Most of the women, all the old men and all the children had been sent away. There remained only Miklos Keiff and about sixty of his picked men—and perhaps twenty women, the wives of the most prominent bandits.

For these Kazatovians were not ordinary soldiers. They were wild men of the mountains, and they were supporting Prince Zeno because he had promised them that they would be left in peace in their fastnesses if he mounted the throne. For centuries they had been a law unto themselves, and the Grand Duke Rudolph had been striving to civilise them—to stamp out the brigandage which had always been ~~rife~~ life along this section of the frontier.

Keiff was no fool; he knew that idleness breeds mischief. Far better, then, to work his prisoners at high pressure from morning till night. While working they could do no plotting, and when they were finished they were too weary for plotting.

From sunrise to sunset the boys had been kept at work on the roads, during these past days. It was necessary work, too. At any hour the order might come from Prince Zeno that Miklos Keiff's main forces were to be moved from the Grod Valley.

The coup was to be swift and sudden.

Even now the people of Caronia knew nothing of the under currents that were at work. The grand duke had not dared to publish the facts of King Victor's seizure. And if Rudolph refused to abandon the throne, the revolution was to start. Simultaneously with the broadcasting of the news that King Victor was a prisoner, the Kazatovian bandits would sweep into the peaceful industrial valleys. Zeno was hoping for a swift victory.

THE girls, as Doris Berkeley had said, were in a more advantageous position than any of the others.

For whilst Lord Dorrimore and the boys were working under the eyes of armed guards, the girls were allowed a great deal of liberty. But it was restricted liberty.

There was no real discipline amongst these bandits. It was the one fact which Prince Zeno deplored. He was having a great deal of difficulty with them, for they did not take kindly to military routine.

Laden with sticks and twigs, the girls were preparing to return to the main encampment.

"Another day of drudgery!" said Doris, in a rebellious voice. "I say, what a ripping holiday we're having! Peeling potatoes, washing dishes, and doing all the dirty work of the camp!"

"It won't last long," said Irene confidently.

"How do you mean?"

"I have an idea that Mr. Lee will turn up soon," replied Irene. "He was never caught, although this gorge was searched from end to end. That means he must have escaped. At any hour he might turn up with a rescue-party."

"It's nice to imagine it, anyhow," murmured Winnie Pitt. "I wonder how he'll come? Perhaps by aeroplane! Wouldn't it be too gorgeous for words to see a great 'plane swooping out of the sky, to rescue us? But I'm afraid it's rather too good to be true."

"If he doesn't come pretty quickly it'll be no good coming at all," said Doris. "Keiff has got thousands of men in the Grod Valley, and perhaps they're on the move even now. They'll march right through this gorge. I've heard that the prince has supplied them with heaps of the most modern war material—even tanks. Once the revolution starts anything might happen to us."

It was a sobering thought.

"You're right, old girl," said Ena slowly. "These leaders make their plans, but the rank and file don't always keep to them. And if I'm any judge of human nature, the bandits of this country won't take long to grab the reins once they get fairly started. We shan't be very safe then, shall we?"

"Oh, don't let's cross our bridges before we come to them," said Irene, with a laugh. "For goodness' sake get a move on! Old Mother Onda will be furious for being so long."

Doris, however, had dropped her bundle, and was looking excited

CHAPTER 2.

The Poisonous Berries!

"LOOK at these, you girls!" said Doris eagerly.

They were in a dense part of the wood, where there was a great deal of undergrowth. It was hot and humid there, for none of the breeze which stirred the tree-tops reached these depths. Overhead, the great trees spread their dense foliage.

"What have you found?" asked two or three of the girls, in one voice.

Doris had dropped her bundle of wood, and now she was on her knees near some rank-looking weeds. There was a little dip just here, and the ground was marshy. All the vegetation was moist and semi-tropical in character.

"Look!" said Doris, as she pushed some of the undergrowth aside.

The other girls now saw two or three bunches of ripe, luscious-looking berries. They were bright red, with a slight speckling of yellow, and grew in bunches. They bore a vague resemblance to strawberries.

"I wouldn't have seen them, only I happened to drop some of my sticks, and bent down," said Doris breathlessly. "Look at them! Four or five great bunches—and there are probably heaps of others in this wood."

"Well, it's not surprising," said Irene, in her practical way. "We've been having

mid-summer heat for weeks, and this gorge gets horribly hot. Just the kind of atmosphere for this tropical-looking fruit. We'll take a bunch and ask some of the native women what they are."

"I'm going to taste one," said Doris, plucking a berry from its stalk.

"No! Don't be silly!" said Irene sharply. "It might not be good to eat!"

"I can soon tell," replied Doris. "Don't you understand? Can't you see what I'm driving at? Not long ago you said we had no food, and that it would be madness to try to escape."

"Yes, but——"

"Well, fruit's food, isn't it?" went on Doris. "Supposing we have a good feed of berries? It'll be better than nothing, and there might be other fruits in these woods, too."

"Oh, you're hopeless," said Irene almost angrily. "There's no sustenance in fruit of that kind. We should be hungry again within half an hour. And what's the good of separating ourselves from Lord Dorrimore and the boys? It's all very well to have these wild ideas, Doris, but we should only come a cropper. Let's be sensible."

"Well, I'm going to taste this, anyhow," said Doris stubbornly.

She bit into the red berry before Irene could stop her. It was just as luscious and juicy as it looked—but not quite so palatable.

"H'm! I'm afraid you're right," said Doris disappointedly. "It's all juice, and there's precious little flavour. A bit acid, and there's a curious kind of tang, too. You taste."

"I'm not such an idiot!" replied Irene impatiently. "Oh, Doris, how can you be so silly? You shouldn't have eaten that."

"Why not?"

"Well, it might be poisonous."

"It doesn't taste poisonous."

"That's nothing to go by," said Irene, who was genuinely alarmed.

"She's right, Doris," said Winnie, with concern. "It was a bit foolish, you know. Does your mouth feel drawn up, or anything?"

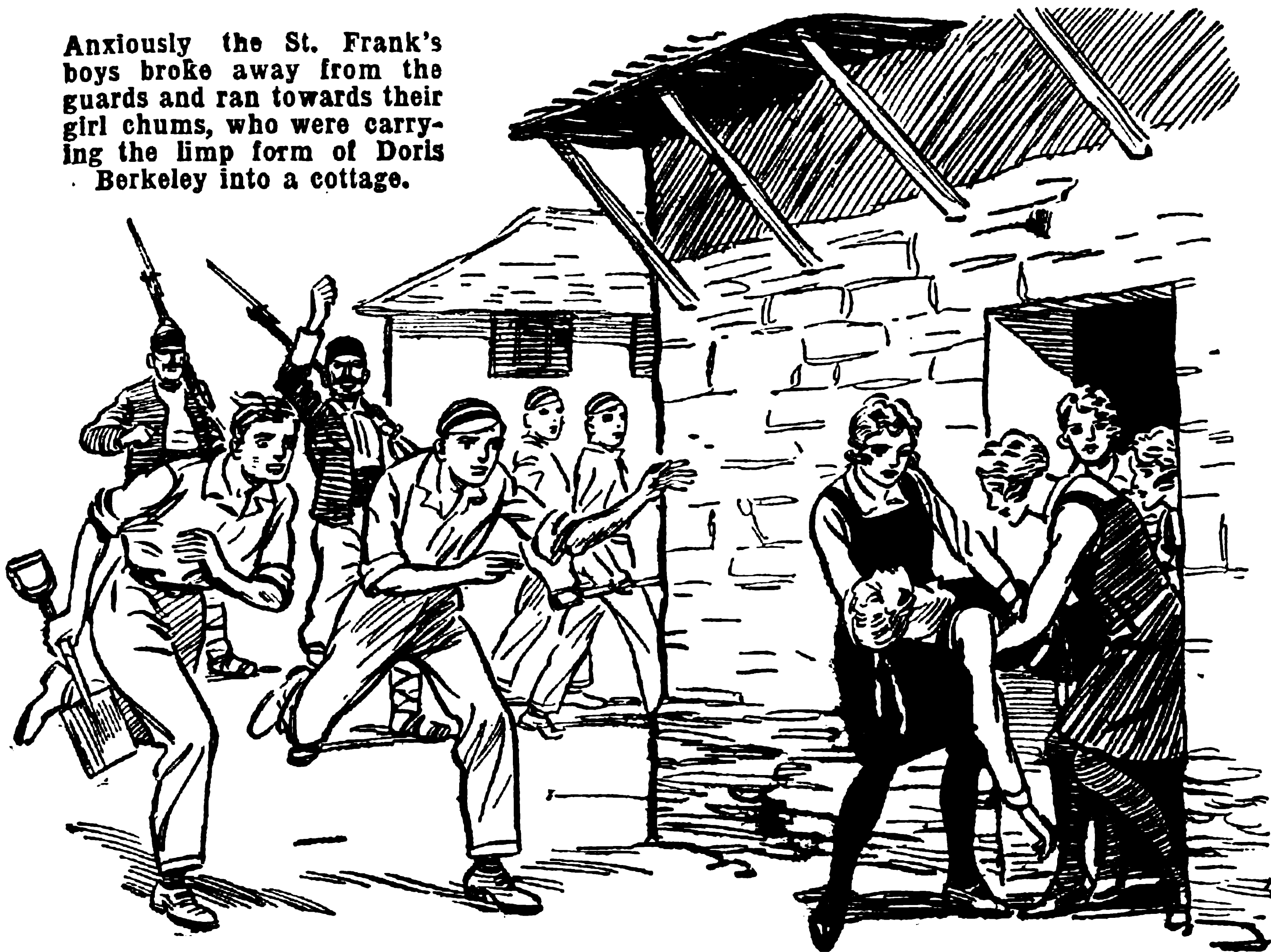
Doris laughed.

"Well, you are a lot of cheerful beauties!" she said. "What are you trying to do—scare me? How can I come to any harm? I only ate half a berry."

"Well, perhaps it's all right, but you can't be too careful," said Irene. "I'm going to ask Mother Onda when we get back to the camp. She'll know."

"Perhaps there'll be no need to ask," said Doris, with a sniff. "Perhaps I'll be dead before we get to camp."

Anxiously the St. Frank's boys broke away from the guards and ran towards their girl chums, who were carrying the limp form of Doris Berkeley into a cottage.



She treated the whole matter lightly, but, in fact, she was rather disappointed. She had been hoping that the other girls would rally round her in her plan of escape. But they realised that Irene Manners was sensible. Nothing but disaster could follow if they attempted to flee from the gorge.

When they emerged into the open, the sun was shining brilliantly. In the distance two or three gangs of boys were already at work on the roads, and some of the men were working, too.

There were cottages in this gorge—quaint, picturesque places enough. But they were insanitary, grubby, and altogether unhealthy inside.

The berries were completely forgotten.

Mother Onda—whose duty it was to look after the girls—was a middle-aged, angular woman of uncertain temper. She was the wife of one of Miklos Keiff's chieftains, and she was very much of a taskmaster. She scolded the girls roundly for having been so long on their wood-gathering expedition.

And she promptly set them to work making fires, and preparing breakfast.

She was one of the few Kazatovian women who could speak English. Most of the others—and the men, too—knew only

their native Slav. It was for this reason that Onda had been given her present job.

She gave the girls no rest. She set them various tasks, and some of the other women, acting as overseers, made sure that the English girls did not slacken down. The women were quite pleased with the arrangements, for their own work was greatly lightened. The young prisoners were doing all the arduous, menial jobs.

"She's getting worse," murmured Doris, as she and Irene and Marjorie set to work on a great pile of washing. "Yesterday, and the day before, she allowed us to have a comparatively easy time. But to-day she's awful!"

"I expect Keiff has been talking to her—telling her to keep our noses to the grindstone," said Marjorie. "Or perhaps she was suspicious because we stayed so long in the woods."

"By the way," said Irene. "We didn't ask her about those berries."

"Oh, don't bother," said Doris. "What does it matter now? I haven't come to any harm."

"All the same, I'm going to ask Mother Onda as soon as she comes back," replied Irene, giving Doris a keen, searching look. "Do you feel all right, Doris, old girl? You don't look quite yourself—"

and you didn't eat much breakfast, either."

Doris laughed in a careless way.

"That black bread doesn't suit me," she replied lightly.

But it was a fact that some of her colour had gone. And once or twice, during the past ten minutes, she had passed a hand unconsciously over her eyes. Perhaps it was the heat. Out here, in the open, the air was stifling. The girls were working in the shade of a big tree, but the atmosphere seemed to quiver with the increasing heat of the day.

Doris swayed a trifle now, as Irene looked at her. But she continued her work without making any comment.

"Doris!" said Irene suddenly. "There is something wrong! You're not at all well!"

"I tell you——"

Doris started speaking, but this time she swayed quite giddily, and only by clutching at the edge of the big washing-tub did she prevent herself from falling.

"I can't understand it," she muttered. "I—I feel so faint and dizzy. But it can't be——"

She went limp, and her face had now gone deathly pale. Her eyes were not closed, but they had a glazed sort of look.

"She's fainted!" panted Mary Summers, who had come running up with Winnie Pitt and Vera Wilkes.

"No, no!" said Irene. "It's not an ordinary faint. Look at her eyes! Doris—Doris!"

"I—I don't know what's the matter," whispered Doris, with difficulty. "I feel so—so funny. There's no feeling in my limbs—I can't close my eyes—I'm all numb. I can't even speak properly, and—and——"

Her voice trailed away. It was pitiful to see her, and watch her efforts to remain conscious. It was certainly no ordinary faint.

"Water!" said Irene sharply. "For goodness' sake, girls, bring some water."

Vera dashed off; and the woman, Onda, noticing all this commotion, came hurrying up.

"What is this?" she asked roughly. "What you do?"

"Oh, quick!" cried Irene. "Doris is ill!"

"Ah! She want to escape the work, yes?" asked Onda sourly. "She has what you call the faint, yes? But I will soon——"

"No, it's not a faint!" interrupted Irene. "She's really ill!"

One or two other women were attracted, and they stood round, talking excitedly

in their own language. They were middle-aged women mostly, and they were dressed in the native costume, and were by no means unprepossessing. Their sallowness and their high cheek-bones were eloquent of their Slav blood.

Doris had been picked up by now, and she was carried into the neighbouring house. It so happened that a squad of the St. Frank's fellows, in charge of two of the armed guards, were passing close by at the moment. Nipper and Vivian Travers and Handforth and Church and McClure were included in this group of boys. And Handforth and Nipper broke ranks and ran towards the house, taking no notice of the shouts of the guards.

"What's wrong?" asked Nipper quickly. "Has something happened to Doris?"

"Have these awful people been knocking her about?" demanded Handforth, his eyes burning.

"No, no!" said Ena quickly. "Don't be silly, Ted! It's nothing much—she's only fainted."

"It's this heat," said Nipper, who was perspiring freely. "Don't get so excited, Handy. Doris will soon come round, I expect."

Ena did not want to tell of the suspicion that was in her mind. No good purpose could be served by alarming the boys needlessly. Perhaps there was nothing very much the matter with Doris.

At all events they were reassured, and when the guards angrily commanded them to get back into the ranks, they obeyed. They had found that disobedience resulted in hard knocks and extra strenuous work.

The boys did not look much like holiday-makers, neither did the girls. Their clothes were untidy and dusty and tattered. They were in a sorry condition, and the hard work of the recent days was already beginning to show its effect upon them.

Ena was glad that she had got rid of her brother and the other boys. She ran into the cottage, and found Irene and Mary and the others gathered round the couch on which Doris was lying. She was quite motionless now, and her eyes were closed.

"Have you asked about those berries?" demanded Ena bluntly.

Mother Onda turned upon her.

"Of what you speak?" she asked. "You say berries?"

"While we were in the wood before breakfast, Doris found some lovely-looking red berries," explained Irene breathlessly. "I was going to ask you, but there hasn't been time yet. We thought, perhaps——"

"Ah!" cried Onda, her face expressive

of the utmost alarm. "You speak of berries! The calilo!"

The other women began to talk rapidly and excitedly, and the word "calilo" was frequently used. They were all looking in a horrified way at Doris' still form.

The girls, not unnaturally, were filled with terrible alarm.

"Oh, I warned her!" said Irene, in anguish. "I told her not to eat the berries. I was afraid they might be poisonous, but she only laughed, and——"

"How many?" interrupted Onda, holding up her hand, and indicating her fingers. "The calilo berries! How many she eat? One? Two?"

"No, she only took a bite out of one," said Irene. "She ate about half a berry, I should think. Not more. I don't think she liked the flavour of it."

"Half?" repeated Onda, in relief. "Of this you are sure? She ate not more than the half? She took not more than the one bite?"

"That's all," said Irene. "Will—will it be fatal?"

Onda shrugged and smiled.

"She not die from the one half," she replied. "But you give me the fright, yes. I am glad. She get better soon—by to-night, perhaps, or by the morning. Not longer."

"And will she be dreadfully ill?"

"To-morrow she work," replied Onda, with another shrug. "If she eat one berry, not so bad. Half a berry—pouf!—nothing!"

"Are they terribly poisonous?" asked Vera.

"You mean, they kill you?" said the woman. "They kill you if you eat three. Perhaps two for some people. The foolish girl should not have touched. Where did you find these calilo berries?"

"In the wood, just on the other side of the little stream," replied Irene. "They were almost hidden under a lot of bushes."

"Calilo berries very much danger," said Onda, shaking her head. "Not often are they found. Me, I have only seen them twice in all my life. We do much to kill them—to stamp them out. It is said that there were no more of the calilo in these hills. But they grow again, yes. Ah, it is the pity. We must tell the children, so that they be warned."

Vera looked up from Doris' still form.

"But can't we do anything?" she asked. "Can't we give her something to revive her?"

Onda shook her head.

"You mean a—how you say?—a cure?" she asked. "But there is none. She get right herself."

"Oh, but are you sure?" asked Irene. "Is there really nothing that we can do?"

"She lay like that for hours—no movement," said Onda, gazing down upon Doris. "Her limbs have no use in them. Before she can walk she will be awake. And then, after another hour or two, she will be able to walk. The calilo, it is strange. It causes the—how do you say?—the paralyse."

"How awful!"

"But we do no work," went on Onda briskly. "For this girl, we can do nothing. We leave her. She will be all right. Come, we go back to the work, or Miklos Keiff will ask the awkward questions, yes."

She hustled them all outside, back to their labours, but they were by no means reassured.

CHAPTER 3.

A Daring Plan!

MOTHER ONDA was a garrulous woman; she loved hearing her own voice. Furthermore, she was very proud of her English, and so, at every opportunity, she talked with Irene & Co.

English, of course, was now the national language of Caronia. The Grand Duke Rudolph had passed an edict to the effect that all other languages were prohibited. Hitherto, Slav, German, and Italian had been used in Caronia. But to simplify Caronian life in general, the grand duke had decided that one language was preferable; and, to avoid any possible dissatisfaction amongst any section of the community, he had chosen English. In the grand duke's opinion, English would one day become the universal language of the world. So he meant to be in good time.

Amongst the Kazatovian mountain people, English was hated. For it was a symbol, so to speak, of the modernisation of the country. And they preferred Caronia to remain stagnant, so that they could pursue their banditry without interference.

Onda, therefore, had been unable to air her knowledge of the English language—until the coming of these English girls. Now she was getting in plenty of practice.

She became quite informative on the subject of the calilo berry a little later, when the girls were busily preparing

dinner. This was no light task, for at present there was a kind of communal kitchen in vogue, and great cauldrons were filled with vegetables, and so forth. At the present moment Irene & Co. were sitting in a big semi-circle, with great piles of potatoes in front of them, busily peeling.

"The foolish girl," said Onda, with a jerk of her head towards the cottage. "She eat one berry, she very ill. Three berries, she die. You are sure she eat not more than the half of one?"

"Yes, we all saw her," replied Irene.

"Then she soon be all right," said Mother Onda complacently. "Even a taste of a berry is enough to make one silly."

"Silly?" repeated Mary.

