

LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL & DETECTIVE THRILLER
INSIDE!

THE NELSON LEE

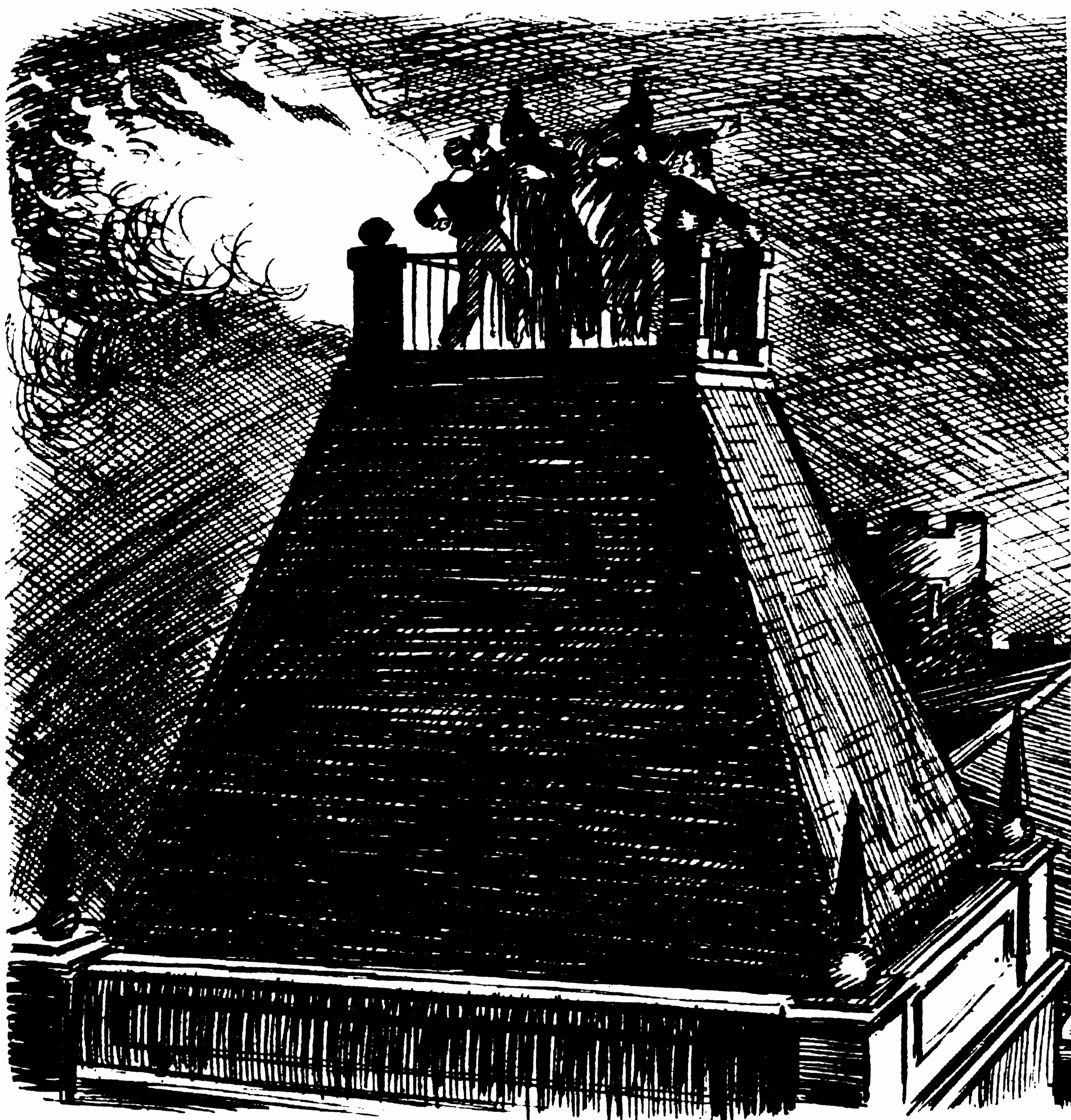
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CHAPTER 1.

An Unfortunate Mishap to Phipps.

“WHAT-HO! ’Morning, and all that sort of thing!”

Archibald Winston Derek Glen-thorne, the genial ass of the Remove at St. Frank’s, sat up in bed and revealed his superstructure encased in blue-and-orange striped silken pyjamas. Phipps, his imperturbable valet, was in the act of pulling aside the curtains.

“Good-morning, Master Archibald,” said Phipps, as he turned.

“Oh, rather! Somewhat murky, though, by the look of the north-eastern horizon,” said Archie, as he took one look at the leaden sky and subsided back upon the pillow. “Odds shivers and blasts, Phipps, it’s not absolutely time to hit the good old linoleum, is it?”

“I’m afraid so, sir.”

“Well, you know best,” continued Archie, with a sigh. “I mean to say, it’s no good arguing about it, is it? What about the cup of cheer? I gather that it is somewhere in the offing?”

“I am bringing it immediately, sir,” replied Phipps.

And, having seen that the curtains were set to his satisfaction, he performed the celebrated Phipps glide to the door and vanished noiselessly. Phipps was always like that. He came and went in the most disconcerting manner. A perfect servant.

Archie was a pampered youth. He was the only fellow in the whole of St. Frank’s, in fact, who boasted a valet. Not even the lordliest member of the lordly Sixth employed a personal servant. Even Archie only retained Phipps on conditions. Phipps also performed duties as the headmaster’s butler,

—Another Powerful Story Of The Fellowship Of Fear and NELSON LEE, Detective!

The SIEGE of St. FRANK'S!

By E. S. Brooks



High above the Triangle, in the school tower, Nipper and Handforth fought with the hooded raiders, whilst their distress signal blazed fiercely. Below hooded machine-gunners and riflemen kept up a ceaseless vigil. St. Frank's was in a state of siege. . . . Once you have started to read this amazing thrill-packed story of St. Frank's you won't be able to put it aside until you have finished it. It's great! It's grand!

and his services for Archie were mainly confined to the early morning and the tea hour.

The door opened again, and Phipps now entered carrying a neat tray on which stood a steaming cup of tea, a sugar bowl, and a plate containing a couple of biscuits. Archie freely admitted that he was never himself until he had imbibed the good old India and Ceylon.

"If you will kindly sit up, Master Archibald," said Phipps.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie, his eye on the steaming teacup. "I'm sitting up already, laddie, to say nothing of taking notice. Kindly come right across with the cockle-warming beverage."

Phipps came across all right. In fact, he obeyed Archie literally, though it appeared

to be through no fault of his own. Archie's slippers which usually reposed neatly beside the bed, had strayed this morning, and were right in the fairway. Owing to the tray, Phipps was unsighted, so to speak, and his left foot caught against the slippers, he tripped, and the tea went across perfectly.

It shot up into the air, accompanied by the sugar and biscuits and the crockery, and as Phipps stumbled heavily against the bed, the tea splashed liberally over Archie.

"Help! I'm scalded!" shrieked the unfortunate junior, leaping out of bed as though he had been stung by a hornet. "Good gad! Man the lifeboats! We're sinking!"

It was fortunate for him that the tea was not scalding hot, and although in some pain, he was not really hurt. Tea was dripping from his ears, and from his chin, and his magnificent pyjama suit was ruined.

A hollow groan came from Phipps. He had subsided to the floor, but now he reached an arm upwards, clutching at the bedpost, and he pulled himself into an upright position.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie in a strange voice.

He was staring at Phipps' forearm. In reaching up, the valet's sleeve had drawn back, exposing his forearm half-way to the elbow. There was nothing wrong with it, but Archie seemed quite stunned; so much so, in fact, that he became strangely cooled.

"I—I'm dreadfully sorry, sir," said Phipps, who was now on his feet.

"And so you dashed well ought to be," retorted Archie.

"I trust you are not hurt, sir."

"Then you can go on trusting," said Archie icily. "I mean to say, if you don't think it hurts to have a cup of boiling tea splashed all over your tenderest spots, just try it!"

His expression changed as he noted the agonised look on Phipps' face. He was staring at the man strangely—almost wonderingly, as though there was something here which was unfathomable.

"Are you hurt?" he asked abruptly.

"Thank you, sir. Nothing to speak of," replied Phipps, controlling himself. "My ankle caught against the bed, and I fear it is slightly ricked, but the injury is only trifling. I was unfortunate enough to stumble over your slippers, sir, which appear to have been left in an unusual place."

"That's dashed rummy!" said Archie, staring. "I'll swear I put those slippers under the bed last night. Odds waste of time!" he added plaintively. "Bother the blighting slippers! What are you going to do about this?"

He indicated his soaked person, but before Phipps could answer, the door opened, and Nipper, the cheery Remove captain, looked in. Behind him were Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Need any help?" asked Nipper. "We heard some awful yells—Hallo! What have you been doing to yourself, Archie?"

"Pray don't be so frightfully ridic.," protested Archie. "You don't think I tipped the tea over myself, do you? Phipps did it! At least, it was done by this blighter!"

And he looked at Phipps harder than ever.

"Alas and alack!" said Nipper, with feigned horror. "Phipps, the Perfect, has at last slipped up!"

"No, sir," said Phipps imperturbably. "I slipped down."

"By stumbling over my slippers," added Archie.

"Begad, there seems to be a lot of slippin' about it, there does, really," remarked Sir Montie, with a chuckle. "But as long as nobody is hurt, everything's all right."

"We're both hurt, dash you!" said Archie, who still seemed unaccountably calm. "I'm scalded, and Phipps has put a kink in his ankle. My pyjamas are ruined, and the bedclothes—Dash it! It's most frightfully odd!"

"What is?" asked Nipper.

"There's something I can't understand, old tulip," replied Archie, addressing Nipper but looking straight at Phipps. "In fact, it's the rummiest mystery I've ever come across."

"You mean about the slippers, sir?" asked Phipps. "Perhaps you used them in the night and forgot—"

"I don't mean the slippers, Phipps," broke in Archie in a strange voice. "Bother the blinking slippers! I mean you!"

"Well, we'll leave you to solve the mystery between yourselves," said Nipper, laughing. "Personally, I don't think you'll do it. How the dickens you could stumble over Archie's slippers, Phipps, beats me hollow. You're usually such a careful merchant."

"Yes, sir," said Phipps sadly.

But before Nipper & Co. could reach the door, Archie called them back. To their surprise he requested them to turn the key in the lock. But now an expression of determination had come into his face. Archie was regarded as something of a chump but, actually, he was one of the keenest fellows in the Remove.

"Just a minute, lads all," he said quietly. "You, too, Phipps. This thing needs thrashing out."

Phipps looked at Archie just as steadily as Archie looked at Phipps.

"I don't quite understand, sir," he said.

"And neither do I," replied Archie. "But before you leave this room, Phipps, I'm going to understand—absolutely! The fact that you stumbled over my slippers is queer enough—because, you know, Phipps, you simply couldn't do a thing like that. There's something else. Be good enough, old cheese, to hoist the left sleeve."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Phipps, in surprise.

"The young master is anxious to see your forearm."

"My forearm, sir!"

"Absolutely!"

"Must be the shock," murmured Tommy Watson, shaking his head. "Archie likes his tea in a cup. He simply hates to have it thrown at him."

Archie ignored him.

"I'm waiting, Phipps," he said grimly.

Phipps pushed his sleeve back so that a section of his forearm was in full sight. Archie looked at it almost dazedly.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated, aghast.

Nipper and Tommy and Montie stared in wonder.

"What's the matter, Archie?" asked Nipper. "There's nothing wrong with Phipps' arm."

"Exactly," said Archie. "Nothing wrong at all."

"Then why are you looking like a half-boiled cod?"

"Because there should be something wrong," replied Archie, ignoring the insult in his bewilderment. "When Phipps tripped over the slippers it was suspicious enough. But this forearm clinches the thing. Kindly be good enough, somebody, to fetch the police."

