

POWERFUL SCHOOL & THRILLING YARN
& DETECTIVE STORY & OF THE GREAT WAR
INSIDE!

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NELSON LEE
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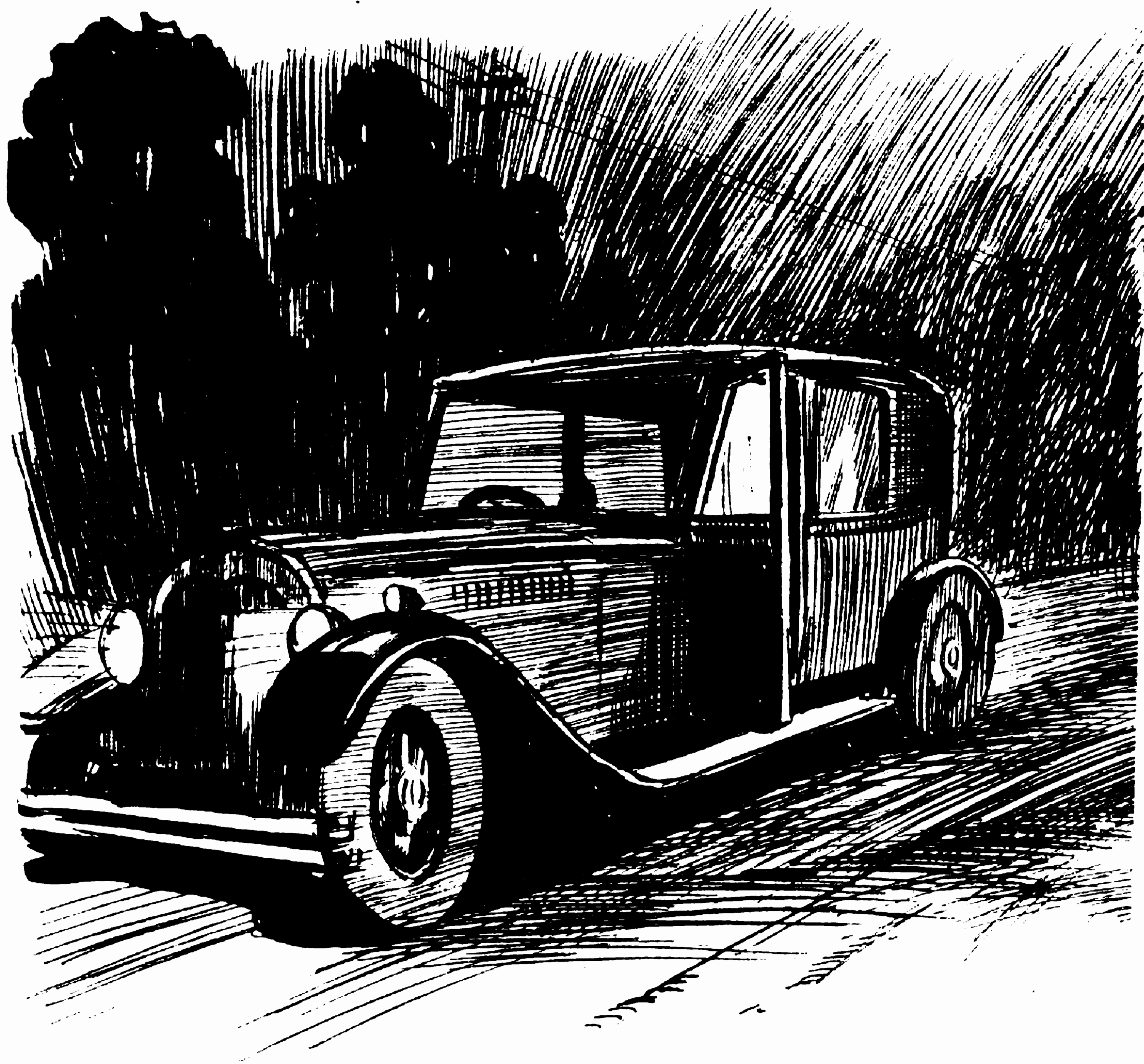


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OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 4th, 1933.

The FIGHTING



CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Binks' New Lodger.

THE kindly-faced old man closed the shop door, with its old-fashioned jangling bell; and Nipper & Co., who were occupying most of the little counter, moved obligingly aside.

"Thank you kindly, young gents, but I ain't buying anything," said the old man, with a smile. "Feels like more rain, Mr. Binks. My rheumatism's rare bad this afternoon."

"We've had more than enough rain lately, I'm thinking," said Mr. Binks heavily. "The weather seems to get worse and worse."

The old man passed through to the back

of the shop, and the St. Frank's juniors heard him climbing the stairs.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West thought nothing of the incident; but Nipper had become thoughtful. They were the only occupants of the village tuckshop, with the exception of the proprietor himself. It was a windy, wintry afternoon, and, lessons over, the chums of Study C had strolled into Belton to make a few purchases. These included a selection of Mr. Binks' confectionery, which they were now busily consuming.

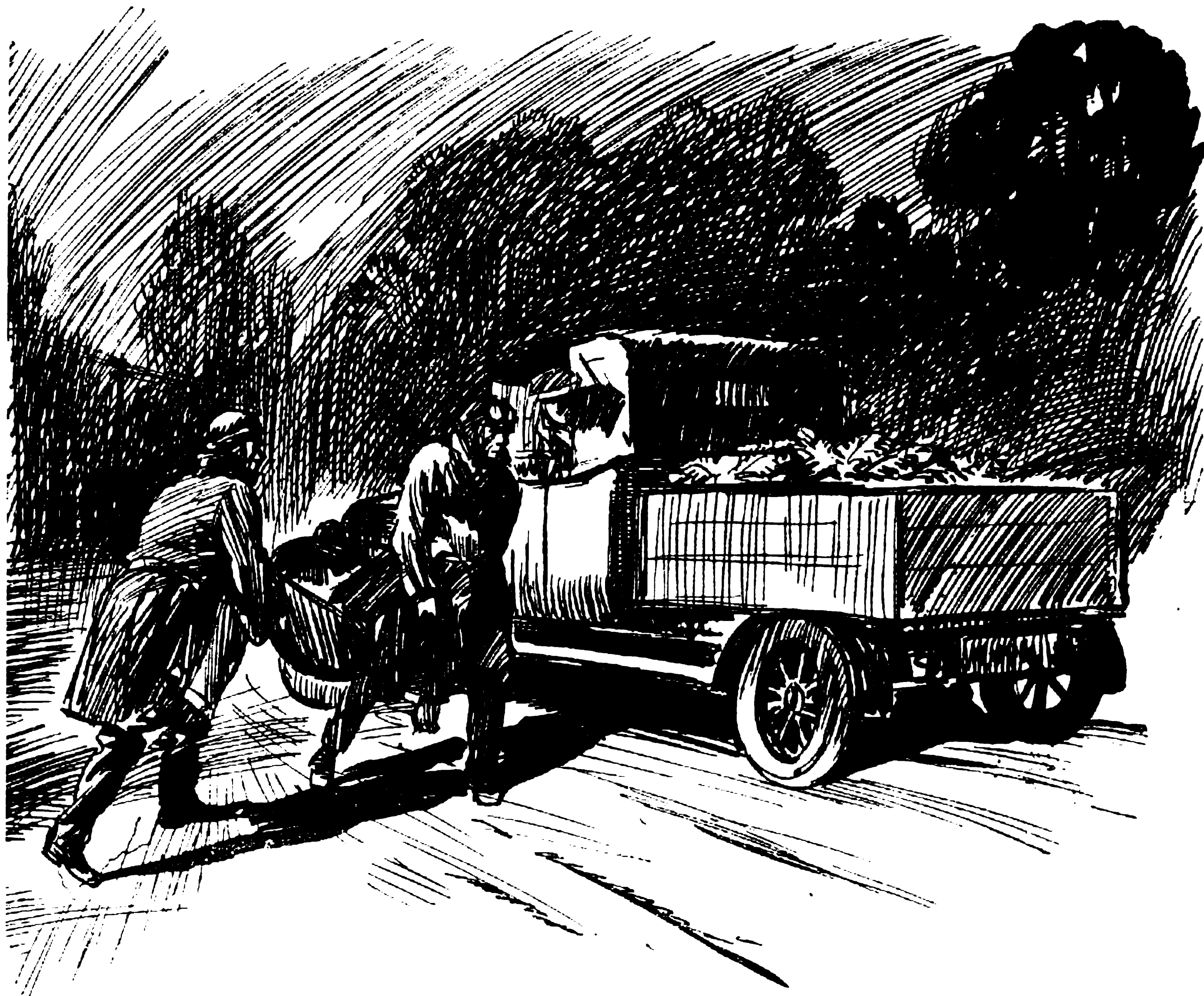
"Who's the old gentleman?" asked Nipper casually. "Relation of yours, Mr. Binks?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Binks, slightly embarrassed. "He's staying here. He'll have been here a fortnight come Saturday. Sort of boarding here."

—Starring Nelson Lee, Nipper And The Chums Of St. Frank's!

SIX!

By EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS



The titanic battle between Nelson Lee and the Fellowship of Fear, a dreaded organisation of Terrorists who have fastened their ruthless claws on St. Frank's, sees the Fates dead against the famous detective!

"A lodger?" asked Tommy Watson in his blunt way.

"Might as well admit it, young gentlemen—yes," said Mr. Binks resignedly. "The missus and I haven't taken in lodgers before, but times are so mortal hard that we're glad enough of every extra penny. And the old gentleman isn't any trouble. We liked the look of him the very minute he came, and asked if we could let him have a room."

"Yes, he seems a nice old boy," said Nipper.

"Old Army man—sergeant-major," explained Mr. Binks. "Name of Lambert.

He's an old Bellton man, I understand; left the village as a lad, to join the Army. Seen a lot of service in India, and out East generally. He thought he'd like to settle in his old district, and as he has no folks of any kind— Well, you know what it is. He doesn't cause us any trouble. Keeps to his room mostly."

Later, when the three Removites were walking up the lane to the school, Sir Montie gave Nipper a shrewd, inquiring glance.

"Any particular reason, old boy, for bein' so inquisitive about Mr. Binks' lodger?" he asked.

"Only that I'm suspicious of any new face in the district," replied Nipper, lowering his voice. "No need for us to talk much—but you know how things stand. New tenants in outlying cottages, and new lodgers in the village, are all worth a spot of attention."

TOMMY WATSON and Tregellis-West understood. These were exceptional times at St. Frank's—although, on the surface, everything appeared to be normal. There were only six schoolboys in the whole of St. Frank's—Nipper and his chums, and Handforth & Co., of Study D—who knew that Mr. James Kingswood, the headmaster, was menaced by a relentless organisation of terrorists known as the Fellowship of Fear. These fanatics were conducting a world-wide campaign, and their activities were mostly under the surface; secretive, insidious, remorseless. They were attempting to force schoolmasters, all over the country, to adopt their own harmful teachings and doctrines. It was impossible to know exactly how much success the fellowship had gained, for many schoolmasters, terrorised, were obeying. Others, more courageous, had defied the fellowship. And some of them had mysteriously disappeared, as though into thin air. Scotland Yard knew that these unfortunate schoolmasters had been kidnapped by the grim secret society—either to be kept in captivity, or to be killed. Since they had disappeared, no trace of them had been found.

The fellowship was giving its attention to Mr. Kingswood, and "Fighting Jim"—as he was known—had already had one or two startling adventures. But he was still the Head of St. Frank's. He was still defiant.

But he was well aware—as, also, was Nipper—that secret agents of the fellowship were lurking in the district. Any new face, therefore, came under suspicion.

"**B**UT, dash it, it's idiotic!" protested Tommy Watson. "You're not suggesting that Sergeant-Major Lambert—"

"Better not say it, old son," interrupted Nipper cautiously. "I know just what you mean. And why not? He has been here a fortnight, and he's obtained lodgings at the tuckshop. He asked for those lodgings himself. That's a significant point."

"I'm frightfully dense, but I can't see it," objected Montie.

"Well, Mr. Binks has never taken in a lodger before," replied Nipper. "He wouldn't have taken Lambert in if Lambert had not asked for a room. And the village tuckshop, don't forget, is a place of considerable strategic importance."

"Jiggered if I can see it," said Watson, staring.

"No? That shows you haven't thought the thing out," replied Nipper. "Tell me of any other shop in the village where the St. Frank's chaps congregate in such considerable numbers? Tell me any other

place where they meet to chat upon school subjects in general? A school tuckshop, don't forget, is very much like a club-room. Fellows meet there and air their grievances, and express their opinions frankly. And they do it more freely in Mr. Binks' place than they do in the school tuckshop. No chance of the beaks overhearing them. It's in Binks' place that they speak their minds, and openly air their grievances."

"That's true enough," admitted Sir Montie, nodding. "But how does it fit in?"

Nipper stopped, and drew his chums nearer to him.

"It's better not to discuss these matters," he murmured. "But there's no danger here. You silly fatheads! Don't you realise that the fellowship has ordered Mr. Kingswood, under threat of dire consequences, to introduce a new kind of teaching into the school? They can't have spies in the school itself; yet they must have some method of feeling the school's pulse, as it were. Supposing, for example, Mr. Kingswood had introduced the fellowship's doctrines into the school curriculum. You can bet your boots that there would have been lively discussions in the tuckshop. That's why it would be of great value for the fellowship to 'plant' a man under Mr. Binks' roof."

"Begad! I shouldn't have thought of it, old boy—I shouldn't, really!" said Sir Montie in wonder. "But you're right, of course. It's as plain as daylight when you explain it."

"I'm not saying it is the case—it's just a possibility," went on Nipper. "Anyhow, I'm going to tell the guv'nor at once, if I can get hold of him."

"But that old chap seems so utterly decent!" protested Watson.

"All the more reason why he should come under suspicion," retorted Nipper. "You don't suppose the fellowship would bring suspicious-looking foreigners into the district, do you? Do you think their agents are men dressed in black cloaks, and wide-brimmed back hats? They're the kind of terrorists you read about in the comic papers, my sons. We're up against the real thing—and these people are mighty clever."

Luck was with Nipper. It was difficult to get in touch with Nelson Lee these days—for Lee was not living openly at the school. It was Mr. Alington-Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, who unconsciously assisted Nipper. For as the chums of Study C entered the lobby, old Wilkey gave them a hail.

"I wonder if one of you fellows would do me a little favour?" asked the Housemaster.

"Anything you like, sir," they answered, in unison—for old Wilkey was popular.

"One of you will do," smiled Mr. Wilkes. "I only want you to take this book to the headmaster for me. He telephoned for it, and it's rather urgent. I can't find Tubbs anywhere. That wretched pageboy is never about when he's wanted."

"I'll take it straight to the Head, sir," said Nipper. "See you later, you chaps."

He hurried away, inwardly pleased. For, by visiting Mr. Kingswood on legitimate business, he would be able to get into instant touch with Nelson Lee. There was a secret organisation of sorts, even at St. Frank's.

Reaching Mr. Kingswood's House, Nipper was at once admitted into the "presence." Not that there was anything awe-inspiring in the athletic young headmaster as he sprawled back in his chair, broad and brawny, with a big pipe jutting out at an angle of forty-five degrees from his aggressive jaw.

"We are honoured," he said dryly, as Nipper came in.

"Mr. Wilkes asked me to bring you this book, sir," said Nipper. "I was glad, because it gave me the chance of having a private word."

Mr. Kingswood became interested.

"Anything special to report?" he asked, lowering his voice.

He knew, of course, that Nipper was "in the know," and he listened interestedly whilst Nipper told him of Mr. Binks' new lodger.

"H'm! I don't think there's anything in it," he commented at length. "Just as well for you to keep your eyes open, though. After the extraordinary things that have happened of late, we can't be too careful. Perhaps you'd better have a word with the Big Chief," he added with a chuckle. "Quite unofficially, young 'un, and as one conspirator to another conspirator, I fancy that Mr. Lee is getting a bit fed up. He hates marking time. He wants to get into action."

"I think you're wrong, sir," said Nipper, shaking his head. "My gov'nor possesses the patience of Job." He glanced over at the handsome-looking table-grand radio which stood on a side-table. "Can I get through now, sir? Any chance of us being interrupted?"

"I'll lock the door, to make sure," said Mr. Kingswood. "I have a visitor in the House—a highly respected aunt of mine—but she won't interrupt. She's going back to London after tea, anyway."

Nipper went to the radio—which, incidentally, was a most efficient set. But it had one or two secrets. Nipper opened a door at the back, and then he took off the metal cover of one of the components. And he withdrew from this a tiny telephone receiver. There was an identical radio in Mr. Kingswood's bedroom, and another one in the chauffeur's quarters, over the garage.

For Nelson Lee, surprisingly enough, was at St. Frank's in the guise of "Carson," the Head's chauffeur. It was one of Lee's most masterly impersonations, and not a soul in the school, with the exception of those juniors "in the know," had the faintest idea of the real truth. By acting as Mr. Kingswood's chauffeur, Lee was always in the Head's company when the latter went abroad. Lee, in fact, was Mr. Kingswood's bodyguard. But, being a humble chauffeur, ordinary communication was difficult. For it was ob-

viously impossible for the headmaster and the chauffeur to be constantly visiting one another—or even for Nipper to be constantly going to the chauffeur's quarters. Such movements would have caused comment. Hence these cunningly concealed private telephones.

"Well, Jim?" came a soft, whispering voice in the receiver.

"It's not Mr. Kingswood, sir—it's me," said Nipper.

"I hope you had a good excuse for visiting the Head," came Lee's voice. "We can't be too careful, young 'un."

"That's all right, sir—I came on an errand for old Wilkey," explained Nipper. "There's something I want to tell you. Tommy and Montie and I were in the tuckshop not long ago, and we found out that old Binks has got a new lodger. He's a harmless-looking old chap, but——"

"But you fancy he may be a fellowship agent?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think it's odds that you are right."

"What!"

"I have already observed the excellent Sergeant-Major Lambert," came Lee's cool voice. "Don't imagine that you are giving me news, Nipper."

"What an ass I am!" said Nipper disgustedly. "I might have guessed that you would know all about it!"

"I'm afraid I'm not quite so clever as you imagine," chuckled Nelson Lee. "I knew nothing of Lambert until two days ago. He came very unobtrusively, and for some days, indeed, people in the village believed that he was Mrs. Binks' uncle, or some other such relative. It is certainly significant that he obtained lodgings at the tuckshop. An excellent place, Nipper, for overhearing interesting scraps of schoolboy talk."

"Just what I thought, sir!" said Nipper eagerly.

"But we can't prove anything—and we may be doing Lambert a great injustice," continued Lee. "Still, I'm glad that you got in touch with me. You had better warn your chums to be careful. Lambert, having met them, may go farther. There is always the chance that he will get into 'casual' conversation with some of you boys. He wouldn't discover anything in the ordinary way, but if he got talking to Watson or Tregellis-West they might unguardedly let a word slip here and there."

"Or Handforth, sir?" said Nipper.

"Particularly Handforth," agreed Nelson Lee. "We know that he is as honest as the day, but he is easily fooled. A word of warning will not be amiss. See what you can do—but do it diplomatically."

"Wouldn't it be better to say nothing to Handy?" asked Nipper dubiously. "He doesn't even know of Lambert now; and if I tell him he'll get all excited, and he'll want to do some of his investigating."

"I've thought of that," came Nelson Lee's voice. "But if we don't tell him, Nipper, and if Lambert is really a fellowship agent,

and gets Handforth off his guard, it may be far worse."

Nipper was slightly disappointed. He had expected to give Nelson Lee a scrap of news; but, as it so often proved, Lee was "there first."

"It's no good trying to tell the guv'nor anything," he grumbled, after he had hung up. "He knows all about Lambert, and he said it's odds that Lambert is a fellowship man."

"Don't let this thing 'get' you, lad," said Mr. Kingswood kindly. "If we all keep cool we shall defeat these fanatical rogues. By the way, if you want to have a word with Mr. Lee in person, you might be able to get hold of him after tea. He's taking my aunt to Bannington, to catch the London express. So he'll be coming back alone in the car—and if you happen to be casually walking along the lane, he'll probably give you a lift," added the Head dryly.

"Thanks for the tip, sir, but I don't think it would be wise," replied Nipper. "The guv'nor's warned me about these 'casual' meetings. We've got to watch our step all the time."

Ten minutes later he was back in the Ancient House—in fact, within Study D. Edward Oswald Handforth and his two faithful chums, Church and McClure, were at home. Handforth was sprawling in the armchair, and Church and McClure were getting the tea ready.

"You're out of luck," said Handforth gloomily. "Funds are low, and we've only got bread-and-butter for tea. Can't even afford a dish of cakes!"

"I didn't come in for tea, but if you chaps are stony, kindly allow me to bridge the gulf," said Nipper. "How much? Will ten bob see you through until funds accumulate?"

"Now, that's what I call sensible," said Handforth, his gloom vanishing. "Churchy, my lad, take some of that money and dash to the tuckshop and buy some of Mrs. Hake's special meat pies and——"

"Just a minute," interrupted Nipper. "There's something I want to say." He spoke in a lower tone. "Talking of tuckshops, have you noticed the old boy down at Binks' place?"