"Yes. Is that not right?" asked Onda.

"Silly, yes. How you say?—stupid."

"But we don't understand," said Irene. "How can a taste of one of those berries make you stupid?"

"Ah, but they do that—they make you so stupid like the drinking of wine," said Onda.

"The funny thing is, Doris didn't show any effects at all until after breakfast," remarked Winnie.

"That is how the calilo always act," said the woman. "At the time—nothing. Then, after the hour or two, collapse. And when you have eaten two or three, you die. Oh, yes, calilo berry bad."

She became reminiscent.

"In olden days, many, many years ago, there were witches in Kazatova," she said. "You understand? And the calilo berries were very useful to the witches. They would mix them with food."

"With food?" echoed two or three of the girls, pausing in their work.

"Oh, yes," said Onda, gratified by the attention she was receiving. "But you go on with the peeling, yes? Then I tell you. The calilo berry is strange. It paralyse the brain, and the brain cannot work. But it paralyse the body, too. In old days, the witches take the calilo berries, squeeze out the juice, and mix it with food. Or they sell it in little bottles, so that other people mix it with food. The people not know, then, that it is the juice of the calilo. For if they did know, they not pay so much."

"A sort of witches' secret?" asked Irene. "But what was the juice used for?"

"People eat the food, or drink, and they taste nothing," said the woman. "But soon they become foolish and simple. A man who is fierce and terrible can be ordered by a child; he will do as he is told. His mind become so foolish for many

hours. He is not harmed, and the next day he become himself. But while the calilo act upon him, his relatives rob him, or cheat him. You see?"

"Pretty useful, those berries," remarked Vera.

"The witches had the secret to themselves in those days," nodded Onda. "They sell the juice, mixed with other fruit syrups, to frightened wives." She laughed. "Then they put the juice into their husbands' food, and their husbands become so quiet, so tame. They do anything their wives tell them—give them money to spend in the markets. When they get better, it is too late. The money has gone, but the wife has got what she wants. And the husband is frightened, for he think that his wife has cast a spell over him."

"The witches must have done quite a big business," said Irene amusedly.

Onda sighed.

"But nowadays, no," she said regretfully. "People know too much nowadays. A husband is not so fooled, no. He would guess. And it is thought that the calilo plant is dead. You tell me of this plant, and I am surprised. But there cannot be many. Perhaps not another one in all the Kazatovian hills."

"And poor old Doris had to find that one!" said Irene feelingly.

OCCASIONALLY, when the opportunity offered, one of the girls would slip off and take a look at the unconscious Doris. They were reassured by the fact that she was breathing evenly, and that some colour had returned to her cheeks. But it was impossible to arouse her.

There seemed to be no known antidote. The girls could only wait for Doris to come round.

Irene slipped away soon after the vegetables had been dumped into the great cauldrons. There was another cauldron full of stew, but the very odour of it was sufficient to turn the stomachs of the English girls—and the boys, too. For large quantities of garlic were cooked with the meat.

"Poor old Doris!" murmured Irene, as she sat alone, looking at the unconscious girl. "It's all my fault—I shouldn't have let you eat that beastly berry!"

She pondered over Onda's witches' tales. They would have been more interesting if Doris had not been lying there unconscious—evidence of the calilo berry's noxious power.

"What an awful plant," thought Irene, with a little shiver. "Only half a berry

sends you unconscious like this. Just a little of the juice makes you silly—it paralyses your brain and muscles. No wonder two or three of them kill you!"

As Irene muttered the last words, an idea came to her which set the blood coursing through her veins. For the idea was daring to say the least.

Onda's talk was responsible, of course, but this did not detract from the brilliance of Irene's brain-wave.

In her mind's eye, she could see that great cauldron of stew, steaming and bubbling, and giving forth its reek of garlic. Garlic! So strong in flavour that any foreign juices introduced into that stew would be completely disguised.

What was it Onda had said? The calilo juice, mixed with food, caused people to become tame and stupid after an hour or so!

And that cauldron contained the meat for everybody in this gorge—all the sixty men, and the women, too! They would all eat that stew for the midday meal!

Irene felt breathless as the possibilities hammered through her brain.

She remembered yesterday. The men came in batches; they were served by the women. Some of the women had their food at the same time. And—best of all—none of the prisoners shared that meal, so there would be no danger of the girls or the St. Frank's fellows becoming affected.

They could not eat that meat stew, heavily charged, as it was, with garlic. They preferred the rough bread and the simple cheese of the country, washed down with water.

How simple and easy it would be! If



Making sure that nobody was watching, Irene emptied the potion into the great steaming cauldron.

only she could slip away, gather those other berries, squeeze the juices out—

"I'll do it!" panted Irene, getting to her feet, and quivering with inward excitement.

Now was her chance! She could slip out by the back door, and get away to the wood before she was missed. Later, she could easily give some plausible explanation of her absence. If she waited to tell any of the other girls, the opportunity might not come. She would probably be set some task which she could not leave.

Irene moved cautiously towards the rear of the cottage, but paused as she was about to pass out through the back door.

A doubt assailed her.

She didn't know the proportion of juice to put into that stew. Supposing she used too much? It was a terrifying thought. Suppose she killed everybody in the gorge—the sixty men, and the twenty women?

It wouldn't matter much if the "potion" proved too weak. No harm

would be done; the plight of the prisoners would not be affected, it was true, but Irene would not have a dreadful secret on her conscience. The thought sobered her.

Then she steeled herself.

She remembered the ruthlessness of these mountain people; she remembered that young King Victor was in danger of his life. Lord Dorrimore, the St. Frank's fellows, her girl companions—they were all prisoners, and there was no guarantee that they would ever escape from these mountain fastnesses. She remembered Umlosi, Lord Dorrimore's faithful African friend. Umlosi had already been sentenced to death, and his life had only been saved in the nick of time by Prince Zeno. Umlosi, because of his great strength, was now kept a close prisoner in one of the caves.

By merely putting that juice into the stew, perhaps all these men would be rendered helpless. Dorrie and the boys could then seize the gorge; they could all escape from the mountains, and make for Nid, the little town not many miles away, which was the terminus of the railway. There they could entrain for Galvarad, the capital.

The possibilities were certainly rosy, and Irene clenched her little fists and squared her jaw. It was within her power to help all the unfortunate prisoners, and she was determined to do so.

Slipping out of the back door, Irene was soon under cover of a neighbouring clump of trees. Then, unhurriedly, she went off towards the wood. If anybody saw her, they would not suspect. They would assume, perhaps, that she had been sent for more twigs and firewood. Her great fear was that she would be stopped and brought back. But no; she reached the wood safely and, once in amongst the dense trees, she breathed more freely.

Her heart was thudding quickly, and a fresh fear assailed her. Would she be able to find that spot again? The berries had been hidden behind dense undergrowth and—

But there was no need to worry. She could see the trampled grasses and weeds, where she and the other girls had passed earlier in the morning. Irene followed this trail without difficulty, and very soon arrived at that fateful spot. She paused to listen. Not a sound came to her ears except the droning of insects. The air quivered with moist heat. She bent down, pushed the clammy leaves aside, and caught her breath in sharply.

There were the berries. How luscious, how delicious, how enticing they looked!

She gathered all the berries she could find.

Now came the business of crushing them and extracting their juice. She had brought a medicine bottle with her—an empty one she had found in the cottage.

"Splendid!" Irene breathed, after she had looked round helplessly for a moment or two. "Oh, these will do wonderfully!"

She found some coarse leathery leaves. They were so tough that she could scarcely tear them with her hands. It was easy enough to take a stone, and crush berry after berry upon one of these leathery leaves, and extract the juice. Then, folding the leaf, she poured the juice into the bottle.

Berry after berry was treated in the same way, until the task was finished.

Irene looked at the result of her labours with shining eyes.

The bottle was over half full of the juice—a muddy reddish-brown fluid, speckled with tiny scraps of fruit pulp.

"Oh, I wonder if it will work?" she breathed tensely. "Somehow, it seems too good to be true!"

Was it indeed possible that that little medicine bottle could contain the key which would open the gateway of this mountain prison?

CHAPTER 4.

Poisoning the Stew!

FORTUNE, it is said, favours the brave. And certainly Irene Manners had been brave in going off alone to carry out her daring idea.

When she arrived back, breathless, she was not even questioned. Mother Onda was busy with a great batch of bread, helped by some of the Moor View girls.

When Irene moved over to the cauldron with its cargo of garlic charged stew, she was unhindered. She took the great stirring-rod, and gave the stew a brisk turnover, reeling as the steam came into her face.

She glanced round quickly. Now was the moment! Providence, it seemed, had made for her this opportunity. At least, so it appeared to the excited girl. Actually, there was nothing in it. One or other of the girls frequently went to the cauldrons to give them a stir, and to see that the fires were burning evenly. Irene's presence here was commonplace.

Light as her clothing was, she had found no difficulty in concealing that medicine bottle. Another glance round to make sure that nobody was looking in this direction; then, deftly, she took out the bottle. It was now or never! Stirring

vigorously, she held her other hand just over the lip of the cauldron, and in that hand the medicine bottle was uncorked and upside-down, emptying its contents into the stew.

A final stir, and Irene backed away. A single glance told her that the bottle was empty. Swiftly she threw it into the heart of the glowing fire, where it was instantly concealed by falling ashes.

Irene looked round again. Still she was attracting no attention. Her relief was so great that she felt almost dizzy. But she recovered quickly, and a great glow of intense satisfaction surged through her.

She had succeeded!

And how easy it had been! In spite of all her fears and doubts, how absurdly smoothly had her task been accomplished!

"Why, Renie! Where have you been?"

She found Marjorie Temple by her side, and Marjorie was looking at her very open-eyed.

"Why, I—I—— Why are you looking at me like that?" stammered Irene.

"I wondered where you'd got to, that's all," said Marjorie curiously. "Mother Onda sent me over to give the pots a stir. She couldn't have known that you were here. Where did you vanish to?"

For a moment Irene was tempted to tell Marjorie everything, but there wasn't time. Mother Onda was approaching.

"Later, old girl," she said tensely. "I've got something to tell you—but not now. Do I look very flustered?"

"Well, you do look a bit excited," said Marjorie.

Onda came up, and she gave Irene a sharp, searching glance.

"You escape the work, yes?" she asked harshly. "For this you work harder later."

"I'm sorry——" began Irene.

"You go in and see your friend—and there you stay," went on Onda accusingly. "You pretend that you so sorry for her, yes? But you really sorry for yourself—so you stay there to shirk. I show you something!"

What she showed Irene was the palm of her hand, and she brought it with stinging force on the side of Irene's face, sending the girl spinning, her cheek stinging.

"Oh!" cried Irene, in pain.

"You are the lazy one!" stormed Mother Onda. "I come to the cottage, but you are not there. You know I come, so you slink away. Yes, you are the lazy one! And for this you shall work harder than all during the heat of the afternoon."

Irene was so relieved to find that the

real reason for her absence was not suspected that she was not even resentful of that rough blow. It was a trifle. But the blow served its purpose, all the same—although it was not the purpose which Mother Onda intended.

If Irene had had any scruples about introducing that "potion" into the stew, they were occasioned by thoughts of Mother Onda. The bandits and the other women—all of them were hard-featured and cruel. They could suffer, and Irene would not mind. But she had felt a wee bit sorry for Mother Onda—who, after all, had given the information about the calilo berries. But now Irene cared no longer. That brutal blow on the side of her face effectually killed all her sympathy.

"Never mind, Renie," murmured Marjorie, as she and Irene were left to themselves. "She's a proper beast. Has she hurt you very much?"

"It's nothing," replied Irene, her eyes burning. "I can't even feel it now."

THE morning seemed endless for the girl who carried such an exciting secret.

Yet, really, there was only just over an hour to the time of the midday meal. It seemed an age to Irene. Fresh fears obsessed her. Perhaps the boiling of that juice would ruin its effect, perhaps it would be all evaporated. Onda had said nothing about the juice being introduced into hot foods. Oh, well, it was no good worrying about it. There was only one thing to do—wait and see what the effects were.

Irene had no opportunity of speaking privately with any of the other girls. They were all kept too busy; and Mother Onda made a point of keeping Irene herself hard at it.

But at last the first batch of men came in for their meal, and soon they were sitting round, in their true gipsy fashion, noisily eating.

It was at this hour that the boys and girls were allowed to feed—they partaking of the dry bread and the rather flavourless cheese which the hill country provided.

There were no restrictions on the prisoners during meal-times.

They were left to themselves, and Lord Dorrimore and the boys and girls were allowed to fraternise. These were the only times during the day that they could talk together and exchange notes.

And there was really no need for them to be guarded, for if any one of them moved even a few yards away, he or she

could be seen by the bandits and by the women.

They all sat in a great semi-circle round the rough plates which contained the food. And the boys were glad enough of the rest, too. They sprawled on the grass, under the shade of the trees. They looked dusty, grimy, and weary.

"What's this we hear about Doris?" asked Nipper, as soon as he and the other boys had joined the girls.

"Yes," said Lord Dorrimore. "Is Doris ill or something?"

"She ate a poisonous berry," explained Vera. "Only half a one, or it might have been serious. Still, it's bad enough now, in all conscience. Poor old Doris is unconscious, and——"

"Unconscious!" went up a general exclamation of consternation from Dorrie and the boys.

Vera went into further explanations, and her listeners were slightly relieved.

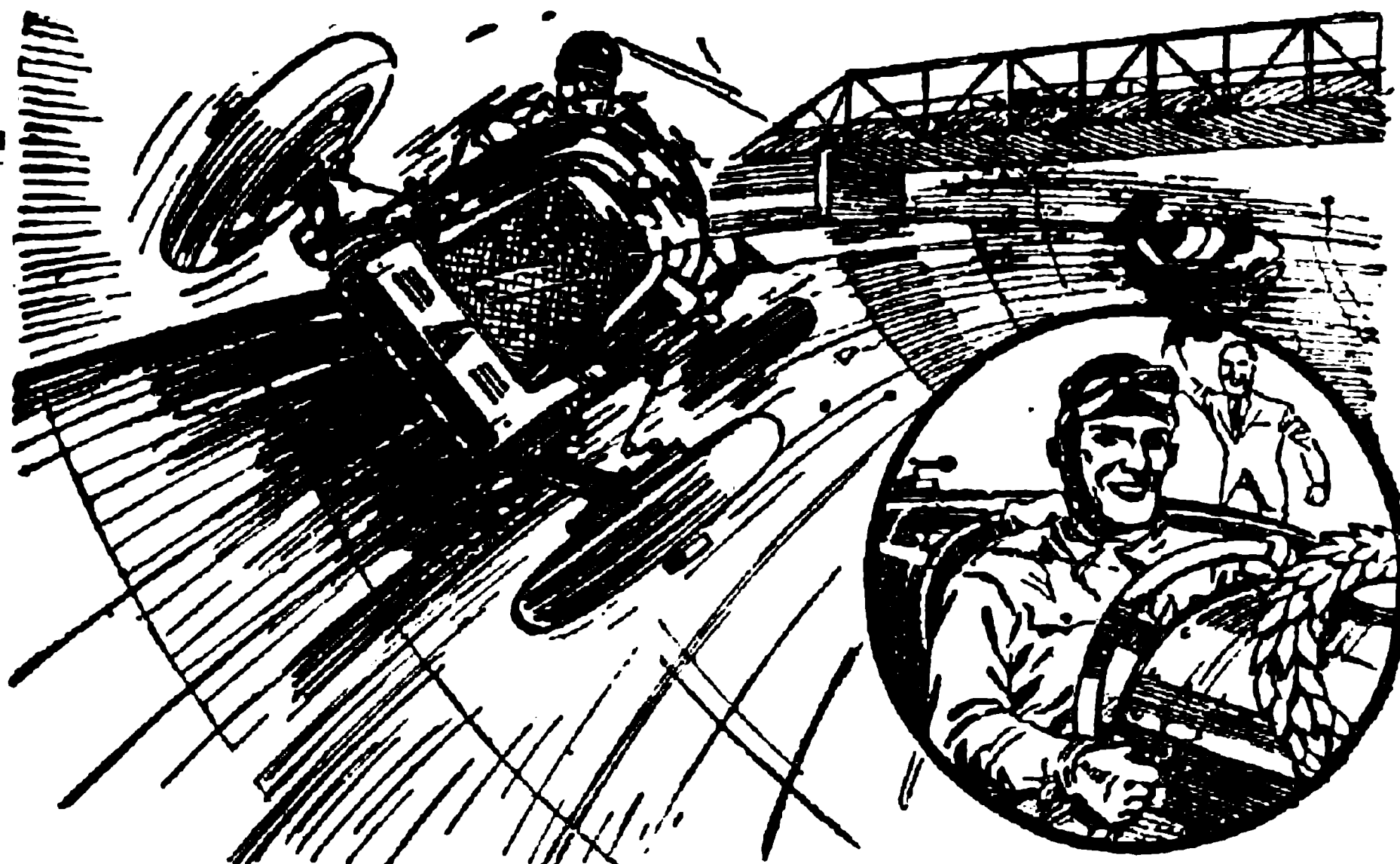
"Of course, we've only got that woman's word for it," said Lord Dorrimore, frowning. "By hook or by crook, I'll have a look at the girl as soon as this infernal meal is over. I'm something of a doctor, and I know more than a little about poisonous plants, too. But I must say that I've never heard of this calilo thing."

"Onda thought that it was practically extinct," said Winnie. "It seems that these mountain people have been trying to stamp it out for years because it is so deadly."

Irene sat silent, listening to all this, her heart throbbing rapidly again.

"It's all my fault!" growled Dorrie accusingly. "I brought you all here, thinking that you'd have a good time,

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plenty of excitement, and all that, and look what's happening. We're working like slaves, and there's not an earthly chance of getting away. Even you girls are having a rough time," he added, glancing at their coarsened, swollen hands and tired features. "I feel most awfully miserable about it——"

"Please don't, Lord Dorrimore!" interrupted Vera earnestly. "You're always saying that. And it's not your fault at all. We all begged of you to take us with you."

"Of course we did," growled Handforth. "Dry up, sir! We're not grumbling, are we?"

"That's just it," said his lordship. "If you grumbled, it wouldn't matter so much. But you don't. Why on earth can't you all jump on me, or something?"

"Don't you worry, Dorrie," said Nipper, with a laugh. "We don't blame you a scrap. Besides, our turn will come soon."

"By the Lord Harry! I hope it does!" said Dorrie, unconsciously clenching his hands. "I've never felt so confoundedly helpless in all my life!"

"About Doris," said Reggie Pitt anxiously. "Tell us what happened, Renie. Or you tell us, Winnie," he went on, turning to his sister. "Are you sure she isn't very bad?"

"But we've already told you, Reg," said Winnie gently.

She knew that Doris was her brother's "special" girl chum. And, naturally, Reggie was deeply concerned.

"Listen, all of you!" said Irene suddenly. "I've got something to tell you—and now's the chance. Onda has just gone to one of the other cottages, farther down the gorge. And nobody else here can understand a word of English, so it won't even matter if we're overheard."

"Why, what's the secret?" asked Handforth wonderingly.

"I knew Renie had something on her mind!" said Vera, in some excitement.

"It's about that calilo berry," said Irene steadily. "Mother Onda was telling us about the witches of old. It seems that the witches took the juice of this berry, and sold it to people. They put it into food, causing anyone who ate it to act stupid, as though drunk."

"I'm not surprised," said Lord Dorrimore. "Those old-time witches were up to all sorts of shady tricks."

He and the boys listened with interest as Irene continued her story; and they felt, somehow, that there was something behind it.

"If those old witches could do it, why couldn't it be done now—to-day?" asked

Irene, with sudden tension. "Why couldn't I do it myself?"

"What the dickens do you mean, Renie?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I took my chance. I went back to that wood and gathered the rest of those berries," replied Irene, looking from one to the other with excited eyes. "Yes, I managed to get the juice out, and I put it in a bottle. I emptied the bottle into that horrid garlic stew that all those men are eating."