"Wouldn't it be better to fetch a doctor?" suggested Nipper. "You'll be all right after a rest, Archie——"

"Lads, you may think I'm loony, but I'm telling you that this blighter is not Phipps," said Archie. "He looks like Phipps, he talks like Phipps, and he smells like Phipps. He absolutely uses the same brand of brilliantine. But he's not Phipps."

Phipps remained as imperturbable as a sphinx.

"Quite remarkable, sir," he said calmly. "May I be permitted to know how you have arrived at this extraordinary conclusion?"

"Extraordinary is right," said Watson. "Pull yourself together, Archie! You're talking drivell! What's the matter with you? Are you only half awake, or what?"

"I rather think that Master Archibald is more wide awake than I gave him credit for being," said Phipps, a dry note creeping into his voice.

Nipper looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean, Phipps?" he demanded. "Why did Archie want to see your forearm just now?"

"That is what I am waiting to hear, sir," said Phipps calmly.

"Then I'll tell you," said Archie, his words slow and deliberate. "You're not Phipps, and I can prove it! Last night, while Phipps was poking up the study fire, a red-hot cinder shot out and burnt his left fore-arm most frightfully. The cinder made a hole as big as a sixpence—and you're not going to tell me that a burn like that could heal over-night! So I've got you, you dashed impostor!"

"You're mad," said Watson impatiently. "It must have been the other arm—that's all."

"It wasn't the other arm," replied Archie, moving across to the door. "The whole thing is so rummy that I'm more or less

dazed, but you can't fool me about that burn! I'm going to ring up the police and give this blighter in charge."

Nipper & Co. stared in amazement as Phipps quickly walked to the door and placed his back against it.

"Just a minute," he said quickly.

"Not on your bally life," exclaimed Archie. "When you hoisted yourself up from the floor your sleeve pulled back, and I spotted your arm."

"Ah, now I understand!"

"Then it's more than I do, my tulip!" said Archie, with some warmth. "It's no good messing about. I've bowled you. I don't know what your game is——"

"I'll tell you," said Phipps grimly.

His voice had changed completely. Nipper jumped, and the others stared incredulously.

For it was the voice of Nelson Lee!

FOR some moments there was a tense silence.

"Guv'nor!" ejaculated Nipper at last.

"Well done, Archie," said Nelson Lee, his eyes twinkling. "You were too clever for me."

Not only had his voice changed; his whole bearing was different, he held himself more freely; the stiffness of the well-trained servant had vanished. Even the expression of his face had relaxed, so that whilst he still bore a striking resemblance to Phipps, it was obvious that he was not Phipps.

"Odds shocks and staggerers," ejaculated Archie, with a jump. "It's—it's not you, Mr. Lee? I mean to say, how frightfully exciting!"

"I'm lucky that you made the discovery here, in the bed-room," said Nelson Lee. "I'm lucky, too, in the fact that you made your startling accusation in the presence of these three boys. They might easily have been three others."

"Oh, rather! But I confess I don't gather the trend."

"Nipper and his friends are aware of my presence in the school, and there are four other boys who are also in the secret," replied Lee. "The rest of the school is in complete ignorance."

"You fooled me properly, guv'nor," said Nipper admiringly. "Your impersonation of Phipps was perfect. "Of course, you've done it before, and that made it easier, I suppose. We shall have to let Archie into the full secret now, shan't we?"

"Yes, of course," replied the disguised detective. "I'm sorry I spilt the tea over you, Archie. I meant to have a spectacular tumble, and I purposely put your slippers in the middle of the floor before you awoke—so that I should have a reasonable excuse."

"Good gad! You mean, you did it on purpose, sir?"

"I'm afraid I did—but I intended the tea to fall clear of the bed," replied Nelson Lee gravely. "My object was to make a pretence of ricking my ankle, so that I should have

a good excuse for limping. You see, my leg is slightly injured, and I should limp in any case. By adopting that trifling safeguard I unconsciously gave myself away. It was very remiss of Phipps to forget that burn."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Nipper. "Doesn't it show you how the smallest thing can upset all your calculations? Phipps burnt his arm last night, and forgot to tell you about it. Or perhaps he thought it didn't matter, as the burn was hidden by his sleeve."

"And Archie's keen eyes did the trick," said Lee dryly.

"Oh, rather! I mean to say, sir, I was going to ask Phipps about his bally arm, and when I saw that there was no burn I knew dashed well that there was something squiffy about the whole business," said Archie. "But I must confess that I'm bowled over. I mean to say, even now I can't get the hang of things. Dashed disturbing, first thing in the morning!"

"The absence of that burn was conclusive proof—and you were very smart to keep your head as you did," said the disguised detective. "Well, as I don't want this secret to go any further—and as, in fact, my very life may depend upon your discretion—I shall have to give you a few brief facts. I will add that I meant to take you into my confidence later to-day, as it would have been most unfair to maintain such a trick. But I wanted to test my disguise on you first."

Archie was dumbfounded. Even when he had made the accusation he had been prepared for Phipps to give some logical explanation of the healed burn. Yet he had known, at the same time, that such a thing was impossible. The actual truth left him in a maze.

THEN and there, in the privacy of that little dormitory, Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne was admitted into the Great Secret.

The Secret Seven became the Secret Eight. The only other boys in the school who knew the truth were Nipper and his two chums, Handforth & Co. of Study D, and Handforth minor, Willy. Archie made the eighth.

He listened breathlessly as Nelson Lee told of the terrorist organisation, known as the Fellowship of Fear, which was operating up and down England—operating secretly, stealthily. The central headquarters of the fanatical confederation was situated, Lee believed, somewhere on the Continent; the leaders were Poles, Russians, Germans, and so on—and they had gathered desperate men of every nationality to their banner. The majority of these men had no fervent interest in the aims of the fellowship, but they were well paid and the work was light. And many were becoming converted to the faith.

The avowed objects of the Fellowship of Fear were desperate in the extreme. World revolution—the upheaval of every existing civilised code. These fanatics wanted chaos, so that they could grasp power and rule the world in their own mad way

It was an impossible dream. But, none the less, the fellowship was dangerous, for it worked underground, and unless it was quickly crushed it might cause the death of hundreds of innocent people, and the ruin of thousands of others.

When the menace had come to St. Frank's, Nelson Lee had thrown himself heart and soul into the battle. One form of attack, which the fellowship strongly favoured, was to induce schoolmasters, by means of threats, to introduce the fellowship's teachings into their schools. Many headmasters had resisted, many had ignored the warnings. Others had placed themselves under the protection of the police. But it made no difference. Those who defied the fellowship suffered. In many cases they had vanished utterly, and were either dead or being held prisoner. "Fighting Jim" Kingswood, headmaster of St. Frank's, had been singled out for attention, and from the first he had proved defiant.

Here was Lee's chance.

The detective, disguised as the Head's chauffeur, had been on the premises for some weeks. He had succeeded in locating the local headquarters of the fellowship. The secret criminals operated from the old, deserted Moor Prison. Quite recently, Lee had fallen into the hands of the enemy, but with more than his usual brilliance he had beaten them all along the line, and had escaped. But his career as "Carson," the chauffeur, was at an end.

AS it was essential for me to remain near Mr. Kingswood I conveniently vanished," explained the detective.

"I am confident that the fellowship has lost track of me. It would have been dangerous to appear at St. Frank's as a newcomer—a substitute chauffeur or a gardener, for example. The fellowship's spies would have suspected me at once. So I took Phipps into my confidence—he is a man who can be trusted—and he was smuggled away last night. In his shoes I am safe, for he is an established character of St. Frank's—and, furthermore, he is the headmaster's butler. That enables me to be constantly near Mr. Kingswood."

"A frightfully brainy scheme," commented Archie approvingly.

"There is no reason why it should not work out well," continued Lee. "I am trusting you, Archie, to keep this matter a complete secret. I adopted that 'tumble' to account for my slight limp—"

"How is your leg, guv'nor" asked Nipper anxiously. "While you were escaping you were winged—"

"A muscle was cut, but the wound was purely superficial," said Lee. "Well, boys, it looks as though things might boil up suddenly before long. So far, you know, it has been merely a simmer."

"What are you expecting, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Here, at St. Frank's, I'm expecting very little," replied Lee, becoming thoughtful.

"The fellowship may have ceased its operations in this district. At all events, the Moor Prison is now deserted. The birds have flown—and they have taken their prisoners with them."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tommy Watson.

"Then—then there'll be no more excitement," said Nipper, pulling a long face.

"After my escape from the prison the fellowship agents naturally cleared out," continued Lee. "They were afraid of being raided. The prison was raided, in fact—as quickly as I could get into operation. But

"It was impossible for me to aid them when I was in the prison. I was alone, surrounded by enemies. And my object was not to release the prisoners but to obtain evidence. It won't be long before I reap the fruits of my labour."

He was thinking of something which was his own secret. Whilst within the enemy's camp he had obtained possession of a secret code-book, and he believed that that insignificant-looking volume contained information of incalculable use—the names of the leaders, even their addresses; the location of the cen-



Phipps had almost reached the bed when he tripped, and sent the tray of tea-things showering clean over Archie. "Help! Man the lifeboats!" yelled the unfortunate junior. "We're sinking!"

I expected to find the place empty. To all intents and purposes, the fellowship has abandoned this part of the country completely. But make no mistake—the game has really only just begun."

His eyes were glowing, and Nipper, at least, knew the reason for that change of expression. And Nipper shared his famous gov'nor's animation. They were not attached to St. Frank's, as the other boys were; they could carry the fight into new fields. And Nipper was certain that Nelson Lee was thinking of going abroad, and attacking the evil at its very root.

"It's a bit rough on those poor men who were imprisoned on the moor, sir," said Nipper. "I was hoping that you would be able to rescue them—"

"I shall rescue them," broke in Lee grimly.

tral headquarters; everything, in fact, which would enable a net to be closed in.

He had worked on that code-book for many hours, and he was beginning to see daylight. There was no greater master of codes and ciphers than Nelson Lee; he had never been beaten by one yet, and he was determined that this one should succumb to his efforts.

When it did so, and he had that mass of valuable information in his possession—

"Meanwhile, we must take nothing for granted," he continued. "Mr. Kingswood is not yet out of danger, and for that reason I have made this impersonation."

"But, good gad, sir!" ejaculated Archie, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying Lee in wonder. "I mean to say! You're not absolutely telling me that the

good old Head—Fighting Jim, himself—requires a bodyguard?"

Lee smiled.

"Mr. Kingswood can take care of himself very nicely, Archie," he replied. "My reason for being near him is to trail the fellowship agents if and when they come near the school. At the same time, Mr. Kingswood can easily do with a little extra help. These people are relentless. They may abandon St. Frank's as a bad job—or they may attack from a different angle. We're just at a point, now, where we don't quite know how the cat will jump. So we've all got to be very careful—and I'm relying on you boys to use your discretion."

"In that case, guv'nor, we'll keep this strictly under our hats," said Nipper. "We won't even tell Handforth or the others. Where's the need?"

They took their departure, inwardly thrilled, leaving Nelson Lee, once again in the character of Phipps, to attend to his usual morning duties for Archie—much to that elegant junior's unbounded embarrassment.

CHAPTER 2.

The Shape on the Roof.

COUNT MICHEL PETRASS, late Professor of Science in Warsaw University, paced the room of his London hotel, gesticulating angrily. He was a big, heavily-built, clean-shaven man, and the square cut of his jaw told of his aggressive character.

"Mein Gott! But you are the fool, Venner," he said harshly. "Not only have you failed in your trust, but you have allowed that man, Lee, to escape from you with a vital document. You know the reward of men who betray the fellowship, do you not?"