"What old boy?" asked Handforth.

"He's a Sergeant-Major Lambert—an old pensioner," explained Nipper. "He's lodging there. Just for the sake of general precaution—you know what I mean—I'd be pretty careful, if I were you, if he happens to get chatting."

Church and McClure nodded appreciatively, but Handforth only stared.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Is this man a wrong 'un? Oh, by George!" he added eagerly. "You mean—— You don't think that he's an agent——"

"The chances are, he's as harmless as old Muddy, the postman," replied Nipper. "But as he's new in the district—well, go easy.

I thought I'd give you the tip, in case you ever ran across him."

"A spy, eh" murmured Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "I'd like to have a look at that fellow. By George! Here's a chance for us to do some investigating——"

"No, you don't!" said Nipper grimly. "I told the guv'nor that you'd run off on that tack! Nothing doing, Handy. Can't you realise that we've got to be careful?"

"Just a casual sniff round, sort of thing," said Handforth, looking abashed. "You can rely on me not to give the game away."

"I think I can," agreed Nipper quietly. "Ordinarily, Handy, I wouldn't—but you know that the guv'nor's life may depend upon your discretion, so you be extra careful. At the same time, there's no sense in going out of your way to look this man up. You'd better go easy this evening, anyhow," he added dryly. "The guv'nor's taking the Head's aunt to catch the express, in Bannington, and he'll be driving back through the village a bit later, and if he spots you nosing about near the tuckshop you'll be 'for it.' Be sensible, old man, and take this calmly."

Unfortunately, Handforth was physically incapable of taking anything calmly.

CHAPTER 2.

The Folly of Handforth.

FIVE minutes after Nipper had gone—— "Why have tea here?" asked Handforth abruptly. "Never mind those pies, Churchy—and you can take the kettle off, too. As we're in funds, why not splash for once, and have tea at the tuckshop?"

"Not a bad idea," said Church.

"The village tuckshop," added Handforth carelessly.

"Eh? Now, Handy, don't forget what Nipper said," exclaimed McClure, in some alarm. "If you go nosing about——"

"Keep your hair on," interrupted Handforth calmly. "Haven't I kept this secret for weeks? What do you take me for? Do you think I'm going to endanger Mr. Lee's life by acting like a silly chump?"

"Then why act like one?" asked Church. "Why not have tea here?"

"There'll be nothing risky in us having tea at old Binks'," said Handforth, with perfect truth. "There'll probably be more of our chaps there, anyhow. But why shouldn't we get a look at this giddy sergeant-major, or whatever he is? I'm suggesting that we have tea in the ordinary way, and if the man comes in we'll give him the once-over."

"And if he doesn't come in you'll ask lots of questions, I suppose?" asked Church tartly.

"Not one—I promise," replied Handforth.

After that, of course, there was nothing more to be said. Handforth always kept his

promises. For once, apparently, he was ready to act rationally and sensibly. Church and McClure were highly gratified. During the past week or two Handforth had surprised them. When it was a matter of vital importance he could hold his tongue as well as the next fellow. And it was perfectly true that there could be no harm in having a look at the man if he placed himself on view.

As a matter of fact, Handforth & Co. caught sight of the bent old sergeant-major as they were walking through the dusk of Bellton High Street towards the tuckshop. Mr. Lambert, in fact, was wending his way unerringly into the public bar of the George Inn—which, after all, was a perfectly legitimate proceeding.

"That was him," murmured Church.

"You mean, that was he," corrected Handforth severely. "Don't you know your grammar? And how do you know it was him—I mean, he?"

"Simply a matter of elimination," explained Church. "He's a stranger to us, and therefore a new-comer in the village. Also, he came out of Binks' shop two minutes ago, and as he wasn't carrying a bag, it proves that he didn't buy anything."

"I don't think much of that reasoning," said Handforth tartly. "The man's got pockets, hasn't he?"

However, it was impossible to enter the George in order to investigate. The George was, naturally, out of bounds. So the chums of Study D marched boisterously into the tuckshop and ordered tea. Mr. Binks was delighted to accommodate them, for it so happened that there were no other customers in the shop, and business had been slack all day.

"Any news, Mr. Binks?" asked Handforth, with exaggerated carelessness.

"Don't get much news down in these parts," replied Mr. Binks, shaking his head. "I hear that the old cow died up at Mr. Holt's. There was some scare of foot-and-mouth disease—"

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth hastily. "I didn't mean that kind of news. How's your new lodg— Hi, mind where you're putting your feet, Church, you fathead! You gave me an awful clump!"

"Sorry!" said Church, glaring malevolently.

"Eh? Oh, I see! But, dash it—"

"You were saying something about my new lodge, sir?" asked Mr. Binks politely. "I don't belong to a new lodge. I've been a member of the old one for twenty-two years."

Handforth was fortunate. Mr. Binks had misunderstood—evidently believing that Handforth had been talking about the Freemasons. Mr. Binks was a loyal "mason" himself.

Church and McClure succeeded in dragging their leader into the secluded corner of the tuckshop. This was at the very rear, and it was a favourite spot. There was a kind of deep alcove, with an old-fashioned cushioned seat running round three sides of

it. There wasn't a window or a door within yards. It was the one spot in the shop where customers could chat in absolute privacy—without the slightest fear of their conversation being overheard. A little lamp stood on the table, sending forth a warm and comfortable glow.

"Now, you ass!" murmured Church aggressively.

"What the dickens—"

"Didn't you promise us that you wouldn't ask any questions?"

"Yes, but the man isn't here himself—"

"That doesn't make any difference," said Church. "You don't want Binks to think that we're interested in his lodger, do you? That's the very way to get him talking. He'll tell Lambert that we asked him questions, and if Lambert is a spy he'll twig—"

"Hallo! The old boy's coming back," murmured Mac.

The door-bell had jangled, but it wasn't a customer. Sergeant-Major Lambert, with a friendly nod towards Mr. Binks, and with a suggestive bulge in his overcoat pocket, came down the shop.

"Thought I was right about the rain, Mr. Binks," he said. "It's pouring in reg'lar bucketfuls. We'll have floods before long if this wet weather keeps on."

He was about to pass the juniors when he saw them for the first time, sitting in their alcove. A smile came over his kindly old face, and he nodded pleasantly.

"Evening, young gentlemen," he said. "Didn't see ye there at first. You'll be from the big school up yonder? Aye, and mebbe you'll soon be filling yourselves up with indigestible pastries!" He chuckled. "But there, I was just the same when I was a young 'un, and it never did me no harm. You mustn't mind my joke, young gentlemen," he added half apologetically.

They heard him mounting the creaking stairs, and they could hear him chuckling, too.

"Piffle!" said Handforth, in a low voice.

"Hear, hear!" agreed Church.

"Nipper and his warnings!" went on Handforth, with a sniff. "It's a downright shame to suspect a nice old boy like that! Anybody with half an eye can see that he's a real old soldier. We've been brought down here on a wild-goose chase, my lads."

"But I thought we came down for tea?" asked McClure.

"Oh, well, we might as well have tea now that we're here," admitted Handforth. "But it's a frost, all the same. Fancy believing, even for a moment, that that old chap could be a fellowship agent!"

AND upstairs, in his bed-sitting-room at the back of the house, Sergeant-Major Lambert had acted rather strangely. The instant he closed his door, he softly locked it and then moved with surprising agility—for one so old and rheumatism-ridden—over to the farther corner of the room. He quickly bent down and removed

a section of floor-board. From the hollow space beneath he produced a pair of ear-phones and donned them.

"... frost, all the same," came the faint but unmistakable voice of Handforth. "Fancy believing, even for a moment, that that old chap could be a fellowship agent!"

Mr. Lambert nearly choked with consternation.

"The devil!" he muttered hoarsely.

He had expected to hear an odd scrap of schoolboy conversation—but here was a St. Frank's boy actually mentioning the Fellowship of Fear! Lambert had received a nasty shock.

Nelson Lee's suspicions were justified. This man was, indeed, employed by the fellowship. He was a special member of the fellowship secret service. He did not come within the same category as the active agents—those men who stole about at dead of night on their missions of evil. He was a spy, employed for special work, and his only duties were to accomplish his spying and report to his immediate superiors. Nipper had come surprisingly near to the truth—in fact, he had hit the nail on the head—when he had suggested a possible reason for Lambert's lodging at the tuckshop.

But even Nipper had not dreamed that Lambert, soon after his arrival, had spent four or five hours of one blustery night—when indoor sounds were masked—fitting up a secret line between the shop alcove and his room. Concealed in that alcove was a sensitive microphone. Even whilst sitting in his own room, the spy could thus listen in on the private conversations of the people who favoured the alcove. And most of those people were juniors and seniors of St. Frank's.

It was by this means, in fact, that the fellowship had definitely established the fact that Mr. Kingswood had not obeyed their orders. Every report from the spy told the same story. Not a word from the boys on the subject of their studies. There had been no change in the school teaching. If the Head had adopted the fellowship's doctrines, the boys would certainly have discussed the subject. Thus, the organisation was able to keep its finger on the pulse of the school.

Nipper believed it possible that Lambert was a fellowship man; but Nipper assumed that the spy was confining his work to overhearing the ordinary scraps of conversation in the shop. Even Nelson Lee could not have guarded against the disaster which was now taking place. For it was pure folly on Handforth's part to discuss the subject at all. Church and McClure realised this, but they did not realise the danger. They did not know that the old adage "alls have ears" is more true in these days of modern science than it was when it was first coined.

"**I** BELIEVE in being cautious," said Handforth firmly. "Dash it, I've proved that, haven't I? I wouldn't take a chance, my sons! But this old man is obviously genuine."

"It isn't always the obvious that's true," said McClure sagely. "He looks harmless enough, I'll admit, but——"

"Shush! Here comes the tea," murmured Church.

Mr. Binks' daughter, aged 26, and school-boy-proof, placed the tray on the table. She passed a few pleasant remarks, and then beat a retreat into her hidden lair. Church poured the tea out, and the juniors were once again in complete seclusion.

"What were you saying, Mac?" asked Handforth. "Oh, about old Lambert? He looks harmless because he is harmless. He's never even heard of the Fellowship of Fear. And as it's jolly risky for us to discuss the subject, even in private, we'll dry up."

"I'm glad you're getting sensible," said Church.

"And let me warn you chaps to hold your tongues," went on Handforth sternly. "I've had to tell you of this before! An incautious word might mean disaster. So let's get on with tea, and change the subject."

At any other time Church and McClure would have told Handforth just what they thought of him, but they did not wish to prolong the argument. They were glad enough that he, himself, had suggested that the subject should be changed.

"Raining like the dickens outside," said Handforth, as he glanced down the shop and noted the streaming windows. "My only hat! What weather! We didn't bring any macs with us, either. We shall get soaked."

"It might ease off soon," said McClure.

"I'll tell you what, though," went on Handforth, as a bright idea came to him. "Didn't Nipper say that Mr. Lee had gone to Bannington with the Head's car? What's the time?" He looked at his watch. "Yes, he's there by now. The express is due to leave almost at once. He ought to be here in about ten minutes. If we give him a hail as he passes, we can get a lift up to the school."

"Don't be an ass," said Church, almost roughly. "We're not supposed to ride in the Head's car, are we?"

"But on a wet night like this it's different," argued Handforth. "The Head's car comes past, empty. There's Mr. Lee at the wheel, and he spots us and——"

"There's who at the wheel?" hissed Mac.

"Eh? Oh, well, Carson."

"That's better."

Handforth set his cup down firmly.

"Look here, my lads, are you trying to take a rise out of me?" he asked, in a grim voice. "I'm as cautious as anybody, but I don't believe in going to extremes. We're private here, aren't we? We all know that Carson is really Nelson Lee in disguise. As long as we don't talk about these things in public it doesn't matter."

"Well, we can't bag a lift," said Church finally.

"Why not? Supposing Carson really was Carson?" asked Handforth. "I mean, supposing he was a real chauffeur? We

shouldn't hesitate to ask him for a lift, should we? Don't forget, my sons, that we've got to act naturally."

"Oh, all right, have it your own way!" said McClure. "I dare say there's nothing in it. It's a filthy evening, anyway."

Apparently, they had taken no chances; they had kept their voices very low. But,

operators had chanced to listen in—which was most unlikely—not a word of that conversation would have been understandable.

But the Fellowship of Fear was now in possession of that all-important fact—that Nelson Lee was in the district, working against them!

CHAPTER 3.

The Fellowship Shows its Fangs.

MR. JAMES KINGSWOOD was hard at work.

He had successfully got rid of his well-meaning, but inconvenient aunt. She had come to the school some days earlier, apparently intent upon paying an indefinite visit



Handforth & Co. sat in the corner of the tuck shop and talked in hushed whispers, little realising that every word they said was overheard by the Fellowship of Fear agent in the room above!

unquestionably, Handforth had been guilty of grave folly in bringing up the subject in the first place. Again and again he had been warned to refrain from all such discussions.

And upstairs, Lambert, the spy, had made a discovery of vital importance. By sheer chance, and utterly unexpectedly, he had learned the startling and devastating news that Nelson Lee, the world's greatest detective, was actually at St. Frank's, masquerading as the headmaster's chauffeur! This was a piece of news to impart to his chief without a second's delay—particularly as it was apparent that Lee was making a lonely journey home within the next few minutes.

Lambert acted promptly.

He went downstairs, coughing realistically, and as he passed through the shop he made some remark to the effect that he had forgotten to buy his cough mixture. Out in the rain he went straight to the big concrete telephone booth which stood outside the post-office. In less than thirty seconds he had obtained a Bannington number. He was in touch with his immediate chief.

"Listen—news of extra value," he said, talking rapidly in Russian. "Nelson Lee is working on this job."

"Are you sure?" came a startled voice. "You mean Lee, the detective?"

Quickly, concisely, Lambert gave the details of what he had overheard. Without even saying good-bye he hung up, and was out of the booth within another thirty seconds. If any of the local exchange



—knowing absolutely nothing, of course, of the true state of affairs. Mr. Kingswood, by pleading an excess of work, had persuaded her to shorten her visit. It was quite true that he had some arrears of work, and he was now intent upon piling into them. He would have gone with her to the station but for the fact that he was to deliver an important lecture to the Sixth. He was completing his notes now, and was practically ready.

For the moment, the Fellowship of Fear was far from his thoughts. He gathered up his papers, donned his gown, and strode towards the door. He was due in the lecture hall in exactly one minute, and Mr. Kingswood, who liked his boys to be punctual, was the soul of punctuality himself.

His hand was almost on the light switch when a voice sounded mysteriously in the room.

"Headquarters calling," it said with uncanny distinctness. "Rush call for No. G. 5 and No. G. 10."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Mr. Kingswood, jumping.

He walked rapidly across to a plain-looking wireless set which stood in a corner. Mr. Kingswood, of late, had displayed such a keenness in wireless that he had acquired an amateur short-wave set which Dick Goodwin, of the Remove, had constructed in his spare time. For that set possessed qualities of which Goodwin knew nothing—although he was the inventor! It was capable of receiving the signals which were broadcast from the fellowship's secret headquarters! By a lucky chance, Goodwin had placed an instrument of incalculable value in Nelson Lee's hands. Pretending to be interested in short-wave reception, Mr. Kingswood had bought the set from Goodwin, lock, stock and barrel.

And the Head had acquired the habit of leaving the set tuned in, and on the fellowship's private wave-length. Whenever Mr. Kingswood was in his study, he switched the set on, and left it on. So far, nothing had happened. Nelson Lee had discovered that instructions were sometimes sent out to the fellowship agents at three o'clock in the afternoon and seven o'clock in the evening. But there was always the chance that something of value would be broadcast at other times.

And now, at last, something was being broadcast.

"Headquarters calling," repeated the voice. "Here are rush orders for No. G. 5 and No. G. 10, of the B.B. district."

Mr. Kingswood forgot his lecture, and he went rapidly across to the amateur wireless set and reduced the volume. It gave him a little thrill to realise that he was listening in to a broadcast which should only be picked up by the special receivers with which the fellowship agents were equipped. These grim conspirators believed that no living soul, other than their own trusted members, could pick up the signals. Dick Goodwin had hit upon the secret circuit by mere chance—without, in fact, knowing that he had done so.

"Kingswood's car is on its way back from Bannington, empty," said the voice, to the headmaster's amazement. "The chauffeur of that car is Nelson Lee in disguise. Get him!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Fighting Jim, aghast.

"You must move quickly, No. G. 5 and No. G. 10," continued the voice. "You know the car well. Overtake it, and get Lee! But get him alive. I want to question him. Get him—and bring him alive."

Then—silence.

Mr. Kingswood stood there, momentarily helpless. The unexpectedness of the secret

instructions wellnigh overwhelmed him. In some way, the fellowship had discovered "Carson's" real identity! And a couple of agents were even now—this very minute—setting forth on their grim mission. Nelson Lee, confident in the security of his impersonation, would be driving without a suspicion.

Suddenly, the headmaster jumped. There might be just a chance. If he could reach Nelson Lee first—if he could go along the Bannington road and meet him—he might be in time to convey a warning. But there was no other car! And seconds were precious.

Mr. Kingswood dashed out of his study. The lecture meant nothing now. The Sixth could wait—and wonder. The Sixth had ceased to be of any importance.

Running like a hare, Fighting Jim raced across Inner Court. He took no notice of the rain. In the Triangle he met with a piece of real luck. A figure was running across from the Modern House to the Ancient House; and Mr. Kingswood recognised it. Nipper!

"Just a minute, Hamilton!" called the Head sharply.

Nipper swung round. They met in the gloom, standing in the rain.

"What is it, sir?" asked Nipper, sensing the urgency of the Head's call.

"You drive a motor-cycle, don't you?" rapped out the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it ready for the road?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Come, then—don't talk," said Mr. Kingswood. "Quick! It might be a matter of life or death."

They ran for the garage.

"You mean—for the gov'nor?" asked Nipper anxiously.

As they were running, Mr. Kingswood related what he had just overheard.

"Oh, my goodness!" panted Nipper, wild with alarm. "How did they know? Great Scott! I wonder if Handy——"

"This is no time for wondering," broke in Mr. Kingswood. "Get that machine of yours. We've got to drive like blazes. You can take me on the pillion, can't you?"

"Yes, rather, sir."

Without the loss of a moment they were off. It was fortunate, perhaps, that it was raining so hard—for they got out into the lane without being seen. The St. Frank's boys—to say nothing of the masters—would have been considerably startled if they could have seen the headmaster perched on Nipper's pillion, tearing off into the night!

NELSON LEE, at the wheel of the big limousine, was driving leisurely.

He was about midway between Bannington and Bellton, and the road, in this part, was empty, and, indeed, singularly lonely. It was perfectly true that

Nelson Lee was off his guard—or as much off his guard as he ever allowed himself to be. Secure in his false identity he was in no fear of the fellowship. There was always the danger that the Head's car would be held up on the road—if Mr. Kingswood himself was travelling inside. And Lee, during such drives, was always on the alert. But with an empty car there was little or no risk of a hold-up. Lee did not doubt that the fellowship agents were constantly watching; they knew all of Mr. Kingswood's movements.

Even when a motor-cyclist, begoggled, and wearing a weather-proof helmet, forged alongside, Lee did not suspect. But when, the next moment, he caught sight of a second motor-cyclist, on the near side of the car, he felt his pulses suddenly throb. This was an unusual occurrence—and anything unusual was worth special attention.

That one single second was sufficient for No. G. 5 and No. G. 10.

Even as Nelson Lee stepped hard on the foot throttle, both motor-cyclist's grabbed at the car, and allowed their machines to run free. The next moment they were clinging to the running-board, and two muffled crashes announced the fate of the cycles.

Nelson Lee changed his tactics at once. He reached round for his gun. But, again, that one single second was all against him. The man on the off-side had already wrenched the driving-door open, and before Lee could even reach his gun an arm came swinging through the open doorway; something heavy and hard struck the detective a cruel blow on the side of the head. He was half stunned, but not "out." The limousine swerved wildly. No. G. 10 grasped the wheel in the nick of time, and regained control, causing the car to swerve back from the grass verge towards the centre of the road.

Meanwhile, No. G. 5 had succeeded in opening the other door, and he was inside the car.

"Take him!" rapped out the other.

Crash!

This time the gunman made no mistake. The blow which struck Lee knocked him senseless. And as Lee's body became limp and inert, his foot pressed down on the throttle controls, and the great car surged forward at a mad speed. No. G. 10, hampered by Lee's unconscious form from getting up into the driving-seat, was obliged to crouch half-in and half-out of the doorway, clutching desperately at the wheel. During those few tense moments it was touch and go, indeed.

The other man was dragging at Lee, attempting to pull him clear. No. G. 10 was pushing. And, all the while, the car was increasing its crazy speed. It roared on, swaying from side to side of the road, swerving like some destructive juggernaut.

It was approaching a bend. A single light came swinging round the bend. It was a

motor-cycle head-lamp. The limousine was only showing its side lights—for complete darkness had not yet fallen.

"This might be the car!" exclaimed Mr. Kingswood, into Nipper's ear.