"What!" went up a yell.

"Don't—don't!" urged Irene. "They're looking at us already. You mustn't shout like that."

"But, Renie, you don't mean it!" said Marjorie.

"I do!" insisted Irene. "Onda said that people go silly—stupidly helpless—if they get a touch of that drug, or poison, or whatever it is."

"But do you want to kill them all?" asked Vera, aghast.

"No, of course not!" replied Irene. "My only fear is, that proportion of berry juice won't be enough to have any effect. But supposing it is enough? Don't you understand? Can't you see what will happen? All the guards will be affected during the afternoon, and they'll be like children. You can turn on them and take their guns. They're all eating that stew, so if one is affected, the others will be, too. We can seize the place for ourselves, and it's an absolute fortress. There are enough of us here to hold it against an army!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Nipper frankly. "And this has been done by a girl!"

"We girls aren't so slow!" said Ena promptly.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth excitedly. "Good old Renie! Didn't I always tell you chaps that Renie was a corker? Didn't I say that she had enough brains——"

"Don't, Ted!" interrupted Irene. "It may come to nothing."

"But that doesn't make any difference to the brilliance of your idea," retorted Handforth. "It's absolutely a top-notch! We're going to grab the gorge, and——"

"Better not count our chickens before they're hatched, dear old fellow," murmured Vivian Travers. "Personally, I don't think it's quite good enough. I hate to throw cold water on your stunt, Irene, old girl, but don't you think that it's rather steep? I mean, you can't believe Mother Onda. Ten to one she was just romancing."

"Of course," said Fullwood. "All those tales about the witches were just old wives' yarns!"

"Were they?" retorted Irene. "What about Doris? Is it an old wives' yarn that she's in that cottage, unconscious—after eating half a calilo berry?"

"Exactly," said Lord Derrimore, nodding. "Bravo, Irene! That's the stuff to give 'em! Old wives' yarn nothing! The very fact that Doris is unconscious proves that these berries are deadly."

"By jingo, that's true!" said Church eagerly. "I say, perhaps that stuff might work, after all! That juice, I mean!"

"Of course it'll work!" said Handforth. "It's bound to! How long does it take, Renie, before the stuff takes effect?" He looked across at the gipsy-like mountaineers. "None of 'em seem to be rolling over yet."

"It might take an hour—perhaps more," replied Irene. "Oh, I don't know what to think. It all seems so silly—so impossible! And yet, when I think of poor Doris, I get hopeful again. Oh, I do wish the next hour would pass in a minute!"

Only she and Handforth and one or two others were feeling excited. The rest felt just a bit sorry for the girl. She had taken such risks—she had buoyed up her hopes—for what?

It seemed clear to the majority that Mother Onda had been spinning a yarn. True, Doris was ill after eating that berry; but that did not prove that a trifling dose of the juice would be enough to send sixty men and twenty women "silly" so that they could be surprised and overcome by a handful of schoolboys!

No, it was altogether too much to hope for.

And after the simple meal the boys were packed off in squads, to return to their wearisome labours.

CHAPTER 5.

The Watchers on the Crag!

ROUGHLY twelve miles north of the gorge, deeper into the mountains, lay the Grod Valley.

This was an immense fertile region, surrounded and hemmed in by snow-peaked mountains and precipitous crags. But the valley itself was one of the most fertile regions of Caronia, and it was entirely populated by these mountain tribes, of whom Miklos Keiff was the recognised chief.

It was a country of fair pastures, where cattle grazed, where corn grew, where the people lived as they had lived for many hundreds of years. It was not cut off from civilisation, but it was well guarded, and it would have been difficult for the mightiest army to force an entry.

Here, in this hidden recess of the mountains, Miklos Keiff had been training his men. Here they had been gathering. There were thousands there now—all ready for war.

The only way by which this valley could be reached from the gorge was by passing through frowning canyons, where the rocks rose sheer for hundreds of feet. In some places it was possible for only one man to ride at a time. The way led down dizzy mountain paths, with a sheer precipice on one hand, and a rock wall on the other. Through twisting winding passes, with the sun-scorched rocks on every side.

And, occasionally, there would be a little camp at a widening of the trail, where there might be a little grassy glade, and perhaps some trees. Here tents would be pitched, and a group of Miklos Keiff's picked men would be on duty.

On this blazingly hot afternoon, two figures were sleeping soundly on a concealed ledge far above the pass. That ledge was invisible from below; it seemed inaccessible, too; the rocks rose sheer.

It was shaded in that crevice, and it faced the direction from which the light breeze was coming. The heat in there, therefore, was tempered, and the air was comparatively fresh.

One figure was tall, wiry, and was dressed in the uniform of a high-placed officer—in point of fact, the uniform of Prince Zeno of Kazatova.

The other figure was smaller, younger—a boy dressed in a holiday-making flannel suit, now sorely and sadly tattered and out of shape.

The smaller of the two figures stirred. He opened his eyes, yawned, and sat up.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, startled.

He had caught his head against the rock above, and at the same moment he had glimpsed the sheer precipice close at hand. But he could not have fallen, since his companion was lying on the outer edge of the crevice, thus protecting him.

"Not so loud, young 'un," said the taller figure. "I warned you that these rocks echo in a most uncanny manner! Even a whisper uttered here might be amplified until it becomes audible two or three hundred yards away."

"Sorry, sir," said the youngster. "I'd forgotten where we were. I say, Mr. Lee, it must be quite late in the afternoon."

Nelson Lee, for the taller figure was indeed that of the famous schoolmaster-detective—pulled out a watch and glanced at it.

"Yes, it's getting on," he said. "Thirty. We've had an excellent sleep, Orlando. How do you feel? Refreshed? Fit for further hard climbing?"

"Rather, sir!" replied Victor Orlando, King of Caronia. "I'm fit for anything—as long as you're with me!"

"Good lad!"

"It was marvellous, sir, the way you diddled those guards, back in the Grod Valley," went on the young king enthusiastically.

"We must be half-way to the gorge, mustn't we? And there's been no sign of pursuit, and we're safe."

"Safe as yet," agreed Lee. "It seems that our little dodge worked, young 'un."

VICTOR thrilled as he thought of the events of the previous night.

Then he had been a prisoner in a grim cave, in the Grod Valley. Nelson Lee had gained an entry into that cave—by worming through an apparently impassable crevice in the roof. Lee, hunted by Miklos Keiff and his men, had eluded all pursuit, and by dint of courage and determination had penetrated King Victor's prison.

Then luck had favoured the detective.

For Prince Zeno himself had entered that cave—alone. Within ten seconds Lee had sprung out and faced him—crashing him to the floor with a well-directed right-hander. In a very short space of time the revolutionary prince had been bound hand and foot and gagged, and Lee had donned his uniform.

By a dodge, Lee had succeeded in getting Victor out in the darkness; and by assuming Zeno's voice had given the guards definite instructions that the cave was not to be entered until twenty-four hours had expired.

He gave the men the impression that he had quarrelled—or, rather, that Zeno had

quarrelled—with his half-brother. And Victor was to be punished accordingly—by being left in solitary confinement for twenty-four hours without food. It really seemed that the plan had worked—or there would have been signs of pursuit by now.

Throughout the dark hours the fugitives had fled—first of all on horseback, and afterwards afoot. Towards dawn they had taken to the rocks, leaving the recognised route. Lee was almost as sure-footed as a mountain goat, and he had unerringly led the way past some of the guards. No special watch was being kept, for there was no suspicion that anything was wrong. So these men had never been on the alert.

Now the fugitives were resting. They had slept well. Soon they would be on the move again—their objective being the gorge, where Lord Dorrimore and the schoolboys and schoolgirls were held captive.

"**L**ISTEN, young 'un!" said Lee abruptly.

They had been talking for some twenty minutes, but now the detective held up a warning finger, and he leaned farther out towards the edge of the rock. Victor had heard nothing, and he wondered why Lee was so tense.

Looking down cautiously from their lofty perch, Nelson Lee and Victor Orlando saw a cavalcade of bandits pass beneath them.



But now, as he concentrated his faculties, vague sounds of human voices came to his ears; not ordinary conversation, but a rising and falling, as of singing.

Lee smiled grimly as he glanced at the youngster.

"Our genial mountain bandits are not unmusical, Orlando," he murmured. "You hear their song? As they ride, they sing. Very picturesque—and, incidentally, very useful. Do you care to have a peep?"

He beckoned, and Victor crawled towards the edge of the crevice. They both crouched there, peering over. They were both concealed by the dense shadows cast by the rocks overhead.

Below, seventy or eighty feet down, was the pass. From this point of vantage, the pair could see a clear hundred yards of the pass, before it turned abruptly to the

left, where a mass of crags obstructed the view.

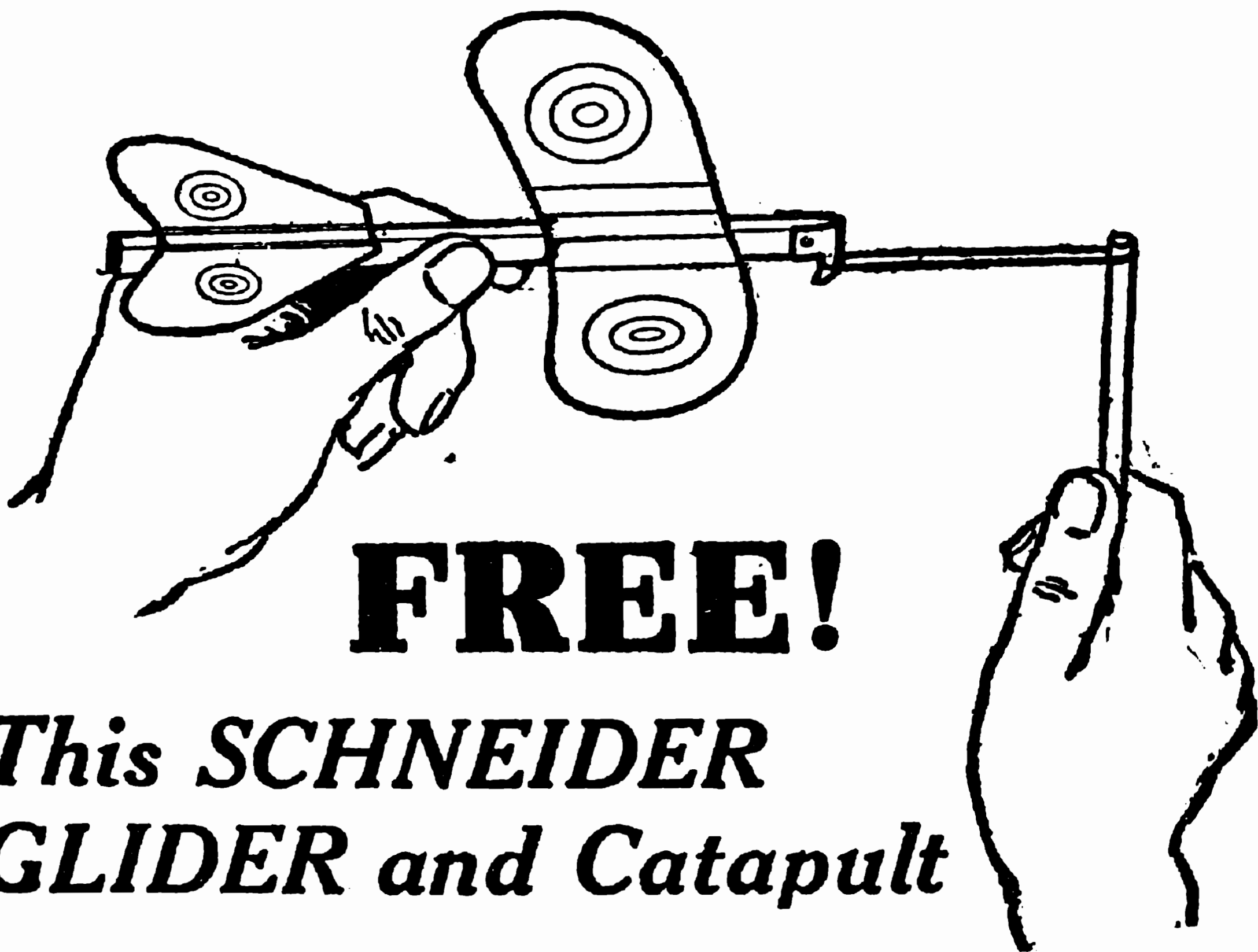
Horsemen were in sight, and Victor felt his heart beating more rapidly as he saw them. They were so close—seven of them; the leader and six companions as a sort of bodyguard.

"But aren't they going towards the Grod Valley, sir?" whispered Victor. "I mean, they can't be after us, can they?"

"If they were after us, they wouldn't be quite so musical," replied Lee dryly. "And they would be in much more of a hurry. Unless I'm very much mistaken, Orlando, we are looking upon Miklos Keiff himself and his trusted lieutenants. They are on their way from the gorge—to the Grod Valley."

"Keiff!" muttered Victor. "Oh, I say! The fat wili soon be in the fire, then!"

"Within an hour or two," nodded Lee grimly.



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However, he was not surprised—or disappointed. He had rather expected the hue and cry to start earlier. Miklos Keiff and his men were riding to the valley. Keiff had known, no doubt, that Prince Zeno had gone to the Grod Valley overnight.

Arriving, it would not take the bandit chief long to find out that the prince was no longer in evidence. It might be some little time before Keiff visited the royal prisoner's cave, but sooner or later he would do so, and then the truth would be out. And the hounds would take the trail.

"We can't wait until darkness, Orlando," whispered Lee, after the horsemen had vanished from sight. "We shall have to be making a move pretty soon now. Fortunately, we've rested, and the worst heat of the day is over."

"What's the exact plan, sir?" asked Victor eagerly.

"We can't make any exact plans," replied Lee. "All we can do is to trust to luck. We must hope for the best. Our objective is the gorge, where Lord Dorrimore and the boys and girls are captive. Perhaps we can reach the gorge by nightfall. I hope so."

"And what then, sir?"

"I wonder," mused Nelson Lee. "It is certain that Miklos Keiff will have discovered the truth by then—and he and Prince Zeno will compare notes. There will be the very dickens of a dust-up, Orlando. You have escaped, and I have helped you in the enterprise. They'll move heaven and earth to get hold of us again."

"But they won't do it," said the young king confidently. "No fear! I'm as safe as houses with you, sir!"

"Well, I like your expression of confidence, and I hope we shall be able to outwit the enemy," replied Lee dryly. "But we mustn't count on anything, Orlando. Our fate, more or less, is in the lap of the gods."

And so they started out.

It was a difficult trail. Climbing over rocks, clinging to ledges and crags, they successfully descended to the pass. Here the going was fairly easy, and they made good progress. Lee had been this way before, and knew the route. He knew exactly where Keiff's men were to be found. There were at least two small camps between the fugitives and the gorge. Otherwise there was little danger to be encountered, unless other parties were on their way through.

"Be ready to dodge at a second's notice," said Lee more than once. "Fortunately, there are plenty of crevices, and

we can soon hide if necessary. And even when we get to the gorge, we shan't exactly know what to do. However, we'll leave those troubles until we come to them."

So they pressed on, eager and determined.

CHAPTER 6.

Turning the Tables!

IRENE MANNERS was sick at heart.

The midday meal had been finished over an hour ago, and she and the other girls were labouring at the great piles of dirty dishes. They were washing up, and the Kazatovian women, for the most part, were lounging about, looking on. And there wasn't the slightest sign that any of these people were affected by their meal.

"Hard lines, Renie," whispered Vera, as she worked side by side with Irene.

"Don't!" choked Irene. "I was hoping so much, Vera. And—and now——"

"Perhaps it'll happen soon?" suggested Vera. "It's not too late, old girl."

"I think it is," said Irene, shaking her head. "Oh, I was a fool to hope so much. I wish I hadn't said anything at all to the boys, or to Lord Dorrimore! They all thought I was silly, didn't they?"

"Not silly."

"But they did!" insisted Irene. "Only Ted Handforth believed in the plan—and you know what Ted is."

"Ted was always an optimist," said Vera softly. "Besides, he'd believe in anything that you did, Renie."

Irene sighed. She remembered how most of the St. Frank's fellows had smiled with open scepticism. She didn't blame them. Now that the meal was over, and that everything was going on as usual, the girl realised how impossible her hopes had been. The effect on Doris after eating half a calilo berry supported her hopes. But, of course, her case was exceptional. She had eaten the berry straight off the bush. These other people had merely partaken of the juice in that high-flavoured garlic stew. The boiling had doubtless killed the properties of the "poison." Oh, it had been silly to expect——

"I say!" came Mary's voice, with sudden, tense excitement. "Renie! Quick!"

"What is it?" asked Irene, glancing up from her work, her weariness momentarily forgotten.

"Look at those women!" said Mary breathlessly. "No, not Mother Onda. Those others, over by the tree. There's something funny about them, isn't there?"

Irene looked furtively. There were two of the bandit women standing in the shade of a tree not twenty yards away. They were folding some clothes which had been out drying. And it was a fact that the two women were unsteady on their feet; they had paused in their work, and one of them was laughing in a curiously inane fashion. The other had a dazed, stupid look on her face.

"They look as if they're drunk!" whispered Vera. "Oh, Renie! I wonder——"

"We mustn't jump to conclusions," interrupted Irene, her voice steady, but her eyes burning with inward excitement. "Oh, can it be possible that that juice is really having an effect?"

A MILE away, on the sun-scorched dusty road which led through the centre of the gorge, a party of St. Frank's boys was hard at work.

Lord Dorrimore was with them.

Several hundred yards farther on, a second party worked. Lounging near by were numbers of the bandit guards.

Many of the men, too, were working with the prisoners—instructing them and setting an example. The road through the gorge was being repaired.

It badly needed it. In places there were enormous pot-holes, and the dust was thick everywhere. The boys were carrying loads of stone on to the road, filling up the holes, and hammering the new material down. It was difficult work, for their tools were of the crudest.

And in that dust-laden atmosphere, in the broiling heat, it was back-breaking toil.

"I'm frightfully sorry for Irene, dear old fellows," remarked Travers, as he worked. "She seemed so certain, you know—until we pointed out how little chance there was of the wheeze succeeding."

"You rotter!" growled Handforth. "Why can't you have some faith? Renie did wonders!"

"I'm not denying it——"

"Well, why couldn't you have encouraged her?" asked Handforth. "She took an awful risk escaping to the wood to gather those berries, and squeezing out the juice and putting it in that stew. It was jolly plucky of her!"

"Absolutely, laddie!" declared Archie Glenthorne, who was working as hard as any of the others. "And I'm not so dashed certain that the dear old girl's stunt won't come off. I mean to say, look at this frightful blighter on the starboard bow. I may be wrong, of course, but it

seems to me that he's already flying a signal of distress."

The boys were not restricted in their talk. And it was pretty safe for them to say anything they pleased, for their guards could not understand English. Even so, it would not have mattered.

Handforth and Travers and the others near by looked keenly at the guard. He was the nearest man; he was leaning against a tree, taking advantage of the little patch of shade. His rifle was propped against the tree, and he was looking strangely indifferent.

"It's nothing, Archie," said Travers. "The fellow's only half-asleep."

"Absolutely! But why?" asked Archie. "Dash it, these blighters haven't fallen asleep before, have they? Good gad! It's only been necessary for us to slack a bit, and they've dashed in amongst us with sundry harsh words of command."

"By George! That stuff of Renie's is working!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Rot!" said Travers.

"You miserable fathead!" shouted Handforth. "You haven't any faith at all! Can't you believe the evidence of your own eyes? I'm going to jolly well prove the thing, anyhow!"

All the boys in this "squad" were slacking now, and they were feeling excited. Never before had Handforth been allowed to talk so much, or to neglect his work so glaringly. The bandits had kept them hard at it, without a moment's rest.

But now the men seemed utterly indifferent. Those who had been working were showing signs of an unaccountable tiredness. Everything, in fact, was different.