Boris Venner, with perspiration standing in beads on his learned forehead, shrank away from the bigger man's gaze. He was an austere, refined-looking man, and under more favourable conditions he would have been dignified in bearing.

"No, no, count!" he protested. "I did not betray! You do not know this man, Lee! He is the devil—he performs black magic!"

"Pah! He tricked you, that is all," said the other contemptuously. "And you will pay, Venner—unless you recover the code-book."

It was a grim enough little scene. Count Petrass was one of the Big Men from central headquarters; Boris Venner was the Master of the Southern Section, in England, of the Fellowship of Fear. He was the man who, at the old Moor Prison, had been known by his subordinates as "No. 1." Now he was on the carpet. His organisation had been broken up, his members disbanded. He had been relieved of his responsibilities.

This was a direct result of Nelson Lee's operations.

"It is a mystery," he said, for the twentieth time. "Lee was brought into the prison, unconscious. He was placed in a cell. I was present when he was searched, and I will swear that he carried no tools on him. Yet, within an hour he had escaped from that cell—leaving the door locked. My code-book is missing—but there is no certainty that Lee took it."

"If he did not take it, then who did?" demanded the count. "You admit that he was in your office——"

"But the safe was locked, just as I had left it."

"The cell door was locked, too," snapped the man from headquarters. "If Lee can open a cell door, he can open a safe door. It was he who took your code-book, Venner, and our only hope is that he has been unable to read it. Gott in Himmell! Think of the consequences if Lee should decode——"

"But it is impossible!" exclaimed Venner, in fear.

"Our agents can find no trace of Lee," continued the count, frowning. "I will give you one chance, my friend. You will recover that code-book, and bring it to me within twenty-four hours, and you shall be spared. Fail to do this, and you suffer the reward of all who fail the fellowship."

Boris Venner went chalky white.

"You give me an impossible task," he protested, in panic.

"You may have the services of two men," continued the count relentlessly.

"Two?" asked the other wildly. "Where can I start?"

"It is for you to decide what you shall do, and where you shall start," said Count Petrass, with a shrug. "But I would suggest that you start at St. Frank's. We know that Lee was quartered there, posing as the headmaster's chauffeur. It is certain, therefore, that Kingswood was in the secret. If any man can tell you where Lee is to be found now, that man is Kingswood." He changed his tone as he placed a hand on Venner's shoulder. "Come, my friend, this is a chance for you to reinstate yourself," he said, not unkindly. "Accomplish this mission, and you will not only be restored to your former prestige, but I will see to it that you gain promotion."

"Thank you!" muttered No. 1. "But, again, I say you have given me an impossible task."

"You have the facilities of our organisation at your disposal—use them," said Count Petrass shortly.

And without another word he dismissed the man who had lately been in command of the fellowship branch at the old Moor Prison.

The evening of that day proved blustery and threatening. A strong south-wester was blowing in from the Channel, and the wind, reaching gale-force at times, boomed and sang round the various Houses of St. Frank's. There was no moon, and the sky was almost completely hidden by dense masses of black cloud.

Comparatively early in the evening, therefore, the darkness was of that pitchy kind when it is difficult to see one's hand in front of one's face.

Lights glowed warmly from the windows of the school; occasionally, voices made themselves heard above the blustering of the wind. But, for the most part, St. Frank's was silent, for the fellows were keeping within doors. There was a cold, biting nip in the wind, and occasionally a few drops of rain would patter down in the squally gusts.

A figure, almost indistinguishable from the night, approached the headmaster's House from across the playing fields. The man was smallish, well wrapped up against the weather, and on his back he carried a bulky ruck-sack.

He was evidently familiar with his surroundings, for, having climbed to the top of the garden wall with surprising agility, he dropped behind a dense patch of laurel bushes. It was the one spot in the garden which afforded him the greatest cover.

With extreme caution he edged his way round the bushes, and emerged upon the Head's lawn. Not once did he falter. In spite of the darkness, he seemed to know every flower-bed, every path. He was making for a corner of the building where no windows were lighted. It was, therefore, in absolute blackness—and blackness was what this intruder desired. Reaching a wall of the House, he gazed up. Thick creepers grew here, clinging affectionately to the stonework. Without hesitation, the man started climbing. His agility was amazing. He was like a skilled acrobat as he mounted higher and higher.

At last he reached an upper window. He pulled himself upon the sill, and, pressing himself back against the stonework in the recess, he prepared for the next move. The creeper, on the wall above him, was not strong enough to sustain his weight. He swung a rope sharply upwards, and a grappling hook was attached to the end of it. It caught against the gutter, held firmly, and in a moment the man was swarming up like a monkey. He knew, from previous observations, that the gutter was strong and reliable.

Even when he reached it, his position was precarious. Only a trained acrobat could have hoisted himself up as this man did. He got one leg into the gutter, heaved, and like magic he was gripping at the tiles. There was, indeed, something almost uncanny in the fellow's spider-like progress. With infinite caution, yet with a sure touch, he crept higher and higher, until, at length, he reached the apex of the room. The wind whistled round him, but he took no notice. He edged his way along until he came to the central chimney stack, where there were two towering piles of masonry. He selected one, swarmed up it, and sat perched across the top. Smoke and fumes surged round him from the black, yawning opening.

He worked quietly, deliberately. With his knees gripping the stonework, he unfastened his ruck-sack, and from it he took a round object which looked suspiciously like a well-wrapped bomb; but which was, in fact, an asbestos-covered microphone. It was attached to a long cable, and this, too, was asbestos-covered.

The man's next move was to fix some ear-phones to his head. Then, with great care, he proceeded to lower the microphone down the chimney. The ruck-sack contained batteries—and, in fact, a delicate instrument, with softly glowing valves, which would enable every word spoken in the room below to enter the microphone, and reach the ears of the spy above.

This was the chimney of Mr. James Kingswood's study. The fellowship knew every detail of the St. Frank's geography; their knowledge of the Head's House was particularly extensive. The man who was now operating knew his job thoroughly. The apparatus he was using had been put through the most rigorous tests; and the man knew, by the very sounds which reached his ears, just how far the microphone was from the fire. His plan was to leave it suspended in the chimney, well out of sight, but low enough to catch every spoken word within the room.

"I don't think you can improve on that, Mr. Wilkes," came the Head's voice, with extraordinary clarity. "Of course, mathematics is an important subject."

Mr. Kingswood was discussing school matters with the Housemaster of the Ancient House. The spy had adjusted his microphone carefully. Then, securing the cable, he gently lowered himself to the roof proper. Here he made himself as comfortable as possible, sheltering from the wind, and he crouched there, prepared to wait, if necessary, for hours.

The evening was yet young, and the spy, who had received his instructions from Boris Venner—No. 1—was hoping to pick up some scrap of information which would give him a clue as to Nelson Lee's whereabouts. It was quite likely that Mr. Kingswood would telephone to Lee—or talk about Lee with one of the other masters.

If this vigil failed to produce any results, the fellowship would then act drastically. Kingswood, under pressure, might be forced to talk. Before going to such lengths, however, this other plan might succeed.

Mr. Kingswood, after all, was the only man who was likely to know of Nelson Lee's present whereabouts. Lee had that vital code-book in his possession. The detective's capture of the book, in point of fact, had put the fellowship into an absolute panic. Boris Venner's very life depended upon the success of to-night's operations.

So the spy sat there, waiting—listening. The wind was already moderating, and, by the look of the sky, it seemed likely that a calm would follow. But it was bitterly cold up there, on the roof. Not that the spy was

affected, for his suit, like that of an airman, was electrically heated. He sat there in comparative comfort—invisible, silent.

Hour after hour he waited patiently.

He heard people come into the Head's study, and he heard them go. During long intervals there was an absolute silence, proving that the room was empty. The microphone enabled him to pick up every word, even though the voices were quiet. But the man on the roof heard nothing but inconsequential matters connected with the school routine. Mr. Kingswood used the telephone once, but it was only to call up the headmaster of the Bannington Grammar School in reference to the condition of the Grammarian's football ground.

Figures ceased to move about on the ground; boys no longer crossed and recrossed the Triangle, going from House to House. Doors were locked, the lights in the lower windows were extinguished. St. Frank's was preparing for bed.

But the fellowship spy, perched on the headmaster's roof, waited with the patience of Job himself.

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee's Great Discovery.

YES, by James, it works out right!" Nelson Lee uttered the words under his breath; and although he was an unemotional man, he could not conceal a note of gloating triumph. He had every reason to be pleased.

It was mid-evening, and Lee, in the guise of Phipps, was sitting in the latter's little private room in the headmaster's House.

Phipps was not on duty just now, so he was enabled to devote himself to the intricate task of making commonsense out of the meaningless jumble which filled the code book from cover to cover.

At last, after many weary hours of labour, Lee had discovered the key. Only a man deeply steeped in the mysteries of ciphers, and such like, could have hoped for success. Lee, by a process of elimination, and by making endless calculations and experiments, had achieved his object.

After that, the rest was comparatively simple.

He worked hard. He sat at a little table, with the code book near at hand; he had, too, a writing block and a fountain pen, and his fingers drove the pen diligently.

Once or twice he was interrupted—for he attended to all of Phipps' duties punctually. But he came back again and again to his task. And it was at an hour when the junior boys were going to bed that Nelson Lee made his way to Mr. Kingswood's study, and quietly tapped upon the door.

"Well, Phipps?" asked the Head, as the dignified figure entered.

"I would like a private word with you, sir," said Lee, who was Phipps to the life.

Mr. Kingswood's eyes twinkled. He was sitting back in an easy chair, near the fire,

reading; but now he laid his paper aside, and picked up his pipe.

"Go ahead, Phipps," he said, with a chuckle. "You can close the door."

Nelson Lee did so.

"Nobody is likely to disturb us now," continued the Head. "In any case, what would it matter? Surely a man can spend a little time with his butler without arousing suspicion?"

Lee came to the fireplace and sat in the easy-chair opposite.

"All the same, Jim, we've got to be careful," he said in his natural voice. "You may think that I am faddy, but——"

"Not at all," interrupted Mr. Kingswood. "I've had quite enough experience of the fellowship to know that the beggars are determined—and cunning. You are well advised to be cautious, Mr. Lee."

"Better call me Phipps," said the detective.

And upon the roof, the spy positively trembled in the intensity of his sudden excitement. Not two minutes ago he had been telling himself that the venture was a failure. Now the whole position was reversed. He had made the Great Discovery! He had not only learned where Nelson Lee was, but he knew that Lee was impersonating Phipps, the butler!

The fellowship's task should now be simple, for it was only necessary to make a quick raid and grab Lee, and the code-book would be recovered.

"Anything fresh?" asked Fighting Jim, looking at Nelson Lee in wonder—for he could never get over the brilliance of Lee's impersonation.

"Before we talk I would like you to go to the window and take a casual look out," replied Lee. "Oh, you may smile, Jim! But the fellowship's spies are clever and daring. I tell you candidly I don't feel that it is really safe for us to talk, even here, in the privacy of your own study."

How justified were Nelson Lee's fears. And yet even he, for all his astuteness, did not think of looking up the chimney. Even if he had done so, he would have seen nothing, for the microphone was now blackened by soot, and lying snugly in a corner of the chimney. In the grate, too, a fire was glowing with radiant heat, and, on the face of it, it seemed impossible that any spying could be done in that quarter.

The Head went to the window, looked out, then he went to the door, had a stroll across the hall, and came back. He shrugged his shoulders as he sat down in the easy-chair again.

"Nothing," he reported.

"Well, we'll talk in low tones if you don't mind, Jim," said Lee softly. "What I'm going to tell you is of vital importance. I have mastered that code-book."

If Mr. Kingswood received a surprise, the spy, above, received a shock. For he heard the words distinctly. With Lee and Kingswood sitting close to the fireplace, not even a whisper failed to reach the microphone.