"It is the car, sir," said Nipper eagerly. "Oh, thank goodness! We've managed to reach the guv'nor before—Hullo! What the—There's something wrong, sir! Look at that off-side door!"

"Good heavens!" muttered the Head.

They were nearer now; they had turned the bend. The beam from Nipper's head-lamp revealed the limousine clearly. It was swerving from side to side, and coming onwards at an appalling speed. The off-side door was half-open, half-closed—a man appeared to be jammed midway. In that flash Nipper guessed what had happened. Nelson Lee's enemies were upon him, and a fight was in progress.

It was a hectic moment.

Nipper, steering well to the near-side, in order to pass—for it was obviously impossible to stop the car—felt his heart leap into his mouth. For the limousine, swerving diagonally across from its own side of the road, was coming onwards for a head-on collision. There wasn't even time to sweep across to the other side. Indeed, but for Nipper's quick presence of mind, both he and Mr. Kingswood would have been killed.

Without hesitation Nipper sent his motor-cycle plunging full tilt into the wide ditch which separated the road from the high hedge. The limousine swept past with not an inch to spare.

Splash! Splash! Crash!

Nipper and Mr. Kingswood were sent hurtling and spinning through the air, turning somersaults. They landed in the ditch—which, fortunately, was nearly full of muddy water. The motor-bike smashed into the bank and crumpled up. Nipper and the Head, plunging about, grasped at the grass, and they pulled themselves out. Both were unhurt, and in the distance they could faintly see the red tail-light of the limousine.

"Well done, young 'un!" spluttered Mr. Kingswood. "You saved our lives."

"But what about the guv'nor, sir?" panted Nipper, wild-eyed. "Did you see? There were two men in that car! They've got the guv'nor! We were too late!"

"It all happened so quickly that I am still bewildered," confessed Mr. Kingswood. "Are you sure you saw two men? You had a better view than I—"

"The fellowship has struck!" said Nipper in a low, agonised voice. "And when the fellowship strikes, sir, it makes no mistake. It strikes swiftly—decisively. What are we going to do? How can we get on the guv'nor's track?"

"Well, we can do nothing by standing here—catching cold!" replied Mr. Kingswood promptly. "Come, Nipper! We had better run as fast as we can into Bellton."

IN the village tuckshop, Handforth had settled the bill, and he and his chums were standing near the door, looking out through the rain-spattered glass into the dull, wintry twilight.

"Waiting for somebody?" asked Mr. Binks.

"Not exactly," replied Handforth. "We were wondering if we could get a lift to the school, that's all. It's still raining cats and dogs."

"Here comes a car now," said Church quickly. "Come on—we might bag a lift."

They raced out, much to Mr. Binks' amusement. A car was certainly coming down the village street, and it had approached from the Bannington road. Its headlights were full on, and it was roaring along at great speed.

"It's the Head's car all right!" shouted Handforth. "Hi! Wait a minute, Mr.—I mean, wait a minute, Carson! Why, what the dickens——"

Zurrrrrrrrh—swoooooosh!

The big limousine was travelling at sixty miles an hour at the very least. It simply thundered past, sending showers of spray on both sides. One or two people on the cobbled pavements stood staring in wonder and indignation. Cars sometimes passed through the village in a road-hoggish manner, but seldom, indeed, had a car raced through at this reckless, hair-raising speed.

Handforth & Co. stared after it; they saw it swing round the bend; it heaved upwards as it rose over the bridge at the end of the village. Then it vanished from sight.

"That's the Head's car—that was!" said Church, with a whistle.

"There were two men inside it, too," muttered McClure. "I say, you chaps, I don't like the look of it much. We know jolly well that—Carson wouldn't drive at that rate."

They drew aside, careless of the rain, as some other people came along the pavement; and these people were talking angrily, and the boys could hear Mr. Kingswood's name mentioned. The car, of course, had been recognised.

Handforth & Co., their plan spoilt, discussed the situation in a shop doorway, where they sought shelter. They all felt uneasy. Knowing all they did, there seemed to be something sinister—something grim—in the headlong passage of Mr. Kingswood's car.

They were still talking—they were still undecided—when they became aware of a commotion up the street. They heard the voice of P.-c. Sparrow, the local constable. Then they recognised the familiar voice of Mr. Kingswood himself.

"Something rummy about this," said Handforth quickly. "Come on."

They ran up the street, and they saw that Mr. Kingswood was talking rapidly with the policeman. Nipper was there, too, to say nothing of a group of excited village people, some of whom were pointing down the street and shouting that the car had "roared through" only a few minutes earlier.

"There's only one explanation of the extraordinary incident," Mr. Kingswood was saying as Handforth & Co. ran up. "Carson, my chauffeur, was attacked by car bandits. He may have been injured; but we know, for certain, that two men were in the car, and that they were in possession of it."

"Best thing I can do, sir, is to get straight through to the inspector on the telephone," said the constable, who was much flustered. "Lor' love us! Car bandits down 'ere, eh? What are we coming to?"

"If it had not been for this youngster's admirable presence of mind, both he and I would have been killed," continued Mr. Kingswood. "Those infernal rogues nearly ran us down and drove us into the ditch."

The Head thought it unnecessary to explain why he and Nipper had been hurrying towards Bannington on a motor-cycle. Nobody thought of asking him. The sensational news that his car had been stolen was sufficient for the moment.

Handforth & Co., after the first minute, succeeded in dragging Nipper aside from the others. They got him quite to themselves.

"What does it mean?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Come on! Tell us! We're in the know, don't forget!"

"Somebody has been talking," said Nipper grimly. "It's beyond my understanding, but in some way the enemy discovered who Carson really was. And they acted like lightning. They've got him."

"But how can you be sure?" asked Church quickly.

"Oh, do you think I'd speak like this if I weren't sure?" retorted Nipper. "The Head heard one of those secret broadcasts. The guv'nor's name was mentioned openly. Two of the enemy's agents were ordered to overtake the car and get the guv'nor!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth, and it seemed to him that a cold grip clutched him.

"What's the matter?" asked Nipper sharply. "Do you know something?"

"No, of course not—Eh? I—I don't know."

"Look here, Handy, I want the truth!" said Nipper, his voice low, but his manner fierce. "Have you been gassing? Have you, by any chance, mentioned my guv'nor name during this past hour?"

"Of course not—Eh? Well, yes, but nobody could have overheard——"

"What do you mean—nobody could have overheard?" broke in Nipper, in agony. "When did you mention the guv'nor's name? Where were you? Tell me!"

"We were in the tuckshop, and——"

"Here—in the village?"

"Yes."

"Are you mad, Handy?" asked Nipper, aghast. "Are you stark, raving mad? Didn't I warn you? Didn't I tell you that that man, Lambert, was perhaps a spy——"

"Yes, I know, and that's why we came down," said Handforth, whose face had turned suddenly pale. "But you're wrong, Nipper! That old boy is harmless enough."

Nipper could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"You don't mean to say that you discussed—" he began.

"We didn't mention Mr. Lee's name at all—except when we were absolutely by ourselves," said Church, coming to his leader's rescue. "Don't make any mistakes, Nipper. Mac and I look after Handy pretty well. We were sitting in the deep alcove, at the back of old Binks' shop, at the time. Handy wouldn't have mentioned Mr. Lee's name, only we thought of bagging a ride back to the school. The name was only mentioned once or twice—and then only in whispers. And you know as well as I do that that alcove is absolutely private."

"Yes, that's true," admitted Nipper, frowning. "But I can't understand—Where was that man, Lambert?"

"Upstairs, in his room."

"Are you sure of that?"

"We heard him go up," said McClure. "And besides, the stairs are a long way from the alcove. Even if he had been listening round the corner, he couldn't have heard anything. It's too far off."

"You were crazy to mention my guv'nor's name—even in the tiniest whisper," said Nipper angrily. "When was it you talked like that? How long ago?"

"Not more than half an hour—a bit less, in fact."

"And did you see Lambert afterwards?"

"No, he stayed downstairs— Wait a minute, though," said Handforth. "He came down and went out."

Nipper was fairly trembling.

"Time for him to have telephoned," he muttered. "He could have 'phoned to somebody in Bannington—those gunmen got on their motor-bikes and shot off in pursuit. They were ready, and as soon as they heard the broadcast— By Jove, though, they would have to do some fast moving! It's possible—and that's about all."

"I tell you it's impossible," grunted Handforth. "Nobody could have overheard what we said. How many more times must I tell you that I was in that alcove? Churchy and Mac were with me, and we never raised our voices above a whisper. There wasn't another soul in the shop except Mr. Binks—and he was behind the counter. Don't get hysterical, you ass! I'd be the first to admit—"

"The alcove," said Nipper, a strange light coming into his eyes. "By jingo, I wonder!"

He ran off without another word; and after a moment Handforth & Co. followed him. They could not understand Nipper's expression of sudden consternation. Mr. Kingswood was still busy with the constable and the rapidly growing crowd. Nobody noticed the four boys as they ran off. Nipper headed straight for the tuckshop.

"Hey! What's the idea?" called Handforth.

They all burst into the tuckshop together.

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr.

Binks. "Whatever's the matter with you, Master Nipper? You're soaked to the skin."

"Yes, had a bit of an accident," explained Nipper. "Some bandits have stolen our headmaster's car—and things look a bit bad for Carson, the chauffeur."

"My!" ejaculated the confectioner.

"You don't mind if we have a look in the alcove?" went on Nipper, moving down the shop. "We want to find something if we can."

Mr. Binks naturally jumped to the conclusion that Handforth & Co., during their earlier visit, had dropped some little object which was of value to themselves. He was so excited that he went to his door to hear the latest gossip. Thus, the juniors had the back of the shop entirely to themselves.

Nipper was gazing round the private alcove with keen, intent eyes. He examined the walls, he went down on his hands and knees and looked under the seats. And Handforth & Co. watched dumbly—with ever-growing uneasiness.

"You see, there's nothing—" began Handforth at length.

But Nipper gave him a quick, warning glance, and held a finger to his lips. He came nearer to them, and when he spoke his voice was so soft that they could scarcely hear the words, although their ears were within an inch or so of his mouth.

"Talk fairly loudly—discuss the car bandits," he breathed. "I've got an idea. It may be nothing, but I want to make sure."

They obeyed him, and again Nipper continued his search. His yes, always keen, were extra keen just now—for he was looking for something definite. And then, suddenly, he stared at the rear padding of the long, built-in seat which ran all along the back of the alcove. Nipper had seen something which would have escaped his own eyes, even, if he had not been on a definite hunt. It seemed to him that one or two of the tacks, which held the padded cushions to the wall, were different from the rest. The same tacks, yes, but they had been disturbed. In a moment, Nipper was tearing at the material, forcing it away. At last he had made a considerable gap, and now he could look right down between the padding and the wall. At the first glance he caught his breath in so sharply, that he clapped a hand over his mouth.

Again he held up a warning finger—and then pointed into the cavity.

Handforth & Co., staring in, were startled and amazed to see a tiny metal object, with a wire attached, fixed lightly on to the wall. It had been completely hidden by the padded seat-back. Without a word, Nipper pushed the padding back into its place. He and the others advanced towards the shop door. It was safe for them to talk there—for they were now quite out of earshot. And Mr. Binks himself had joined a group of people in the next shop doorway.

"What—what does it mean?" asked Handforth hoarsely.

"A microphone," muttered Nipper. "That's what it means, Handy! Every word you spoke in that alcove was heard—by Lambert, who was up in his own room."

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"I'm not blaming you so much," went on Nipper. "You couldn't possibly guess anything like that. Even I didn't think of it—or the gov'nor, either."

"But—but you mean——"

"I mean that Lambert is a spy," whispered Nipper. "He's able to overhear everything that's said in that alcove; and yet he does not even have to move out of his own room. Now we know how the gov'nor was betrayed! Lambert gave the warning—and the other agents did the rest. Well, it's something to know."

"The—the crook!" panted Handforth. "The miserable hound! We'll give him in charge—we'll have him arrested——"

"Don't make things worse, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "What can we charge the man with? Far better to keep mum—let him think that he succeeded. That alcove may come in useful to us later on. Don't you see? By keeping Lambert fooled, we can come into the tuckshop one day and 'spill' all sorts of fake information, and put the fellowship right off the trail."

"By George! You're right!" said Handforth, his eyes blazing. "You think of everything!"

"I say! There's the blighter over the road, now," said Church suddenly. "Of all the nerve! Mixing with the people, and talking about this car bandit stunt as though we didn't know the truth!"

Nipper stared, and then he nodded.

"Yes, that's the man," he agreed. "Can't you understand that he's doing the best possible thing? Stay here, you chaps. Give me a call if anybody comes in."

Nipper ran back to the alcove at the rear of the shop. He had been awaiting such an opportunity as this. Earlier, he had not known whether Lambert was in his room, or whether he was out. Now he was safe. With the aid of a big scout's knife, he re-fastened the tacks in the padded back of the seat—so that no trace of his investigation remained.

Then he rejoined Handforth & Co., and they all went out into the street. The rain was much less fierce now, but they scarcely noticed it.

"It's all my fault!" muttered Handforth bitterly. "You chaps have always told me that I'm a fathead and a chump. That's just what I am. I'm worse. I'm a fool! It's all because I mentioned Mr. Lee's name——"

"Well, don't mention it again," said Nipper. "It's no good crying over spilt milk, Handy. You didn't mean to do any harm; you didn't even realise that you were doing it."

"That's no excuse," said Handforth fiercely. "I had been warned, hadn't I? It was my blathering tongue which gave Mr. Lee away—and, by George, I'm going to save him!

I don't know how—I don't care—but I'm going to rescue him."

He spoke with such a fixed determination that Church and McClure were freshly alarmed. Handforth, in this mood, was dangerous. More dangerous to himself than to anybody else.

"You'll have to go easy, old man," said McClure quietly. "This thing has proved to us that we can't trust anybody. There are spies everywhere. This man, Lambert, merely gave the word. Other men did the job. There's not a chance in a thousand that Lambert knows where the prisoner has been taken."

"I've got to do 'something,'" said Handforth, clenching his fists. "Oh, why the dickens didn't I have my little car here? I might have gone in chase——"

"Some hopes!" interrupted Church. "The Head's car was doing over sixty when it roared through here."

"Listen to me, Handy," said Nipper quietly. "The gov'nor's in a mess—and it's the fellowship's fault, not yours. So don't be silly. We can trust him, can't we? I'd back my gov'nor against that crowd of fanatics any day."

"By George, rather!" said Handforth, inspired by Nipper's confidence.

"Very well, then. We've got to be more careful than ever now," continued Nipper softly. "Pull yourself together, old son! If we go about looking scared, or wearing long faces, people will question us. Look excited if you like—but don't look worried. Carson, the Head's chauffeur, has been attacked by car bandits, and the car has been stolen. That's all that's known. There's just a chance, in fact, that Carson was in league with the bandits."

"Why, you silly ass——"

"That's the story that's likely to get about," continued Nipper. "You know how people talk. The Head's car has been stolen. Let that sink right into your head—and stay there. That's all we know."

And Edward Oswald Handforth understood. But, although he calmed down outwardly, he was just as much determined, in his heart, to do something big, something spectacular, in order to make amends.

MEANWHILE, other things were happening.

While Mr. Kingswood, without the loss of a second, was himself getting through on the telephone to the Bannington police, the stolen limousine was being driven at break-neck speed across the lonely moor road. It fairly sang past the grim, black gates of the old derelict prison, and it roared on into the night.

Although the old Moor Prison was, in fact, the Southern Headquarters of the Fellowship of Fear, the two agents in the limousine did not dare to stop. No pursuit was within sight; but it would have been risky to have stopped. The delay of slowing up, and then the stoppage itself, could easily allow a pur-

suing car to arrive upon the scene. And if men were seen moving towards the old prison it would be disastrous. People would commence talking; the police would make inquiries.

No, there was a much better plan.

Two miles farther on, where the road was utterly desolate, the feeble lamps of another vehicle came into sight. The man at the wheel of the limousine dimmed his headlamps quickly, and flashed them on again. The other headlamps were extinguished completely for a moment, and then they, too, came on again. It was a signal.

The limousine pulled up with a gentle application of the brakes—so that there should be no tell-tale marks left upon the road. The two cars stood side by side. The other one was hardly a car at all. It was a decrepit old Ford—one of the old-style vehicles which are seldom seen nowadays. At one time, apparently, it had been a two-seater, with a "dickey" in the rear. But the latter had been removed, and there was an additional bodywork, something like a miniature truck. It was open, and it was filled with an assortment of strange vegetation.

Scarcely a word was spoken.

"You are ready?" asked No. G. 10.

"Yes," said the man at the wheel of the Ford. "Do you want me to help?"

"No—sit there," said No. G. 10.

The man nodded. He was elderly and kindly-looking. In fact, he was none other than Professor Matthew Merritt, the well-known botanist. There was no deception about the professor's qualifications; he was a man who was highly respected. He had spent many years at Kew Gardens, and was a recognised authority on ferns and lichens and mosses.

He was living openly in the old governor's residence at the Moor Prison. The prison itself was supposedly empty, but Professor Merritt lived in the private house, for he was making a careful study of the moorland mosses and ferns.

Even Nelson Lee, who had learned to trust nobody, was puzzled about Professor Merritt. It was difficult to believe that this learned man, so wrapped up in his botanical studies, could be a member of the terrorist organisation.

Yet here he was, in charge of the Ford car into which Nelson Lee was now being transferred! The rear of the old car was filled with piles of ferns and moss. This was quickly rolled back, and Nelson Lee was pushed far in. Then the ferns and mosses were spread over him until he was completely concealed. His captors had made certain that he would make no move for some hours; for in addition to knocking him on the head, they had given him a "shot" of stupefying drug.

The limousine did not wait a moment. The very instant Lee was out of it, No. G. 5, who was now at the wheel, drove on. The big car roared off into the night.

No. G. 10 having satisfied himself that Lee was completely concealed, turned to the professor.

"All right," he said. "Drive on."

And without another word he struck off across the moor, away from the road, vanishing amongst the patches of gorse.

The whole thing had been done within a minute—and it had been done efficiently, and with machine-like precision.

The limousine tore onwards in the same reckless, abandoned fashion as before. Once across the moor, it struck northwards, and it caused quite a sensation in the little village of Hexley. For there was an unexpected curve in the middle of the village, and the car, hurtling onwards, scattering people, caused the driver of a sports coupé to mount the pavement, and crash into a shop-front. The limousine, skidding terrifyingly, went round the curve in a series of zig-zags, and only by a miracle did the driver regain control. Then, with throttle wide open, he sent the car hurtling out of the village.

He took a roundabout route after that, dodging through this village and that village, and causing widespread comment by his excessive speed. He was, in fact, leaving a distinct trail. The rural police, in all these little places, were getting busy on the telephone, passing the information on that a madman was loose, at the wheel of a big car.

No. G. 5 knew the risks he was taking; but he knew when to stop, too. For, as soon as he had reached a main highway, after traversing a network of side lanes, he switched off the engine and left the car standing quietly by the side of the road, with the side lamps and the tail-light glowing. The car had come through its adventure unscathed, although it was fairly bathed in mud.

No. G. 5 took a quick look up and down the road, saw that he was alone, and then he gave a last look into the car. He was still wearing his motor-cycling outfit, which included heavy gloves. He knew well enough that not a fingerprint had been left on the steering-wheel, or on any other part of the car.

He took a deep breath, and then walked quickly down the main road, and presently he turned into a side lane. After walking half a mile he came to a deep ditch. Here he removed his overalls and helmet, and he wrapped them into a bundle, weighted them with a heavy stone, and sunk them to the bottom of the ditch.

No. G. 5 was now respectably dressed in a lounge suit, and he placed a soft tweed hat, which he had carried folded in his pocket, on his head. He walked back to the main road, smoking a cigarette.

Presently a well-lighted bus, belonging to a local service, came along. No. G. 5 hailed it, climbed in, and his work for the evening was over.

CHAPTER 5.

The Lost Trail.

INSPECTOR JAMESON, of the Bannington Police, was ready for action.

In response to Mr. Kingswood's urgent appeal, he had had a car brought round. Jameson himself was determined to go in chase of the motor-bandits. Various reports had already come in, by 'phone, of the hectic doings of the car thieves. At the last moment a message came from the police sergeant at Hexley; and the police sergeant, almost incoherently, told of the limousine's mad career through Hexley village.

"That's our trail," said the inspector, as he dashed out to the waiting car, and gave instructions to the driver. "Don't trouble to go to Bellton—that's out of our way. Take the moorland road, and drive straight to Hexley. We ought to be able to pick up fresh information there."

"Right, sir," said the police driver.

And in a moment they were off in pursuit. Mr. Kingswood's idea had been for Jameson to come round by way of Bellton—and then the headmaster himself with Nipper, perhaps, would have joined in the chase. But Inspector Jameson, who was inclined to think a great deal of himself, had his own ideas.

The police car was speeding along the moorland road, not far from the old prison; when the feeble lights of another vehicle came into sight; they seemed to be sagging curiously, one much lower than the other; and an electric torch was flashing up and down. The police driver, at a word from Jameson, slowed down.

"Hey! One moment, if you please!" shouted the elderly man who came forward, his voice full of mingled agitation and anger. "I wonder if you will help me with my car?"