"I say, you!" said Handforth boldly, striding up to the nearest guard. "We're fed up, and we want a rest!"

The man looked at Handforth stupidly. Then he laughed. He reached forward, as though to give Handforth a friendly push, but he staggered, reeling drunkenly. He laughed again, and his rifle clattered to the ground. He did not even trouble to pick it up. And he seemed to lose all interest in Handforth and the other boys. He went off, swaying from side to side like an intoxicated man. And a raucous song came from his lips. All the boys had ceased work, and they stared breathlessly.

"It's exactly as Renie said!" panted Handforth. "It's exactly as old Mother Onda said, too! This man's as easy to handle as a child. Can't you see, you chaps? His brain's half-paralysed, or

(Continued on page 24.)

Here's Another Full-of-Laugh Number of



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

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EDITORIAL STAFF.

August 15th, 1931.

THE EDITOR'S LIFE STORY

(continued)

Written by Himself

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
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OH, YE BRAINY ONES!

By Mr. ALINGTON
WILKES

HAVING deeply offended my godmother, in the manner described, I thought my silly relations would have sense enough to let me alone. But, by George! two days after my grandmother had breezed off, along came my Aunt Sarah, who brought me a "Cuddly" doll.

"See what I've bwrought lickle Eddy-Weddy," she said, holding the beastly doll in front of my face. "Lovely, nice, big dolly. Lickle Eddy-Weddy like nice dolly?"

I absolutely gurgled.

"Ain't it the limit?" I gasped to my nurse. "Jevver hear anything like it? Great whillikins! Every two minutes I'm woke up from forty winks to hear some beetle-witted, cloth-brained, yammering muttonhead talking kid-talk and wagging beastly dolls about."

My aunt stared.

"What a child!" she yelled, holding up her hands in horror. Then she stalked indignantly out of the room.

Glad to see the back of her, I was getting ready to go on with my snooze, when the pater came in and looked down at me, kind of sad.

"My son," he groaned, "your godmother is worth thirty thousand pounds. Your aunt Sarah is worth just a trifle more. And you've driven 'em both away."

Then he went to the cupboard and yanked out a large cane. I eyed it grimly.

"Far be it from me," he sighed, "to strike a year-old baby—except in self-defence; but I think it's time you had a rather sharp lesson. Kim up!"

Pulling me up by the scruff of the neck, he waded in. When I tell you that I could feel the cane through four pairs of knicker-bockers—which I had put on for this very emergency—you'll realise that the pater put some energy into it. I crawled back to my cradle, licked to a splinter.

A few months later my parents took me to the seaside. They thought I might enjoy it. I did. When we came back home, the pater's hair had turned absolutely white. I'll tell you all about it next week.

THE other day I thought it would be rather humorous to select a word not very well known, and ask various boys in my House if they could tell me the meaning of it. I desired to know how many of them would be honest enough to tell me if they couldn't, and how many would have a wild shot at it and hope they were right.

I picked on the word CORCHORUS—the proper name of the jute plant—as that word seemed as if it might mean anything. Of all the fellows I asked, only two—Sir M. Tregellis-West and Hussi Khan—confessed that they didn't know. Hamilton, the captain of the Remove, had a very good shot at the right answer. "Some sort of a tree, I fancy, sir," was his reply. Which wasn't bad.

As for the rest—well, here are some:

Charles Bangs.—"Mountains in Russia, sir." (He was thinking of the Caucasus, I suppose.)

Handforth major.—"Corchorus, sir—yes, I know it by sight, and I've often heard one played, but I can't play it myself. Rather a sweet-sounding instrument, sir."

Thomas Hobbs.—"The noise made by rooks, sir—a chorus of caws." (This answer made me break down.)

Owen major.—"A lot of corks, sir." (Oh, corks!)

Edward Long.—"Yes, sir, please, sir; it wasn't me, sir." (What he meant by that I cannot say.)

In addition to these, Waldo, who evidently thought I said "Corkeress," informed me that it was a female Corker. A Corker, he explained, was a Ripper, Topper, or Spiffer. I rewarded him with a stiff imposition and passed on.

Oh, all ye brainy ones! Next time I ask you something you do not know, say so like men. Don't make wild and hopeless shots at the answer.

And now, I have one more question to ask. Who spilt the ink-bottle over my study carpet? I await your answers.

LOUD (COR) CHORUS: "We don't know!"

Our Interesting Interviewer Looks into the Future

FIFTY YEARS HENCE

BY way of a change from interviewing, I was given the job of reporting a trial at the Law Courts, before the celebrated Mr. Justice Cornelius Trotwood. Each counsel was provided with a megaphone to address the judge. There was no criminal in this court. It was the Probate Court, where old jossers argue about each other's wills. And this was what the various counsel had to explain to old Corny:

A certain Benjamin Bunkum had left a will in which he bequeathed all his money to his various relations, and the residue of his estate to his trustees and executors, to be divided in equal parts. These were called the residuary legatees. But before he died, a certain Martha Mackerell, spinster, had pre-deceased him by four days, and left him £20,000. Now, as old Benjy did not mention this in his bequests to his relations, this £20,000 went in with the residue of his estate and had to be handed over to the trustees. And naturally old Benjy's relations were indignant about this, and they were bringing the action against the trustees to set the will aside. Fancy trying to explain all that to old Corny. I wept.

The judge, complete with ear-trumpet, duly took his seat and the counsel for the executors rose to address him.

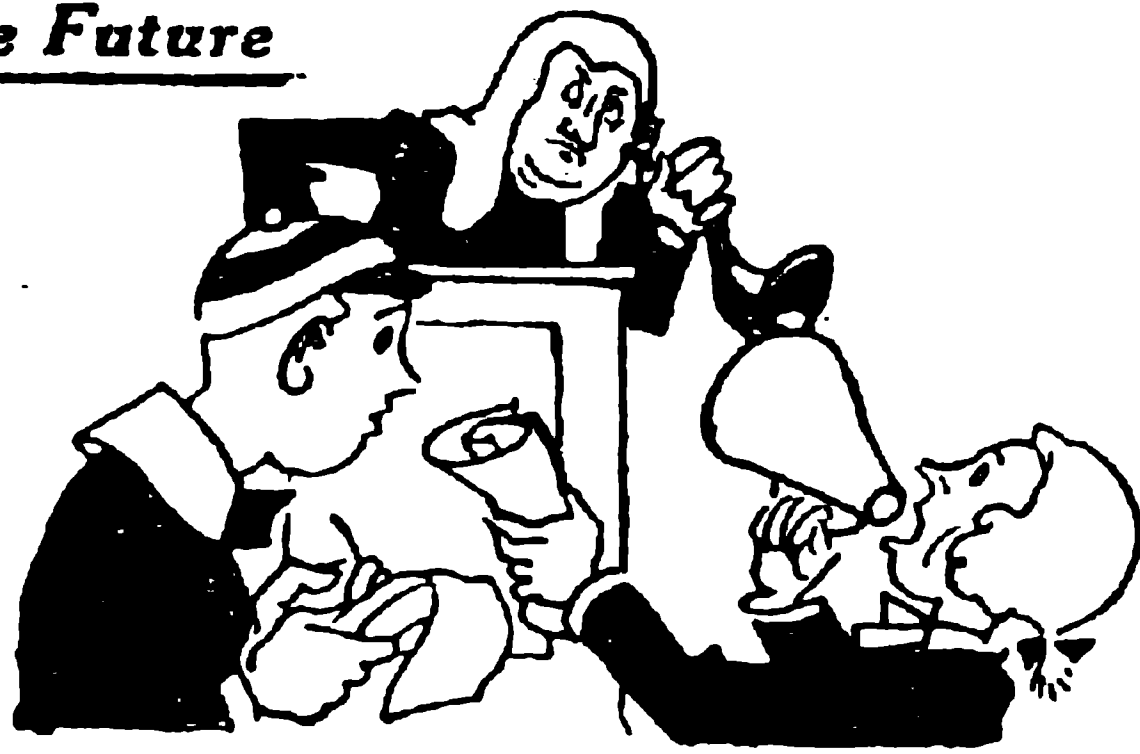
"Eh?" said the judge.

"I said," roared the K.C., "that this property being left unspecified——"

"Eh?" said the judge.

"Unspecified—not on the list of bequests," shrieked the counsel. "The testator didn't leave it to anybody, so it goes to the trustees."

"What does?" asked the judge.



"The money!" yelled the K.C. "The £20,000—Miss Martha Mackerell's money."

"What about it?" asked the judge.

"It goes to the residuary legatees of Benjamin Bunkum's will, your lordship," bawled the K.C.

"Then why does it go to them?"

The defendant's counsel sobbed, and cast a hopeless look around the court.

"Because it is counted in with the residue of the estate," he roared.

"Why?" asked the judge snappishly.

The poor old K.C. collapsed, and counsel for the plaintiff—who was chief beneficiary of old Bunkum's will—rose up.

"My client's view is that Mr. Bunkum never intended to leave that money to his trustees," he shouted.

"Trusty what?" asked the judge.

"Trustees!" screamed the counsel.

"He ought not to have the dough."

"Didn't he?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

Collapse of counsel for plaintiff. Another counsel got up.

"The Public Trustee desires this case to be held over for investigation for a time," he shrieked.

"What's prime?"

"Time!" yelled the counsel.

"TIME!"

"Time for what?"

"THE PUBLIC TRUSTEE," bawled the counsel. "THE PUBLIC TRUSTEE WANTS TIME."

Old Corny's face brightened up.

"Time!" he exclaimed. "Certainly. Three years in the Second Division."

HOW HOLD

By WALT

LAST week and my Banning Handy and all we had to and watch.

"You note or said the cham then you'll know picnic."

Mac and I carefully, and the proper way was like this:

First of all, pour into the tank of This makes the than petrol can

2.—After you in savaging the why it doesn't recollect that y it on.

3.—When you and have got a make the intere you have forgot

4.—Arrived at are about to pi cloth right over ensures plenty o

5.—Pour peti stove and apply

6.—When you burns in a broo oil over the bli try to find the s distance telescop for this purpose.



7.—Light a fi Then suddenly haven't brought

8.—Try to be an empty salmo (More brook and

9.—Take a p right underneath is the safest plac

10.—Try to pi (Continued at f

NIPPER'S PUZZLE CORNER

THIS week, you follows, I have invented a little acrostic for you to sharpen your wits on. It isn't remarkably easy, so if you solve it, you can pat yourselves on the back.

You know how to work it out? Find out the words hidden in the clues below, and write them underneath each other to form a column. When you have done this, the first and last letters of each word, when read downwards, will give you the names of

TWO IMPORTANT ST. FRANK'S CHARACTERS.

Clues

My FIRST is always concealed from the crowd.

My SECOND is land to be furrowed and ploughed.

If that is a story, then so is my THIRD.

My FOURTH'S in your ears, and can often be heard.

My FIFTH is a picnic—when all the grub's gone.

My SIXTH is a deep, dark-blue thing that rolls on.

The King owns my SEVENTH—a word of great state.

For billiards or dinner you want number EIGHT.

My last you will find on a bag or a purse, And I seize it gladly to "wind up" this verse.

The solution will be found in another column. Next week I have some different word puzzles for you. Cheerio!

NOT TO A PICNIC CHURCH

Handy took Mac
self on a picnic to
Moor. As usual,
tinged everything
o do was to stand by
reafully what I do,"
pion chump, "and
vwhy how to arrange a

Accordingly noted
we discovered that
to arrange a picnic

unmethyated spirit
your Morris minor.
ear go much better
m.

Have spent an hour
car, and wondering
t start, suddenly
ou haven't switched

I get the car going,
ut a mile from school,
sting discovery that
en the picnic hamper.
the spot where you
enic, lay the table-
r an anthill. This
f fun.

col into the spirit-
a match.

have bathed your
k, and poured salad
sters on your face,
pirit-stove. (A long-
o is especially useful
)



to boil the kettle.
discover that you
kettle.
il water by holding
n tin over the fire.
more salad oil.)
of jam and open it
a wasps' nest. This
o for it.
ck the wasps out of
od of next column.)

THE SECRET SPY!

Thrilling, Breathless Drama

By E. O. HANDFORTH.

(NOTE.—Owing to the fact that the Editor of the NELSON LEE still refuses to let me have more than three pages for my ripping magazine, I've had to condense this story. I pleaded with him to let me print it in full—it was only 27 pages long—but he wouldn't hear of it. So the story is more like a serial story synopsis than anything else. That's the Editor's fault, though—not mine.—E. O. H.)

A ROTTER named MARMADUKE MUDD was a spy for a beastly country named HEERUARTHEN which is situated in the middle of of Europe, just between Afghanistan and Argentina. This Mudd had obtained a job as a propeller maker to the DROP-KWICK AEROPLANE CO., which was owned by a youngster named PHILIP WRIGHT-HOOK, who was a champion boxer. Mudd's job was supposed to be carving aeroplane-propellers out of lumps of wood with a knife, but in reality the awful rotter was only there to sneak the plans of a new invention, which would make his country the most powerful in the world.

The secretary of the Aeroplane Co. was really a burglar, and he spent his time off in burgling people's houses. His name was I. STEEL-HALL, Esq. and young Phil trusted him with the plans of this new aeroplane that this blighter Mudd wanted to pinch. Well, one night this Mudd was sneaking about near the Aeroplane Works when he saw a man sliding down the drain-pipe of a house nearby. So he went over and he noticed that the man's pockets were full of jewellery. He shone his torch on the rotter, and found it was Steel-Hall, the secretary, who was out burgling as usual.

The secretary begged to be let off; but Mudd threatened to tell the police unless he handed him the plans of the new aeroplane right away. This made the villain frightened, and he let himself into the works to get the plans.

HOW NOT TO HOLD A PICNIC

(Continued from previous column.)

the jam with your fingers. (Brook and salad oil for stings.)

11.—Get fed up with the picnic, the ants, the wasps, and the salad oil. Throw everything you can find into the brook, and kick the car.

12.—Try to start car. Find you have no petrol left. Push car back to St. Frank's.

This is the way Handforth conducts a picnic. Mac and I noted it all very carefully.

But it happened that the office-boy, a curly-headed, humorous Cockney named SPOTTY, was working late that night, and he saw the rotters oil in. There was nobody to help him, because it was about half-past one in the morning, so the plucky youngster tried to sneak out and call the police. But Mudd saw him sneaking out, and gave him a thump on his cabeza with a ruler, which knocked him clean out.

This made the secretary terrified; but Mudd, like the callous rotter he was, merely laughed and tied Spotty up in a sack.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked the trembling secretary.

"Drop him in the canal—har, har!" sneered Mudd, with a beastly cynical laugh. Then the secretary handed over the plans, and Mudd took a pigeon from his pocket and tied the plans to the pigeon's leg and away it flew—straight to the spy's headquarters.

After that Mudd took Spotty away in the sack, and went to the canal to drop him into the water.

But it happened that young Phil was out for a moonlight row in his rowing-boat that night, and the bag containing Scotty dropped right clean in the boat, as Mudd chucked it over the bridge. Phil jolly soon released the little office-boy, and when he heard what Scotty had to say, Phil promptly steered into the bank and hopped up to the aeroplane works and found Mudd and the secretary just shaking hands at the front gate.

Then he waded in and gave the two rotters the hiding of a life-time, and wiped the road up with them, and jolly well left the place littered up with the awful cads. And then he said:

"As for the plans, they're no good at all. I jolly well know all the time that you were after those plans, you rotters, so I made out a fake set which you have stolen. Ha, ha, ha!"

Then he sacked the burgling secretary and made young Scotty secretary in his place. And serve them all right.

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC

H idde N
A rabl E
N ove L
D rum S
F iasc O
O cea N
R oya L
T abl E
H andl E

PRISONERS OF THE PASS!

(Continued from page 20.)

something. He doesn't know what he's doing—and he doesn't care! Look at the other guards, too! And look at these men who were working with us! They're all catching it!"

"For the love of Samson!" said Vivian Travers, open-eyed.

All within a few minutes, it seemed, the Kazatovians were being affected. The mysterious "fluence" was working. It was rather bewildering to watch.

Some of the men were less affected than others; they were making signs to the boys, shouting thickly, telling them to get on with their work. Others were taking no interest at all. But, clearly, they were all suffering from the same cause.

"Look here!" shouted Handforth. "I'll show you whether Renie was right or not!"

He strode up to one of the bandits. The man was a burly, bearded ruffian. Handforth gave him a push, swung him round, and took the rifle away from him.

"Get out of here!" roared Handforth aggressively. "I'm fed up with you, and all your pals! We're the bosses from now onwards!"

The man stared stupidly. He tried to pull himself together, and he uttered an angry exclamation. But Handforth gave him another push, and he reeled back. He stared in that same stupid way for a moment. Then, looking sullen, he backed, muttering.

And without any attempt to regain his rifle, or to attack Handforth, he slunk off. It was astounding. That fiery bandit, so dangerous ordinarily, was as easy to handle as a child.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said Nipper. "Are we dreaming, or is it really a fact?"

"Of course it's a fact!" yelled Handforth. "Good luck to the calico berries!"

"Not 'calico'—calilo," said Church breathlessly.

"What do I care what they're called?" shouted Edward Oswald. "They've done the trick, haven't they? Irene has saved us!"

"Hurrah!"

The excitement spread like lightning. Within a moment all the boys in this particular "gang" had ceased work, and they were ignoring their guards and the men who had been directing them. The bandits were so completely subdued that they took no action whatever.

All they could do was to walk about drunkenly, with expressions of inane helplessness on their faces.

That noxious drug was working; it was numbing their brains, exactly as the woman Onda had said. All of them were robbed of their normal faculties.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The sharp reports came from farther down the gorge. Rifle shots! And they were followed by much shouting and confused excitement. Nipper, running along that dusty road, saw a fight in progress. Lord Dorrimore and the rest of the St. Frank's fellows were briskly and enthusiastically attacking their guards. One man had managed to fire his rifle, but apparently no damage had been done. Dorrie's voice came clearly, and it was full of lighthearted enthusiasm.

"They've brought it off, you chaps!" yelled Nipper. "Come on! We'll do the same! There won't be much resistance!"

"Good egg!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

"Down with Miklos Keiff!"

In the far distance a number of men could be seen emerging from some of the squat buildings. They had been attracted, no doubt, by the rifle shots.

But these men were as useless as their fellows. They were like drunken men.

"What about Irene now?" demanded Handforth excitedly. "Didn't she say that we could turn on our guards, and seize the gorge? Most of you chaps laughed at her——"

"Don't rub it in, dear old fellow!" interrupted Travers. "We were wrong—and we were a lot of idiots! We're ashamed of ourselves! Good old Renie!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If we strike now, we'll turn the tables completely!" went on Handforth. "Where's Keiff? We want to grab him first of all——"

"Miklos Keiff isn't here," interrupted Nipper. "Didn't you see him riding off during the morning? He went with half a dozen men—towards the Grod Valley."

"By George, yes!" said Handforth. "I'd forgotten! They went before dinner, didn't they? That's a pity."

But nobody else gave the matter much thought. It was satisfactory enough to turn the tables on the men who remained.

LORD DORRIMORE now came to the fore with all his usual brilliance.

Seeing that the guards were more or less helpless, Dorrie quickly organised the boys into fighting units.

Every firearm was seized, and the next thing was to render the men helpless.

"We're going to sweep through the whole gorge!" shouted Lord Dorrimore, as he addressed the boys. "It's going to

be hard work, and it's going to take us some hours. But who cares?"

"We're game, sir!"

"Rather!"

"Let's give three cheers for Irene!"

"We'll give her those cheers later—after we've consolidated our position," said Dorrie briskly. "We know that there are, roughly, about sixty men in this place—an overwhelming force under ordinary conditions. For they were all armed, and we were unarmed. But thanks to that brave girl, the brutes are easy to handle now. But we mustn't take too much for granted."

"There's no doubt that we shall win, is there, sir?" asked Handforth.