"You must forgive me, Jim, if I sound boastful," continued Nelson Lee. "But I am now in a position to smash the fellowship completely. With the information which is now in my possession I can set the British police, and the police of many European countries, in motion. And at one blow the Fellowship of Fear, will be shattered, and many men, whose names are highly respected, will find themselves behind prison bars."

"Don't tantalise me with these hints," said Mr. Kingswood, bending nearer. "What have you actually discovered?"

"I have decoded the contents of that book," replied Nelson Lee. "First and foremost I have learned that the central headquarters of the fellowship are at Holtz Castle, in the Bavarian mountains."

"Great Scott!"

"I don't wonder that you are surprised," said Lee grimly. "Holtz Castle is one of those quaint, medieval piles which are to be found in many parts of Bavaria; an ancestral castle with turrets and towers, perched on a rock. It is the home of Baron Heinrich von Holtz, a German noble with an ancestry which goes back to the Middle Ages."

"But are you sure of this?" asked Mr. Kingswood. "It sounds incredible."

"It is written in the code-book, and there can be no mistake," replied Lee. "Holtz Castle is the War Office, so to speak, of the fellowship."

If the spy on the roof had received a shock earlier, he was now cold with fear. Never for a moment had No. 1 believed that Lee would master the code-book. But Lee had done so—Lee not only knew the inner secrets of the terrorist society, but he was imparting those secrets to another!

The spy listened with such intensity that he was almost in pain; he held himself rigid, and his heart was thudding with the excitement and fear which gripped him.

Nelson Lee talked on—and his talk was relentless. He explained to Mr. Kingswood that the code-book gave him the necessary information concerning local headquarters—not only in Germany, but in Poland, Austria, France, Belgium and England. Lee was in possession of every vital fact. He knew the names of all the fellowship chiefs.

"But this is stupendous," said Mr. Kingswood at length. "No wonder you say you can shatter the fellowship at one blow! What are you going to do, Mr. Lee? When will you strike?"

"To-morrow, I hope—or the next day, at latest."

"But how will you get to work? You, singlehanded, cannot accomplish much."

"This matter will now pass out of my own hands," replied Nelson Lee. "Naturally, I dare not trust this information to the local police. I shall not even venture away from St. Frank's during the hours of darkness. Neither will you, Jim. When you go to bed I shall place myself on guard near you."

"Will that be necessary?" asked Mr. Kingswood, frowning. "Hang it, I don't want to feel that I've got to be watched over and protected—"

"It isn't that," said Nelson Lee. "We must not allow anything to interfere with our plans. In the morning I shall take a trip to London—apparently on a shopping expedition for Archie Glenthorne. Actually, I shall go straight to the Home Office, and place all my information in the hands of the Home Secretary. He, in turn, will communicate with Scotland Yard, and with the police chiefs of all the big European cities. Then, at a given signal, the fellowship will be surprised and broken. With the definite information I can supply, it ought to be a comparatively simple task."

"So that adventure of yours, the other night, looks like bearing splendid fruit," said Fighting Jim warmly. "I congratulate you, Mr. Lee. You did a wonderful piece of work there—and a more wonderful piece of work in decoding that book. When the fellowship is smashed, it will be entirely due to your own activities. You ought to be made a peer of the realm for this service to your country."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"We mustn't count our chickens before they're hatched," he replied. "There's many a slip, you know—although, in this case, I don't think we have much to fear. As I said, I shall go to London to-morrow—and, in the character of Phipps, even the fellowship's spies, if any of them are about, will not give me any unwelcome attention."

"Does anybody else know of this discovery of yours?"

"Nipper knows that I have been working on something of importance this evening, but I thought it advisable to give him no details," replied Nelson Lee. "I told you about young Glenthorne, didn't I? It was necessary to take him into the secret."

"That makes eight boys 'in the know,' doesn't it?"

"Yes, but they can all be trusted," said the detective. "The eight boys are ignorant of this code-book episode, but they know all the rest. Not another soul in the school, man or boy, knows anything at all."

"Nipper, Watson, Tregellis-West, Handforth, Glenthorne—Who are the others?"

"Church, McClure, and young Willy Handforth," replied Nelson Lee. "Of course, they are as keen as mustard to take an active part in the next move. But I'm afraid there won't be a next move. Not here, in this district, at all events. The fight against the fellowship will now become widespread. Well, Jim, we can do nothing further to-night. You had better get to bed—at least, I shall now go to my own room, and you will retire at your usual hour."

They talked for some minutes longer, discussing the subject in general terms; then Nelson Lee took his departure.

But, prior to that, the spy on the roof had carefully hauled up the microphone, and

had once again stowed it in his knapsack. Then, with that same acrobatic activity, he descended to the ground. It was necessary for him to exercise much greater care now; for the whole school was quiet, and the wind had died down, leaving almost a dead calm. But so careful were the movements of the spy that he made no sound whatever; and he was so sure-footed that he never once stumbled. He kept to the black shadows, and thus he passed beyond the range of the school property.

He did not venture upon the road, but kept to the meadows, cutting across to the secluded rustic bridge which spanned the River Stowe. Crossing this, he hurried along a footpath, and at length came out into a lane. From a dense bramble thicket he pulled a bicycle—an ordinary push-bicycle. With great speed he removed his black overall suit, and strapped it, with the knapsack, to the bicycle's carrier. Then, looking like a very ordinary cyclist, he pedalled hard to Bannington.

There was no reason for him to be careful now, for he had a little bungalow of his own on the outskirts of the town. This man, in fact, had been living in the bungalow for quite a few weeks, and was respected by his neighbours. He was even supposed to be an agent for small hardware articles, and his cycling trips, with a well-packed carrier, aroused no comment.

He let himself into the bungalow by means of his key, pushed his machine in, and closed the door. Striding into the comfortably furnished front-room, he found Boris Venner sitting by the gas fire.

"Well?" asked No. 1, in a low, eager voice.

"My report is bad, sir," said the other.

"Bad! What do you mean?" panted No. 1. "Out with it, man!"

"Lee is there—at St. Frank's."

"What!"

"And he knows everything."

"What do you mean—he knows everything?" snarled Venner, gripping the other man in his excitement and fear. "Tell me! Tell me! Are you saying that he actually knows my identity?"

"He knows not only your identity, but the identity of everybody else in the fellowship," replied the spy. "He has decoded the secret book. To-morrow he is to visit the Home Secretary, and set machinery in motion which will smash the fellowship to atoms."

"It is unbelievable," said No. 1, horrified.

But after his subordinate had gone into all the details he was convinced. And his fear increased with every minute that passed. He looked a nervous wreck as he paced jerkily up and down the little room, his hands nervously twitching, his facial muscles working spasmodically, and distorting his features.

"It's bad," said the spy.

"Bad?" almost screamed Boris Venner. "For the fellowship it may mean disaster—for me it is death!"

"But why?" asked the other quickly. "Lee will remain at the school to-night. He is taking no action until to-morrow. He has told nobody of his discoveries—except Kingswood. The police know nothing—yet."

"Yes, yes! There is a chance," panted No. 1, halting, his fingers tremulously drumming against his chin. "Let me think, man! Get away from me, you fool! Let me think!"

He only thought for a minute or two, then he went to the telephone and gave a London number. Soon he was connected with the room of Count Michel Petrass—who was one of the "Big Five" of the fellowship.

"It is I—Venner," said No. 1, speaking in a little-known Slav dialect.

"If you wish to communicate, see me personally," came the voice of Count Petrass, in tones of icy anger. "You know the rules, do you not?"

"But this matter is of such vital urgency that there is no time," replied Venner quickly. "For once, sir, we must take a chance. If an operator happens to be listening in, he will not understand."

"I will not listen," retorted the voice.

"But you must," gasped Venner. "I have found Lee—and he knows the secrets of the code-book."

"What!"

"Unless action is taken to-night, all will be lost," continued Venner, speaking rapidly. "Lee knows of Holtz Castle and the baron—he knows everything."

"By the saints! It is impossible!" came the count's frightened voice.

"He knows you, too—he mentioned your name," went on No. 1. "He has given this information to Kingswood, but not another soul in the world knows. He is delaying action until to-morrow. There are eight boys in the school who know something of the secret——"

"Stop!" came the voice of Petrass. "You are in Bannington, yes? I will be with you shortly after midnight. Say no more now. I will also give instructions—— But I will say no more. Wait for me. Do nothing meanwhile."

The line became dead, and No. 1, trembling, hung up the receiver. His face was ashen. He was wondering, at that moment, whether he should make a bolt for it. It might be his only chance. The fellowship had no use for its members who blundered.

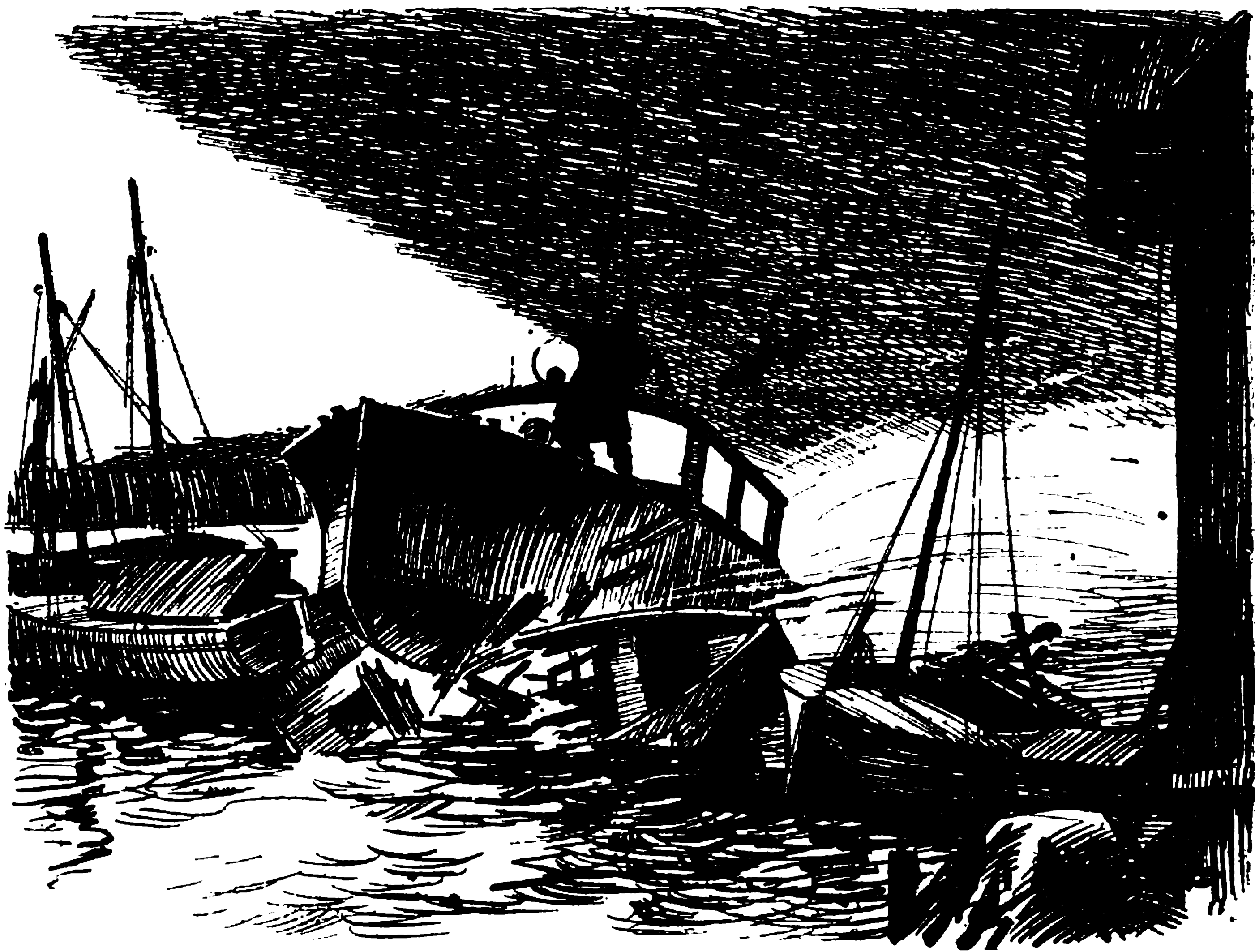
"Well, sir?" asked the spy.