Jameson cursed. Just as if he had time to bother with a disabled motorist!

"I'm sorry," said the inspector curtly. "I am on very important business, and I cannot waste a single moment——"

"Good gracious! Police!" exclaimed the elderly man, running up, "I want to make a complaint. My name is Merritt—Professor Merritt. I live at the old governor's house here, just along the road."

"Why, of course, professor," said the inspector. "I thought I recognised you. I've met you in Bannington, haven't I? I'm really very sorry——"

"And I'm very angry, sir!" shouted the professor. "Some infernal scoundrel in a big car came roaring along this road not long ago, and I was obliged to go into the ditch——"

"Oh, indeed!" said Jameson, with sudden interest. "Well, to tell you the truth, Professor Merritt, we're after a motor bandit. That car you saw was stolen."

"I expected as much!" said the professor. "The rogues! Not content with stealing somebody else's car, they nearly wrecked mine!"

The inspector held the private opinion that Professor Merritt's car was a wreck, in any case; but he forebore to express this opinion.

"Thanks, professor," he said crisply. "We know that we're on the right road, then. He went straight on, I understand? Driving fast, eh?"

"He came along here at a disgraceful speed—between sixty and seventy miles an hour," said the professor hotly. "But, really—— Please, inspector! Won't you and your men help me with my car? It will only take you a minute."

He prevailed upon them; and Inspector Jameson and the other police-officers, searching for Nelson Lee—for they, of course, were in the secret—heaved the old Ford out of the ditch-like gully, beside the road into which it had slithered. Nelson Lee was within a yard of them, and they never even thought of searching that wet pile of ferns and mosses.

"Many thanks, inspector—I am deeply grateful," said Professor Merritt. "And I hope sincerely that you will catch that scoundrel, and put him in prison. I have met a few hogs in my day——"

He found that he was talking to himself; for the police, having wasted this precious minute, were once again in their car, speeding onwards towards Hexley.

The audacity of the fellowship agents was startling. Their cunning was amazing. By adopting this simple trick they had made certain of conveying their prisoner into the old convict settlement in perfect safety. Professor Merritt was a well-known character in the district, and his old Ford contraption was a local joke. Inspector Jameson was scarcely deserving of censure for having failed to search the ferns and moss; for not by the wildest stretch of the imagination could it be thought that the highly respectable professor was mixed up with the terrorists.

Rather than chance being seen by a possible pursuing car, the fellowship agents had deliberately placed the Ford in the ditch, so that it could not fail to be seen. In that way they stifled suspicion before it was born.

The Ford, now left to itself on the lonely road, rattled into life, and vibrated its way to the big prison gates. Professor Merritt got out, produced a key, and swung one of the gates open. He drove in, locked the gate again, and took the Ford round to the rear of the governor's residence. Two figures, dim and silent, materialised out of the gloom. The rain had ceased falling now, and the sky was clearing.

"All right?" whispered an inquiring voice.

Professor Merritt quivered with suppressed emotion.

"I demand to see the man who is in charge here!" he said tensely. "Not content with threatening my life, you now force me to take part——"

"Yes, you've said that before, professor," interrupted the other. "But what's the use?"

"You scoundrels!" panted the old man. "I rented this house in good faith; you descended upon me in the night and made me your prisoner. You threatened to kill me if I breathed a word of your activities. Yes, you wanted me to stay here—so that any lights or movements should be satisfactorily cloaked."

"Tell it to Number One," said the man.

"How can I when I am never allowed to see him?" asked the professor hotly. "You even forced me into this disgraceful business.

ship captives. He had been here for many months; he was an established thing at the Moor Prison; his presence was of great value to the terrorist organisation. But, like Damocles of old, he was constantly haunted by the grim sword which hung suspended over his head.

The shadowy figures pushed the ferns and moss aside, and Nelson Lee was lifted, and carried across the great courtyard, and conveyed into the prison proper. This was supposedly empty, but as a matter of fact, be-



Handforth forced his way into the study which was filled with evil-smelling and choking fumes. There, stretched on the floor, was his minor, Willy, inert and crumpled!

One of your murderous men was lurking behind the gorse, listening to every word I said to the police. I knew very well that I should be shot if I lowered my voice, or uttered the faintest semblance of a warning——"

"It's no good saying this to me, Professor Merritt," broke in the man impatiently. "I'm just as much a unit as you are. I've no power."

"How dare you!" flamed the professor. "I'm no unit of this accursed organisation. If I thought there was the slightest chance of exposing you I would take the risk—ay, and invite death itself. But I know well enough that you would kill me before I could do you any harm."

He went into his house, fuming. And what he had said was perfectly true. Although apparently living openly, he was as much a prisoner as any of the other fellow-

hind the shuttered windows and barred doors there were many activities.

Nelson Lee was carried straight through a dim passage. He was taken to a room which had once been the governor's private office. It was warm and comfortable, and well lighted. A man, austere and learned-looking, was sitting behind the desk.

"So!" he exclaimed, as he rose to his feet. "You have brought this man. Let me see him. There was no hitch?"

"None, Master," said No. G. 10. "No. G. 5 and myself carried out orders to the letter."

"You shall be fittingly rewarded for your good work," replied the Master of the Southern Section of the Fellowship of Fear. "It was very smartly done, and I am pleased—— But what is this?" His eyes suddenly blazed. "Fools! Imbeciles! This man is not Lee, the detective!"

"He is the man you told us to get," replied No. G. 10. "He is the man who was driving Kingswood's car."

"Yes, yes—I am not blaming you," said No. 1. "But that fool who gave the report — But why should I be angered? I am relieved rather than angry."

He stared down at the limp figure in the chauffeur's uniform. The face was weather-beaten, the nose broad, the mouth unshapely, with protruding teeth. By no stretch of the imagination could this man be mistaken for Nelson Lee.

"It seems we have had our work for nothing," said No. 1. "A pity. It is difficult enough to capture the men we want—without going to the trouble of capturing the men we do not want. This fellow is on our hands now, and we dare not allow him to go."

"Are you sure you don't want him?" asked No. G. 10.

"Am I sure?" retorted the chief. "Do you think I am a fool?"

"I'm not one of your sort," replied No. G. 10, with some insolence. "You only hire me and my kind to do your dirty work. I'm a gunman—and, in your heart, you look down on me, don't you? I'm just doing the job I'm paid for."

"You may go," said No. 1 curtly. "And, remember you must take every precaution —"

"Forget it!" said the other. "I'm sick of hearing your warnings. Don't you think I know what's good for me? But let me tell you this, chief. I'm admitting that this man doesn't look like Lee—but when we grabbed him he was as quick on the draw as Lee himself would have been. We pulled his teeth in the nick of time."

"So he had a gun, yes?" asked No. 1 keenly. "H'm! That is most interesting. I wonder——"

He bent closer to the captive; and, suddenly, he reached forward. He pulled at the protruding teeth, for Lee's mouth was partially open. The teeth, after a short tug, came right away in No. 1's hand. And, beneath, a perfect set of teeth was revealed.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Master. "Perhaps, after all——"

That first discovery led to others. Tiny metal "enlargers" were removed from Lee's nostrils. Then, indeed, No. 1 knew the truth. This capture of his was as important as he had at first believed. His spy's information had been correct. This man was Nelson Lee himself.

"Amazing!" muttered the Master. "Even I was fooled at first. So this man is Lee! And we have him here. How long before he recovers consciousness?" He swung round upon No. G. 10, and the latter shrugged.

"Three hours, maybe—perhaps four," he replied. "We gave him a good shot."

"Take him to one of the special cells, and strip him," said No. 1, addressing two other men who were in the room. "Search him thoroughly— Wait! Search him here, now."

And then and there Nelson Lee was virtually stripped. Every pocket of his clothing was examined; every inch of the lining of his jacket and waistcoat. But nothing of importance was discovered. His pockets contained just the things that a chauffeur's pockets were likely to contain. His driving licence was made out in the name of Carson, his cigarette case bore the initials "H. C." Nelson Lee had carried nothing whatever which would have given him away.

"He is clever—almost as clever as we are," said No. 1 grudgingly. "You may dress him again. Replace these things in the pockets. Then take him to the cell and lock him in. Later, when he recovers consciousness, I will question him. And if he does not willingly answer——"

He left the sentence unfinished. His subordinates knew well enough what happened to captives who refused to talk.

INSPECTOR JAMESON had an easy task.

The "bandits" had left such a clear trail that it was followed without the slightest difficulty. Even when Jameson lost it—when he could get no further reports of the stolen car's progress—luck came to his aid. For in a small town, called Kelford, a motorist had reported to the police that a large limousine car was standing unattended on the highway, three miles from the town and a mile from any house. A visit to the spot was sufficient. This was Mr. James Kingswood's car; and it bore ample evidence of its hectic journey. But of Carson, the chauffeur, there was no sign.

The police, of course, knew just what it meant. The Fellowship of the Free had "bagged" Nelson Lee. They did not want the car. They had abandoned it, and it could be taken for granted that Lee himself, by this time, was a great distance away.

The police theory was that Lee had been transferred to another car, and conveyed, perhaps, to London. Even a third car might have been brought into use, carrying him farther onwards, perhaps to the north. Once the local trail was lost, it was next to impossible to track the missing detective.

Jameson himself took charge of the car, and he drove in it to St. Frank's. And very soon the school was agog—although it was only a brief spell of excitement. The story which went the rounds—and which the police were anxious to go the rounds—was that the stolen car had been traced and recovered. Everybody was led to believe that Carson had been hand-in-glove with the bandits; but as the trail had got too hot, he and his associates had abandoned the car, thinking more of their own safety.

At St. Frank's, of course, many of the fellows were surprised—and a bit shocked—to learn that Carson was a wrong 'un. But nobody had had much to do with the Head's chauffeur, so the fellows merely shrugged their shoulders and changed the subject.

By now, of course, Nipper and Handforth and the other juniors had returned to the school. They managed to get hold of the inspector as he was crossing Inner Court, after interviewing the Head. Nipper badly wanted to have a word with Jameson alone.

"No luck, young man," said the inspector gravely. "I'm sorry. They've got him."

"I was afraid of it, sir," said Nipper. "Any idea where he was transferred?"

"Not the faintest—although, probably enough, there was another car waiting on that main road, near Kelford," replied the inspector. "You boys, I understand, are in possession of the inner facts? Well, I'm relying upon you to keep quiet. The less said about this unfortunate business, the better."

He gave them a brief account of the chase, even mentioning Professor Merritt and the old Ford; but the juniors, even including Nipper, thought nothing of that incident at the moment.

"He's wrong," said Nipper grimly, ten minutes later.

He was in Study C, now, in the Ancient House. Handforth & Co. had come in, too, and the door was locked. They were supposedly busy with their prep; but none of them could give a thought to work just now.

"Who was wrong—Jameson?" asked Handforth.

"Of course he was wrong," said Nipper. "My guv'nor hasn't been transferred into another car and taken to London, or anywhere like that. The fellowship's headquarters are somewhere in this district; and it's any odds that he was taken straight there. All the rest of that business was in the nature of a bluff."

The "Secret Six," as the juniors called themselves, all looked grave. They were the only boys in the whole school who were "in the know."

"But where are their headquarters?" asked Tommy Watson helplessly. "Didn't Mr. Lee discover them last week?"

"I believe he did, but he wouldn't let on," replied Nipper. "What a pity! If he had told me— But it's no good 'ifing.' He didn't tell me, and there's an end of it."

"Not necessarily, old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "What about the Head? It's frightfully likely that Mr. Lee told the Head."

"By Jove, perhaps you're right," said Nipper, his eyes suddenly gleaming. "Mr. Kingswood might be willing to tell me— But I doubt it," he added, shaking his head. "Both he and the guv'nor are mortally afraid of telling us too much, my son. It isn't that they don't trust us. But the less we know— Well, the guv'nor, I'm sure, was thinking of our own safety. He didn't want us to be in possession of any knowledge which might lead us into danger."

"And don't you think the Head would tell you—in these peculiar circumstances?" asked Church.

"He might—but I think it would be better to adopt a little strategy," replied Nipper thoughtfully. "Let me think for a minute. I've got an idea, but it's not quite clear yet —"

"Hallo! What was that?" asked Handforth abruptly.

The window had rattled, and the very air in the study had somehow throbbed. It was as though a great weight had fallen somewhere nearby, causing a concussion. There had been no sound of an actual explosion, yet the effect was just like one. And the six Removites, in their present state of tension, were prepared for almost anything. They, knowing the relentlessness of the Fellowship of Fear were prepared for any violence.

"Great guns!" gasped Handforth. "I'll bet I know! They've bombed the Head's house! Blown him up!"

"Now, look here, Handy——"

"That was an explosion, I tell you!" went on Handforth excitedly. "It was a good way off, too, and we wouldn't hear the actual report. The rotters have collared Mr. Lee, and now they've killed Mr. Kingswood!"

Even the others caught some of his excitement. Nipper unlocked the door, and as he did so a wild shout sounded far down the Remove passage. Somebody was running, and yelling at the same time. Doors were opening all down the passage, and Removites were shouting inquiries.

"What the dickens is the matter?" yelled Handforth, dashing out.

"Oh, Handy—quick!" gasped Chubby Heath, of the Third. "Your—your minor!" Handforth jumped.

"What's happened to him?" he demanded. "Is the garage on fire, or something? We heard an explosion——"

"I don't mean your car!" shrieked Chubby Heath, who was almost incoherent. "It's Willy! He was in the study, by himself. Juicy Lemon and I were just going to open the door when we heard a terrific thud, and the door burst right open. We were nearly choked. And—and Willy was lying on the floor, all crumpled up. I—I believe he's dead!"

CHAPTER 6.

Nipper's Cunning.

THE same thought instantly flew into the minds of Nipper & Co. and Handforth & Co. Willy Handforth was an innocent victim of the Fellowship of Fear! Edward Oswald, already haggard with worry, now turned as pale as a sheet. He was for ever growling and grumbling at his minor, but there was a very real bond of affection between the two brothers.

Without a word, he raced down the corridor. Nipper and the others sped at his heels; and more juniors were collecting every moment, until a great crowd was surging into the Third Form passage. Here, there were a number of fags, most of them splut-

tering and gasping, and keeping well clear of the door of Willy's study.

"Let me through!" panted Handforth, as he fought through the mob.

"You can't go in there!" gasped one of the other fags. "The room's filled with poison gas, or something!"

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Handforth.

He took no notice of the warnings. He forced his way into the little study—which, indeed, was filled with evil-smelling and choking fumes. Stretched on the floor was Willy, inert and crumpled. Handforth acted with praiseworthy presence of mind. Instead of carrying Willy out through the doorway—where the passage, in both directions, was blocked with fellows—he flung open the window, bent down, grabbed Willy in his arms, and plunged out into the cold night air.

Nipper and Watson and several others, who had quickly followed him, came to his help. Nipper was flashing an electric torch into Willy's face; and whilst he was doing so he discovered that although the fumes in the study had sent him dizzy, his throat was unaffected. Yet the merest whiff of genuine poison gas would have caused intense agony.

"Thank goodness!" said Nipper. "He's all right, Handy—breathing quite evenly."

Handforth gulped.

"And—and I thought— Where's that fool of a Chubby?"

"Don't blame Chubby," said Nipper. "The kid was scared—and no wonder. Willy isn't even scratched. It's only the effect of this chemical stuff. It put him to sleep."

"You don't think—" began Handforth.

"Shush! Not here!" whispered Nipper.

It was a wise precaution; for many fellows who were not in the secret were crowding round now. And, to Handforth's further relief, Willy was showing signs of recovery. When finally he opened his eyes the cool night air had worked marvels—he came to his full sense with astonishing rapidity. He threw off the effects of the gas within a second or two.

"Why, hallo, Ted!" he said, blinking. "What's all this? What's the excitement?"

"That's what we want to know," said Nipper. "What happened to you, Willy? There was an explosion, or something—"

"My hat! So there was," said Willy. "Not exactly an explosion. It was more like a puff. Dash it, and I meant the whole thing to be a secret, too. I can't understand what went wrong."

Handforth's expression changed.

"What do you mean—what went wrong?" he asked ominously. "Were you monkeying about with a bomb or something? I mean, did you do it yourself?"

"No objection to my making chemical experiments, is there?" retorted Willy calmly. "I've been quite busy in the lab lately. I've made some discoveries, too. Do you know, I only had a teaspoonful of that stuff in a fountain-pen filler. I was filling my fountain-pen with it—"

"What!"

"It's a liquid," explained Willy. "But it has rummy properties. When you splash a drop of it on something suddenly it sort of evaporates all in one big puff—sending out a cloud of steam. And it knocks you silly, too."

"You—you awful young rotter!" gasped Handforth, his relief changing to anger. "Then—then it wasn't—I mean, you blew yourself up—"

"Don't exaggerate, Ted," said Willy. "I'm as right as ninepence now. That chemical is harmless enough—it's effect wears off in a minute or two. Do you think I haven't experimented with it? I've even tried it on some of my pets—and that ought to prove to you that it's harmless. I wouldn't hurt one of my pets for quids."

The juniors were beginning to laugh now. What had promised to be a sensation was merely a joke. It was fortunate, indeed, that no masters or prefects had come upon the scene.

"And so you made a chemical liquid, did you?" asked Handforth grimly. "And you were filling your fountain-pen with it?"

"You see, when a drop is splashed on the floor it gives a tremendous puff—just like you read about in the 'Arabian Nights,'" said Willy coolly. "I thought it was rather a good wheeze. I was going to take out my fountain-pen later, in the common-room, give it a shake, and send some of the chaps to sleep. But the whole lot went off together, I don't know how, and I was bowled completely over. You needn't think I'm going to give you the secret of this chemical, because it's my own invention, and it's pretty ripe, too. If you'll let me demonstrate—"

"I'll jolly well give you a tanning if you mess about with chemicals again!" broke in Handforth aggressively. "You—you young chump! You might have killed yourself! You've got to promise me—"

"Rats!" said Willy rudely.

And, with his hands in his pockets, he stalked away. No further demonstration of the harmlessness of the chemical was necessary. Everybody was roaring with laughter, and, in fact, the incident was forgotten soon afterwards.

Nipper and Handforth and the other members of the Secret Six went back to Study C for their interrupted conference.

"We're getting jumpy, my sons," said Nipper. "Forget about Willy. At any other time we shouldn't have thought much of this affair—we should have laughed, just like the rest of the fellows. We mustn't be jumpy, either. It's not good for us."

"You were saying something about the Head—just before Willy exploded himself," said Sir Montie. "How about it, old boy?"

"You fellows wait here," replied Nipper. "I'm going across to have a talk with Mr. Kingswood. I rather fancy I might discover something."

"I'll come with you—" began Handforth.

"Thanks all the same—but I'd rather be

alone," interrupted Nipper. "I shan't be long."

He hurried away, and although Handforth wanted to follow, the others kept him back.

When Nipper arrived at the Head's house the door was opened by Phipps, the butler. Phipps was a tall, cleanly built, imperturbable man; he was, indeed, something more than a servant. And he divided his time between the headmaster and Archie Glenthorne, of the Remove. He served Archie as valet, and, in the redoubtable Archie's opinion, Phipps was the brainiest person in the whole of St. Frank's.

"Hallo, Phipps!" said Nipper, forcing himself to speak in his usual cheery way. "Is the Head alone?"

"I believe so, Master Nipper," replied Phipps. "You have an appointment?"

"Well, hardly," admitted Nipper. "But Mr. Kingswood is different from the ordinary run of headmasters. I'll bet he'll see me. He's a sport."

Sure enough, Phipps returned a minute later to tell Nipper that Mr. Kingswood would receive him.

"I can understand this visit of yours, young man," said the Head, after Phipps had gone. "Ordinarily it would not be wise for you to call upon me like this, in the middle of the evening. It's a bad business, Nipper."

"Yes, they've got him, sir," said Nipper gravely. "That spy down at the village tuck-shop did his work well."

Mr. Kingswood opened his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Nipper explained about the hidden microphone, and he told the Head of Handforth's incautious words. Mr. Kingswood listened with growing alarm.

"These devils are prepared for everything," he said at length. "Think, too, of the speed with which they must have acted! They have their agents ready to move at a second's notice."

"We knew that before, sir," replied Nipper. "And one thing's pretty certain now, I imagine. With the gov'nor in their hands, they know that you are more or less unprotected. They'll have another go at you."

"Glad as I was of Mr. Lee's protection, I'm not entirely helpless myself," retorted the athletic young Head in a grim voice. "I shan't be sorry if the enemy makes an attack. I'm quite ready for them."

"You're a fighter, sir, and you're naturally fed up with all this mystery," said Nipper. "But it's no good blinking at the facts. The fellowship people are relentless—and they are determined. They mean to get you, sir. They only got the gov'nor by a fluke, and I'm not scared. Mr. Lee is a match for the blighters."

"I like to hear your expressions of confidence," said Mr. Kingswood quietly. "We know, at least—from the broadcast instructions—that Mr. Lee has come to no real harm. The orders were that he should be captured alive. And the very movements of

the stolen car prove that the fellowship agents carried out their orders to the letter. For if they had intended killing Mr. Lee, they would have killed him on the spot, at the first moment of the encounter."