"No doubt at all, but we shan't be able to hold our position unless we work hard," replied Lord Dorrimore. "We've got to shove all these men in the caves, and lock them up. Perhaps they'll recover within a few hours, and they've got to be helpless when they do recover. It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to barricade the exits of this gorge, so that no other men can enter."

He gave his orders swiftly, sending one party of boys in this direction, and another party in that direction. The girls, too, were eager to help. Irene was looking flushed and happy.

"Well done, Irene!" said Dorrie, giving her a pat on the shoulder. "Splendid work!"

"Oh, Lord Dorrimore, do you think we shall be able to seize the gorge?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"It's as good as seized already!" replied Dorrie.

And he was right. It was scarcely an attack which he and the boys undertook. The remaining guards were easily dealt with. A few shots were fired here and there by the dazed men, but no damage was done. The bandits were no more dangerous than a crowd of children. Not only were their brains numbed and half-paralysed, but their limbs were feeling the effects, too.

When it came to fighting, they went down almost at the first blow.

They were marshalled into batches, and then they were marched into the great caves which were to be found in the cliffs. Many of these caves were provided with heavy doors so that they could be used as prisons. They came in handy now.

All the bandits were bundled into them, and locked up. Incidentally, Umlosi was released, and his joy was unbounded when he found that his beloved "N'Kose" was in command of the situation.

"Wau! Let me fight this rabble, O, my father!" rumbled Umlosi. "If only I had my faithful spear——"

"You couldn't use it, old friend, even if you had it," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "You couldn't spear helpless men. All the same, you can make yourself useful. Come along! There's no rest for us until we've got all these blighters locked away in these caves."

And so the work went on.

The women were herded together and imprisoned in a separate cave.

Horses were rounded up, and very soon parties of the boys were galloping up and down the gorge, rounding up the "strays." Two or three hours was occupied in this exciting work; but when evening came there wasn't a Kazatovian to be seen from one end of that gorge to the other. All had been captured and imprisoned.

Further efforts of organisation had been effected.

Every boy was armed with a rifle, and supplied with ammunition. Most of them were St. Frank's Cadets, and they were able to use firearms. Before long, perhaps they would be called upon to fight in grim earnest.

Thanks to the brilliant plan which a schoolgirl had put into effect entirely on her own, Lord Dorrimore and his party were restored to liberty, and they were in full command of the mountain gorge.

CHAPTER 7.

Reunited!

THE evening meal was a joyous one.

The sudden and dramatic change had given the boys and girls new strength.

Weary as they were, they now felt refreshed. They were ready for anything. No longer were they prisoners, working like slaves under the eyes of the bandit guards. They were an armed force, ready to fight grimly for the retention of their liberty.

"What's the next move, sir?" asked Handforth, during that exciting meal.

"I've been thinking," replied Dorrie.

"But does it need much thinking of, sir?" asked Travers. "Surely we'll all go down to Nid—and escape?"

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "A somewhat juicy scheme, laddie!"

"Yet I venture to suggest that Brother Dorrie will regard it with a jaundiced eye," said William Napoleon Browne, the long-legged skipper of the Fifth, who had

been working as strenuously as any of the others. "To dash to Nid, and to run away from this adventurous country, would be slightly on the tame side."

"But what else is there to do?" asked Church. "If we stay here we shall only be attacked. When Miklos Keiff finds out what's happened, he'll swoop down with all his men!"

"Let 'em come!" shouted Handforth. "Who cares? We're ready, aren't we? We can hold this gorge against a thousand!"

"Don't you be too sure, Handy," said Nipper. "Miklos Keiff has a pretty strong army, back there in the Grod Valley."

"He has," agreed Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "But an army isn't much good, young 'un, if it can't operate. Don't forget that this gorge is a vital strategic spot. Keiff's army has to pass through here on its way out."

"But we can't stop the army, can we?" asked Nipper. "Keiff has been supplied with tanks and artillery, and——"

"Tanks and artillery nothing!" interrupted Dorrie coolly.

"But it's a fact, sir!"

"I'm not denying it," said his lordship. "But where are those tanks? Where is that artillery? Not in the Grod Valley."

"Oh!"

"The only way out of the Grod Valley is by means of the narrow canyons and passes," continued Lord Dorrimore. "Even at the spot where the pass enters this gorge, it is so narrow that two men can scarcely ride abreast. That means that Keiff's forces can only enter in single file. The tanks and the artillery are waiting outside—on the plains beyond Nid. His men are in the Grod Valley, it is true—at least, a great number of them. The rest don't matter. They'll be helpless without their leader. But supposing we stay here, and hold this gorge? Supposing we bottle up Miklos Keiff and his men? They can't do anything—they can't start a revolution, even!"

"By George! We hold the key to the situation, you chaps!" shouted Handforth.

"And what about Mr. Lee?" went on Dorrie grimly. "What about King Victor? We came here to rescue that boy, didn't we? We know that he's a prisoner in the Grod Valley. I don't think we should run away. It wouldn't be playing the game. Why escape at all? Irene, by her brilliance, has placed us in a strong position. We can hold the gorge, and Miklos Keiff and Prince Zeno will remain helpless for just as long as we like."

"Hurrah!"

"Down with Prince Zeno!"

"Still, I'm willing to leave it to you fellows—and you girls," continued Dorrie. "I'm not forgetting the girls. You've done wonders, all of you. You're just as enterprising, and just as plucky and energetic as any of the boys!"

"Yes, rather!" chorused the boys.

"Oh, I say, do chuck it, please," protested Irene, flushing. "I haven't done anything particularly brave. It was just luck."

"We know all about that," grinned Dorrie. "Well, what do you say? We'll put it to the vote. Once before, I asked you this same question, and you decided to back me up. I let you in the cart then, for we were all taken prisoners, and we were compelled to work. Don't forget that this affair might pan out just as badly—even worse. By leaving this gorge at once, and getting down to Nid, the chances are that we shall be able to get on a train, and escape to Galvarad. On the other hand, if we stay, there will probably be some fighting."

"We'll stay, sir!" went up an excited chorus.

"We've got to," said Nipper. "We couldn't go away leaving Orlando in the hands of these bandits."

"We'll turn bandits ourselves!" shouted Handforth. "By George! How's that? We'll take a leaf out of Miklos Keiff's book!"

They all voted unanimously for staying. Not one of the boys or girls desired to tamely escape. As Travers said, they were in this adventure up to their necks, and they might as well see it through.

"All right, then," said Lord Dorrimore, grinning with pleasure. "That's settled. What we've got to do, now, is to consolidate our position. Darkness will soon be on us, so we'd better get some camp fires prepared. We need plenty of light—we don't want any of the bandits to come down upon us in the darkness. And there are the exits of the gorge to guard, too. Some of us must be constantly on duty. Nobody must be allowed to enter."

And so, after that brief rest, the work went on again. Great bonfires were built, and they were ready to be lighted when night came. Dorrie organised his forces in a business-like way. So many boys were to guard the passes, and they were to be relieved at fixed intervals.

The girls took on the job of preparing the meals, and doing the useful work of the camp. The boys were fighters now, and they could not be spared for any other activities. At any minute they



The bandits rushed to the end of the cave, and there they found the bound and gagged figure of Prince Zeno.

might be called upon to give battle to the bandits.

ARE there any of Keiff's men at the end of this pass, sir?" whispered Victor Orlando.

"Not usually," replied Nelson Lee. "So there's no reason why we should fear any to-night. The gorge itself is such a natural fortress that it requires very little guarding. Furthermore, these Kazatovians are careless and undisciplined. We know that Miklos Keiff himself is absent, and that means that his men will be slack."

The pair trudged wearily on.

They were tired and footsore; their limbs ached from the hard going of the past few hours. They were ravenously hungry, and, worst of all, their throats were parched with an intolerable thirst.

They had carried a certain amount of water with them, but at last the supply had become exhausted. There were no springs along that mountain track, and their only hope of getting fresh supplies of water was to reach the gorge.

As for food—

"We shall have to make a big effort, young 'un," said Lee quietly. "We have successfully avoided the bandits so far,

but there will be plenty of them in the gorge."

"It seems hardly true that we have come all this way without being nabbed," said Victor huskily. "We shall stand a lot more chance in the gorge, shan't we?"

"Well, I think we shall be safer—and, at least, we can get water," replied Lee.

"Well, that's everything, sir."

"It will give us fresh life—particularly if we can obtain some food," said the detective. "In the gorge, too, we can obtain a good sleep. We had better seek out a secure hiding-place first. Then we can sleep throughout the heat of to-morrow. However, we had better not make our plans too far in advance, Orlando. We're not even in the gorge yet."

"But we soon shall be, sir," said the young king. "Oh, how I'm longing to get there! My throat is like a lime-kiln!"

His feet, too, were blistered and bruised. If only he could reach a stream, and take his shoes off and bathe his feet in the cool water!

He felt faint from hunger and thirst. Now and again his brain reeled, and everything seemed to go round. But he made no complaint to Lee; he pulled himself together, and pressed on, refusing to accept Lee's offer of a supporting arm.

Victor knew well enough that Lee himself must be feeling almost exhausted. He had been on the go for a considerable time. It was true he had had some sleep. Without it, even he could not have carried on. But no food had passed his lips for at least twenty-four hours.

They emerged, at length, from the rocky pass, and before them lay the gorge. The way led down steeply, and it was open ground—where they would be plainly visible in daylight. Now, in the darkness, there would not be much risk.

But after their hours and hours amid the heated rocks, it was good to see that fertile valley of the gorge, with the dark clumps which denoted the little woods and spinneys.

Lee was rather puzzled to see a number of fires blazing—bonfires apparently. Overhead, the sky was starry, and scarcely a breath of wind stirred.

The pair halted, silent in the darkness. Victor was too tired to think. He trusted implicitly in Nelson Lee. What Lee did would be right.

The detective pondered as he stood there.

So far, his enterprise had prospered. Not only had he rescued Victor Orlando from the Grod Valley, but he had scored heavily over Prince Zeno. However, it was foolish to ignore the fact that the situation was still desperate. By now, perhaps—in fact, of a certainty—Miklos Keiff had arrived in the Grod Valley, and he had discovered that Victor had been spirited away. Prince Zeno would be raving up and down, explaining the circumstances.

That meant that the hue and cry was already out.

Lee knew that it would be impossible to get through this gorge, to cover the weary miles of the farther mountain passes, and reach Nid. He and Orlando might do it eventually, but they were too tired and hungry to venture farther to-night.

A rest was essential—to say nothing of food and drink. Moreover, Lee wanted to help Lord Dorrimore and the boys and girls if possible. How much better if they could all escape together.

"Am I mad?" muttered Lee suddenly. "Am I dreaming?"

"What do you mean, sir?" whispered Victor, who had heard the words.

"Perhaps it is the effect of over-tiredness, young 'un," murmured Lee. "Look! You see this nearest camp fire?"

"Yes."

"There are some figures moving near by, in the light of the flames," continued Lee. "Surely those figures are not men?"

Victor blinked, and he rubbed his eyes. He looked again, and a gasp escaped him.

"They're—they're the fellows, sir!" he panted. "They're not Kazatovians at all! I can recognise them now. St. Frank's chaps!"

"But this is incredible!" said Lee, in a startled voice. "I could understand the boys being round that fire—there is a good deal of laxity amongst these mountain bandits. But how can we account for the fact, Orlando, that the boys are armed with rifles?"

"My only sainted aunt! So they are!" ejaculated Victor. "What—what does it mean, sir?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but I will soon find out," replied Lee tensely. "Come, young 'un! Water—food!"

They emerged farther into the open, stumbling clear of the last barrier of rock. As they did so a sharp command rang out.

"Halt!" it came. "Move another step, and we'll fire!"

There was a tense silence as Lee and Victor halted; and then another voice sounded.

"I say!" it sounded. "They won't understand English, you know!"

"No; but they can understand the tone!" said the first voice.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Nelson Lee, in amazement. "If those voices don't belong to Fullwood and Pitt, of the Remove, I'm off my head!"

"Hi! Don't fire!" shouted Victor hoarsely. "We're friends! It's Mr. Lee! It's me—Orlando!"

"What!" came a startled, excited shout.

The next moment there was a rush of feet. Figures came up from the darkness—half a dozen of them. And Nelson Lee and Victor found themselves surrounded by joyous St. Frank's boys.

CHAPTER 8.

Preparing to Depart!

"GUV'NOR!" panted one of the figures.

Nipper sprang forward, clutching at Lee's arm. He clung tightly, peering closely into Lee's face.

"Hallo, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee steadily. "Quite a surprise, eh?"

"It's—it's a staggerer, guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "Oh, this is marvellous!"

Guv'nor! You're safe—and you've got Victor Orlando with you!"

"Hurrah!" cheered the other fellows, wild with excitement.

"If you boys are surprised to see us, I can assure you that we are no less surprised to see you," said Lee. "How in the name of all that's miraculous are you armed in this way? How is it that you are guarding this pass? Where are the Kazatovians?"

"Bottled up, sir—imprisoned in the caves," said Nipper tensely. "We've grabbed the gorge. It's ours! We're in full command here, sir."

"Oh, hold me up, somebody!" murmured Victor. "This is too much."

Lee seized Nipper firmly by the shoulder.

"Before we go into any explanations, young 'un, we must have some food and water," he said. "Orlando has borne up pluckily, but he is nearly exhausted. And, if it comes to that, so am I. We can talk later. What food have you? And where is the nearest water?"

"Oh, guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "I ought to have known! Come on—this way!"

HALF an hour later the two fugitives were, as Victor put it, as good as new.

Rough but wholesome food and hot coffee had charged them with new life. They had bathed their feet, too, and now they were resting. They felt ready for any fresh adventure.

While feeding, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had exchanged "yarns." Gathered round, in a large circle, were the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls. So great was the excitement that all the "boy bandits" had left their posts, and to all intents and purposes the gorge was unguarded. Not that it really mattered. There was little or no fear of an attack yet.

Nelson Lee was gratified when he learned all the details—and he was particularly pleased with Irene for her brainy and cleverly-executed plan.

"Just an example of what can be done if an opportunity is seized," commented Lee. "Such opportunities are more common than most people believe, but they are seldom taken advantage of. Irene acted promptly, and for that she is to be commended in the highest possible terms."

"We've already done that, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "And you? What about commending you in the highest possible terms? By the Lord Harry! You

entered the Grod Valley single-handed, and you bagged their prize prisoner!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Mr. Lee!"

"You've saved us an enormous lot of trouble," continued Lord Dorrimore.

"We were thinking of getting up a rescue-party, although we didn't quite know how to go about it. We're all together; we're all safe."

"But we've got to be prepared for trouble, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee, as he eagerly accepted a cigarette from his lordship. "By James! You don't know how I've been longing for a smoke! Yes, Dorrie, we've got to be prepared." He puffed contentedly. "On the whole, we're lucky. But we mustn't underestimate the grimness of these mountain bandits."

"The general idea is this," said Lord Dorrimore, in a careless way—which clearly denoted his anxiety. "This gorge is, in a way of speaking, Miklos Keiff's only gateway. You see what I mean? His main army is bottled up in the Grod Valley. It can only reach the plains by coming through this gorge."

"Yes, I am aware of that," said Lee, nodding.

"Well, we're holding the gorge," continued Dorrie. "We've got Prince Zeno and Keiff and all their men in a trap. As long as we hold this gorge, Zeno is helpless."

"And you are proposing that we should remain here—holding the gorge against Keiff's hordes?"

"Why not?"

"There are many reasons, Dorrie," replied Lee, shaking his head. "I'm not surprised to hear that you had come to this decision. And I dare say the boys and girls have agreed to give you their wholehearted support?"

"Yes, rather!" chorused the boys and girls.

"Well, it can't be," said Lee firmly.

Lord Dorrimore grunted.

"I was expecting it!" he said disgustedly. "Hang it all, Lee, if you throw a spanner into the works, I shall be almost sorry you turned up!"

Nelson Lee smiled, but he still looked determined.

"You're a reckless beggar, Dorrie, and these boys and girls are ready to back you up in your recklessness," he said. "I admire their spirit just as much as I admire their pluck. But it's folly."

"Well, couldn't we stay here, holding the gorge, until some of us got the word through to the grand duke?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "His nibs could send us a

big relief force. Then we could all gracefully retire."

"Unless, in the meantime, we were cut to pieces by Miklos Keiff and his men!" put in Lee politely.

"Oh, but that's practically impossible—"

"It's the most likely thing in the world," interrupted Lee, almost sharply.

"But—"

"My dear Dorrie, do be sensible," said Nelson Lee. "We're all together now, and our way of escape is open. We can get to Nid and take the train, and we can deliver King Victor to his uncle. That, alone, will be sufficient to ruin Prince Zeno's scheming plan."

"Of course, you're right there," admitted Dorrie reluctantly.

"It might not be so adventurous, but it is the only common-sense course for us to pursue," went on Lee. "While Orlando and I were missing, you were justified, perhaps, in deciding to hold the gorge. But now that we are with you, the very reason for holding the gorge has vanished. Don't you see?"

"Well, go on," growled Dorrie.

"You might be robbed of your excitement, but we shall ensure the safety of King Victor and all these boys and girls,"

continued Nelson Lee. "That's worth something, Dorrie, isn't it? All the advantages are with us. We can get out. The hue and cry has started, but we are sufficiently ahead to feel safe."

"Then—then we're leaving the gorge practically at once, sir?" asked Handforth, in dismay. "You mean, we're not going to be bandits—or—or anything?"

"The sooner we're on our way, Handforth, the better," replied Nelson Lee. "When Orlando and I were coming into this gorge we hadn't the faintest idea of what we should do. But now we know. You boys and girls have solved the whole problem."

"Well, it's a swindle," said Lord Dorriamore, with a sigh. "All the same, Lee, I dare say you're right."

"There's no other way," insisted Nelson Lee. "Supposing we stayed, Dorrie? Supposing we held this gorge, as you say? Do you think for a moment that we could hold it against Keiff and his bandits?"

"Of course we could, sir!" went up a chorus from the boys.

"Once again, young man, I admire your spirit, but it won't do," said Lee. "These Kazatovians are past-masters in the art of mountain fighting. We are raw recruits at the game. Even if we succeed



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives, and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

NO DIFFERENCE.

Teacher: "This essay on 'Our Dog' is word for word the same as your brother's."

Boy: "Yes, sir; it's the same dog!"

(H. Verner, South Porcupine, Ontario, Canada, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

BARS OF ANOTHER TUNE.

Prison Chaplain: "So you were a musician? Well, I'm afraid I won't be able to give you any comfort in musical ways."

Convict: "If you give me a file, sir, I think I could get through a few bars very well myself."

(H. Hart, 35, Hill Street, Lye, Nr. Stourbridge, has been awarded a topping book.)

NO PAMPERING.

Fond Mother: "Don't you think we'd better buy the boy an encyclopedia now he's going to the secondary school?"

Stern Father: "I don't think anything of the kind. Let the lazy young beggar walk, the same as I had to!"

(A. Payne, 131, Heneage Street, Vauxhall, Birmingham, has been awarded a splendid pocket wallet.)

POINTED.

Employer: "Did you put that note where it would attract Mr. Smith's attention?"

Office-boy: "Yes, sir, I stuck a pin through it and put it on his chair!"

(F. D. Weeks, 30, Dartmouth Cottages, Watling Street, Bexley Heath, has been awarded a useful penknife.)

LEARNING.

Landlady: "Do you know what it is like to starve?"

Lodger: "No; but I'm just learning."

(T. Putwain, 2, Beresford Terrace, Gillingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

VERY FUNNY.

Salesman: "These shirts simply laugh at the laundry, sir."

Customer: "So I've found out. I have some at home with their sides split."

in holding the gorge for a time, we can't possibly win in the long run. And don't forget that Prince Zeno has, until now, given the strictest orders that nobody is to be harmed. But if we defy him—if we start an actual warfare—he will be perfectly justified in continuing that warfare. His men will fire upon us. Some of you will probably be killed—oh, yes, I mean it! Keiff's forces are overwhelmingly superior. And although the gorge may be simple enough to hold, it could only be held at the cost of precious lives."