"Nothing can be done yet," said Venner, sinking into a chair. "You have a cigarette, yes? Give me one. Petrass is coming. We are to take action."

"Petrass is coming—here?" asked the other. "Won't it be dangerous? People might talk!"

"What matters?" said Venner. "The very life of the fellowship is at stake. For once we must throw caution to the winds. We must act drastically. Leave me alone, man."

Venner was a wreck. And one man was responsible for his condition. Nelson Lee, alone, had struck terror—hideous terror—into



With an earsplitting roar the motor-boat, carrying Nelson Lee and Co. smashed full-tilt into the barricade of boats, sending them crashing right and left.

the heart of this man who had, only a few days earlier, been in command of an important branch of the fellowship.

"It is unbelievable!" he muttered as he smoked furiously. "Lee—the butler! We have had the man, Phipps, under observation. Was he Lee all the time? No, that is impossible. Phipps was at the school while Lee was there under the name of Carson. By Heaven! That man is a worker of black magic."

He was calmer after an hour had elapsed; and by the time a car drew up outside, in the deserted road, he was almost dignified.

Count Michel himself and three other men, all foreign looking, came striding into the front-room. They were grim and dangerous.

"Now, Venner—tell me!" said the count, without any delay.

Venner gave the full details.

"There is only one chance—for you, and for us," said Petrass, at length. "Lee must be forcibly removed from St. Frank's to-night—together with Kingswood. If we can take them, and secure the code-book, no damage will be done. If Lee, in the character of Phipps, had gone to London this evening, we should have been wrecked. Lee, by his delay, has given us the chance to recover. Also, we shall seize this man and put him where he can do no further harm."

He did not know that Lee would have gone to London that evening but for the fact that the Home Secretary was out of town; and Lee was determined to impart his information to no other man.

Venner was looking flushed.

"But how can this be done?" he asked. "You do not know this man, Lee! He is like a will-o'-the-wisp! To catch him is like running after the rainbow. When you get to the spot he is no longer there."

"To-night there must be no mistake," replied Count Petrass. "We shall take such steps that failure will be impossible. I am sorry, Venner, but you must suffer for your grave blundering. But we need not speak of that now."

"At least, I have made a recovery," protested No. 1. "I have discovered that Lee is posing as Phipps, the butler, and——"

"You have done something, yes," interrupted Petrass. "That will go in your favour, my friend. But it is still necessary for us to take most drastic measures, and we can only hope they will be successful."

"I am willing to do everything within my power——"

"The matter is now beyond your control," said the count. "For your sake, Venner, I trust that the Great Terrestrial Master will be satisfied with your explanations."

Remember, he himself is in a position of acute danger."

"And one man is responsible," muttered Venner. "Why take the chance of capturing him? Would it not be better to kill? I am no advocate of violence, but in these exceptional circumstances——"

"To kill Lee would be a grave mistake," broke in Count Petrass. "Our object will be to seize him—as Phipps. There are only nine people in the school who know that Lee is not Phipps—the headmaster and eight boys. When we take Lee, we shall take them, also. Thus we shall be safeguarded."

Venner looked his amazement.

"But—but you are proposing something that is impossible," he protested. "We might take one man, yes—perhaps two. But these boys are sleeping with hundreds of other boys. It will not be possible to take them without arousing the school."

"Believe me, Venner, the school will be aroused," said Petrass grimly. "We go into action to-night, and our success or failure will decide the fate of the fellowship. Tomorrow it would be too late. This is our last chance."

CHAPTER 4.

The Great Sensation.

MYSTERIOUS things were happening at and round about St. Frank's.

The school clock had just chimed the hour of two a.m. Not a light showed from any House; the night, still pitchy black, was now calm.

From the playing field, from the meadows, approaching the school on every side, in fact, came dozens of silent, shadowy figures. They were concentrating relentlessly on the school; they were forming a great cordon which completely encircled the school property.

And within this cordon other figures moved forward, with machine-like precision, every man having his allotted task.

Others had been at work for nearly an hour at St. Frank's; they had crept forward in the darkness, and telephone wires had been cut. Even the ropes which operated the school bells had been put out of action.

The whole range of school buildings, in fact, was now completely cut off from outside help. St. Frank's was isolated, and, the preparations having been completed, the Fellowship of Fear was now on the point of striking.

The organisers of this raid were determined that there should be no hitch. Everything would depend upon speed—once the signal for action was given. Every available fellowship agent had been rushed into the district for this job; many had come from London, others from various towns along the South Coast, from the east and from the west. They had concentrated in response to an urgent "hurry call" sent out on the fellowship's secret wireless.

Powerful motor-cars were hidden in meadows, in side-lanes, and tucked away up

farm-tracks. The whole countryside round about St. Frank's, although apparently so quiet and deserted, was actually teeming with grim life.

Nearer and nearer crept the cordon, and some of the men were carrying bulky objects, which they treated with infinite care.

The first activity came in the vicinity of the headmaster's House; and it was fitting that Nelson Lee should be the first man to discover that something was drastically wrong.

NELSON LEE was sitting, fully dressed, in the easy-chair in Mr. Kingswood's bed-room. The headmaster himself was sound asleep—and although he was lying on the bed, he, too, was fully dressed, except for his shoes. Lee did not know what might happen to-night—he was suspicious. And he wanted Fighting Jim to be ready for any emergency.

But even the great detective, keen as he was, could not possibly anticipate the move which the fellowship actually made. For it was the most staggering move imaginable.

Occasionally, in the darkness, Lee had gone to the window, and had peered out. Twice he had made a round of the house, padding silently down the corridors, and up and down the stairs. He had seen nothing amiss, had heard no unusual sounds. And now, at two o'clock, he was beginning to think that the night would pass peacefully.

How mistaken he was, was made abundantly clear when a dazzling white light came pouring right into the bed-room—for the curtains were not drawn. The light awakened Mr. Kingswood on the instant, and he sat up, blinking.

"Great Scott! What's wrong?" he asked in amazement.

But Lee had leapt out of his chair, and was at the window. He was blinded by the glare of a searchlight—which, placed in the centre of Inner Court, was playing fully upon the face of the House. Standing in the glare of the light, below, were a dozen extraordinary figures—men dressed in long flowing robes of vivid green; their faces were completely hidden, and above their heads arose high-peaked cowls.

Even in that tense moment, Nelson Lee did not forget his rôle.

"It—it must be some practical joke, sir!" he said, turning to Mr. Kingswood, who was just joining him. "There are lots of strangely dressed men out here——"

"The fellowship!" muttered Mr. Kingswood, aghast.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Man alive, don't you realise—— Yes, Phipps, perhaps you're right," said Mr. Kingswood hastily. "It must be a joke——"

"You will be good enough, Mr. Kingswood, to arouse your household as quietly as possible, and give instructions that every servant, man or woman, is to collect out here," said a firm voice from below. "I would point out that if you attempt any resistance, we shall be compelled to act in the most drastic

manner. We have machine-guns here, and every man is also armed with automatic pistols."

Mr. Kingswood was completely at a loss. Even Nelson Lee, for once, was puzzled.

"Talk to them," he whispered. "Keep them talking. I will slip away——"

"Not yet, my friend," interrupted a soft, but grim voice.

And Lee felt something jabbed hard into the middle of his back. Mr. Kingswood experienced the same sensation. And when they stared round they saw that four of the hooded and gowned figures were in the room. They had entered silently—taking advantage of the moment when Lee and the Head had gone to the window. Deadly pistols were menacing Lee and Fighting Jim.

With a quick movement, one of the raiders deprived Nelson Lee of his own gun; the detective had made a quick move to get it, but he was a shade too late. The fact that it had been seized told him that the fellowship agents knew his true identity—for they would not even have gone to the trouble of searching the butler.

"A strange practice, is it not, for a household servant to carry a pistol?" asked one of the raiders. "My friend, you will come downstairs with us; and if you make one false move you will be riddled with bullets."

Nelson Lee was far too sensible a man to offer any resistance. The odds were all against him. He was furious with himself for having allowed the disaster to happen—but, as yet, he did not realise the full extent of the fellowship's move.

While he was taken downstairs, gripped by two men—one on either side of him—and with a third ramming a gun into his back, Mr. Kingswood was escorted round the building and the whole household was aroused.

The servants were more startled than frightened; for Mr. Kingswood, in his free-and-easy way, assured them that there was nothing to fear. But when, after hastily dressing, the servants were marshalled out into Inner Court, they gave every manifestation of terror. The very sight of those hooded figures struck fear into their hearts.

Nelson Lee was still held tightly—so closely guarded that there was no possibility of making a sudden dash for liberty. He knew perfectly well that if he made any such move a dozen pistols would spurt fire and lead. These raiders were not bluffing. The very size of the raid proved that they were here for business.

Some of the unfortunate servants were quaking; one or two were in a half-fainting condition. Four of the fellowship men rapidly went through the House, making certain that everybody had come out.

Then a sharp order went up. Certain of the cloaked figures closed round the victims, and they were marched, without a word of explanation, towards the Triangle.

Now began the real attack—and the evidence of machine-like organisation was an eye-opener, even for Nelson Lee.

The headmaster's House was isolated from all the other school buildings; it was for this reason that it had been attacked first. The Ancient House, the West House, the Modern House and the East House all faced the Triangle; the cordon, closing in, had no difficulty in surrounding these four main boarding Houses.

Searchlights blazed in the Triangle, the beams playing upon the buildings. Soft whistles sounded, evidently signals; short, low-voiced orders were given. Mr. Kingswood, guarded by four men, was escorted to a spot near the fountain, in the centre of the Triangle. The Head had seen the grim, ugly shapes of several machine-guns, with men crouching behind them.

"You will arouse the school, Mr. Kingswood," said one of the hooded figures, approaching the Head. "When boys or masters appear at the windows, you will give orders that every person, servants included, must leave each House, and collect in an orderly fashion here, in this open space."

"By Heaven! You expect a great deal!" said Mr. Kingswood hotly.

"You will obey—because, if you refuse to obey, we shall open fire on your servants with our machine-guns," said the other curtly. "And let there be no great outcry. If there is any wild shouting—in the vain hope that you will attract attention in the village—we shall put a stop to it by bloodshed. Remember, Mr. Kingswood, we are in earnest."

"But what do you want?" demanded the Head. "If you have come to take me away—take me! Why disturb the school and frighten the boys——"

"I do not propose to answer your questions," said the other—who was, in fact, Count Petrass himself. "Remember, Mr. Kingswood, the lives of your servants and your boys are in your hands. See to it that the school collects in this open space quietly."

While he was speaking, other raiders were throwing handfuls of gravel at many windows of all the Houses. Thus, only a few moments elapsed before some of the upper windows were flung open, and many seniors, including prefects, stood there. Masters appeared, too. At first they could only stare down at the amazing scene in blank bewilderment.

"What on earth's the matter down there?" demanded Mr. Alington Wilkes, of the Ancient House.

"I am sorry, Mr. Wilkes, but we are in the hands of bandits," replied Mr. Kingswood. "I want you to arouse all your boys, see that they get dressed as quickly as possible, and then collect down here, in the Triangle."

"Surely you're not serious, sir?" asked the astounded Mr. Wilkes.