Nipper was thinking rapidly. Mr. Kingswood knew the location of the fellowship's headquarters. Nipper did not. To ask the Head point-blank might result in failure. Far better to use strategy.

"I'm wondering, sir, if we can get up anything in the way of a rescue stunt," said Nipper. "It's not far for us to go, and we know that Mr. Lee can't escape single-handed. That place is too well guarded."

"It is more than well guarded," replied Mr. Kingswood in a worried voice. "We can take it for granted that they'll clap him into a cell. What chance has he of escaping? And if it comes to that, what chance have we of effecting his escape?"

The Head's reply sent a thrill through Nipper. For that reply proved that Nipper was right in one thing—that the fellowship headquarters were near by. It proved, incidentally, that Mr. Kingswood was assuming that Nipper knew the full truth.

"We could get the others into it, sir," he said. "I mean, Handforth and Montie and Tommy and——"

"A mere handful," interrupted Mr. Kingswood, rising to his feet, and pacing up and down. "Even supposing we scaled the walls, and got into the grounds themselves? What then? There were many strongly guarded buildings, and hundreds of cells. Mr. Lee might be in any one of them."

"Oh, I don't know, sir!" said Nipper hopefully. "It isn't as though it were a real prison——"

"But it is a real prison," interrupted Mr. Kingswood impatiently. "Nothing has been radically changed since the authorities closed the place up. I don't see how we could make an effective raid by ourselves. We should need a hundred police-officers; and I'm not sure that Mr. Lee would approve."

Not by a movement, or by the slightest change of expression did Nipper show that he had learned the secret. But Mr. Kingswood's words were capable of only one interpretation. The old derelict Moor Prison was the fellowship's fort!

"We might try, sir," said Nipper eagerly. "Think of it—you and I and the other chaps, scaling the old wall in the darkness! We can creep forward, and right into the prison itself. Once inside we could make a dash for it. I know the position of the cells in the Moor Prison—I've been there once or twice. It wouldn't take us long to locate Mr. Lee's cells——"

"No, no!" interrupted the Head. "It's altogether too hazardous, my boy. Heaven knows I'm worried enough—and I'm willing and eager to take a chance. But this would be plain folly. Don't forget that the fellowship is a powerful organisation. We don't know how many men there are in the prison. A dozen, perhaps—or a hundred. Even Mr.

Lee did not know. 'What chance should we have if we penetrated right into the very heart of the enemy's domain? There would be a short fight, we should be captured, and our venture would end in ignominious failure. No, Nipper, I cannot countenance this fool-hardy project.'

"Then why not get the police to help?" asked Nipper.

"Because Mr. Lee made me give him my word—my word of honour, mark you—that if he fell into the fellowship's hands, I was not to take action for at least forty-eight hours," replied Mr. Kingswood grimly. "I was a fool to give my promise. But, having given it, I must keep it. Mr. Lee's idea, no doubt, was to avoid publicity. Furthermore, he has plenty of confidence in his own powers. But how in the name of wonder he can hope to escape, single-handed, is beyond me."

"He'll do it, sir," said Nipper confidently. "You don't know the guv'nor as well as I do. He's like a magician. He always keeps a card somewhere up his sleeve—and he doesn't play it until the crucial moment. I think we'd better trust him—and he'd like you to carry on as usual."

A few minutes later, Nipper took his departure—and Fighting Jim Kingswood had no idea that the astute youngster had bluffed him. For Nipper went back to the Ancient House in full possession of the knowledge he so keenly desired. He also knew that Mr. Kingswood was prohibited from making any rescue attempt. Nipper was glad, now, that Nelson Lee had not taken him into his confidence—or Lee would have made him promise, too.

"Any luck?" went up an eager chorus, as he entered Study C and closed the door.

"Plenty," replied Nipper.

After he had locked the door, he went over to the fireplace, where the other juniors were gathered.

"Now, keep your voices low," he said warningly. "Without letting Mr. Kingswood know, I've discovered that the headquarters of the fellowship are at the old Moor Prison."

"Great Scott!"

"As near as that!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"I suggested making a rescue effort, but the Head was against it," continued Nipper. "Then I found out that Mr. Lee had made him promise that he wouldn't take any action. But I didn't promise—neither did you chaps. So, while the Head himself can't take part in any rescue stunt, we can go right ahead."

"But—but you're not suggesting that we should go to the Moor Prison and raid it?" asked Watson in amazement. "But what could we do? I mean, just six of us. Those rotters are armed with pistols and gas-guns, and goodness knows what else! We shouldn't stand a dog's chance."

Handforth snorted.

"Rats!" he said. "We should have everything in our favour—for the simple reason

that the fellowship rotters are not expecting us. By George! What an adventure!"

"No, Handy, we can't go there in the way you suggest—blindly, recklessly, without preparation," said Nipper, shaking his head. "This thing needs careful thinking out. We shall have to adopt some careful plan. But we know the guv'nor's there—probably locked up in one of the old cells."

"I don't care what you chaps do—I'm going to make an effort to rescue him," said Handforth, with a light of determination in his eyes. "It was I who got him into this



The master-crook swung open the cupboard door
The next moment Nelson Lee had stolen up—
staggering.

mess—and I'm going to do my best to get him out of it! It makes me go all hot and cold when I think of it. I'd like to start now—this minute—— By George! I wonder if that old chap, Professor Merritt, is mixed up with the crooks?"

"It's almost impossible," said Church. "We met him a week ago, and he's one of the nicest old chaps——"

"I'm getting suspicious of the nice old chaps!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "What about Sergeant-Major Lambert? He looked all right—but he's nothing but a spy."

"Wait a minute," said Nipper thoughtfully. "Professor Merritt! Old Jameson was saying something about the professor, wasn't he? The police met him on the moor this

evening, with his old Ford, and they helped to get the Ford out of the ditch."

"What of it?" asked Tommy Watson.

Nipper's eyes were blazing.

"Don't you see?" he asked. "The Head's car, with the fellowship agents in charge, went along that road shortly before. I'll bet a penny to a pound that Mr. Lee was taken out of the car and dumped into that old Ford. He was actually in the Ford when the police helped to lift it out of the ditch! And that chump of a Jameson never guessed!"



or, whence he thought he had heard a sound. Behind him and, with a violent push, sent him forward!

"He wouldn't!" growled Handforth. "And—and the professor drove the car openly into the prison, the gates were closed, and—— It's almost too impossible!"

"Remember, we're in possession of the inner facts," said Nipper. "These fellowship people believe that they have preserved their secret; but my guv'nor, by his own cleverness, made the great discovery. He did not even tell me—but he told the Head. My sons, we've got to go into action."

"We're all game, old boy—we are, really," said Sir Montie. "But won't it be rather like Daniel in the lion's den? I'm the last chappie in the world to raise objections, but I must say it seems a pretty forlorn hope. We're almost certain to be bagged. Then we shall be escorted to some more of those

cells, locked in, and another chapter will be closed."

"If you're afraid to chance it——" began Handforth.

"Chuck, old man—Montie is right," said Nipper quietly.

"What!"

"He's keeping a cool head, and he's seeing this thing in its true perspective," continued Nipper. "If we go on this raid just as we are—I mean, without any special weapons—we shan't stand an earthly. Yet we can't take guns. And even if we could, it would be impossible to use them."

"We might be able to fake up some make-shift gas-masks," suggested Church. "We shall need, them, too. Those beggars are armed with peculiar guns which discharge stupefying gas——"

"By George! That's it!" interrupted Handforth. "Stupefying gas! If we can give them some of their own medicine——"

He broke off suddenly, and his face was flushed.

"What is it?" asked Mac.

"Shut up! I'm thinking!"

"I thought there was something wrong with you," nodded Church.

"I'm thinking!" repeated Handforth huskily. "By George! It's a wheeze, you chaps! It's gilt-edged, solid twenty-two carat! It's the brainwave of the century!"

They waited patiently, and without much enthusiasm. Handforth's brainwaves, as a rule, had a way of petering out when they came to be scrutinised under the microscope of criticism.

"We're waiting," said Nipper gently.

"Willy!" ejaculated Handforth.

"Eh?"

"Willy and his giddy drops!"

"His what!"

"His drops of chemicals!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly. "You know what's happened to him, don't you? He has been monkeying with chemicals, and he's found a mixture which evaporates into a kind of gas when a drop of it is thrown to the floor. And that gas is stupefying. Don't you see? Why couldn't we make lots of little bombs? With those in our pockets, we should have a fine chance of success. Every time we met the enemy, we could chuck our bombs, and they would explode in puffs of vapour, and the blighters would fall down helpless. Yet they wouldn't be really hurt."

All the juniors were looking at one another excitedly.

"There's something in it, Handy," said Nipper warmly. "By Jingo! This looks like a real brainwave. Sauce for the gander, eh? If the fellowship agents use gas guns, we can use gas bombs. Give 'em their own medicine—and it's any odds that they won't like it."

"I'll go and find Willy and get the formula out of him," said Handforth, moving towards the door. "No need to tell him anything."

"Just a minute," said Nipper. "We want to be fair. Willy's a useful chap, and if

we're going to use his patent chemical, it's only right that he should be in the swim with us."

Handforth stared.

"You don't mean you're going to tell him everything?" he asked blankly.

"Yes."

"You're going to tell my minor about the Fellowship of Fear?"

"We need that formula—and we've got to have it," explained Nipper. "I know Willy just as well as you do, my son—perhaps better. He can be trusted, and he won't give us the secret of his chemical unless he knows what it's for. Better bring him here right away—and we'll have a quiet talk with him."

Handforth object, as usual, but in the end he was prevailed upon to fetch Willy. The others were all decided that this was the identical moment for somebody else to be brought into the secret—and Willy was the somebody else.

When the Third Form leader arrived he was looking a bit fed up; and he fairly sniffed when Handforth turned the key in the door.

"What's this—a third degree?" he asked, looking at Nipper. "Has Ted been influencing you chaps?"

"It's a serious matter, Willy," said Nipper quietly. "We haven't brought you here to put you on trial, or anything silly like that. We want to know if you'll give us the formula of your chemical. You say that a mere drop of it, when thrown to the ground, gives forth a great puff of stupefying vapour?"

"Yes," replied Willy. "Just between ourselves, it's rather wonderful stuff. But it's a Third Form secret, and I'm not going to give it away to the Remove. So that's that. Will somebody kindly unlock the door?"

"Listen, Willy," said Nipper. "This isn't a jape. We're serious. We want that stuff of yours for a definite purpose."

Willy looked round at the circle of tense, eager faces and he changed his mind. Seldom had he seen the Removites looking so serious.

"You don't know how to treat the young idiot," said Handforth gruffly. "Now then, Willy, my lad! Are you going to trot that secret out, or shall we put you across this table and wallop you?"

"You're the one who doesn't know how to treat him, Handy," said Nipper. "It's no good threatening Willy. He's obstinate—like you. Willy, old son, you can take my word for it that this is a matter of vital urgency. No japes—no larks. We want you to be sporting, and let us have that formula."

"As you put it like that, it's O.K. with me," replied Willy promptly. "Something to do with your guv'nor, eh?" he added shrewdly. "I'm not so green. How much of the stuff do you want? And how do you want it? It's a bit difficult to handle—"

"Can you make improvised bombs?"

"Nothing easier," said Willy. "I wasn't going to do anything so ambitious—because

the results would have been a bit too effective. But a tiny glass bottle full of that liquid will go off with a tremendous puff when it hits the ground."

"The flying glass is pretty dangerous, isn't it?" asked Church.

"Not a bit," replied Willy. "The bottle just bursts, and doesn't send any splinters anywhere. And up comes a tremendous puff of stupefying vapour. I've tried it. In fact, I was thinking of sending the formula to the War Office," he added calmly. "It ought to be worth a lot of money."

"And can you make a big supply of this stuff—quickly, I mean?" asked Nipper eagerly. "Can you make it to-night? What about supplies of chemicals?"

"There's plenty in the lab," replied Willy. "And plenty more locked up in the store-rooms—but I doubt if we can get permission to use it."

"The locks on the store-rooms are easy enough to pick," replied Nipper coolly. "Now, Willy, you've been very decent about this. So we're not going to keep you in the dark. We're going to let you in on the secret—and, if you like, you can help in the game."

And, then and there, Willy Handforth was admitted into the circle, and the Secret Six became the "Secret Seven." He took it very calmly—but even he opened his eyes wide once or twice.

"Now I'm beginning to understand," he said, at length. "I've wondered, for days past, what was the matter with Ted. Nipper, old man, you're a brick. Thanks awfully for letting me in on this. If you'll come with me, I'll show you just how to make that stuff—and we can get a lot of it in readiness before bedtime. And we shall have the lab. to ourselves, too."

So the plans were made. These seven schoolboys were determined to make a raid, that very night, on the headquarters of the Fellowship of Fear—and their primary object was to rescue Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER 7.

The Fellowship Catches a Tartar.

NO. 1 was impatient.

Several hours had passed since Nelson Lee had been brought in; yet the detective was showing no signs of returning consciousness. He was lying in a cell at the extreme end of a dim corridor, well away from the other prisoners.

"We must make efforts to revive him," said No. 1, when a guard came in to report. "You have tried cold water? Yes?"

"We have tried everything, sir," said the guard. "But it's no good. He's completely under."

"Get back to your post," said the master. "I will come and look at the prisoner for myself in a few minutes."

He was left alone, and he contemplated the preparations which had been made in the office. On the farther wall some stout straps were dangling from heavy metal hooks. There were other straps lower down. Nelson Lee was to be questioned—and if he proved obstinate, No. 1 was ready to persuade him. Strapped to that wall, with his back stripped.

No. 1 frowned. He disliked these methods—for he was not a violent man by nature. But he was a fanatic. To gain his ends he was ready to go to any lengths of cruelty. It had come as a shock to him—and to the whole Fellowship—that Nelson Lee, the great detective, was working against them. It was evident that Lee was already in possession of valuable information. He would talk—or, unless he talked, he would suffer.

No. 1 had already been in secret communication with the true headquarters of the organisation. He had received certain instructions from the Supreme Master. And after Lee had been made to talk he was to be dealt with—effectively.

As No. 1 rose to his feet he sighed. It was a pity that men were so blind, so foolish, so obstinate. If they would only see reason they would save themselves from much torment—and even from death.

And so No. 1, who looked as though he might have just stepped from the platform in the lecture-room of one of the universities, went out of his office and paced down the gloomy, stone-flagged corridor.

The Moor Prison was out of date; it was one of the old-time penal settlements, and it was a place of grim gloom at the best of times. Now, deserted, it was full of cold draughts, black shadows; and, altogether, it was an abode of evil.

After dark only small lights, here and there, were allowed. Even so, every window was tightly shuttered, so that not a gleam could escape into the night.

At the doorway which led into a wide central hall a man stood on duty. His figure was shadowy and vague. But as No. 1 passed him he saluted.

"Everything quiet, sir," he said briefly.

No. 1 crossed the wide floor, and though his footsteps were soft, they echoed dully, and with a hollow thudding. He passed up a staircase to the first gallery. There were more tiny lights here, and as the Master went down the gallery he glanced, now and then, through the gratings into the locked cells. There were some prisoners here—schoolmasters, mostly. They were men who, like Mr. James Kingswood, had refused to obey the fellowship's demands. They had been kidnapped—they had vanished completely, leaving no trace. And now they were languishing in these cells. The fellowship offered them freedom if they would agree to the terms. It would be safe enough to release them, for these unfortunate gentlemen, one and all, had been so confused by a mass of false clues that they believed themselves to be in some old prison on the Continent. They believed that they had been

taken from England by aeroplane. Because of this belief—because they thought they were far beyond the reach of their own countrymen—they had almost given up hope. The fellowship had adopted exactly the same tactics in kidnapping Mr. Kingswood. He, too, was to have been fooled into believing that he had been taken on an aeroplane journey; but Nelson Lee, by his astuteness, had not only saved Mr. Kingswood, but he had completely fooled the fellowship.

Now Lee himself was in the hands of the enemy.

No. 1 reached the end of the gallery. There was no guard on duty here, for such a precaution was unnecessary. Once an hour a guard would come round, inspecting the doors, and that was sufficient.

No. 1 inserted a key in the lock of the end door—but not before he had taken a careful look through the grille.

Having entered, he switched on an electric torch, and played the light upon the still, silent figure which lay on the hard bunk.

"Come, my friend, wake up!" said No. 1, shaking the figure's shoulder.

But it was no good. Nelson Lee did not respond. He remained limp, and his breathing was regular. On the side of his head there was an ugly bruise; and No. 1 wondered if it was this blow which was having such a lasting effect. Lee had been drugged, certainly, but he should have "come out" long before this.

"The fools!" muttered No. 1 angrily.

He was thinking of the two gunmen—No. G. 5 and No. G. 10. They had done their work far too well. However, it did not really matter; within an hour or two Lee would certainly be in possession of his senses.

No. 1 left the cell and relocked the door. And as he walked down the corridor towards the staircase, Nelson Lee watched him through the grille.

"A pity," murmured the detective. "If I had known that the fellow was alone, I could easily have mastered him."

But caution was Nelson Lee's watchword; and so he had cunningly played "possum" while No. 1 had been in the cell; for the great detective had believed that one guard, at least—and perhaps two—were ready at hand, just outside the door. How easily he could have taken No. 1 by surprise, flooring him and gaining possession of the keys.

But it was too late to think of that now. It was a lost opportunity, and Nelson Lee did not concern himself. He was not the type of man to spend even one moment in idle regrets.

He had recovered consciousness fully two hours earlier; and, fortunately, nobody had come near him for a full half-hour after he had first opened his eyes. This had given him ample time to gain full possession of his wits. Now, except for a violent headache, he was quite himself. His brain was clear, and it suited his book to let the enemy think that he was still "under." All he wanted

was time. For over forty-five minutes he had been working hard.

He now continued his labours.

He inserted a curiously shaped wire through a tiny hole on the inner surface of the door-lock. And with the skill of an expert cracksman—or a locksmith—he manipulated that wire. It was, in reality, a lock-pick of Nelson Lee's own design. It was made of incredibly toughened steel, and although it was so thin, so fragile, it was of well-nigh unbelievable strength, and capable of tremendous leverage, for it would neither bend under strain, nor snap.

Prior to these efforts, Lee had calmly and deliberately bored the little hole in the inner surface of the lock. For this work he had employed the tiniest drill imaginable—a drill which was not unlike a dwarf gimlet. The handle was merely a strip of metal which could be folded flat at a touch. There were other implements in Lee's possession—all similarly tiny, all similarly ingenious. They were of his own construction, and some of them

had taken weeks to make. Only a man with the fingers of a conjurer could have manipulated such tiny instruments.

He was working patiently now; working with the utmost calmness. He knew just where he was, and he knew the dangers of his position. He had lost consciousness whilst at the wheel of the Head's car; he had regained consciousness in this prison cell.

One fact was clearly apparent. The fellowship knew his real identity. For he had found that his false teeth were removed, and, also, the "wideners" from his nostrils. Lee would have given a great deal to know just how the fellowship had spotted him, for, as Carson, he had taken every possible precaution.

But this was no time for theorising or conjecturing. It was time for action.

For Nelson Lee simply had no intention of remaining a prisoner.

The fellowship agents had searched him thoroughly—and they had searched in vain. For Lee had never been incautious enough



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to carry anything worth while in the pockets of his clothing.

Like a conjurer, he had a secret pocket—and this had been overlooked in the search, in spite of the thoroughness of that search.

For the pocket in which Lee kept his secret implements was actually attached to his own skin! It was an invaluable pocket, so cunningly devised that, except under the closest scrutiny, it was indistinguishable from his own skin.

Normally Lee did not wear that ingenious pocket. But ever since he had started on his campaign against the Fellowship of Fear he had taken special precautions. He had known from the beginning that at any moment he might fall into the hands of the enemy. In such an emergency he wanted to be ready—so that he could, with any luck, break free.

Having bored the tiny hole, he was able to insert the lock-pick; and now, with delicate fingers, he manipulated that fragile tool. Only an expert locksmith—and Nelson Lee was that—could have hoped to succeed. He knew by the “feel” of the pick-lock just when he was near to success. He knew when to apply pressure. Patiently, calmly, he persisted.

And five minutes after No. 1 had gone, Lee felt, rather than heard, a tiny click. He applied pressure on to the tool, and with steady hands and with one ear held close to the lock he completed his work.

The door gave slightly, and then it swung silently open.

“Not bad,” Lee told himself. “Not at all bad. I expected it to take me much longer.”

He did not waste a second now. Quickly he replaced the tools in that slim pocket, and then, with silent footsteps, he crept along the passage. He knew, by various little sounds from some of the other cells, that the fellowship’s prisoners were incarcerated here. But he could not have rescued them, even if he had wanted to. For he had no keys—and it was quite impossible to pick all those locks. Moreover, Lee was of the opinion that a rescue just now would be ill advised. It would be premature. He was anxious to help the unfortunate prisoners, but this was not the time.

He halted suddenly, his senses on the alert. His quick ears told him that somebody was ascending the stairs from the great hall below. Like a shadow he crept back, and now, instead of returning to his own cell, he vanished round a narrow side-passage. There, in the shadows, he waited, crouching.