Lee's words had a sobering effect upon his listeners.

"No, Dorrie, it won't do," continued the great detective. "I quite agree that you were right in your plan—for you were thinking of King Victor and myself. But we are here now, and that materially alters the whole outlook."

"Of course," growled Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "I see that, old man. Undoubtedly the only thing for us to do is to quit."

Handforth groaned.

"Just when things were beginning to look promising, too!" he muttered dismally.

"It is a sad blow, Brother Handy, but we must bow to the will of our leader,"

murmured Browne. "And I venture to suggest that Brother Lee knows what he is talking about."

"The sooner we make a start, the better," continued Nelson Lee briskly. "We mustn't forget, boys, that there are thousands of mountain men in this region. The instant we show fight they will have a good excuse for attacking us. We have but to fire one shot and the consequences will be on our own heads. I know well enough that you are ripe for an adventure; but the price is liable to be too high. You know I'm not the kind of man to run away. But when I have accomplished my object, I believe in letting well alone. King Victor is with us, and our only motive in coming here was to rescue him."

"The gov'nor's right, you chaps!" said Nipper. "Let's get busy!"

Handforth, perhaps, was the only one who was really upset. But he was an incorrigible firebrand. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were a bit disappointed, but Dorrie, at least, recognised the wisdom of Lee's decision.

The rest were excited and relieved.

Their treatment in the hands of the Kazatovians had made them sick of the mountains. They had had their adventure, and they were satisfied. The

(W. Tibble, 37, Oval Mansions, Kennington, S.E.11, has been awarded a useful penknife.)

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON.

Frenchman: "Ah! So zis ees your leetle son? He look similaire to you."

Proud Father: "Yes, there is a likeness."

Frenchman: "He ees—how you call it?—a chip off zee old blockhead, ees he not?"

(C. Parker, 19, McKenzie Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia, has been awarded a topping book.)

SUMS SIMPLIFIED.

Teacher: "Tell me, Smith, who helped you with your arithmetic?"

Smith: "Nobody, sir."

Teacher: "I want you to tell me the truth. Was it your brother?"

Smith: "No, sir, he did not help me; he did it all himself!"

(F. Hutchinson, Box 4609, Johannesburg, South Africa, has been awarded a useful penknife.)

TICKLISH.

Farmer (to tramp standing on doormat): "What are you laughing at?"

Tramp: "Well, sir, your mat is tickling my feet."

(W. Craven, 2, Roker Street, West Hartlepool, has been awarded a useful penknife.)



'HOLE-HEARTED.

Bore: "Yes, I'm a born enthusiast. Whatever I undertake, I throw myself into wholeheartedly."

Victim: "I wish you'd undertake to dig a very deep hole!"

(P. Burnard, 11, Peter Street, Bethnal Green, E.2, has been awarded a topping book.)

CHILDISH.

Brown: "Isn't your son rather young to join the army?"

Green: "Perhaps; but he's only going to join the infantry!"

(C. Flavell, 86, Summer Lane, Lower Gornal, Nr. Dudley, Worcestershire, has been awarded a useful penknife.)

TACTFUL.

Pecksniff: "I say, old man, are you using your step-ladder this afternoon?"

Sniffpeck (on his guard at once): "Afraid I am."

Pecksniff: "Splendid. Then you won't mind lending me your lawn-mower?"

(S. Burrows, 27, Underley Road, Kendal, Westmorland, has been awarded a splendid pocket wallet.)

sooner they could get back to really civilised regions, the better!

"We can't start off as we are, of course," said Nelson Lee practically. "It's a pretty long march to Nid, and there are quite a few of Keiff's men to hinder our progress. We shall need food, water, and we shall have to be armed. That means preparation. With luck, we may be able to get off within two hours—but it'll mean hard work."

"We're all ready to help, sir," said Handforth eagerly.

"I know, and I appreciate your readiness," said Lee. "Dorrie, I'll remain here and superintend the preparations. I want you to go to the entrance to the pass—the northern entrance, which leads to the Grod Valley. We've been neglectful. That pass should be well guarded. Take Umlosi and a dozen of the boys with you. See that they are suitably armed."

"But you don't expect the enemy already, do you?" asked Dorrie, with a gleam of hope.

Lee smiled.

"No; but it is as well to be on the safe side," he replied dryly. "When we are all ready, we'll signal you, and you can join us. Then we'll commence our march as one unit. No need to worry about the people who are imprisoned in the caves. They will be released soon enough."

So Dorrie and his party went to the pass and took up their posts in the darkness.

Not that they expected to do any fighting. This was just a safety measure of Nelson Lee's, and Lee could always be counted upon to take such precautions.

However, the night was not yet over!

CHAPTER 9.

Pursuit!

WHILE these exciting events had been taking place in the gorge, the enemy was becoming intensely active.

Miklos Keiff and his escort arrived in the Grod Valley well before sunset. And as they descended from the heights of the pass, Keiff was occasionally uttering grunts of satisfaction.

For the picture that he beheld was a pleasing one—to a man of his warlike temperament.

The great valley stretched out in the evening sunlight, and even at this distance it could be seen that the whole countryside was a hive of activity. Men were moving everywhere, some mounted, but most of them on foot. They were men of the mountains who had rallied to the call of Prince Zeno. They were preparing for the revolution.

"See!" said Miklos Keiff, waving one of his great hands. "Our good prince is active to-day. He is keeping the men active, too!"

One of the others frowned.

"But you are our chief," he retorted. "We obey you, Miklos Keiff. More than once, of late, Prince Zeno has assumed an authority which none of us recognise."

Miklos Keiff shrugged.

"Let him have his way," he replied indifferently. "It pleases him, and we come to no harm. Prince Zeno is young—he is an upstart. We use him for our own ends—but that is all. We support him because we support ourselves, yes?"

Keiff was a typical bandit; a huge, brawny man, with a swarthy, bearded face. He was the monarch of the mountains; he ruled these wild tribes with an iron hand. Such men as these respected him; whereas they regarded the slim, aristocratic Prince Zeno with thinly-veiled contempt.

It was natural that Miklos Keiff should assume that Prince Zeno was active in the Grod Valley—drilling and training the tribesmen. For had not Zeno come into the valley yesterday? There was no other exit except this pass, and he had not been encountered.

Keiff, it is true, was somewhat surprised. Zeno had told him that his object in going into the Grod Valley was to see King Victor; after which he was returning at once, since he had important business beyond Nid. It was rather surprising that Zeno remained.

However, there was probably a good reason, and Keiff would soon find out what that reason was.

He and his men rode down into the valley, where they were acclaimed vociferously by all. Not until they reached the thriving village—which was really Miklos Keiff's home—did the bandit chief make the inquiries which were uppermost in his mind. He had been rather surprised, in fact, to see no evidence of Prince Zeno.

"Why is his Highness not here?" he asked gruffly. "Does Zeno consider me of such small importance that he cannot welcome me?"

"But the prince has gone, chief!" said one of the men.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Did he not return to Nid?"

"That is impossible," replied Keiff. "If he had returned to Nid, he would have passed through the gorge. He has not been there, neither have we encountered him on the road. I am puzzled."

"None of us here saw the prince last night," said the man who had first answered. "The prince went straight to the cave, where the young king is imprisoned. He remained only a short while, and then departed. We all thought that he returned through the pass."

"H'm!" grunted Miklos Keiff. "I must inquire. No doubt the boy will know."

He pulled his horse round, and soon he was approaching the frowning cliffs. King Victor's prison cave was situated here. Keiff was not yet uneasy, but he was certainly

worried. What had become of Prince Zeno? It was very strange that none of these men in the Grod Valley could give him any definite information.

There were two sentries on duty outside the tunnel which led to the prisoner's cave. They gave their leader suitable greeting as he dismounted.

"You were here last night?" demanded Miklos Keiff brusquely. "You were on duty when Prince Zeno came?"

"Yes, chief," replied one of the men, surprised by the other's tone.

"I am told that his Highness departed after only a short visit?"

"Yes, chief."

"And the boy?" asked Keiff. "How has he been to-day?"

"That we do not know," replied the man. "We have not seen him to-day. Nobody has seen him to-day."

"How can that be?" snapped Miklos Keiff. "The boy has been fed, has he not?"

The man grinned.

"His Highness did not take us into his confidence, but we imagined that he quarrelled with his half-brother," he said, with an expressive shrug. "We were definitely instructed by his Highness not to enter the cave until twenty-four hours had elapsed."

"By St. Peter!" swore Keiff. "I smell mischief here!"

"But how can that be?" protested the man, rather frightened by his leader's tone. "We have but obeyed orders, chief. There are yet two hours to go before—"

"Make way!" snarled Keiff. "I will see the boy at once! What trickery is this? He is to be left alone for twenty-four hours—and



In the distance the St. Frank's adventurers saw the glow of a bonfire, which disappeared and then reappeared periodically. "Signals!" muttered Nelson Lee grimly.

Prince Zeno has not been seen since! I do not like the look of it at all!"

Until this minute, no suspicions had entered the minds of the sentries. They had come on duty again this evening highly amused. They were expecting to find the young king in a very humble, subdued mood when they took him his food. Had not Prince Zeno told them to starve the boy as a means of humbling his spirit?

Miklos Keiff did not know what to suspect, but he had a premonition that something was drastically wrong.

Torches had been hastily lighted, and, bearing one of these, Keiff charged along the tunnel. He shot the bolts of the prison door, swung it open, and strode in.

A black cave loomed ahead of him, with the rock walls reaching upwards in jagged, serried inequalities.

Keiff stood there, the flaring torch held high above his head.

"The boy is not here!" he thundered. "Fools—fools! What blundering is this during my absence?"

The two guards, and the men who had accompanied Miklos Keiff, stood round in a frightened semi-circle. They shouted in vain. There was no prisoner!

"You chicken-brained dolts!" snarled Miklos Keiff, swinging round on the two guards. "You were on duty last night, yes? The boy escaped then. By my soul! You were bribed—"

"No, no, chief!" gasped one of the men in frantic denial. "The boy did not escape last night. We have taken no bribe. Our loyalty—"

"Bah!" raved Keiff. "You say the boy did not escape; yet the boy is not here! Prince Zeno came. You saw him leave, eh?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Did he take the boy with him?"

"But we could not see, chief!" protested one of the guards. "It was so dark. We heard the prince, and—"

"Yet you tell me, a minute ago, that you saw him leave!" roared Miklos Keiff. "He left, yes—but since it was dark, could it not have been possible for him to take the boy, too?"

"See, chief—see!" panted one of the others, suddenly pointing. "There is something in the far corner of the cave on the floor! Perhaps the boy—"

"Come," interrupted Keiff sharply.

They fairly ran to the end of the cave, and shouts of consternation arose when the bound figure of a man could be seen.

Thrusting the torch into the hands of his men, Keiff went down on his knees. A moment later he shouted with amazement. For the man on the floor was none other than Prince Zeno of Kazatova!

Keiff slashed through the bonds and removed the gag, and Prince Zeno stared up at him dazedly.

"Keiff!" he croaked.

It was the only word he could utter. Clearly, he was in the last stages of exhaustion. For nearly twenty-four hours he had been in this cave, bound and gagged. He was parched, and his limbs were well nigh useless.

Even now the suddenly-restored circulation was beginning to cause intense agonies.

Miklos Keiff said nothing now, but his eyes were burning with rage. His suspicions were more than justified.

Prince Zeno was carried into the centre of the cave; the men set to work rubbing his limbs, and they persisted in spite of the unfortunate prince's shrieks of agony and protests.

A raw, fiery spirit was forced down his throat, and the stuff soon had its effect. Prince Zeno quickly recovered under the treatment he received.

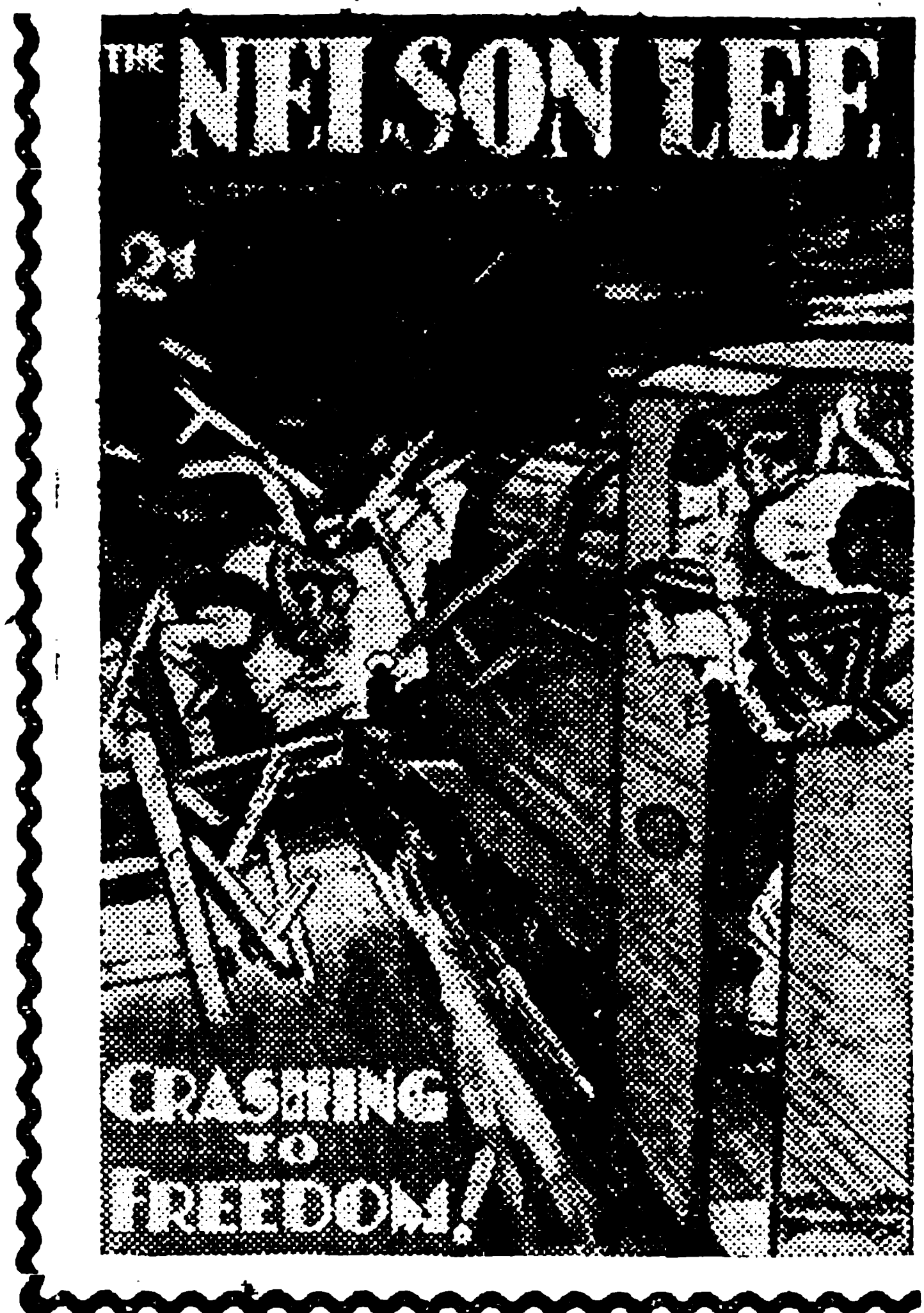
"Lee!" he croaked, at length. "You have got Lee—and the boy?"

"Lee?" repeated Keiff uncomprehendingly.

"Nelson Lee!" panted Zeno. "You know of Nelson Lee, Keiff!"

Miklos Keiff half-choked. He had very good reason to know of Nelson Lee, since the detective had caused him to be seized by the Grand Duke Rudolph's secret agents; and Leo himself had impersonated the bandit chief.

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"What do you mean, your Highness?" he asked harshly. "What has Nelson Lee to do with this? He escaped in the gorge, and we did not recapture him—"

"I came to visit King Victor," interrupted Zeno, his eyes burning with madness. "But no sooner had I entered this cave than that man Lee sprang upon me. I remembered no more until I awoke to find myself bound and gagged. Lee had gone—the boy had gone! How long have I been lying here?"

"For nearly twenty-four hours," replied Miklos Keiff tensely.

That statement served to complete Prince Zeno's revival. He was staggered. For twenty-four hours he had been lying there—and Nelson Lee had escaped with King Victor.

"You-see what happened?" shouted Zeno, struggling to his feet, and gesticulating like a madman. "Lee removed my clothing—he dressed himself in my uniform!"

"These fools have told me that Prince Zeno left this cave last night," said Miklos Keiff harshly. "And yet you remain here, your Highness! It was Lee who left this cave—and he took the boy with him."

"By heaven!" panted Zeno. "Where is he now? Where is Victor?"

"You ask me?" retorted Keiff. "I have only just arrived in the valley. How could I know? I thought you were here; and Lee, in his cunning, gave instructions that

prisoners in my hands. Is it not far more likely that he is still here, hiding in the Grod Valley?"

"Then let the valley be searched—from end to end," ordered Prince Zeno. "Let every man be pressed into this task."

AND so, for hours, the fruitless search went on.

Prince Zeno himself and Miklos Keiff, both mounted, rode here, there, and everywhere. They made endless inquiries; but not one living person in the valley had seen any sign of Nelson Lee or the missing boy.

At last the search was abandoned.

"We have wasted valuable time," said Zeno fiercely.

He had had an opportunity of thinking; his excitement had gone. He was his cool, calculating self now. The urgency of the situation had sobered him.

"Yes, we have wasted time," he repeated, as he consulted with Miklos Keiff. "A fig for your guards in the pass, Keiff! Either they slept on duty, or they were careless. But I am convinced that Lee and the boy took the pass. Freedom is only possible by getting through the gorge, and thence onwards to Nid."

Miklos Keiff did not like the other's tone; but he managed to hide his resentment. Another idea had occurred to him, too, and he was by no means cheered.

"This man is possessed of magic powers," he said, with superstitious awe. "I begin to think, your Highness, that this Englishman is gifted with——"

"Bah!" interrupted Zeno harshly. "Is this a time for idiotic superstitions? Lee is merely a clever man. In his own country he is famed as a great detective."

"But think, your Highness!" protested Miklos Keiff. "He makes people believe that he is me—even my own followers! He escapes, and we find him not! He appears again; he makes his voice so like yours that men who know you can tell no difference! Again he vanished, this time taking King Victor with him! And where is he now? Pouf! He has gone into the thin air!"

"He has gone along the pass to the gorge," retorted Prince Zeno impatiently. "If you had had your eyes open, and your wits about you, you would have seen him!"

"And what is happening now?" asked the bandit chief. "This man, possessed of such powers, has gone to the gorge, you say? Is it not possible that he has tricked my men there, too? Such a man is capable of anything!"

"He is one man against a horde!" said Zeno. "If he wins, it is because he is clever and you are dull! Why was I such a fool to entrust Victor to your care? We must go to the gorge immediately! Such a man as Lee, by his brilliance, may well get the better of sixty! For your men are unsuspecting, and Lee, in the darkness, will creep in. Perhaps, even now, he is helping Lord Dorri-more and those boys. Come! Collect your

"THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES!"

By E. S. BROOKS.

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"Handforth's Weekly!"

"OUR ROUND TABLE TALK!"

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

this cave was not to be entered until to-night. We have been tricked, your Highness. That daring Englishman has beaten us."

"We are not beaten yet, you infernal blunderer!" shouted Zeno. "Lee and the boy left together. It is probable that they travelled by the pass to the gorge——"

"No!" interrupted Keiff. "That is out of the question!"

"And why?"

"I have but come along the pass," replied the bandit chief. "I have had the reports of my men. Even in the hours of darkness it would have been impossible for the pair to reach the gorge. And would they pass that way, your Highness? This man, Lee, knew that I was in the gorge, with sixty of my men. He knew that his companions were

men—your finest shots. We must go, Keiff! While we talk here, Lee and the boy are escaping!”