"Unfortunately, I am compelled to be serious," replied Fighting Jim. "These infernal rogues have the upper hand; they are armed with machine-guns, and they threaten to use them unless we obey orders. I want you to keep all your boys quiet. There must be no shouting or disorder."

Old Wilkey, who was a shrewd man, did not waste any time. He could see, by now, that the situation was grave.

"I'll do the best I can," he promised, vanishing from the window.

Lights sprang up by the dozen. Mr. Kingswood, addressing an East House prefect, told him to go and arouse Mr. Goole, the Housemaster, at once. He gave similar instructions to people in the Modern House and the West House.

The entire school, in fact, was aroused in this way—quietly, without any fuss. And all the time the fellowship agents stood round in their grotesque "uniform." For the most part they stood immovable, menacing, impressive.

Nelson Lee was genuinely alarmed. He was afraid that some of the more high-spirited boys would make a sudden rush in a crazy attempt to surprise the enemy. If anything like that happened, the machine-guns would open fire; and Lee shuddered when he thought of the possible slaughter.

In each House the first thought of the responsible men—Housemasters and Form-masters—was to dash to the telephones. Their object was to ring up the police. But they soon discovered that the lines were dead, proving that the wires were severed.

"We might have known!" said Mr. Wilkes, as he hurried out of his study with Fenton of the Sixth. "Good gracious, Fenton, this is an extraordinary business. St. Frank's cut off in the middle of the night—surrounded by hooded men who look like members of the Ku Klux Klan! I've never experienced anything like it in the whole of my career."

"What about ringing the school bell, sir?" asked Fenton. "It can be heard for miles around, you know, and the people in the village would wonder what it meant, and we might give the alarm——"

"There's the fire-bell, too," said Mr. Wilkes. "Yes, it's a good idea. See what you can do, Fenton. I can't stop—I've got to hurry amongst the boys and prevent a panic."

Fenton, of course, soon made the discovery that the bells were out of order. St. Frank's was really and truly isolated. No noise had yet been made; and even people who lived in cottages half a mile away were unaware of the fact that anything unusual was happening at the great school. Bellton slept soundly. The searchlight, of course, could be seen from afar, but there was nothing to arouse widespread alarm.

Moreover, the school was on the point of collecting in the Triangle now; and the raid would soon be over. Count Petrass, who had organised the whole affair, reckoned that he and his fellowship men would be miles away before any real help could reach the school.

It was a grim, astounding picture. With the searchlights blazing on the school, and with the scores of hooded and cowled figures standing motionless, and with others crouching over machine-guns, the masters and boys came filing out of the various school build-

ings. Such a scene as this would live in the memories of most of the boys for the rest of their lives.

Acting upon the Head's urgent instructions, Housemasters and Form-masters and prefects had ordered the boys to refrain from any excited shouting. They were given to understand, in fact, that their very lives might depend upon their silence. Whispers of the machine-guns went round; and the majority of the boys were only too ready to obey the orders to the letter. The vast majority of them were plucky enough; but to defy a machine-gun would be sheer insanity.

Thus St. Frank's came piling out into the open air, in the glare of the searchlights—masters, boys and servants.

CHAPTER 5.

Nipper Does His Best.

IT was inevitable that at least eight boys should jump to the inner truth of this singular raid. The others were baffled, believing, in a vague kind of way, that robbery was the motive.

But the Secret Eight knew better.

"Ye gods and little fishes! The fellowship!" breathed Nipper at the first alarm, when he looked out of the dormitory window.

"Begad! You must be dreamin', old boy—you must, really," said Sir Montie.

He and Tommy Watson were sitting up in their beds. They had been aroused by Nipper, who had heard vague and strange sounds. No direct searchlight was playing on the window, but a reflection of it was visible. And now, when Nipper looked out of the window, he saw a whitish glare from the direction of the Triangle. He could look right down into the West Square; he could see a number of gowned and hooded figures—men who had been placed here on guard.

"Bu-but what does it mean?" stuttered Tommy Watson, as he jumped out of bed. "What are they going to do?"

"They're after the guv'nor," said Nipper breathlessly.

"But they don't know he's here, laddie!"

"They might have found out—or, perhaps, they're after Mr. Kingswood," said Nipper. "By Jove! They mean business this time, right enough! It's an open raid. The whole school is being aroused."

The door burst open, and Handforth & Co. came charging in.

"The fellowship!" hissed Handforth dramatically.

"Dry up, you fathead!" warned Nipper. "Nobody else in the school knows anything about it."

"They know about it now!" retorted Handforth. "Haven't you looked out of the windows? The beggars have finished with secrecy, and they've got searchlights and everything."

"What do you mean—everything?" asked Watson.

"I heard somebody down the corridor saying they've brought machine-guns."

"Begad!"

"There are swarms of 'em—hundreds!" went on Handforth excitedly. "They've got the whole school surrounded, and the Head's in the middle of the Triangle, with a crowd of the blighters guarding him."

Nipper frowned.

"I'm jiggered if I can understand it," he muttered. "If they wanted to bag the Head, why don't they take him away? You say they've got him already, Handy? There's something deeper behind all this."

"Come on—let's go and see," urged Handforth.

"Better get into some togs first," advised Nipper.

While they were hurriedly dressing—Handforth & Co. dashed back to their own dormitory for the purpose—prefects came hurrying along, ordering everybody to get dressed at once. The prefects themselves were every bit as startled as the juniors. It reflected creditably upon the boys, seniors and juniors alike, that there was no panic. Excitement ran high, of course, but the fellows kept their heads.

And while the boys were dressing, so the servants, at the other end of the building, were being hustled out. The fellowship agents were taking no chances.

"Can't somebody telephone, or something?" asked Vivian Travers, as he met Nipper in the corridor. "I mean, this is a ridiculous situation."

"Telephone wires are cut, I hear," replied Nipper.

"For the love of Samson!"

"Can't even ring the school bell," went on Nipper. "That's been put out of action, too. The rotters have got us all bottled up, and they don't mean us to give the alarm."

"Couldn't we make a rush for it?" suggested Fullwood. "Up, the Remove! We're not going to be robbed——"

"Cut it out!" interrupted Nipper sharply. "Don't you realise that these brutes are dangerous? If you attempt to rush them like that they'll open fire with the machine-guns."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Fortunately, there were many level-headed juniors like Nipper—fellows who squashed all talk of attacking the enemy. Handforth, of course, was all for making a sudden rush, but even he, when he saw the machine-guns, changed his mind. Those guns might be bluff—but, on the other hand, there was a distinct chance that they would be brought into action. It wasn't worth the risk.

Some of the hotheads might have had their own way but for an incident which occurred near the East House. Armstrong, of the Fourth, who was a burly, aggressive junior, refused to believe that there was anything serious in the attack. Armstrong was not

particularly intelligent; he had an idea that it was a practical joke, and he even imbued a number of other fellows with the same idea. About a dozen of them came rushing out of the East House, yelling, and some of them were waving cricket stumps with excited enthusiasm.

Zurrrrrrh—zurrrrrr! Put-put-put—put-put-put!

There were two short, sharp bursts of machine-gun fire. Both Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood stood transfixed, horrified. The excited Fourth-Formers were brought up standing, and a deathly, unearthly silence reigned for a few moments. Armstrong and his hotheads were as pale as sheets; they had heard the bullets humming like angry hornets just over their heads; they had heard them putter dully against the stone wall in their rear.

"We do not wish to shed blood," said Count Petrass, his voice breaking the silence. "By my orders, the machine-gunners aimed high. But if they have occasion to fire again, they will aim at the target. Let this be a warning not only to the boys, but to the masters as well. Obey orders strictly, and no harm shall come to you."

Armstrong and his crowd, trembling, were brought suddenly face to face with realities. Many other fellows, belonging to other Forms, were sobered. Quite a few of them had been whispering amongst themselves—preparing some kind of rush. But that was all dead now. The machine-gun fire, brief though it had been, had served as a grim object lesson.

And the last of the fellows were now trickling out of the Houses. Although so much had happened, only fifteen short minutes had elapsed since the beginning of the raid.

At the last moment, just as Handforth was about to go out into the Triangle with Church and McClure, Nipper pulled him back. Nipper's eyes were blazing.

"Quick, Handy—I've got an idea!" he muttered. "Follow me."

Handforth wanted to ask questions, but there was no time. First of all Nipper dashed to Study C, and he opened the cupboard, and took out a two-gallon petrol can.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "You're not going to set the place on fire, are you?"

"Something like that," replied Nipper coolly.

It was only by chance that the petrol was there. It was against all rules to bring such inflammable stuff into the school; but, during the previous day, Nipper had been cleaning some neckties—giving them a bath of petrol—and he had forgotten to take the can back.

"But—but what are you going to do?" asked Handforth huskily.

Nipper did not answer. He led the way down the corridor, and in the lobby they just managed to dodge one of the fellowship agents, who was standing on guard near the doorway. A minute later the two juniors were hurrying up the stone steps which led to the summit of the West House tower.

"Listen, Handy!" panted Nipper, as they mounted. "We've managed to dodge the enemy—but they'll spot us soon, and it might mean an ugly minute."

"Meaning just what?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"The top of the tower is all of stone—and there's a kind of gully where we can pour the petrol," replied Nipper. "If we set light to it we can make a good beacon—and it'll be seen for miles. That ought to fetch help!"

"By George!"

"But it'll also fetch the fellowship agents up to us," continued Nipper. "There's a chance that they'll fire on us—and kill us both. So it's up to you, Handy, to get down now—while you're safe. I can do this job on my own——"

"If you're asking for a thick ear, just say that again," broke in Handforth gruffly. "Rats! I'm not afraid of the rotten crooks! A beacon flare, eh? It's a great stunt. If I had known that that petrol was in your study cupboard I should have thought of it myself."

Nipper's motive was clear. A dreadful fear had possessed him that some deadly harm would befall his guv'nor. The telephones were cut off, and the bells were out of order. A beacon light, therefore, seemed to be the only possible way of attracting attention. If Nipper had paused to think, perhaps, he would have hesitated before adopting this device. Taking it for granted that the flare would be seen, it might be an hour, at least, before people arrived at the school—thinking that a fire had broken out.

This was the very essence of the fellowship's plan. They reckoned to be through with the job inside of twenty minutes, and at two o'clock in the morning, in such a remote country district, there was not a chance in a thousand that there would be any serious interruption. The very audacity of the raid, the utter daring with which it was carried out, spelt its success.

At last, Nipper and Handforth reached the tower top. They were breathless—but they were fired with a great determination. Looking over the parapet, they stared down upon a scene of bewildering sensation. The searchlights were flooding the Triangle beneath them; the cowed and hooded figures formed a complete cordon all round the Triangle—and even extending round the school buildings. And there, in the Triangle itself, crowded the boys and the masters and the servants. It was an almost unbelievable sight.

"This is the spot," muttered Nipper.

The tower top was reached by a narrow stone stairway which led right up into the roof. There were high stone parapets all round. The space was quite square, and even the room itself was of solid stone. At the farther side—opposite the stairway opening—there was a dip in the stonework. In other words, at that side of the tower top there was a shallow depression, and when

Nipper poured out the petrol it swished into this depression, but did not spread. It remained in there, a long bath of petrol.

"The wind's just right—blowing away from us," muttered Nipper. "But look out, all the same. Be ready to dodge down the stairs. The heat might be too great."

He took care to stand well back himself. He struck a match, and flung it.

Woouooooosh!

With a mighty burst, the spirit caught fire, and a sheet of flame leapt upwards for twenty or thirty feet. Even Nipper, who had expected something spectacular, was startled.

"Great guns!" gurgled Handforth.