It was the guard, coming up by No. 1’s orders to take a look at the “unconscious” prisoner. He had been told to report as soon as Lee showed signs of recovery. He came right up to the door, and flashed a torchlight through the little grille.

But he never uttered the shout of amazement which half rose to his throat. For something happened—something decidedly unpleasant and unexpected.

Crash!

It was only Nelson Lee’s bare knuckles which took the man on the side of the head, but that blow was so well directed, and delivered with such force, that the guard was completely “out.” Yet he did not even fall; for Lee, following up his blow, leapt forward and caught the man. Thus, the thing was done with scarcely a sound.

Nelson Lee now worked with tremendous rapidity. He carried the guard into the cell, and, tearing the rough blankets into strips, he gagged the man, and then bound him so securely to the bed that any movement was wellnigh impossible. It was just as impossible for the man to make an outcry.

Well satisfied, Lee left the cell again. But now he was in possession, not only of the guard’s key, but of the guard’s gun. Lee felt more his own man now. He was ready for anything.

As he walked down the gallery he did so with the same measured tread of the guard. Had he chosen, he could have unlocked the other cell doors, and allowed the prisoners to escape. But he was wiser than that. For he quickly saw that such a move would be futile. Before those prisoners could get away from the convict settlement, they would be recaptured. By releasing them, Lee would merely raise false hopes in their breasts—hopes which would be quickly dashed.

Besides, he was already hoping that he would be able to turn the tables on his enemies—that he would discover something of importance. If he could do that, this adventure would be well worth while.

No, the time was not yet ripe for the rescuing of the unhappy prisoners. Far better to have the fellowship mystified than to expose his hand and put them on their guard.

At the back of Nelson Lee’s mind there was always one thought. He wanted to discover the whereabouts of the central headquarters of the Fellowship of the Free. He knew that it existed somewhere on the Continent—possibly in Germany. Lee believed in going for the root of an evil. There is not much sense in lopping off a branch of a poisonous tree; the only way is to uproot it completely. This local headquarters was merely a branch. Nelson Lee wanted to destroy the whole tree when he struck his big blow.

By coming right out into the open now he would undoubtedly scatter the fellowship members who were quartered at the Moor Prison; but that is all he would do. The fellowship would be as strong and dangerous as ever.

And so, whilst he sympathised with the prisoners, he left them in their cells. He could help them far better by leaving them where they were. He vowed that it would not be for long.

Calmly, quietly, he descended the stairs, reached the big hall, and crossed it. In the gloom he was safe, for his figure was indistinguishable from that of the rightful guard. He had reached the passage when he halted.

Footsteps were approaching. He drew back, so that he stood in deep shadow, but he made no attempt to hide himself completely.

"You have been to him?" asked No. 1 shortly.

"Yes, sir," said Nelson Lee just as shortly.

"No change?"

"None, sir."

"I can't understand it," said No. 1. "You'd better go and have another look at him soon. I am going on my usual inspection, but I shall be back within fifteen minutes."

"Very good, sir," said Lee.

He spoke in a soft voice, and he was ready for instant action should No. 1 become suspicious. But the man walked right on, having noticed nothing strange in the guard's voice. He did not go upstairs, but he went across the hall, down another corridor, and so arrived at a part of the prison which had originally been the warders' quarters. Here there were several men off duty. No. 1 had a few words with them, and then went outside. At various points men were posted. No. 1 went the entire round—as he did at certain hours every evening. There was nothing lax in the discipline here; it was as rigid as in a Government prison. The organisation of the fellowship was stringent.

When, at last, No. 1 returned to the central hall in the main building, he found that the guard was missing from his post. It was not yet time for him to go off duty—and, in any case, he would not go off duty until he was relieved by another man. Apparently, he had gone up to the gallery to have another look at Lee.

No. 1 went up the stairs, expecting to see the guard at any moment. But the guard was conspicuous by his absence.

"What can have become of the fool?" muttered No. 1 angrily.

He went to the door of Lee's cell, flashed his light into the grille, and took a quick look. He was half turning away when he became rigid. For he was not looking at the quiet figure of an unconscious man—but the heaving, writhing figure of a man who was bound tightly to the bed!

"Guard! Guard!" shouted No. 1 urgently.

He whipped out his own key, unlocked the door, and entered. Not until he had flashed his light full into the face of the helpless man did he realize that the figure was that of the guard himself. With a quick movement, he wrenched the gag away, causing considerable pain to the guard, who spluttered and cursed.

"Fool! Imbecile!" almost shrieked the master. "What has happened? Where is your prisoner?"

"Don't know, sir," gasped the man. "I—I came to have a look at him, and when I flashed my light through the grille I saw that the cell was empty."

"Impossible! He could not have escaped," shouted No. 1. "I locked the door with my own key."

"Then something hit me on the side of the head, sir—and when I woke up I was like this," panted the guard. "I tell you, he escaped! He's not human!"

"Escaped!" exclaimed No. 1 hoarsely. "Lee, the detective! He's got out of here—he's miles away by now, perhaps— Good heavens! We must clear out! The police will be on us! This is an appalling calamity."

He was far more bewildered than the guard. He was terrified, too, of the possible consequences of Nelson Lee's escape. The thing seemed absolutely impossible. No. 1 flashed his light on the door lock, but it was intact. There was no sign that it had been tampered with. That tiny hole which Lee had bored was wellnigh invisible.

MEANWHILE, Lee himself had not been idle.

He had heard No. 1's words—he knew that No. 1 was going on a round of inspection which would occupy at least a quarter of an hour. That was good. And Lee, creeping down the dark passage, soon came to the governor's office. He knew it well—for he had often visited this prison, professionally, in the old days. The door of the office was unlocked. He entered, and found a light burning on the desk, and a big oilstove was sending forth a grateful warmth.

Without hesitation, Lee entered, closed the door, and then he quickly looked round. Here, if anywhere, he might be able to find something of vital importance. Papers, perhaps, incriminating documents.

His gaze fell upon a strong, but old-fashioned safe. It was let into one of the heavy walls, and a quick examination of the brass knob showed Lee that the safe had recently been in use.

Here was a chance!

Surrounded by enemies as he was, knowing that his escape would soon become known, he set to work. He could have got clear away from the prison with ease—but he preferred to remain here. For it was here that he was likely to make some discoveries. Taking out two of his precious pick-locks, he got to work on the old style safe.

It was child's play to a man of Lee's experience.

Manipulating those delicate pick-locks, his sensitive fingers responding to every quiver, he won success at the end of ten minutes—ten silent, tense, patient minutes. He concentrated upon his task to the exclusion of all else. And it was by this acute concentration that he conquered.

The safe swung open, and Lee's first glance inside was in the nature of a disappointment.

The safe was no means empty. He saw a number of strange looking pistols. An examination of one showed that they were the peculiar "gas guns" so effectively used by the fellowship agents. Lee slipped one of them into his pocket. There was a good deal

of money here, too—many bundles of currency notes, amounting to hundreds of pounds, and several bags of silver. Wages, no doubt, for the guards and others.

There were quite a few papers, too, on one of the top shelves. And it was while going through these that Lee made the vital discovery. For he came across a little leather-covered book, much used. It contained page upon page of figures and words which meant nothing. Everything was written with great care in ordinary blue-black ink.

Lee turned the pages eagerly, and within a minute or two he had arrived at a definite conclusion. This was a code-book!

Not one word of it could he understand; but he gathered, from the very nature of the entries, that it contained the names of the fellowship leaders, their addresses. Probably it gave information as to the various local headquarters in England, and in other countries. Perhaps it would reveal the actual central headquarters! If Lee could find a way of learning the code—if he could get the key, he would have information of incalculable value in his possession.

This book, in fact, was the passport belonging to the Master of the Southern Section; it was his badge of authority, so to speak. Without it he would be lost.

With set lips Lee slipped the code-book into his pocket, and then he quickly relocked the safe and rose to his feet.

"I think we can call it a day," he murmured complacently.

Now he could escape without further delay. Once free of the prison, he would be all right, for he could assume another identity, and still remain at St. Frank's. Already certain ideas were drifting through the detective's active mind.

He was not deeply concerned as to his present position. At any moment the helpless guard might be found in that cell. Well, it would not matter so much. This office was the last place in which the enemy would expect to find the fugitive. There would be an immediate search of the grounds of the prison, for it would be naturally assumed that Lee had made a bee-line for the open air.

The detective's audacity was paying him well.

He was in the act of moving towards the door when he heard quick footsteps. No. 1, in fact, was hurrying to his office, for it was his intention to issue a special broadcast to all his outlying agents. That was the very first thing to be done.

Lee looked round rapidly. There was no escape except by the door—for the window was heavily shuttered. There was a cupboard, but it led nowhere. As for furniture, the room was singularly ill-equipped. There was nothing behind which Lee could hide.

So he did the only possible thing. He dived under the desk.

He had just vanished when the door opened, and No. 1 came striding in, breathing hard.

From outside came the distant shouts of men. The alarm was out!

As for Nelson Lee, he thought quicker, then, than he had ever thought in his life. He knew that he could not escape detection unless he acted promptly. If No. 1 sat at the desk, Lee's discovery was inevitable, and then, as he well knew, he would be at a hopeless disadvantage.

On the floor, just at his hand, was a small, round piece of india-rubber which had evidently fallen out of the top of a pencil. The very sight of it gave Lee an idea.

This was no time for hesitation. Silently emerging at the back of the desk—where he was invisible—he threw the scrap of rubber with unerring aim at the cupboard door.

Thud!

The sound was unmistakable. But the rubber, bouncing off, vanished. No. 1 spun round at the unexpected sound and stared at the cupboard. It seemed to him—as Lee had anticipated—that the tiny thud had come from within the cupboard.

"By Heaven!" muttered No. 1, his hand leaping for his gun.

He fell into the trap perfectly.

He strode softly to the cupboard, and with a quick movement he flung the door open.

"Hands up!" he said sharply.

Then his jaw dropped—for the cupboard was empty. He thought he heard a faint sound behind him, but he could not be sure. And then, before he could turn, he received a violent push in the back which sent him charging forward. He blundered into the cupboard, crashed against the back wall, and in the same second the gun was wrenched out of his fingers.

Thud! The door closed on him. The key snapped in the lock.

Nelson Lee chuckled. Again he had succeeded—and again it was because of his superb presence of mind. He walked quickly to the door, opened it, and glanced out. The passage was empty. He emerged, closed the door behind him, and walked away. A minute later he opened another door which allowed him to pass out into the cold night. He stood with his back to the wall for some moments. Here and there, at different points, he could see tiny gleams of light. The guards were searching—and they were hampered in this work because they dared not show their lights openly.

Nelson Lee, like a will-o'-the-wisp, disappeared into the blackness.

And No. 1, having burst open the cupboard door, came tearing out, shouting madly. For now he was terrified. He knew that he had been victimised by Nelson Lee, and at first he had feared the worst. But a quick examination of the safe had assured him that it had not been tampered with.

Again he was wrong, and it was well for his presence of mind that he did not know that his precious code-book was at that moment reposing in Nelson Lee's pocket.

CHAPTER 8.

The Schoolboy Raiders.

"**A**RE you sure these will work?" asked Handforth dubiously.

"You can test one if you like—but you'd better go easy," said Willy. "It'll make a big pop, and a cloud of vapour will go up, looking like steam, as high as the giddy ceiling. You'd better take my word for it, Ted."

They were in Study D. Standing about the table were the other young conspirators—Nipper, Tregellis West, Watson, Church and McClure. They were all heavily booted, dressed in overcoats and mufflers, and ready for the big adventure.

It was after lights-out. The juniors had crept down to Study D by previous arrangement. St. Frank's slept, and outside the night was dark and fine. The rain clouds, apparently, had blown over.

The table of Study D was filled, in the centre, by a large number of tiny quarter-ounce medicine bottles. They were short and round, and each one was tightly corked. These bottles had been obtained from the school stores—where there were hundreds. The bottles were filled with a greenish liquid. Altogether, there were forty-two of the improvised "bombs."

"Six each," said Nipper. "That ought to do fine. We'd better stow them away carefully—each one in a different pocket, so

there'll be no chance of breakage. You're quite sure they'll work, Willy?"

"Positive," replied Willy. "All we've got to do is to throw them, and as soon as they bust they'll send up clouds of vapour. And we shall be all right as long as we keep clear."

"Well, come on—no sense in standing here jawing," said Handforth. "Better stow these things away, and then we can start."

They had already discussed a tentative plan. They would approach the prison silently, select a likely spot, and climb to the top. They had prepared a rope, with a grappling hook on the end of it. A great deal would depend upon chance, of course. Many men, venturing upon the same mission, would have been appalled at the uncertainty of the prospect. But the schoolboys—being schoolboys—started off with serene confidence. It wasn't that they under-estimated the difficulties of their enterprise; it was just the unquenchable exuberance of youth.

They knew—none better—that the Fellowship of Fear was an organisation of desperate men; men who, for their twisted and crooked aims, were ready to commit any violence—even murder. If any of the juniors fell into the enemy's hands, they would receive but short shrift.

All this the boys knew—but the knowledge did not hinder them.

They set out on this adventure eagerly, hopefully, and their great plan was to rescue

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Nelson Lee. Handforth, in particular, was full of grim determination. His folly had caused the disaster to Lee, and his conscience gave him no rest.

Having pocketed their extraordinary bombs, they emerged into the night by way of the window. After that, it was a simple enough matter for them to steal like shadows across West Square, and then to the school wall, and drop into the lane. They had done it often enough on other occasions—when, perhaps, bent upon some harmless jape.

At Nipper's suggestion they did not keep to the lanes, for there was always the chance of running into P.-c. Sparrow, or another local constable, as either of them strode his lonely beat. Other people, too, might be about—for the hour was by no means late. They cut across a meadow, and thus they reached the St. Frank's private golf links. Nipper, who knew every inch of the course, led the way across, and, by taking this short cut, the moor was reached very quickly.

"We're all right now," murmured Handforth. "If we cut straight across here, in a bee-line, we shall get straight to the prison—"

"But first of all, we shall walk straight into a bog!" interrupted Church tartly.

"Eh?"

"Don't you know the moor better than that, Handy?" put in Nipper. "Church is quite right. There's a swamp not far ahead. We shall have to bear round to the right, and strike the moor road farther along. Come on. We can't go wrong. Better not do any talking, either. The fellowship may have scouts out and about."

They went on in silence.

Nipper had spoken calmly and easily, and not even Tregellis-West and Watson, his own chums, realised the agony of his mind. For Nipper, in fact, was intensely worried. Many hours had passed since Nelson Lee's capture; and, much as Nipper trusted his beloved guv'nor, he also knew the remorselessness of the fellowship.

But it was no good worrying needlessly. Nipper had done that so often before only to find that Lee had had the upper hand of his enemies all the time. It was so in this case—or nearly so—but as yet Nipper did not know it.

So the seven boys went onwards into the night, bent upon one of the most foolhardy, but glorious, enterprises in the history of the old school.

CERTAINLY, Nelson Lee was not, at the moment, in need of help.

Not only had he beaten the fellowship all along the line—single-handed at that—but amid all the confusion he had escaped into the night, and in his pocket he carried the secret code book of No. 1. His evening, in fact, had been altogether entertaining. He was well repaid for the blow on his head.

He felt, as he sought a means of escape, very much as a real convict would have

felt in similar circumstances. For he was actually within the prison grounds; every door and gate was locked against him; the high walls were unscalable.

He knew that men were searching for him even now, but the thought, rather than alarming him, gave zest to the adventure. He was supremely confident. He had won through thus far, and he meant to make a thorough job of it. He would escape—and he would leave the fellowship for ever baffled as to the methods he had employed. It would be fatal, indeed, if he were caught a second time. For then he would be searched inch by inch—even to his very skin. And thus the secret of his magician-like exit would be revealed.

He kept close to the high wall, moving cautiously, his eyes alert, his every sense on the stretch. He was comforted by one constant thought. The fellowship dared not flash any beams of light round the grounds—for such beams could be seen from afar, and would cause comment. The searchers were only using their electric torches in the secure cover of the high walls. They appeared confident that Lee had not escaped, and could not escape, from the prison grounds.

And then luck took a hand. Thus far Lee had succeeded because of his own brilliance. He deserved a little luck.

He heard the faint movement of loose gravel, and he flung himself flat, and he was fortunate enough to find himself in close proximity to a bulky object which he did not at first identify. When he was stretched full length on the ground, however, and close beside it, he could see that it was an empty crate, with its lid sagging drunkenly. The idea came to him to slip into the crate and pull the lid down on the top of him. But he was afraid of the creaking woodwork. Furthermore, it might be the very place in which the searchers would look.

This turned out to be the case. A man approached, stumbled against the crate, cursed volubly in German and flashed a torchlight into the interior and then passed on. Somebody had called to him in a low voice from some distance away.

Lee experienced a thrill.

It had been a narrow shave; but, in any case, he had been ready to give the fellow a dose of gas from the gas-gun he had borrowed from the safe. What thrilled him was the momentary shaft of light which had flashed through the crevices of the old crate. For the light had revealed a pile of black looking rope which lay half-in and half-out of the crate. And Lee needed a rope, just now, more than he needed anything else.

He was on his feet in a moment, and his nimble fingers pulled the rope out, and in spite of the many knots he found that it could be joined together to make a respectable length. Water-sodden though it was, it seemed to be strong. A section of the lid had broken away from the rest, and he tied the rope securely to this.

Then, without waiting for further developments, he heaved the lid clean over the top of the high wall, taking care to hold securely to the other end of the rope. There was plenty of it, and he hung on, the wet wood sogging against the outer side of the wall with a dull clap. Some of the searchers might have heard it, so Lee lost no time. He pulled on the rope, and, as he had expected, the wood was hauled up—for, of course, it was far too light to counterbalance his own weight. But—as he was well aware—there was a projecting coping on the top of the wall, and suddenly the half-lid caught against this and jammed firmly. Without hesitation, Lee gave the rope a strong pull, found that it held, and then he swarmed his way up, monkey-fashion.

At the last moment the luck failed him. The woodwork either crumpled under the strain, or slipped. At all events, there was a sudden jerk, and Lee was only just able to clutch the wall top. As he hung there the lid fell to the ground on the outer side, and struck with a considerable thud. Shouts followed at once, and Lee heard the sound of running footsteps.

Like lightning he swarmed over and prepared to drop.

Thud-thud!

He saw two livid flashes at fairly close quarters, and he experienced a sudden numbness in his right leg—which, at first, he believed to be caused by catching it against the wall top. He had heard no reports, but he knew that the thuds had been caused by silenced automatic pistols. At that range the gas-guns were useless.

Lee dropped, and as he landed he rolled over and over, and apart from a bad shake up, and a number of bruises, he came to no harm. Yet when he attempted to walk he nearly fell. For his right leg seemed useless; it doubled under him, and the nerves were no longer operating. He dragged himself up and limped away. Once, he bent down and felt his leg, which was now full of "pins and needles." His hand came away wet. It was a warm wetness, and then he knew the truth. One of those bullets had got him, and although it was only a superficial wound, the bone not being affected, it had certainly paralysed the nerves.

But for that mischance he would have escaped with ease. As it was, his speed was so reduced that he could only crawl. And with every step he took, feeling returned to his leg—but it was the wrong kind of feeling. The agony became intense. He limped on, his teeth set, his fists clenched. He was on the moor and he inwardly cursed the fact that on this side of the prison it was free of all gorse—a bare expanse of stubby grassland, without an inch of cover within half a mile. It would have been suicide to keep near the prison. His only course was to make away from it.

The enemy, now in full possession of his position, were after him like a pack of wolves. Gates had opened in two different directions.

Men were swarming out on to the moor in two bodies, and they were converging.

They could see Lee distinctly, for the sky had cleared sufficiently for a number of stars to twinkle, and in the dim light his figure, bobbing grotesquely owing to his awkward gait, could be seen. Lee, looking back, became aware of the impossibility of the position. They were almost upon him—a dozen determined men at least. The fact that they were not using their automatics proved that they were certain of recapturing him. Obviously they meant to get to close quarters and use their gas-guns.

As Lee half turned, in order to face the enemy, he stumbled. Unseen in the gloom, he had paused on the very brink of a great furrow in the moor—a deep trench-like declivity which cut across the grassland like a great gash. He went tumbling down it, quite out of sight.

"Confound the luck!" he muttered savagely.

"Don't you believe it, sir," whispered a tense voice. "You couldn't have done anything better."

Lee almost jumped.

"What the——" he began.

And then he saw dim figures on either side of him—figures which crouched under cover of the bank.

IT was not chance which had caused the boys to approach the prison from that particular direction.

On their way across the moor they had discussed the possibilities, and Nipper had remembered the great natural gash; and he had pointed out that it would serve them as excellent cover until they were ready to make the final dash. As he explained, it was only a short distance from the wall, and if there were any sentries on guard they were less likely to see the raiders.

True, the schoolboys selected a spot some distance away, and they had reached their cover when they heard the "thud-thud" of the two silenced automatics. Immediately following that they had seen the figure on the wall top; and it needed no imagination on their part to "place" him as Nelson Lee.