There was no further delay. A strong, force, with Prince Zeno and Miklos Keiff at the head, set off for the gorge.

Zeno realised that he should have taken this step immediately, instead of wasting time in the Grod Valley. Precious hours had been wasted; but it might not yet be too late.

CHAPTER 10.

Trapped in the Pass!

“**W**HAT are those fires?” asked Prince Zeno, in a low voice.

Miklos Keiff did not answer.

The pair, at the head of the strong force of bandits, had reined in their horses at a point where they could overlook the gorge. They were not yet at the exit of the pass; but at this particular spot there was a break in the rocks, and they could see the gorge below. And dotted here and there were many bonfires blazing.

“This is not usual,” muttered Keiff, frowning. “My men do not burn such fires. All is not well here.”

“Come!” said the prince. “Let us ride down into the gorge—and we’ll soon know the truth.”

But they did not ride down into the gorge.

For presently, as they were about to emerge from the pass, a sharp order reached them from the darkness.

“Halt!” came the command, spoken in English. “Advance another yard and we fire!”

Prince Zeno nearly choked in his consternation.

“Who speaks?” he shouted thickly.

“Hallo, hallo!” came the voice. “Look out, boys—trouble! Isn’t that you, Prince Zeno? Lord Dorrimore speaking—and, incidentally, Lord Dorrimore is at the moment covering you with a handy little rifle!”

“What is this?” panted Keiff, turning in his saddle, and staring at the prince.

“You should know,” retorted the prince bitterly. “You fool, Keiff! You hopeless, dunderheaded fool! I trust you as I have never trusted any man—and what is the result?”

“Have a care!” said Miklos Keiff threateningly. “I allow no man to speak to me thus—prince or no prince!”

“Must we quarrel here—with the enemy listening?” hissed Prince Zeno. “Do you expect me to compliment you, Keiff? I come here, and I find these Englishmen in control of the gorge! What of your sixty men? Where are they? You left Lord Dorrimore and these boys prisoners—and now they are free! Not only free, but in possession of arms!”

Miklos Keiff nearly choked. He could utter no words. The situation baffled him.

“We’re still waiting at this end of the line,” came Lord Dorrimore’s cheerful voice.

“It might interest you to know, Prince Zeno, that over a dozen rifles are pointed in your direction. The exit to the pass is quite narrow, and if you are rash enough to make a rush, we can pick you off one by one as you emerge.”

Prince Zeno managed to control himself.

“What has been happening here?” he asked.

“Well, it’s quite a long story, and I’m sure you won’t expect me to go into details,” replied Dorrie smoothly. “But it happens that all your men are bottled up in the caves. We hold the gorge. We have plenty of rifles, and heaps of ammunition. If you’re spoiling for a fight, we’re quite ready to give you one. That’s about the size of it, in a nutshell.”

Prince Zeno listened to these words with rage burning in his heart. Miklos Keiff’s men imprisoned—the gorge in possession of the English party!

It was disaster!

For it meant that the whole of Miklos Keiff’s forces were bottled up in the Grod Valley. Unless this gorge could be retaken, the whole of Prince Zeno’s elaborate plan for seizing the Caronian throne would fall to pieces!

Lord Dorrimore waited calmly.

The arrival of the enemy was not entirely unexpected; and Dorrie himself was by no means upset. After the gruelling hard work he had been forced to do of late—after being treated like a slave—he was keen enough to have a good scrap with Miklos Keiff.

Umlosi, too, was ready.

The great Kutana chieftain was positively spoiling for a fight. These people had sentenced him to death, and he had escaped merely because Prince Zeno had desired no bloodshed; but since then he had been kept a prisoner in a dark cavern.

Umlosi had armed himself with a roughly-made spear. He had fashioned it himself, and he preferred it to any firearm.

“Wau! Why does N’Kose wait?” he murmured, in his rumbling voice. “Sayest thou the word, my master, and I will spring upon these dogs and strike them down!”

“A thundering good idea, old man, but it’s only fair to give ’em a chance,” replied Dorrie, grinning in the darkness. “I’m not altogether sure that our mutual friend, Umtagati, would approve, either.”

“Thou are surely wrong, N’Kose,” said Umlosi. “For is not Umtagati a mighty fighter?”

“None better,” agreed Dorrie. “But he’s not very keen on starting the trouble. You get the idea? If these people set the ball rolling, it’ll be a different thing.”

All round the boys were waiting, their hearts thudding with excitement. Their fingers were ready on the triggers of their rifles. Handforth, Nipper, Reggie Pitt, Buster Boots, and several others were included in this party.

They knew that the preparations were nearly complete. At any moment Nelson Lee might give the word for them all to march

out of the gorge, on their journey to Nid. And now Prince Zeno and Miklos Keiff had arrived!

The night promised to be an exciting one, after all.

"You are very clever, Lord Dorrimore," came Prince Zeno's voice, calm and steady. "We can do nothing but accept the situation, and retire."

"Rather a pity," said Dorrie regretfully.

"Yes? You would prefer to fight?"

"I was only thinking that it would be most entertaining to have a pot-shot at you, my friend," replied Lord Dorrimore frankly. "And if I happened to score a bull's-eye, I should certainly be doing Caronia a good turn."

"You are so fond of your joke, eh?" retorted Prince Zeno sneeringly.

And then, at the same second, Miklos Keiff suddenly roared out a word of command. In a flash, Lord Dorrimore knew that it had been prearranged.

"Look out!" yelled his lordship. "Steady yourselves, boys! They're chancing it!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A rattle of rifle fire echoed and re-echoed in the narrow entrance of the pass; flashes of livid flame showed.

It was the bandits who were firing. But every bullet hissed past harmlessly. Lord Dorrimore and the boys were practically invisible in the darkness, and it was impossible for Miklos Keiff and his men to take accurate aim.

"Oh! So that's the game, is it?" roared Dorrie angrily. "Go ahead, boys! Fire!"

Crack-crack! Crack-crack!

The St. Frank's fellows replied with a will. They fired steadily, and at least two of the bandits, shrieking with agony, dropped out of their saddles.

Miklos Keiff heard a bullet hum past his own ear; Prince Zeno heard it, too, and he changed colour.

Crack-crack! Crack-crack!

It was short and sharp. Two other men fell. Suddenly a black form, as black as the night itself, loomed up between Zeno and Keiff. Umlosi was on the job.

His spear flashed, and if Prince Zeno had not pulled his horse right back on its haunches, he would certainly have died at that moment. He swung right round, and his voice sounded in hoarse command.

"Back—back!" he shouted. "They're too strong for us! Back, Keiff!"

Miklos Keiff, now receiving Umlosi's attentions, was of the opinion that retreat was indicated. Umlosi was thrusting again, and only the backward lurch of a frightened horse saves Keiff from that deadly spear.

The whole incident was over within a few seconds.

The bandits retreated, leaving the wounded men on the ground. Riderless horses were galloping into the gorge.

"By St. Peter!" panted Miklos Keiff. "The black man—he is possessed of devils!"

The rebels galloped back into the pass, and after they had vanished, Lord Dorrimore

made swift inquiries amongst the boys. Nobody had been hit, so there was nothing to worry about.

"One or two wounded here, but I'm afraid we can't do much for them now," said Dorrie. "Where are you, Umlosi? You silly chunk of blackness! What on earth do you mean by dashing forward like that? You might have been potted by one of our own bullets!"

"'Twas no fight, N'Kose!" grumbled Umlosi disgustedly. "For no sooner did we attack than the dogs fled!"

Nelson Lee arrived, and he quickly heard the report.

"Well, it is fortunate that none of you are hurt," he said. "Quickly now! We had better be getting a move on. Everything is ready for an immediate start."

"But we can't do that," said Dorrie, staring. "We can't leave this pass unprotected. They'll be after us if we do."

"We shall have to take a chance, Dorrie," said Lee crisply. "They won't know that we are moving and they will naturally assume that the exit to the pass is still guarded. They're not likely to attack again for some little time."

"Meanwhile, we'll slip out, eh?" asked Dorrie, nodding. "Not a bad wheeze."

"It is the only wheeze," replied Lee. "Zeno's force is comparatively small—but by now he has probably sent a man back. By the morning, there will be hundreds ready for the attack—perhaps thousands."

"Yes, the darkness will help us a lot here," said Lord Dorrimore eagerly. "They'll think we're still on guard—but we'll be doing a midnight flit. Fine!"

"If only we can reach Nid, we can carry things off with a high hand," said Nelson Lee, in a grim voice. "If necessary, we will commandeer a train. Once out of the bandit country, we shall be all right—and we have King Victor with us. It would be absolute insanity to remain here."

BACK in the pass, Prince Zeno came to a quick decision.

"We do not know what has happened here," he said harshly. "But your men, Keiff, have been overpowered and defeated by a mere handful of schoolboys and schoolgirls."

"It is the man, Nelson Lee!" muttered Miklos Keiff. "Did I not tell you that he is a worker of magic? By no other means could my men have been overcome."

"Magic or no magic, your precious men are locked up in the caves," said the prince bitterly. "You've let me down, Keiff! We must have reinforcements as quickly as possible. And we must not lose sight of the fact that these people might make an attempt to get away."

"But they are guarding the pass!"

"Some of them are—under Lord Dorrimore," said the prince cunningly. "But what of Nelson Lee himself? He was not there—neither was King Victor. How do we know? Perhaps they are escaping even now

—to Nid! Once they get there, they will be virtually free. There is the train—there are good roads and automobiles. At all costs, we must prevent them getting through the outer pass."

"You think I can perform the magic?" asked Miklos Keiff in wonder.

"No; but you have a system of signalling, haven't you?"

"By St. Peter, yes!"

"Then instruct your men at once," said the prince. "You have others watching, on the far side of the gorge, have you not? Send them a message. You signal by means of a bonfire, I think?"

Miklos Keiff understood, and some of his confidence returned. He turned to his men, and he gave them quick instructions.

MEANWHILE, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi and the boys had slipped silently away in the darkness.

The exit of the pass was left unguarded; but the enemy did not even suspect this.

Carefully avoiding the glare of the bonfires—which were now, in fact, dying down—Nelson Lee led the whole party towards the outer pass—that rocky road which led down to Nid.

Most of the boys—and the girls, too—were carrying packs. They were prepared with food and drink. They were leaving, but they were not fleeing. They had attained their object, for King Victor was amongst them.

Nelson Lee had not said much, but he knew that there were many difficulties ahead. That outer pass was almost as tricky as the inner one. It was a narrow road, leading through rocky canyons, where the crags rose precipitously on either side.

And some of Miklos Keiff's men were there. Only a few, but there would be sufficient to cause quite a lot of trouble.

However, it was Lee's policy to meet trouble when it came. He and Dorrie led the way now, their rifles gripped in their hands.

They had reached the farther side of the gorge when Lee glanced back. Everything was black except for the dull glow of the dying fires. But no! There was something else!

High up on the hills, near the inner pass, a great new bonfire was blazing.

The effect was most uncanny. It seemed to be hovering in the sky itself.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Dorrie, staring.

They had all paused, and they were watching in wonder.

As they watched they saw that bonfire suddenly blotted out, as though a hose had been turned upon it. But a second later it reappeared. Then out it went again, only to appear once more.

"What are they having a game at, sir?" asked Handforth blankly.

Lee gritted his teeth.

"Signals!" he said grimly.

"My only sainted aunt!"

"But—but what does it mean, sir?"

"It means that there are some more of Keiff's men on this side of the gorge—probably in the pass which lies ahead of us," replied Lee. "Look! It is a kind of dot-and-dash code."

It was quite true. Sometimes the bonfire would be in view for an appreciable number of seconds; then it would be blotted out, and as suddenly appear for a second.

Unquestionably, it was a sort of Morse-code system of signalling.

"Come!" said Lee urgently. "We are wasting precious time! By hurrying, we might get through before Keiff's men can obey the order which is now being given. But we must lose no time. Hurry, all of you!"

They pressed on, excited and anxious. Not many of the boys desired to remain now. The night signalling seemed ominous. They were to be surrounded probably by these grim bandit enemies.

They entered the pass, and at Lee's suggestion he and Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi formed a kind of advance guard. The rest followed a fifty yards in the rear. Umlosi, in fact, had gone right ahead.

He was unarmed, except for that spear, but his eyesight was like that of a forest animal; his hearing was uncanny. It was better that he should go first, so that he could detect any lurking danger.

On they went, the rocks now crowding in upon them, frowning overhead, rising up sheerly on both sides.

They approached a section of the pass where it narrowed until it was a mere slit in the mountain. High overhead, the stars twinkled brilliantly. But in the pass it was pitch blackness.

There seemed to be no enemies to bar the progress of the fugitives.

And then it was that the party received an unpleasant shock.

Suddenly, there was a blinding blaze of lurid fire immediately ahead, on the ground level. It was instantly followed by a shattering explosion.

"Back!" roared Nelson Lee, his voice drowned by the dreadful noise.

They were all deafened. The echo of the explosion rumbled and roared like thunder. Rocks came crashing down perilously near at hand, and soon the air was filled with choking clouds of dust.

When all the din had died away an absolute silence prevailed.

"What—what happened?"

"We only escaped by the skin of our teeth!" said one of the girls. "They meant to blow us all up—but the explosion happened a minute too soon!"

"My only hat!"

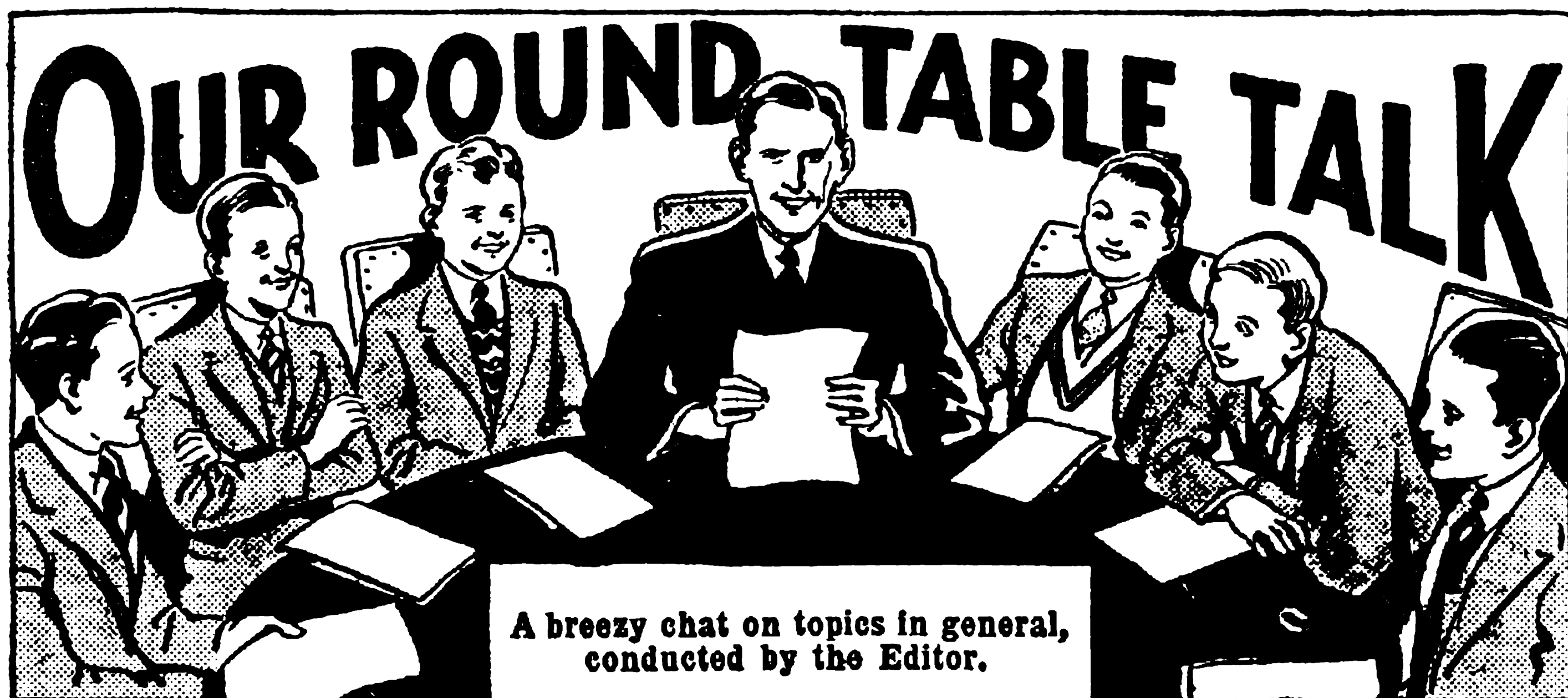
"What a hair-breadth escape!"

Nelson Lee felt, however, that the explosion had not been intended to blow them up. The plan was much more cunning.

Lee, running forward, was glad to find that Umlosi had come to no harm. Dorrie

(Continued on page 44.)

Take Your Seats, Chums, For a Cheery Chat.



THIS week's acknowledgments: Ernest S. Holman (Leyton), H. Quigley (Higher Bebington), A. A. Angus (Sheffield), F. Hamilton Browne—2 letters (Tooting) John R. Fearn (Blackpool), E. Parkinson (Westcliff-on-Sea), David Andrew Moorhead (Castlereagh), Norman Marshall (Westmount, Quebec), G. Williams (Bethnal Green), Reg. T. Staples (Walworth), Barbara Ives (Jersey), Arthur C. Brooks (S.W.9), W. Reg. Osborne (Leicester), A. Urquhart (Vancouver, B.C.), Norman B. White (Radcliffe), Kenneth Wallace (Bolton), Charles R. K. Kenney (Melbourne), Eric J. Rodson, (Caswell, N.S.W.), Thomas Hutchinson (Johannesburg), Master J. Kennedy (Coventry), Ralph E. Clarry (Toronto), Walter S. James (Georgetown, British Guiana), Ernest Johnson (Tottenham), Douglas Marrs (Croydon), Ralph Leadbeater (Clapham), Ben Eyton (Ilford), Thomas Rathbone (Walsall), K. R. Humphreys (Hucknall), "Well-Wisher" (No Address).

Molly Stapleton is at the Moor View School, Ernest S. Holman, and she and Willy Handforth are as chummy as ever. Eileen Dare, the lady detective, who once saved Molly from some crooks, is still actively engaged in her profession. It is not unlikely that she may appear in some future stories.

Peter Short left St. Frank's ages ago. Arthur A. Angus. At one time, he and Teddy long shared the same study, and the chaps used to call them the Long and Short of it. He was a tall, thin junior, in direct contrast to Teddy Long, who is short and tubby.

The first issue of the Old Paper, H. Quigley, was published on June 12th, 1915, and it contained a story called "The Mystery of Limehouse Reach." Please tell your sister that she will *never* be too old to join in "Our Round Table Talk." Letters from all readers of either sex, and of all ages, are equally welcomed and all are heartily appreciated.

Timothy Tucker is not a character, Julius Harman, who can be frequently featured in the stories. Readers would soon become fed up with him. At the same time, you are quite right in hinting that "T.T." has slipped right into the background. The same with Ezra Quirke and Enoch Snipe and Charley Bangs. But Quirke is not a St. Frank's boy, anyhow, and if he did reappear in the stories he would have to come in, as it were, from outside. Quite a number of readers have expressed surprise that "Boomerang" Bangs is not regularly played in the St. Frank's Junior XI. But there's a good reason. Bangs is a devastating bowler to put on for a quick change, but he is no batsman, he never was. And on the English wickets it was found that his deadliness as a bowler was greatly lessened.

Market Donning, where Ezra Quirke, lives with his aunt, is situated some miles beyond Bannington, Ralph Clarry. As regards the swimming-baths, they are certainly in the School House—not, of course, in the main section, but in a kind of annex.