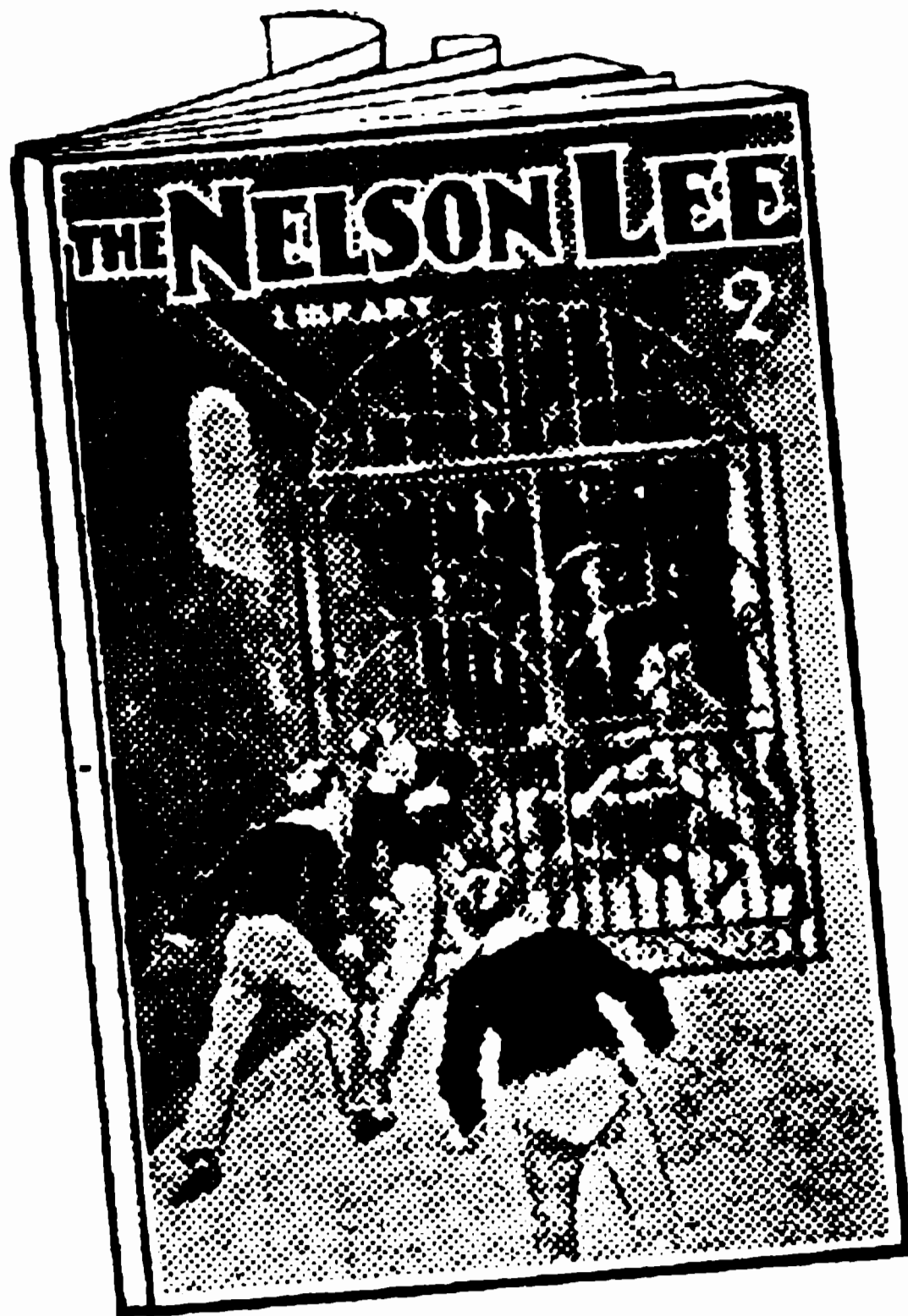
He and Nipper crouched back against the parapet, and they stared fascinatedly. The slight wind, what there was of it, mercifully carried the flames away from the two boys.

"By Jove, that's what I call a beacon!" muttered Nipper, his eyes glowing. "It'll be seen twenty miles away. People in Bannington will spot it—police, too! They'll tell the fire brigade——"

"Look out!" exclaimed Handforth abruptly.

He had caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye; and now two of the fellowship men, in their strange robes, leapt up the stairs, and hurled themselves upon the boys.

**LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER
NEXT WEDNESDAY!**



There was no actual fight.

Both the men were powerful, muscular fellows. Even Handforth, strong and aggressive though he was, could do nothing in the grip of his assailant.

"You young fools!" exclaimed one of the men. "For this you shall suffer. Down the stairs—both of you! If you play any tricks—we will shoot! Now—obey!"

Nipper and Handforth were glad enough, in all truth, to escape so lightly. Evidently, those two fellowship men had seen the juniors entering the tower—or perhaps they had opened the door by chance, and had heard the boys talking on their way up. Not that it really mattered. The beacon was well alight—and, by now, must be attracting widespread attention.

Count Petrass, the leader, was furious—but he kept his head. His only course, now, was to get off at the earliest possible moment. Every second's delay would be dangerous.

By the time Nipper and Handforth were hurled out into the Triangle, the petrol flames were dying lower. The boys were hurried straight across to Petrass, and he curtly ordered them to be placed among the ranks of the other juniors.

"We found petrol burning——" began one of the men.

"Enough! Am I blind?" snapped Petrass. "We waste no time with idle talk."

He swung round upon Mr. Kingswood.

"You will order certain boys to stand forward," he said sharply. "There are eight boys, and I think you know the names of the eight."

Fighting Jim started.

"You are taking a great deal for granted," he replied.

"Oh, no," said Petrass. "Shall I refresh your memory, Mr. Kingswood? The boys are named Nipper, Tregellis-West, Watson, Handforth, Church, McClure, Glenthorne, and a younger brother of the boy Handforth. You will order them to stand forward, well clear of their fellows. At the same time, Phipps, your butler, will join them. You will also take your place there."

In spite of himself, Mr. Kingswood gave a quick glance at the disguised Nelson Lee—as though seeking instruction.

"We are apparently in the power of the enemy, sir," said Lee, who was still Phipps to the life.

"Excellently done, my friend!" murmured Count Petrass, bending closer to the detective. "But your brilliant impersonation will serve you no longer. Let me warn you, furthermore, that if you make any attempt to proclaim your identity to the school in general, I will shoot you as you stand. If Mr. Kingswood fails to give the order to the boys I have named, the machine-gunners will fire upon the rest of the school. You have twenty seconds in which to decide."

"There is, of course, no alternative," said Lee quietly. "Since you threaten death to innocent boys, I dare not take the risk of defying you—even though you may be bluffing. Mr. Kingswood, you had better give that order."

"I agree," said Fighting Jim, his jaw jutting out aggressively. "These devils have the upper hand."

He turned towards the Remove, which was standing in orderly ranks, with Mr. Crowell in front, and with prefects flanking them.

Mr. Kingswood called out the names of the eight boys. He was compelled to turn to the ranks of the Third for Willy.

"You will all stand forward—here," said the Head. "I want you to be sensible, boys, and to make no resistance."

They came at once—and they, like Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood, knew just exactly what it meant.

They, and they alone—the ten of them—knew some of the secrets of the Fellowship of Fear. This great raid, therefore, was not directed against the school, but against the ten. The fellowship, having decided to single out their victims—perhaps to kidnap them—had planned to do so in a spectacular way. It was a sort of gesture to the authorities at large. The fellowship had issued its decree—and the fellowship had struck! The story of this amazing incident would flash up and down the length and breadth of England—and throughout Europe. It would strike

PRISONERS IN A LONELY CASTLE

in far-off Bavaria, helpless in the ruthless clutches of the Fellowship of Fear, guarded by savage dogs and machine-gunners. Such is the fate of Nelson Lee, and Nipper & Co.

But are they downhearted? No! You'll find them plotting the Fellowship's downfall even though they lie prisoners in a secret castle.

Read

"THE CASTLE OF DOOM!"

in next week's issue, and be thrilled!

terror into the heart of every schoolmaster who remained obstinate. For such schoolmasters, naturally, would be fearful lest their own schools should suffer the same fate.

In a word, Count Petrass was killing two birds with one stone—and he was doing it brilliantly.

As the ten boys stood forward Mr. Kingswood warned them more by his expression than by word of mouth, to say nothing. For the Head was afraid that if they started shouting the truth to the rest of the school, something tragic would take place.

Meanwhile, four men had taken "Phipps" in hand, and had searched him. This had happened some little time earlier—and to the intense satisfaction of Count Petrass, the vital code-book had been found in Lee's inner pocket. Lee had kept it on his own person in order to be on the safe side—never dreaming, of course, that the fellowship would take such audacious action as this.

There was no longer any need for delay.

"It is well!" said Petrass grimly. "We have those we came to fetch."

He snapped his fingers, and this was obviously a prearranged signal. A number of fellowship men ran forward quickly.

Nelson Lee, Mr. Kingswood and the eight boys were standing in a group, well separated from any of the other boys or masters. And before they could even guess what was about to happen, the hooded figures produced strange-looking weapons.

Hisss-hisssssh!

Those weapons were gas-guns!

From the muzzle of each came a jet of vapour; it was projected with great force into the faces of the ten victims. Lee, who was partially prepared, was the last to succumb. The boys, gulping in that stupefying gas, staggered drunkenly. One by one they subsided to the ground.

The rest of the school watched in horror—believing, at first, that their comrades were being killed before their eyes. Many of the Removites—and the Fourth-Formers, too—shouted in their horror and anger. And at one time it looked as though they were about to make a rush.

"Keep back!" snarled Petrass. "If there is any move, the machine-guns will open fire!"

And masters and prefects, panting with consternation, urged the boys to keep their heads.

"We are helpless—helpless!" exclaimed Mr. Wilkes, in anguish. "For Heaven's sake keep back, boys! If you make one foolish rush you will be slain by the dozen!"

It went against the grain to give that advice—but it was very sound advice. Old Wilkey, himself, was a game fighter; but, like Nelson Lee, he knew when the odds were too great.

A concerted action commenced now—by the rank and file of the fellowship men.

Two dozen of them, acting upon a prearranged order, leapt upon the victims. Each boy was lifted by two men, and, at

the double, they ran off, carrying their burdens easily. Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood were carried in the same way—but with four men to each. In their case, too, they were handcuffed—and manacles were placed round their ankles. The fellowship was taking no chances with their men prisoners.

The instant they had vanished from sight—making off in the direction of the playing fields—the machine-gunners withdrew, taking their guns with them. The outer cordon commenced melting away.

A sharp whistle blew—faint but shrill.

And like the blotting out of a doused candle, the searchlights snapped off, leaving the startled school in total darkness.

CHAPTER 6.

Travers Tries Hard.

THE alarm was out.

In Bellton the glare at St. Frank's had been seen, not only by the village constable, but by Dr. Brett, and others. Scores of people were soon awake, and, believing that the school was on fire, they were hastening up the lane.

The beacon, too, had been seen in Bannington; here, too, certain activities were afoot.

But when the first of the village folk arrived near the school a strange thing happened. The mysterious glare vanished, and it was succeeded by an absolute darkness. Not even a window of the school remained lighted. One of the fellowship men, told off to the work, had severed the electric main immediately after the Houses had been vacated. The object of this was to plunge the school into confusing darkness as soon as the searchlights were turned off.

It was certainly an effective plan.

For that darkness, succeeding the glare, left the boys and masters and servants helpless. As though by magic, the fellowship men had gone. Pandemonium reigned. Even the masters could not keep the boys in control now. They went rushing about the Triangle, bumping into one another, and they were yelling at the top of their voices in their excitement.

The yells, weird-sounding—and even terrifying—reached the ears of the people who were hastening up the lane. Dr. Brett, who was in the forefront, shouted to the others, and they increased their pace.