"I knew it—I knew it!" gloated Nipper, in a breathless whisper. "The guv'nor's beaten them all! He's escaped!"

"Begad! You weren't so frightfully sure of that two or three hours ago, old boy," murmured Sir Montie. "In fact, you were full of all sorts of ghastly fears——"

"Rats! I knew the guv'nor would do the trick," interrupted Nipper. "Hold your horses, Handy! No need for us to go into action now."

"What!" ejaculated Handforth, in dismay.

"Quiet, you ass!" hissed Nipper. "Do you think we want the enemy to know that we're here—when it isn't necessary?"

"That man may not be Mr. Lee," said Handforth bluntly.

And even Nipper, confident as he was, experienced a jar. For Handforth was right.

MY DEAR CHUMS, I expect you are all very anxious to know the result of the Home Cinema Competition, in which a Grand Home Cinema with films, and 100 model 'planes were offered as prizes. Well, I am able to announce now that the solution of this fascinating contest will appear in the "GEM" on sale Wednesday of next week. As all you competitors are anxious to check your entries you must make certain of your copy of the "GEM." Those whose attempts contained six errors or less will have to send in a claim for a prize. As there is bound to be a rush for next week's issue of the "GEM," make sure of YOUR copy by ordering to-day.



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Next Week's Stories.

In next week's issue we have another powerful, long complete, school-detective thriller dealing with Nelson Lee's titanic fight against the ruthless Fellowship of Fear. This story is entitled: "The Siege of St. Frank's!" and from that you can guess something sensational and dramatic happens. It does! The fellowship are in a desperate position. Nelson Lee has dealt them a staggering blow, as you have discovered in this week's grand story.

In order to prevent complete exposure the fellowship make a wholesale attack on St. Frank's. Next week's story is packed with startling adventures and perilous situations, and you'll fairly revel in it.

"The Green Button!"

Included in next week's programme there will also be further chapters of our Great

War story. Monty Merriman, the British Secret Service agent who has rescued Captain Seton from the German prison camp, is called upon to exercise all his skill and cunning in his dramatic flight for the Frontier with his companion. But with such tre-

mendous odds against them, these two intrepid Britishers find the going almost impossible. Exciting developments occur in next week's thrill-packed chapters of this great story, and you must not miss them.

PEN PALS!

Miss Kathleen L. Parkinson, Cross Keys Hotel, Hednesford, Staffs., wants girl correspondents.

Arthur James, 6, Council Cottages, New Road, Kingham, Oxfordshire, wants correspondents in Australia and Africa interested in birds' eggs.

Lawrence Godfrey, 49, St. Saviour's Crescent, Luton, Bedfordshire, wants correspondents anywhere; 14-16.

William Hines, 12, Briar Street, Middlesbrough, Yorks., wants correspondents in India, Africa and Australia; 16-18.

Miss Betty Charles, Cadene, 21, High Street, Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants girl correspondents—14-18—interested in swimming, riding and corresponding.

Fred Byrne, 524, William Street, Broken Hill, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents interested in tennis and stamp collecting.

It was foolish to take anything for granted. Like shadows, they crept along the trench until they were almost opposite the spot where the fugitive had dropped.

Then, for the first time, they saw that he was in difficulties. He was limping badly, and was hardly able to proceed at a crawl. They could even hear the sharp intake of his breath as he laboured, proving that he was in great pain. On the top of this came the alarming appearance of the pursuers, converging with ominous portent.

"Now's our chance!" breathed Handforth. "Got your bombs ready, you chaps! We can catch 'em on the hop! They don't even know we're here."

"Wait!" whispered Nipper.

A moment later Lee tripped into the unseen miniature gulch, and his involuntary ejaculation established his identity in spite of the gloom. It was enough. Sir Montie was nearest him, and Sir Montie, with his usual sang-froid, made a perfectly cool remark.

Nipper was some distance away, and if there had been more time to spare he would have edged to Lee's side. But the fellowship agents, astonished and baffled by the sudden disappearance of the fugitive, were approaching at the double.

And the schoolboys were ready. Not a audible sound had they uttered. Even now, as they flung their first "bombs," they were silent. It seemed such a senseless thing to do—to fling tiny quarter-ounce medicine bottles at desperate men who were armed with lethal weapons. And it came to Nipper, at least, that this was not the ideal ground for such bombs as theirs. He was afraid, in fact, that they would bounce harmlessly.

Luckily, the ground, although grassy, was bestrewn with loose stones—a characteristic of this part of the moor. The first bottles struck right in front of the running men.

Puff! Puff! Puff!

Four, at least, of the bottles burst. Perhaps five. They did not explode, but just burst softly, and, on the instant, dense clouds of

vapour shot upwards like clouds of steam, billowing amazingly, and, rolling back in a great fog bank.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Church. "What did I tell you?" whispered Willy triumphantly.

"My son, you're a genius!" said Nipper, pressing his arm.

After that they didn't wait. From the fog in front came curses in several languages, gasps, shouts, and the sounds of stumbling feet. The boys hurled another volley—and then another. They put up an impassable barrage of Willy's vapour.

And it was significant that all the sounds died away after the first few moments.

The stuff had done its work. Every member of the enemy party, charging straight into the fog, had been unable to escape. Two or three on the outskirts had been in full retreat when the second volley had struck them. They, too, fell.

"Guv'nor!" whispered Nipper, as he found his way to Lee's side. "By Jove! You're a marvel! How did you manage to escape?"

"Never mind that," said Lee. "How did you manage to be here at such an opportune moment? And what in the name of wonder have you been using? Is that stuff poisonous?"

"Harmless as sea mist," replied Nipper. "We'd better be moving, guv'nor. What's wrong?" he added anxiously. "You were limping—"

"Yes, I was winged," replied Lee. "Nothing much. I'd like one or two of you boys to lend me a hand."

They stole away into the darkness, and all the juniors were eager to have Nelson Lee lean upon them. They took it in turns. Nobody talked. They knew how urgent it was for them to put a big space between themselves and the prison—and to do it quickly.

The most satisfactory feature of the whole affair was that the enemy knew nothing of the schoolboys' part in it. They would believe that Lee, alone, had done the trick—and although Lee was reluctant to take credit which was not his due, in this case it was

most gratifying. For it was certain that the fellowship agents at the Moor Prison would remember him as a kind of super magician—a man who could escape from locked cells, open safes without keys, and produce stupefying gas apparently from nowhere.

Not until they had actually reached the school property and were, in fact, in the shrubbery, did Lee call a halt. At last he felt safe. He knew, at all events, that there had been no pursuit. It was more than likely that the entire personnel at the prison had been caught in that wave of fog.

"However much I may have regretted you boys being in the secret at first, I am now thankful that you made the discovery," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Your work, to-night, has been beyond all praise. Splendid, young 'uns! You saved me from recapture, without a doubt."

"It was all my doing that you were captured, sir," said Handforth fiercely. "I was a blithering idiot! I mentioned your name in the tuck shop, and that rotten spy—"

"Yes, tell me all this to-morrow," interrupted Lee. "It's unwise for us to hang about here."

"To-morrow, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly. "But you won't be here then?"

"I think I shall."

"But you can't keep up that Carson stunt! The enemy knows you—"

"But they won't know me to-morrow," interrupted Lee calmly.

He gave them no further satisfaction, but they crept silently indoors, and went to their beds happy.

And Nelson Lee, relating his experiences to Fighting Jim Kingswood, who was delighted to see him safe—and nearly sound—declared that this round of the fight had easily been won on points. For in Lee's possession was that secret code book, and if he could discover the key he would be well on the road to complete victory.

But Lee knew, better than anybody else, that the fight against the Fellowship of Fear was not over.

THE END.

**Another Great Story In This Series Of Sensational School
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The GREEN BUTTON!



Lord Monty Merriman, star of the British Secret Service, has been sent into Germany to rescue Captain Seton, a prisoner of war. At great risk, Monty accomplishes his task, and the two set off across country for the frontier. But peril dogs them at every step.

Hunted!

WHEN Evans, the keeper of the German beer garden, who was really a British Secret Service agent, got to the doorway, he saw that the attic was bare. Even the chairs had gone! The table was there, with no cloth on it, and that was all. There was no food, no plates, knives, forks, cups, candles—not even the bucket of water for washing!

"I told you there was nothing here!" cried Evans, seizing his chance. "You shall apologise for this outrage, mein Herr. You were drunk——"

"Not so drunk as all that!" raved the officer. "I saw the chairs, the meal laid on that table, candles there, a bucket with water——"

Evans merely glanced at the sergeant and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

The action meant simply that the officer was very drunk—or had been.

"Search the house!" raved the officer.

"It's been searched," objected Evans.

"Search it again. You hear, sergeant? I will stay here with this dog! Wait a bit, though. We will start here!"

He went round and round the attic. He

slapped the plaster of the sloping roof, he smacked the walls, he stamped on the floor, here and there, over in the corner—then stopped.

"Listen!" he snapped.

He gave one stamp with his foot on a board.

"Sounds suspicious," he said. "It is hollow, and loose. Lift that board, sergeant!"

Evans' jaw set hard. He saw a firing squad ranged up before him. Discovery would mean that for him.

The sergeant puffed and panted as he levered the board. It came up with a plop, and the man stood there with the officer beside him. They stooped over the gaping cavity. Another man stepped forward with a lighted match cupped in his hands. The three bent and peered into the hole in the floor.

"Nothing there," growled the sergeant, annoyed at having his leave interrupted in this manner.

Something moved in the hole, and the officer withdrew sharply.

"Only rats!" he snarled. "Maybe they're in another room now. We'll search the house, and take that dog with us."

Evans was so relieved he wanted to laugh aloud. It was only with difficulty that he controlled himself. Somehow Monty had guessed at the trouble and had fooled the officer. But where on earth was he if he had not bolted under the floor? What had he done with the chairs? In another room? Then discovery was bound to come!

Evans was serious again in a flash. But the party went all over the house, even down to the cellars. The search lasted an hour and a half, but there was no sign of the fugitives, and Evans began to bluster.

"I told you there was nothing. You were drunk, mein Herr. I shall lodge a complaint with the commandant in the morning."

The sergeant and his men were not sure whether to snigger or growl at the trouble they had been caused. The officer was looking very foolish.

"Never known the stuff to get hold of me like that before," he said, sliding some money into Evans' hand. "Forget it, my man, there's a good chap. I—I'm sorry."

He stumbled away. The sergeant and his men used bad language, but Evans won their approval by treating them to some of his lager, and they went off quite pleased with themselves.

Having thus got rid of his unwanted guests, Evans entered his house once more, and this time bolted all doors before he went upstairs to the attic. But he found it still bare, except for the table. He stood there scratching his head in bewilderment.

"Where the dickens have they gone to?" he said, half aloud.

Then he listened. He heard something. It was a tapping on the window. He went over, and saw that the shutters, although closed, were not latched. He realised in a flash that they could not be latched from the

outside. He flung them open. The window was latched, but a knife inserted between the sashes might slip the latch into place.

He began to understand. He knew he was right when he saw Monty's face pressed against the window-pane. With trembling hands he opened the window. Monty slid over the sill into the room, then helped Dick in. The remains of the meal, the plates, cups and candlesticks, were in a bundle in the tablecloth. Perched on the ridge of the roof were the two chairs, and with hardly a sound Monty drew them in through the window.

Not until the window and the shutters were closed and the candle lit once more was a word spoken.

"He was properly fooled," said Monty. "And he even tipped you!"

"How on earth did you know that?" gasped Evans.

"You stood in the light from the door below. We sat up here enjoying the scene."

"Nearly had a fit when he found the floor-board and had it lifted," said Evans.

"I guessed he'd search the house again," said Monty. "You see, I heard what he said. When you took him down, trying to get rid of him, I followed half-way to see fair play, so we were warned what to expect. It was easy to get rid of the meal and the bucket, while the water went down the roof into the gutters. But I had to get rid of the chairs, too."

"Why?" asked Evans.

"Simply because there were two," replied Monty. "Anything that hinted that there were two of us here had to go. The chairs wouldn't go under the floor, so we put them on the roof. By that time that officer was coming up the stairs. There was no time to get under the floor, so we camped on the roof. Besides, when he saw the room bare he might guess we were hidden, and that hiding-place would be somewhere in the house. Outside we were safe!"

"You won," said Evans. "For to-night you are safe here—but to-morrow—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"We shall be safer outside," said Monty. "You employ two waiters in your beer garden—those men are our agents, listening to the conversation of your customers. To-morrow you can let us have the usual waiters' get-up, and we will wash the dirty glasses. In the meantime, arrange to pass us on as soon as you can."

"Very well," said Evans. "I'm sorry I let you in for a scare."

"It was a slip," said Monty, with a smile. "Forget it, old man. We all make slips. I've made plenty so far. But Dick wants sleep, and so do I."

They slept soundly that night, and men were posted on the stairs to make sure they were not taken unawares. But morning found them safe. They remained in the house all that day, for the town was quiet. Heinrich Kahn was still searching for them, but the

hunt was going on out in the woods and fields beyond Arnstein.

At dusk the troops came back, tired and dispirited. This was really the danger hour. There were rumours and scares all over the town; troops suddenly descended on certain houses for no apparent reason at all, searched them thoroughly, then went away cursing at their failure. Heinrich Kahn's frenzy was beginning to annoy everybody.

"They've got clean away. They're miles from Arnstein," said everybody. "Kahn is a fool to worry so much. They will catch the Englishers at the frontier. Why should we bother our heads?"

The soldiers on leave flocked to the beer gardens, and many of them came to Evans' place, not deigning to look twice at the two men who, half hidden behind a hedge, washed up the dirty glasses as hard as they could go.

The evening wore on, and nothing happened. The beer garden did a roaring business, and Monty was so confident of himself that during the rush he even mingled with the customers, taking their orders and serving them. Dick would have done the same, but his command of German was not nearly so good as Monty's.

The escaped Englishers were the topic of conversation all that evening. Monty heard many things about Dick and himself that amazed him. Some said that he had a beard; others, that he squinted; and others again, that he had a club foot.

But he was not really interested until he saw two officers at a table in a quiet corner. They were talking earnestly, and one had placed something down on the table.

It was a green button!

"Kahn goes mad at the sight of these," the officer was saying, as Monty approached with glasses. "But no one knows why. They were found on Captain Seton. Kahn was heard to say that he saw such buttons on the frock of Seton's wife, in England. Beyond that, I know nothing, my friend."

Monty set down the glasses on the table and moved away. He was looking fierce. He had forgotten the two buttons that Dick had had taken from him. They were dangerous. Anyone showing one of those buttons might be taken, by one of the British Secret Service, to be one of their own men engaged on the task of getting Seton out of Germany!

If Monty had known that he, himself, had accidentally dropped one of those buttons in the hotel at Dahlborg, he would have been even more perturbed. But he did not know it.

He realised the danger of the green buttons in the possession of the enemy, however, and meant to get them back if he could. This officer had one in his hand. The sight of it filled Monty with dread.

He saw the two officers arguing. Apparently, one preferred to stay at the beer garden. The one with the green button rose to go. Monty hastened to Dick and told him how matters stood.

"We've got to get that button!" he said.

"You can't," argued Dick. "Leave well alone. Chance it. They are not to know what the buttons are for!"

"Kahn will guess, sooner or later," declared Monty. "I must get that button from that man. He's going now—alone!"

Monty slipped out by the side way. The fact that the officer was alone meant that he had an appointment somewhere else in the town. Monty hastened up the lane to the main road. The street was deserted and dark, the lights from the beer garden serving rather to dazzle than to illuminate.

On the corner, where the lane joined the main road, Monty almost collided with the officer. He did not hesitate. The enemy suspected nothing. He simply saw a waiter there, and looked the other way.

It was Monty's chance, and he took it. His fist flashed out, crashed on the man's jaw and dropped him in a heap, with a rather unfortunate clatter of accoutrements.

Monty was beside him in a flash, his hands working skilfully and swiftly. The man's breast-pocket was emptied out. Monty took the green button from him, and also his money to make this appear like ordinary highway robbery.

Satisfied, he rose to his feet. But at that moment the dim figure of an armed policeman shot from out the shadows.

"Halt!" he barked.

Monty turned and ran for it. He pelted off up the lane, trusting to luck. The policeman let fly with a revolver and missed him. He was only six yards behind Monty. It would have to be good, swift, unexpected luck to be of use now.

But it came in the shape of Dick Seton, who was lying under the hedge. He reached out with one hand, grabbed the policeman by the ankle and brought him down with a bang.

The next moment he was up on his feet beside Monty.

"Run!" he urged. "Faster, Monty!"

But by that time the ~~one~~ shot fired had alarmed the whole town!

The Gauntlet.

THERE is always a certain amount of noise in any German town while the beer gardens are open, but the confusion is usually confined to those beer gardens. During that evening there had been the ordinary coming and going, the singing and shouting, in and around the beer garden which Evans ran so cleverly.

But the shot which the policeman had fired altered everything. The military left the beer gardens and thronged into the streets. Officers bawled stentorian orders, more policemen came rushing to the scene, and the whole town of Arnstein was in an uproar.

Monty and Dick fled down the lane away from the main road. It was all they could do. Their chief object was to get as far as

possible from the scene of the disturbance. But with armed men dashing hither and thither, and civilians poking their heads out of their windows to see what all the fuss was about, the sight of two waiters, hatless, with their napkins streaming in the wind from their trousers pockets, was certain to arouse comment, if not suspicion.

They swerved round the far corner and dashed ahead into a labyrinth of dark streets, hoping for the best. They were in a tight corner and the police were close on their heels. They could hear the hoarse cries and the thudding of feet in their rear.

"I got the button," panted Monty.

"Maybe!" retorted Dick irritably. "And you've brought the whole town down on us. They'll get us, this time."

It seemed as if they would, too; for the policeman Dick had brought down was now on his feet again, bruised and bleeding, and was directing the pursuit. They could hear him bawling his directions.

"This way! They ran this way!"

He was bringing the pursuit down upon them. They increased their pace, but every corner represented as great a danger as a help. They might easily collide with someone coming in the other direction, and that would mean capture.

Fortunately the night was dark, and the street lamps had been dimmed in the usual wartime fashion, as a precaution against the activities of enemy aircraft, although Arnstein was really situated too far to the east to be in much danger from that source.

The shadows, however, were dense, and Monty glanced about for some means of tricking the pursuit. Yet another corner saw them careering round the pelting away along a dark residential street, with high hedges overhanging the footpath.

And there, in the blackest corner, where the trees and shrubs overhung to form a kind of natural bower, was an iron seat, where lovers could remain hidden to their heart's content.

Luckily, the seat was not occupied when Monty saw its dim outlines through the gloom. He halted, hissing to Dick to do the same.

"Now's our chance!" he whispered. "Under the seat—quickly, man!"

They went down flat on the ground and rolled under the seat, and the shadows concealed them. Monty drew his coat as best he could across his breast to hide his gleaming shirt-front. Dick was behind him and could not be seen. The napkins were thrust out of sight, and they lay as if frozen.

But only just in time! A few seconds later the police, reinforced by the military, came tearing round the corner. Having lost sight of the fugitives already, and as there was another corner some yards further up the road, they did not slacken speed, but dashed on past the half-hidden seat.

The fugitives lay there, scarcely daring to breathe. But in a second or two the danger was past, so they thought. The hunting party had raced off into the unknown—all

except one fat sergeant, too blown to go any further. And he sat down on the seat!

Dick managed to wriggle his head round and gaze through the gloom at Monty. Neither of them dared to speak. They had escaped their pursuers only for this fat idiot to spoil everything.

The man sat mopping his brow, and panting and wheezing. Then Monty began to move. It was clever the way he manoeuvred his legs without exciting the suspicions of the man on the seat. Dick guessed at once that Monty meant to wriggle free and get rid of that fat sergeant, somehow. But could he slide from under the seat and silence the man? It seemed utterly impossible. In fact, Monty reckoned it was impossible to handle the sergeant without raising a fresh alarm, yet they could not lay there indefinitely.

He wriggled and squirmed, and moved his body out at the end of the seat at the rate of an inch every five seconds. It was slow, nerve-racking work, and all the time the fat sergeant was getting his wind back. His puffing and wheezing grew less laboured, and his breathing more normal.

Then Monty lay still. Another search-party was coming—but not a running, yelling mob this time. A company of Bavarians came round the corner at the double, with torches. And at their head was Heinrich Kahn.

The fat sergeant sprang to his feet and saluted. Kahn called a halt.

"What are you doing here?" he snapped.

The fat sergeant was trembling with fright.

"I was running after the thieves, Herr Leutnant," he explained. "I tripped and fell, nearly stunning myself. The others went on, and I remained here to get my senses back."

Kahn used bad language, half guessing that the sergeant was making his own tale good. Still, there was no time to worry about that.

"Which way did they go?" he asked.

"Round the corner, there, Herr Leutnant. They were close on the heels of the bandits."

"Bandits!" said Kahn irritably. "There were no bandits in Arnstein till those two Englishers escaped. Forward! You all right now, sergeant?"

"Ja, Herr Leutnant."

"Fall in, then Forward!"

The company continued on their way at the double, and passed round the corner out of sight.