Nipper & Co. have been smitten with the latest craze, F. Hamilton Browne, as you suggest. They are as keen as mustard on hiking, and if they had spent their summer holidays at Dorrimore Castle, as originally planned, they would have gone for quite an extensive hike. It had all been arranged. But the sudden departure for Caronia rather upset this scheme. And when they return it will be almost too late, for the football season will be on. Your inability to picture the River Stowe is rather unfortunate. However, in an early story it may be possible to give special attention to a description of the river's course.

All letters for discussion on this page must be addressed to The Editor, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any points in these letters requiring Mr. Brook's personal attention will be placed before him by the Editor.

The PHANTOM FOE!

By JOHN BREARLEY

The opening chapters of this thrilling mystery and adventure serial are retold on page 42.

At Bay!

SPLASHING knee-deep through the water, Snub tumbled aboard the dinghy, cast off the mooring-rope, and, with the boat bobbing vigorously, tailed on the main halyards and began to hoist. A wild thrill of hope surged through him, forcing strength into his bruised, aching muscles. But the

thrill changed next moment to leaden despair. His escape was discovered. That sentry had barred his path a fatal minute too long.

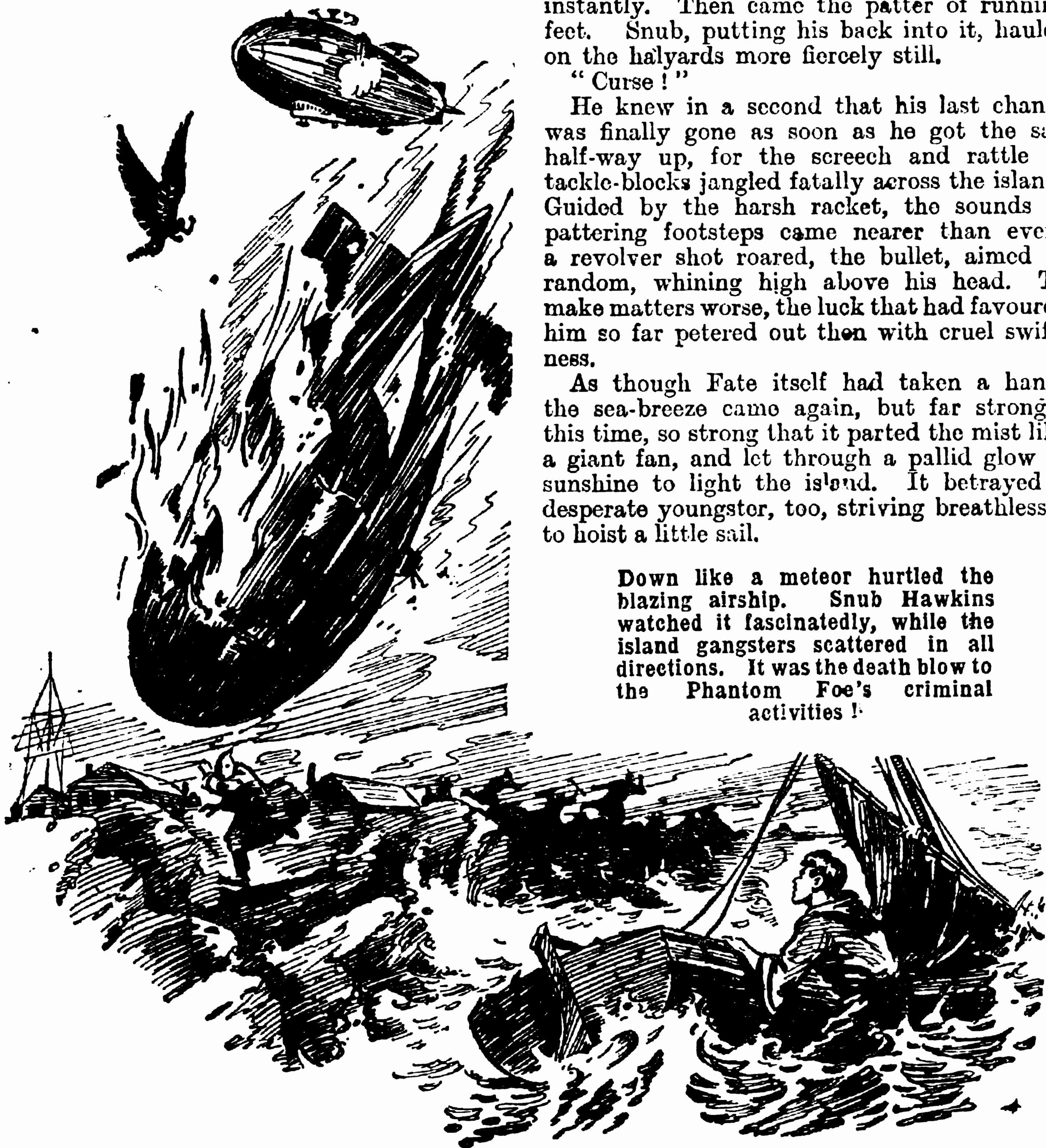
Someone must have peered into the empty hut, for clear and shrill sounded a whistle from behind him, ringing out above the waves in its piercing call of alarm. A faint chorus of shouts answered, growing louder and nearer instantly. Then came the patter of running feet. Snub, putting his back into it, hauled on the halyards more fiercely still.

"Curse!"

He knew in a second that his last chance was finally gone as soon as he got the sail half-way up, for the screech and rattle of tackle-blocks jangled fatally across the island. Guided by the harsh racket, the sounds of pattering footsteps came nearer than ever; a revolver shot roared, the bullet, aimed at random, whining high above his head. To make matters worse, the luck that had favoured him so far petered out then with cruel swiftness.

As though Fate itself had taken a hand, the sea-breeze came again, but far stronger this time, so strong that it parted the mist like a giant fan, and let through a pallid glow of sunshine to light the island. It betrayed a desperate youngster, too, striving breathlessly to hoist a little sail.

Down like a meteor hurtled the blazing airship. Snub Hawkins watched it fascinatedly, while the island gangsters scattered in all directions. It was the death blow to the Phantom Foe's criminal activities!



Crack ! Craa-ack ! Snub let go all holds and ducked. Flying lead screeched all around him instantly ; a great splinter, torn from the starboard bulwark, hissed into the air. In a flash, he realised the hopelessness of his position. Bitter failure had come in the moment of victory. Then, from a struggling lad, he hardened at once into a cold, hard-eyed fighter, well-armed and with his back to the wall.

They'd got him all right—got him square on a bobbing target.

"O.K. Now come and fetch me, you scum !" he gritted.

Snarling a defiance, he whipped up the captured rifle and slid over the side and into the water like an otter. In the shelter of the boat he crouched, drenched to the skin, but with stubborn jaw outthrust. Men came racing towards him from all points, firing hard as they came. And as soon as he saw them, he answered—with a prompt and accurate, hard-hitting stream of lead.

Crack ! The surprise-defence was terrific. The leading man, flinging up his arms, pitched forward and lay where he fell. Crack, crack ! Another, reeling from a bullet through the shoulder, dropped groaning behind a rock. Paralysed by the savage resistance, the others pitched headlong to the ground, crawling snakily to cover. They were up against a marksman and they knew it !

It was Snub's last stand for his life. And with a magazine-rifle, gun, and cartridge belt for when they rushed him, he was going to make it a good one.

A Siege Ends Swiftly !

ANY hope of escape he had now abandoned and rescue was simply a vain dream. Up to his waist in water, he unbuckled the gun-belt clumsily from his hips and draped it round his shoulders, then clung tightly with one hand to the side of the boat. Unmoored and without a sail, the little vessel swayed and rolled uncertainly until the incoming waves took charge, throwing it back against the rocky island shore with a bump. There it lay, tilted on one side, a sturdy shelter for the armed lad it had dragged along.

The mist had drifted far out to sea by this, leaving the grim bleak island clear in the evening sunlight. For the first time, Snub, in quick repeated glimpses, saw the Phantom's lair plainly.

In the centre, half hidden by strewn rocks, lay the cluster of dwelling huts, a skeleton hangar with drably-camouflaged struts and roof, and a workshop alongside. Farther off, a slender wireless-mast rose against a background of tangled thorns, the only vegetation. The mast, he judged, was a good two hundred yards off ; and sighting swiftly, he chanced a shot at the difficult target. He

missed ; and in reply came the flash of guns from behind scattered rocks dotting the island fifty yards inshore.

It was the signal for renewed spite. The crooks, angered by casualties, fired again and again, yet lacked sufficient nerve to show themselves for longer than a split-second. Snub's shooting had them rattled.

Ceaseless blind volleys slammed at him, plunking into the boat or raising watery spurts beyond. Once a hoarse voice bellowed : " Rush him ! " and peering hastily round the dinghy's blunt stern, he let go a snap-shot at a head rising from the nearest rock. The head vanished ; no rush came. He grinned wickedly and fired again.

How many were up against him he had no idea. But he was keeping them mighty busy. Suddenly, from some other rocks farther along, two rifles cracked together, the bullets almost scraping the boat. He shrank deeper into shelter, but, on poking his head round the vessel's bow, was rewarded by a bullet that missed his face by a bare inch. Enfilading fire, eh ? Yes, they'd got him nicely taped !

He crouched amidships, watching the two gunmen away down the shore. Eventually his lynx eyes caught a slow cautious movement, and he fired at the same instant. A shriek ripped out and a stiff motionless arm jerked from behind the rock. A second time he squeezed trigger—and winced at the hollow click of his rifle-bolt. The Winchester was empty at last.

With that disaster came a sudden triumphant roar from the island. The words were vague ; but he understood them well enough, and flicked the gun coolly from its holster. Cunning hounds ! Experts that they were—the gang had counted his shots ; an old dodge, but effective. They knew that his Winchester was useless. The rush would come now for sure.

It did. Heralded by a tremendous hammering of lead, fully a dozen men leapt from shelter, and clattered grimly towards the boat. Cold with rage, Snub swung round the dinghy's stern, his own gun ready. He got the leading attacker squarely, dropping the man in his tracks—aimed at the second. Then something struck the Colt a terrific blow, knocking it clean from his grasp into two feet of water.

Snub grunted savagely as he fell back.

" Huh ! Bull's-eye at last. Wish you luck ! " he sneered ; and crouching, he yanked the heavy cartridge-belt from his shoulder with one hand. The other hung numb and useless. Bracing himself against the side of the dinghy, he waited with his one remaining weapon swinging. The fight was all over now with a vengeance. But, by glory, he'd brain the first one who tackled him, and go down to a finish beneath the waves and rocks.

Thus he waited for the end ; tense and still, like a cornered wildcat. Bullets thudded into the boat, harsh voices shouted and

heavy boots stamped. And then, in one breathless second, everything changed.

The firing ceased; men halted; all their voices merged into one great startled shout of amazement and alarm. Just the one roar, ending as sharply as it began. A nerve-wracking silence of suspense followed. It was as though a soundproof curtain had suddenly smothered the island.

Where, an instant before, victorious bedlam had raged, now all was still. The oncoming crooks seemed to have changed to stone. Warily at last Snub peeped from his shelter, wondering what new dodge was coming, and prepared to fling himself back explosively. But there was no need to duck at all.

The gangsters were less than thirty yards from him, halted in mid-stride towards his boat. Yet now they seemed almost to have forgotten his existence. In crouching attitudes they dotted the strip of shore, every man stiff with fear, and their faces turned fixedly to the sky. Snub stared at them cautiously, heedless of danger—for none existed. And presently he, too, looked upward, following the direction of their bewildered eyes.

His breath left his lungs in a single harsh gasp. Away out to sea, high up and heading towards the island, streaked a bright, slim airship, slicing the air as a torpedo cuts through water. For a sickening moment he thought it was the Phantom's ship, returning with the arch-criminal himself; and his blood ran cold. But as the swiftly approaching vessel twisted strangely at top speed, and the level evening sun glittered on the full length of its hull he recognised it. As he did so he shattered the island-stillness with a fierce, full-throated whoop of joy.

It was the Thunderer. Thurston Kyle's own ship, with the Kittens aboard, hissing all-out towards the lair of the Phantom Foe!

The Aerial Duel!

SNUB danced in water to his waist like a madman. But *was* the ship racing for the island? His jubilation ceased a moment later as he stared again, brows puckered in a frown. Instead of

coming straight on, the Thunderer began diving, twisting, and darting through the sky like a great silver-red fish. What the dickens was the matter? And why was it flying so low, instead of its usual height of twenty thousand feet or more? And—and—by the great Horn Spoon of Samson! It was firing fast and viciously.

Firing! Distinctly, as the Thunderer surged into another swing, the gasping youngster saw tiny flickers of light belching from its turret. In his mind he could see Alf Jenkins or "Sailor" Peters at the quick-firer, with two other Kittens squinting along the machine-guns. Firing, by gosh! But he could see no target.

Around the Thunderer the sky was brightly clear, save for clouds of approaching dusk and the returning sea-mist on the horizon. But if Snub could see no target, those aboard the Night Hawk's vessel plainly could, for the ship circled and swerved on her course as though towed by an irresistible magnet. Over the rugged sea she darted, as though manœuvring in a determined shadow-fight. And suddenly, as more yellow jets sparkled from the turret, Snub guessed at what she was aiming.

The Phantom's "invisible" airship! Realisation came like a blow. Somehow, somewhere, the Thunderer had caught the bandit-ship at last, pursuing her back to the island-lair. Heedless of the armed gangsters on shore, themselves oblivious to him, he strained his eyes to watch this weird battle: a shining airship attacking an unseen enemy over a lonely sea. It was easy to guess from the Thunderer's lightning movements what her opponent was trying to do. Sinking ever lower and cruising in zig-zag spirals, the Phantom's men were evidently doing their desperate best to berth their ship on the island, there to fight it out to the bitter end.

Outgunned—for the Phantom's sole weapons were his smoke-screen and Yellow Gas—the pirate was at the mercy of the swift, vengeful craft following every turn like grim death. Snub wondered why no smoke-screen gushed forth to hide her now; unaware that the thick

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

THE NIGHT HAWK, known to the world as Thurston Kyle, scientist, declares war on THE PHANTOM FOE, a ruthless criminal, who has commenced a reign of terror, killing, kidnapping, looting. Always he attacks amid a cloud of yellow gas, which stupefies his victims; then he disappears literally into air, for he directs operations from an invisible airship. Kyle combines with CAPTAIN FRANK ARTHURS, of Scotland Yard, to bring the criminal to book, but their plans are frustrated owing to a leakage of information. Lucius Pelton, of the Treasury, vanishes, and Arthurs immediately suspects that he is the Phantom Foe. The Night Hawk severs his connection with Scotland Yard; he intends to play a lone hand, for he also has his suspicions regarding the identity of the Phantom. The Phantom announces that he intends to attack the towns of Porthampton and Southtown; Kyle goes out to meet him in his own airship, the Thunderer. Flying through the night on wings, his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, sights the Phantom's craft, attacks, and is captured. He is taken to the gang's secret headquarters, on a lonely island off the Hebrides. Meanwhile, the Night Hawk kidnaps Captain Arthurs, taking him aboard his airship—and there accuses him of being the Phantom Foe. Snub escapes from his prison on the island and reaches a sailing-dinghy.

(Now read on.)

brown fumes had been exhausted long since in a breathless aerial hide-and-seek that had been raging for an hour or more twenty-five thousand feet up. But the Yellow Gas was still in action; he saw a wall of hideous vapour stain the air of a sudden. And as sharply the Thunderer swerved to avoid it.

Gliding away from the peril, the Night Hawk's vessel turned on her course with dazzling neatness. Next instant, the turning-point in the fantastic duel arrived; a crisis whose speed made Snub yell hoarsely and fetched a groan from the stricken men ashore. Above the Phantom's airship, wings slashing madly in one last frantic attempt to get on terms, hurtled Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, grenade in hand.

Three times he had savagely attacked—and failed on account of speed. But now his airship had herded the pirate back, crowding the vessel into his ruthless clutches. Firing stopped aboard the Thunderer as he swooped fiercely. The enemy, plainly seen by the Night Hawk through his goggles, swung away and sank lower still. He had one tense second in which to aim and throw as the leading starboard-window slid past. But that second was enough.

Straight and deadly flew the heavy grenade, flung with unerring force. Followed the crash of glass, drowned in an instant by a reverberating explosion that shook the ship from stem to stern. The venomous impact sent her reeling aside, shuddering like a dying leviathan. It checked her speed instantly.

And more than that, by destroying the delicate ultra-violet controls inside, the explosion stripped her of all "invisibility," as though a cloak had been torn from her hull. For the first time in her piratical career, the Phantom's ship cruised the sky visible to the naked eye!

The Night Hawk's desperate shot was sensational. Gradually, fathom by fathom, the pirate emerged from obscurity, sleek, beautiful—and badly crippled. And as she hung in mid-air, fighting vainly to keep aloft—Spang-ggg! The Thunderer's quick-firer cracked spitefully, once more and for the last time.

The fight was over. What followed was appalling in its swiftness. Snub Hawkins, huddled in tossing sea-water, marked the finish as he crouched instinctively closer to his boat. While the gangsters ashore, danger jerking them from their trance, screamed and scattered for their lives.

Down like a meteor, down in a lurching, toppling dive, hurtled the shattered ship. To the sound of a shrill whistling rush, as of an express train, the sky above Snub's head was blotted out suddenly by a great, dark, flame-tortured shape. A crash thundered across the sea while yet he held his breath. An uproar of rending, tearing metal, and clash of corrugated iron, so explosive that it stunned and deafened him.

Smash into the midst of the island huts landed the Phantom's superb craft in her death-plunge, bursting them asunder. Shapeless spinning objects whirled high into the air, flung across the island by the tremendous force, lending added clangour to the din; the entire corrugated roof of the workshop hissed across the dinghy's mast and skittered into the sea. Hitting the rocky ground at full speed, the pirate bounded into the air again like an idly-flung can; turned right over in a kicking circle. And the rest was lost in a column of flame and smoke, that gushed hideously to the skies.

The Phantom Foe Arrives!

SHAKEN despite his joy by the mad bedlam of the disaster, Snub leaned against his boat, too limp to move for a while. After a time, however, he waded out cautiously into the open, to gasp

at the distorted ruin before him. What had been a powerful airship, equipped with all the arts of science into an evil menace to Britain, was now nothing but a twisted hulk of ripped steel and scrap, twisted vanes and gaping holes. Surrounded by the wreckage of huts and hangar, the monstrous bulk lay across the island. And over all, like a funeral pyre, rose a screen of smoke a hundred feet high.

The Phantom's gang and lair were finished.

Wearily Snub splashed through the water, with vague ideas of rescue-work in his head, hopeless though he knew them to be. Before he had reached the shore, however, he had to fling himself down as a bullet from one of the desperate island-defenders whanged against a rock and out to sea. To his joy, other shots answered instantly from the air, the whiplike reports of automatics; and craning his neck, he was just in time to see the Night Hawk, magnificent and terrifying on cutting wings, swoop in a long curve to defend him, guns aflame. Like a darting swallow, he swerved here and there at reckless speed, firing as he went.

(Don't miss the final thrill-packed instalment of this serial in next Wednesday's issue. It concludes in sensational manner.)

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PRISONERS OF THE PASS!

(Continued from page 38.)

joined them, and they fought their way through the clouds of dust.

And within a few moments they knew the truth.

Just ahead the rocks had collapsed in great masses—thousands of tons had fallen in upon the pass!

It was blocked—it was absolutely filled in by an impassable barrier!

This, then, was the result of Miklos Keiff's signalling.

"We're in a serious predicament, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee steadily. "There's no escape for us now. We were saying, not long ago, that we had Miklos Keiff and his army bottled up in the Grod Valley. But Miklos Keiff now has us bottled up in this outer gorge."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Dorrie, taking a deep breath. "So there's no escape to Nid! It's got to be a fight to a finish, after all!"

"Yes, there's nothing else for it," agreed Nelson Lee grimly. "We must get back, old man—back to that gorge! And we must hold it against all-comers!"

"You'll probably call me a bloodthirsty chump, but I'm glad!" said Dorrie, with a burst of enthusiasm.

THE END.

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