Monty scrambled to his feet and half dragged Dick from under the seat.

"That's the first time I've ever felt grateful to Heinrich Kahn. He did us a good turn. Come on, Dick. Let's clear!"

Keeping well in the shadows, they went right round the block, and crossed the main road, then approached the beer garden from the opposite direction.

Evans glanced up as they appeared, and jerked his head. There were still a few military men at the tables. Monty promptly went out and served them, while Dick dived back to his post behind the hedge, washing up the dirty glasses.

It was dangerous, but the sheer audacity of

the move saved them. The police and the military were out for the best part of the night, chasing shadows round Arnstein. Kahn was furious, guessing that Monty was at the back of the outrage, for the stunned officer had made a list for the police of all that had been stolen from him. Kahn cared nothing about the missing money, but when,

underneath them all, wrapped up in dark blankets and rugs. From that point they watched the search parties coming and going. Evans' house was ransacked from floor to ceiling, and the soldiers lounged by the heaped-up tables and chairs in the darkness outside, little guessing how near they were to the men they sought.



The German soldiers marched straight into the attic expecting to find two British prisoners hiding there. The room was empty ! But little did they dream that those prisoners were only a few feet above their heads—on the roof !

casually, the man said he had lost a green button, it clinched matters.

"Why should a bandit trouble to steal a green button?" he wanted to know.

"Nein, it was no bandit, but one of the Englanders. They attach great importance to those green buttons. I wish I knew just why. But it proves they are still in Arnstein. We will search the houses after midnight!"

Monty got to hear of it by listening to the whispered conversation of the men at the tables. And at midnight, when the customers went away and the lights of the beer garden were put out, he and Dick busied themselves about a hiding-place.

To hide in the house was asking for trouble, so Evans thought. But there was a better way. Outside, in the beer garden itself, the tables were piled one on top of another, and the chairs tilted up in heaps all round them.

And Monty and Dick were in a neat hollow

Eventually Arnstein became quiet, but it was only the calm before the storm. Kahn was not the man to acknowledge defeat very easily. And hour before dawn Evans came and beckoned them out of their improvised hiding-place and escorted them silently into the house.

In the kitchen were rough clothes. The doors were locked and bolted, and all the windows heavily shrouded. Dick and Monty donned the disguise thus provided and appeared as farm workers. Evans attended to their faces, giving them an artificial tan, putting in wrinkles, and smearing grime on their cheeks. They had wisps of moustaches and beards affixed, and their hair was in disorder, and looked as if it had not been washed for years.

Not a thing was forgotten. They had their papers, their paper money, their pipes, and tobacco. The disguise was perfect, even down to the dried clay on their heavy boots.

Evans and Monty pored over a map and discussed the route.

"Take the north road," said Evans. "You stop at Wiener Farm. Brandon is the farmer there. His German name is Ballich. You can't miss the gate of the farm. It's got the name painted on the bar."

"And the real men who should be on the lorry?" asked Monty. for he knew the plans that had been made.

"They are doped under the sacks. Brandon will handle them. Come on. You'd better be out of Arnstein before sunrise. Kahn gets nearer the truth every day."

He led them out in the darkness, and they trudged silently along the deserted streets to the corner of the market square, where Evans stopped and backed into the shadow of a doorway.

"Your lorry is the second one in that line," he said. "All you've got to do is to start her up and drive out. Good luck to you both!"

"Thanks," whispered Monty. "So-long for the present. You've been splendid, Evans. I shan't forget."

They gripped hands. Evans vanished into the shadows, making his way back to his beer garden. Monty and Dick walked with staggering, sleepy steps towards the big lorry Evans had indicated. On the cobbles lay heaps of garden produce, sacks of flour, crates of eggs, and other farm produce, which had been brought into the town on the lorry. The auctioneers would handle that in the morning. The lorry had to return whence it came.

A night-watchman yawned in his hut on the other side of the square. The next day was market day, and the place was already littered with goods for sale. Other lorry-drivers and their mates began to appear, stretching themselves, yawning and rubbing their eyes.

"Can you drive?" asked Monty.

"Anything on wheels," replied Dick.

"Then you take this wheel. Then, if we're stopped, I can do the talking. Up you get. I'll give her a swing. She ought to be tanked up with petrol. Evans saw to that."

Other lorries were being cranked, and their cold engines were giving trouble. But Monty had only to swing the starting-handle once to set their engine ticking over. Dick was an expert with motors, and knew how to handle the big lorry. Monty ran round and clambered to the seat beside him, and off they went, rumbling out of Arnstein with the first pale rays of dawn beginning to show in the east.

They had reached another stage in their desperate adventure. Dick Seton had been spirited out of Arnstein Castle; they had, so far, fooled the pursuit. They had now started on the job of smuggling the fugitive out of Germany.

They were not heading east for the Polish border, nor south towards Bavaria and Austria, which, of course, were hopeless. To strike westwards was dangerous. The Swiss

border was not only well guarded, but represented a dead end, for, once in Switzerland, Dick could never get out again until the war ended. The French and Belgian frontiers were useless. The Dutch frontier represented a chance, but a risky one. So many had escaped that way that Kahn would have every yard of it illuminated by flood-lights, and guarded well.

Monty knew what he was about. He was heading due north to the shores of the Baltic Sea. It puzzled Dick, but he asked no questions. If his adventures of the past few days had taught him anything at all, it was that Monty had planned everything, and that, so far, his plans were succeeding.

Dick drove that lumbering lorry along the north road out of Arnstein. The streets were deserted, and dark. The faint glimmer of dawn was, as yet, too low down on the horizon to make much difference amongst the clustered houses. The absence of life along the road reassured the fugitives, but they both knew it could not last.

They left the town behind and the road became a straight, smooth thoroughfare running between high hedges. Ahead they saw the twinkling of lights.

"The military cordon," said Monty. "You seem half asleep. I'll do the talking; my accent is better than yours. Only remember, if they should ask you, your name is Johann Schmidt. Let's hear you say it."

"Johann Schmidt," said Dick.

"You don't splash enough over the Schmidt," complained Monty. "Say it sharply, like this!"

Dick was quick to learn, and soon was able to say his alleged name to Monty's satisfaction.

By that time they were within fifty yards of the guard on the road. The lights flared up brightly, soldiers barred the way, the light gleaming on their bayonets.

The sergeant came forward, grumbling at having to turn out.

"Papers!" he cried gruffly. "Look alive, now! It's cold!"

"Lot of nonsense, I think," growled Monty, smothering a yawn. "Those Englishers would not stay anywhere near Arnstein."

"What you and I think, my friend, doesn't matter in war. We've only got to do what we're told to do, even if it means blowing our own brains out. Come, now—the papers!"

"All right. Wait a minute!" cried Monty irritably. "My fingers are so cold I can't feel a thing. Here—those are mine—and here are my mate's."

"Johann Schmidt, driver—and Karl Neumann. Seems all right. What's in the lorry—the usual sacks and mouldy potatoes you can't hope to sell in the market, I suppose? That's all we'll be doing now for an hour or two—poking about in lorries. Haven't got any escaped Englishers under those sacks?"

"Oh, there are two men there, under the cabbage leaves," said Monty, yawning his

head off. "You jump in and poke around with a bayonet, and see them jump!"

The sergeant laughed and waved his hand.

"I'd like to make you jump with a bayonet, only I'd rather get back to the fire and have a warm. Your mate doesn't talk as much as you do, does he?"

The man stared at Dick Seton, then walked round the front of the lorry to Dick's side.

"After all," he said, "you're earlier than any lorry has ever left the town before, that I can remember. In a hurry to get back?"

He was staring straight at Dick, and obviously wanted to make him speak. Dick coughed and spluttered loudly, hoping to make himself hoarse and thus disguise his faulty German accent.

But Monty came to the rescue.

"He's not well," he explained. "Ought not to be driving really, only I can't."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Bad throat. The doctor suspects something serious—only we had to come with this load for the castle."

"And what does the doctor suspect?"

"There's a lot of it about in our village, Herr Sergeant. It's typhoid, I shouldn't be surprised—very catching."

The sergeant backed away smartly.

"Then you'd better get home as fast as you can," he growled. "Away you go! We don't want epidemics here."

Dick slipped in the clutch and away they went. Monty thrust his papers back into his pocket and chuckled. Dick grinned as he watched the road.

"That chap was scared stiff of germs," he remarked.

"Yes," agreed Monty. "But he was in greater danger of stopping a bullet. Evans gave me a revolver. If that sergeant had started anything he'd have got it. But we're through the gauntlet, Dick, old man. Carry on!"

— —

Over the Hedge.

THEY saw many evidences of Kahn's search for them, as they drove along the road northwards. The sun rose in the east, and did its utmost to dispel the mist from the hollows and the chill of night from the dank air.

They passed military patrols. Officers in high-powered cars passed them, police were stationed in the villages, watching all that passed on the road. But no one interfered with them. Not a soul betrayed any desire to stop them.

"Do they know we passed the cordon, then?" queried Dick.

Monty leaned out of the driver's cab and gazed along the side of the lorry.

"That sergeant has chalked a big cross on the side," he said. "It is evidently our passport. But we ought to be near Wiener Farm. There's a gate on the bend there."

The gate was open, and on the top bar were painted the words, "Wiener Farm." Dick drove in and along the rugged track to the

clustered farm buildings that were situated some two hundred yards from the main road.

In the yard stood the farmer, a big burly German, he looked, in rough clothing, stout boots and leggings, smoking a meerschaum.

"You are early," he growled, coming up to them as Dick brought the lorry to a standstill.

"Yes, we got away before the thick of the traffic started," said Monty. "I think it will be a fine day."

"Oh, yes, it will be a fine day," replied the farmer. "Got the bills?"

He reached up for the papers, and in his hand was a green button. It was only on view for a second, for in a flash it seemed to vanish up the man's sleeve.

Monty nodded approval.

"All's well, so far, Brandon."

"Better come in the barn, quickly, before anyone's about," said the farmer.

They alighted from the lorry and sauntered across the yard into the barn, and the doors were set ajar to hide them.

The farm seemed asleep. There were no lights in the farm-house, and no labourers about. Monty and Dick peered through the chink of the barn door, and saw Brandon striding back towards the lorry.

"He's got to settle things with the other two," said Monty. "It was special dope Evans used on them."

The farmer climbed into the lorry and tossed the empty sacks and basket about, revealing the huddled figures of two men—the real driver and his mate. The air revived them and they sat up, blinking in amazement.

"What is the meaning of this!" raved the farmer. "How long have you been here? You are drunk!"

Neither of the men could answer. Their own eyes told them they were no longer in Arnstein.

"Where are the bills for the goods you took to market?"

They turned out their pockets. Nothing was missing, except some of their money and the bills.

"Lost them!" raged the farmer. "You work for me no longer. You get so drunk you drive home without knowing it in the middle of the night. You sleep it off in the lorry, and you have lost the bills. I will not employ you another day. You can go—now!"

The men argued that they couldn't understand it. They admitted drinking lager at a beer garden, but not enough to hurt them.

But they could not argue away the fact that they had gone to sleep in Arnstein and were now in the farmyard. Their heads were splitting, and they felt ill—too ill to argue a great deal—and after a time two dazed, bewildered, brow-beaten men staggered out of the yard on the way to their homes.

"But, surely, they'll guess there's something fishy about it," said Dick. "Isn't it a bit rough for men to lose their jobs like that, and—"

"Brandon will forgive and forget—when

"we're safely out of the way," said Monty. "They won't lose by it. The point that occurs to me is that if that lorry was supposed to have come during the night, why didn't someone hear it? And suppose someone heard us drive in?"

But when he put that to Brandon the farmer only chuckled.

"I live here alone," he said. "The village is half a mile away in the hollow behind the woods. Who is to say what happened? But come into the house and have breakfast."

In the farm kitchen a meal was spread. Brandon himself had prepared it. His servants were all engaged on munitions, and farms in Germany were run with as few hands as possible.

Part of their disguise was discarded and promptly burnt. Other clothes were forthcoming, and their faces altered by deft touches so that they appeared as aged land workers, taking the places of the younger men who had been called up to join the army. Their papers were changed for others. Not a detail was left to chance, although chance could do a lot even then.

"You stay here for a day or so till we get word that it's reasonably safe to pass you on," said Brandon. "You better hoe turnips in the ten-acre field. I'll start you right away. Come on."

But no sooner had they set foot in the yard again, than there fell on their ears a most hideous yelping, and round the corner of the barn came a weedy youth, dragging a lean dog on a string, and belabouring the poor brute with a stick. There was blood on the dog's flanks, and the animal howled with pain.

Brandon sprang at him, angrily, cursing in fluent German, and with one well directed cuff sent him reeling away from the dog who promptly raced off towards the fields, the string trailing on the ground behind him.

"Schwein!" raged Brandon. "I won't have you ill-treating any animal here. I'll thrash you till you can't stand if I catch you at it again. Get off with you to the cow byres!"

The youth slouched away sullenly, then hesitated, eyeing Monty and Dick up and down. It was clear that he was only a half-wit—an object of pity—but there was cunning in his colourless eyes.

"Who are they?" he asked abruptly.

"Aged labourers sent to help with the hoeing," explained Brandon. "Get along with you now. There are the cows to milk, and you're late already."

The youth sneered, thrust his hands into his pockets and lurched away round the corner of the house, going towards the byres.

"He seemed interested in us," said Dick.

"No need to be afraid of him," said Brandon. "If he were not a half-wit he'd be in the army."

Monty gazed down at his hands. Their disguise was perfect, but they had forgotten one thing.

"That half-wit of yours stared straight at my hands," said Monty. "Would aged labourers have hands like these?"

Brandon frowned anxiously.

"Better get off to the fields and dirty them," he said.

It was only a minor incident, but Monty knew from experience that it is the little, insignificant things that ruin great schemes. He felt uneasy as Brandon gave them hoes and set them to work in the ten-acre turnip field a quarter of a mile from the farm itself, and adjoining the main road.

The first thing Monty did was to find a puddle, wet his hands and daub mud all over them. The trouble was not so much that his hands had been clean—they had, as a matter of fact, become very grimy on the lorry—but an aged farm labourer's hands would be wrinkled, gnarled, and probably distorted by rheumatism. They both did what they could to make their hands look the part, but having had one fright over the matter, they could not feel very satisfied with the result, although they had to risk it in the end.

There was a fair amount of traffic on the road, and the bulk of it was military. But two figures toiled in the field, many yards away from any sort of concealment, and the men who were out hunting for the escaped Englishers did not look twice at the old labourers hoeing—always hoeing; dull, back-aching work—in the big field.

That hoeing was not done very well, but Brandon did not come to supervise. He left them severely alone, and they toiled for hours, up one row, down the next, the hoes going monotonously.

"This is spoiling me for a country life," said Dick, with a chuckle. "My hands are sore, and my back won't ever get straight again."

"And I never want to see a turnip again," growled Monty. "The idea is great for fooling people, but there it ends as far as I'm concerned. I'm fed-up with the job, and—look out! Uniforms in those cars. They're pulling up! Work like mad! Only don't overdo it!"

They were approaching the hedge that separated the field from the road, and as the cars slackened speed, so they bent lower over the turnips and hoed for dear life.

Then the cars stopped. An officer was standing up in one.

"Hi—you!", he cried gruffly. "Come here!"

There was no one else for him to call to, so Monty half rose, and, leaning heavily on his hoe, slowly began to make his way over the clods, between the turnips, towards the hedge.

"Quicker—dog!" shouted the officer. "Think I can wait here all day for you?"

Monty reached the hedge and glanced up. The blood ran cold in his veins. He was face to face with Heinrich Kahn himself.

He could not tell for sure whether his disguise would prove adequate before the



The pursuit passed swiftly down the road. Just when Monty was congratulating himself that the immediate danger was over, a fat soldier came puffing up to seat himself on the very seat under which the two fugitive Britishers lay !

cold scrutiny of Kahn's hard eyes. Monty stood breathing heavily, as an old man would, leaning on his hoe. He snatched off his tattered hat, revealing his matted, dirty hair, and bowed respectfully.

"I move as fast as my old bones will let me, Herr Leutnant," he quavered.

Kahn frowned down at him.

"How do you, an old rustic, know that I am a lieutenant?" he asked suspiciously.

"Your old eyes must be very good."

Monty was inwardly afraid. He had made a slip, and he sought to cover it up. He laughed in a cackling sort of way.

"Why should I not know?" he said. "Are not all our sons military men in these days?"

Kahn nodded grimly.

"Of course, I forgot. But how long have you been working here?"

"Since sunrise, Herr Leutnant."

"Do you know that two Englanders have escaped from Arnstein Castle?"

"Yes, I have heard of it."

"Have you seen anything suspicious round here to-day?"

Monty rubbed his unshaven chin thought-

fully and glanced around, slowly nodding his head.

"Not men, Herr Leutnant," he replied. "But what did puzzle me was that shortly after dawn I saw a spiral of smoke rise from behind the copse to the southward."

Kahn started and his eyes gleamed.

"Smoke, you say? And what do you think that could mean?"

"A fire, Herr Leutnant—a fire."

"And is that surprising, then?"

"Yes, over there—because there are no houses, nor farms. Who would light a fire in a copse, Herr Leutnant, unless the lighter of it wanted to cook his breakfast—hein?"

Kahn chuckled, and tossed a coin over the hedge.

"You may be old, my friend, but I see your teeth, like your wits, are good. Bite on that coin. It is good, also. Forward—we go to the copse!"

Kahn sat down, and the cars thundered off up the road. Monty remained where he was, leaning on his hoe and mopping his brow.

"Thunder, but that was a near thing!" he exclaimed. "See who it was, Dick?"

"Yes—Kahn. But you fooled him neatly."

"I wonder," mused Monty. "Did you hear what he said: 'Your teeth, like your wits, are good.' Aged farm labourers in Germany ought not to have good teeth. The half-wit noticed our hands; Heinrich noticed my teeth. They might not understand yet what these things mean, but we cannot tell when they will suddenly understand. I don't like it, Dick. We're running risks here. Better get over on the other side of the field, away from the road."

They shuffled away over the clods to the distant hedge and bent to their work again, discussing the matter softly as they worked.

"I think you're worrying over nothing," said Dick.

"Keep working," muttered Monty. "But take a look at the hedge."

Dick shot a side glance at the hedge and saw the head of the half-wit poking cautiously over the top, surveying them intently.

"Don't let him see that he's been spotted," said Monty, still hoeing.

Dick went on working. Monty rose with a deep sigh, as if to ease his aching back. The half-wit bobbed down as if he had been shot, and they heard the swishing of the grasses as he sped away.

Monty dropped his hoe and moved to the hedge, found a hole and poked his head through.

"Thought as much," he said, when he came back. "That half-wit is cutting across country to the copse—where Kahn has gone. He'll bring Kahn back here! We've got to get out of this, Dick. Come and find Brandon! There's not a moment to lose!"

They made their way back to the farmyard. Brandon came out of the barn, looking worried.

"That boy milked the cows, and that's about all. He's vanished. Can't find him anywhere."

"That's why we're here," said Monty tersely. "He's gone to fetch Kahn back."

He explained what he meant, and Brandon nodded his head.

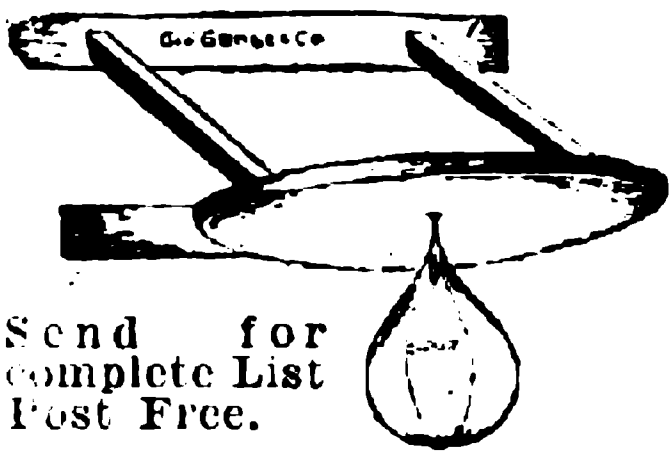
"Time you cleared," he said. "I'll have to risk it and pass you on to Uhlsdorp right away. Come in the barn and I'll fix it. I can 'phone through to our man there—a private wire no one knows about, except the service members."

LESS than half an hour later an old, bent man trudged along the road with his goods in a pack on his back, while beside him walked with staggering steps an old woman, with a shawl round her head in place of a hat. And it was amazing how little of her face could be seen in the voluminous folds of that shawl.

It was risky making a move in broad daylight with Heinrich Kahn's party still scouring the roads, but they dared not remain at Wiener's Farm after what had happened. Monty didn't like disguises, really, but it was the only way. At least, they were both learning valuable lessons.

(Many miles separate Monty and Dick Seton from the Dutch Frontier, miles of perilous roads and countless pursuers. The Britishers have but a slender chance of getting through. But with typical grit and pluck they plod on their way, ready for whatever danger threatens. Don't miss next week's chapters of this fine story of the Great War!)

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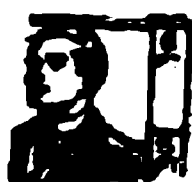
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