Suddenly, the purring of motors sounded. Headlamps sprang into life, and three powerful cars came shooting at breakneck speed down the lane. Only in the nick of time did the people leap into the hedges, out of the way.

Zurrrrh! Put-put-put—put-put-put!

To add to the consternation, a machine-gun, mounted in front of the leading car, was firing in short bursts. Three people were wounded by stray bullets, and it was a mercy that nobody was killed.

Other cars were speeding off in the opposite direction. The raid was over, and the fellowship men were dashing for liberty. By the look of things, at the present moment, they would all escape—and they would owe their immunity to the audacity and brilliance of the whole undertaking. From first to last it had been carried out with the speed and efficiency of a military operation.

In the darkness of the Triangle, amid all the pandemonium and confusion, some of the boys and masters had kept their heads. One fellow, in particular, was remarkably cool.

That fellow was Vivian Travers, of the Remove.

He had noted that the gassed prisoners were carried off across the playing fields, and that meant they were being taken in the direction of the river. Shrewdly, Travers jumped to a conclusion. The river meant a conveyance of some kind. A boat! In all probability, a powerful motor-boat.

There was only one way of escape for such a craft—down the river, and out into the open Channel by way of Caistowe Harbour.

It was a clever move of the fellowship's.

An escaping car on the road was always likely to be held up. The police nowadays have cunning methods of stopping bandit cars. It was not worth the chance. Count Petrass had guessed, too, that the main alarm would be by way of land. The police would throw barriers across the main roads as soon as word reached them of the raid. It would be difficult, indeed, to get the eight victims away by car. Moreover, two or three cars would be needed, for each car would have to contain some armed guards.

A motor-boat on the river—a big, powerful craft—could easily contain the whole bunch, guards included.

And by adopting this method, the boat could speed rapidly to Caistowe, reach the open sea, and then, in the darkness of the night, it could elude all pursuit.

But again, as in the raid itself, everything would depend upon speed.

Travers arrived at his conclusions in a matter of seconds. A motor-boat on the river—Caistowe! Fighting his way through the crowds, he managed to win clear, and he made a bee-line for the garage. Here, without wasting a second, he got out his motor-bicycle, and, by taking the private road, he reached the lane quickly. With a zurring roar the engine awoke to life, the headlamp sent forth its flashing beam, and Travers was away.

There were many people in the lane now, and they dodged aside like rabbits. They believed, no doubt, that this roaring monster was another of the enemy raiders. At all events, Travers had a clear road—and he was glad of it.

He reached the village within a couple of minutes. Flinging himself from the machine opposite the post office, he dashed into the concrete telephone-box which stood on the pavement.

"Number please?" came the operator's voice.

"Give me the Caistowe Police Station, quick!" shouted Travers. "Don't ask any questions—it's vital."

The operator was sensible; he put the call through without any argument.

"Yes?" came a gruff voice.

"Is that the Caistowe Police Station?"

"Yes."

"St. Frank's has been raided by bandits!" panted Travers. "They have captured a number of our fellows, and they are escaping by motor-boat. Their only exit from the river is by way of Caistowe, and you might be able to do something——"

"Here, hold on!" interrupted the voice. "What's all this—trying to play a joke on us?"

"No, no!" urged Travers. "On my honour, it's true! The St. Frank's telephones have been cut off, and I've dashed into the village on my motor-bike——"

Breathlessly he gave more details; and, so earnest was his tone that the police believed him.

"All right, we'll see what we can do," said the inspector, who had been brought to the 'phone.

The inspector, at least, was convinced that the story was true. For he, like the police in Bannington, had known for some weeks that Mr. James Kingswood, headmaster of St. Frank's, was menaced by the Fellowship of Fear. This affair at the school to-night bore all the ear-marks of a daring fellowship raid.

ON the dark river, its engine purring with latent power, squatted a black, rakish motor-boat. It was held close to the bank by two or three men. These men were not wearing the "regalia" of the fellowship. They wore dark clothes and peaked caps. This spot was the nearest point of the river to the school—just on the other side of a meadow which skirted the St. Frank's playing fields. The distance from the school to the river was quite trivial.

Figures were hurrying across the meadow now. The men in charge of the motor-boat had known, from the sudden "dousing" of the searchlights, that the raid was over. Their own part in the affair was now due to begin.

The motor-boat was a very large one, with a covered cockpit. In that cockpit, in fact, was a commodious cabin. An electric light glowed within it. Men stood on the deck ready. On the fore-peak of the craft a powerful searchlight suddenly sprang into life, sending its blazing glare right down the empty river.

The fellowship men arrived with their burdens. One after another the boys were sent tumbling into the cabin. They were all unconscious, and knew nothing of what was happening to them. That gas was effective—but it would not really harm them. Nelson Lee and Mr. Kingswood were the last to be piled in.

Then the fellowship men vanished into the night. They knew that cars were waiting to pick them up at agreed-upon spots. There was not a minute to be lost. They sneaked off, some in one direction, some in another. Each man had his instructions, and he carried them out to the letter.

Those on the motor-boat now sprang into activity.

There were only three men in charge—the pilot, a man behind the searchlight, and a man behind a machine-gun. There was no necessity to carry a bigger crew; for the prisoners were helpless, and would cause no trouble. The cabin had been locked.

With a throbbing roar, the motors zoomed into life. And the craft, leaving a white wake of foam, went speeding down the placid river.

Never had such a craft been seen on the peaceful Stowe before. Never had such a craft taken such daredevil chances. The river was not an ideal one for speed-boat work; but this craft went surging round the bends, approaching perilously near to the banks on more than one occasion. But in the skilled hands of its pilot, it escaped disaster. It roared at tremendous speed down the straight stretches; it slewed round bend after bend, causing the wash to lap over the banks.

It was making a quick dash for Caistowe—for the open sea.

Meanwhile, at Caistowe—thanks to the presence of mind of Travers—certain preparations were afoot. The police acted with commendable promptitude. They made a dash for the harbour; and, in spite of the hour, they got hold of a number of willing men. Every available boat was rushed out into the stream. The inspector in charge wanted to swing a string of barges and lighters across the river—and this, indeed, would have been an effective barrier. Had there been time, the task could have been accomplished, and the fellowship would have been foiled at the last moment.

As it was, there were not sufficient men to get the lighter into motion. Rowing-boats, motor-boats, and launches were requisitioned and strung out across the river. It looked a formidable enough barrier even now.

"Sakes alive! Here it comes!" shouted a boatman suddenly. "Gosh, boys, look at that light!"

The barrier had been put across at a fairly narrow part of the river in the town near the harbour. On one side there was a mass of warehouses; on the other the towing-path, and crowds of people were moving about.

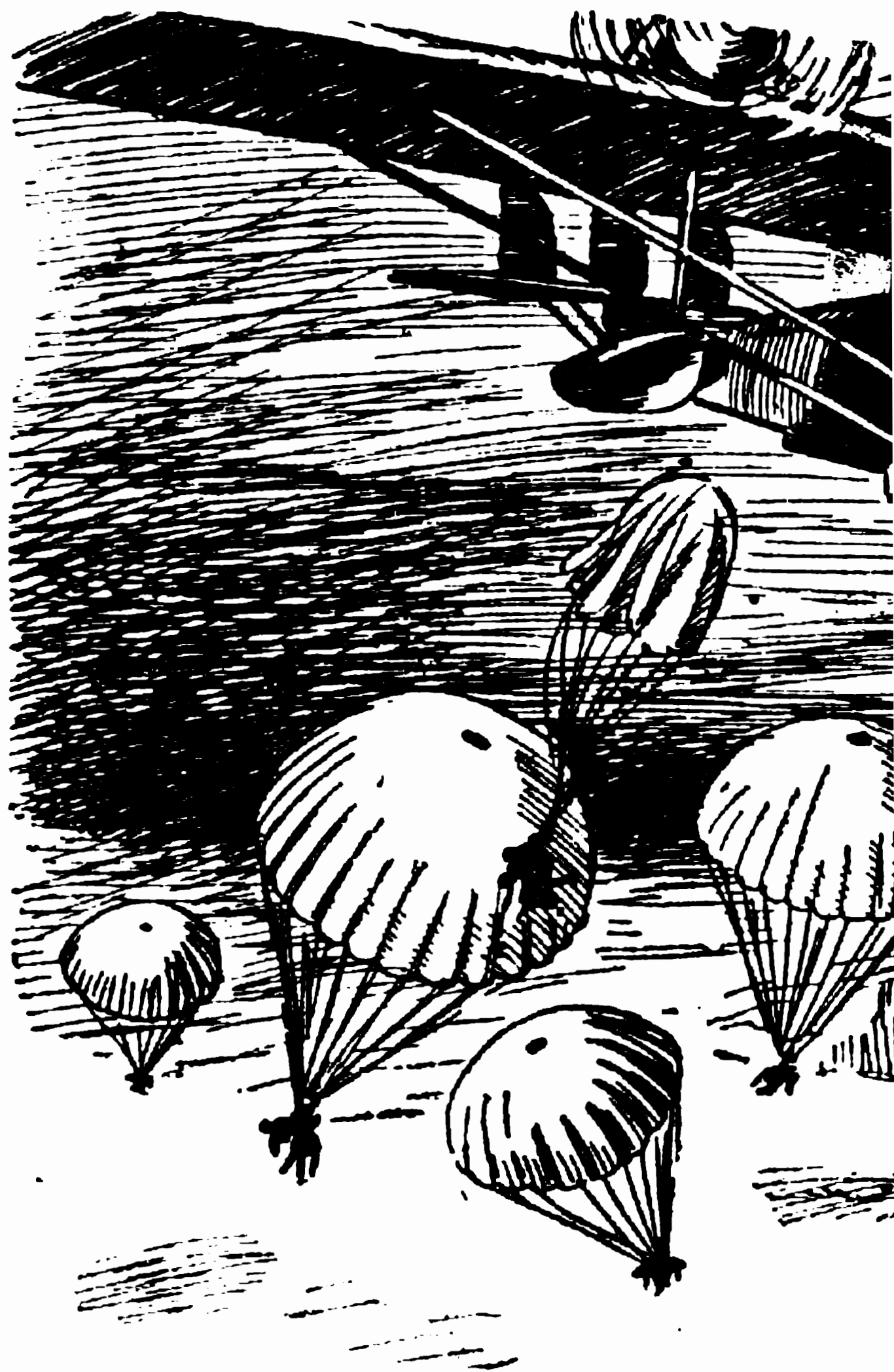
A searchlight had come into view, and the purring hum of a powerful engine could now be heard. The motor-boat, on this straight stretch, was dashing for liberty at top speed.

All the watchers held their breath.

The inspector who was there gritted his teeth. If only he could have got those barges across. The motor-boat came on, and not for a second did the beat of its engine change. It was obvious now that the crooks were determined to charge the barrier—and chance the consequences.

It was, in fact, the only possibility of escape.

It was a risk which had to be taken. The motor-boat's pilot was furious—and amazed, too. He could not understand how the Caistowe people had got word so quickly—or how they had rushed that barrier of boats across the river. But to stop now would mean inevitable capture. Even if they put up a fight, which they could easily do, having the machine-gun, it would be useless. Not only would they be captured and held for



As the giant plane roared over the lonely cas schoolboy companions were thrown bodily out they sailed stea

murder—for a certain number of people would inevitably be killed in the fight—but the ten prisoners would be rescued, and the whole raid would have failed. In fact, the fellowship would be destroyed. Every man who had taken part in this raid knew that it was vital, and if it failed they would be doomed to exposure and capture.

So the terrorist agents were ready enough to take desperate chances.

The pilot of the motor-boat took one now; he charged the barrier at full speed.

"Duck!" he yelled to his companions.

The people on the towing-path watched with bated breath.

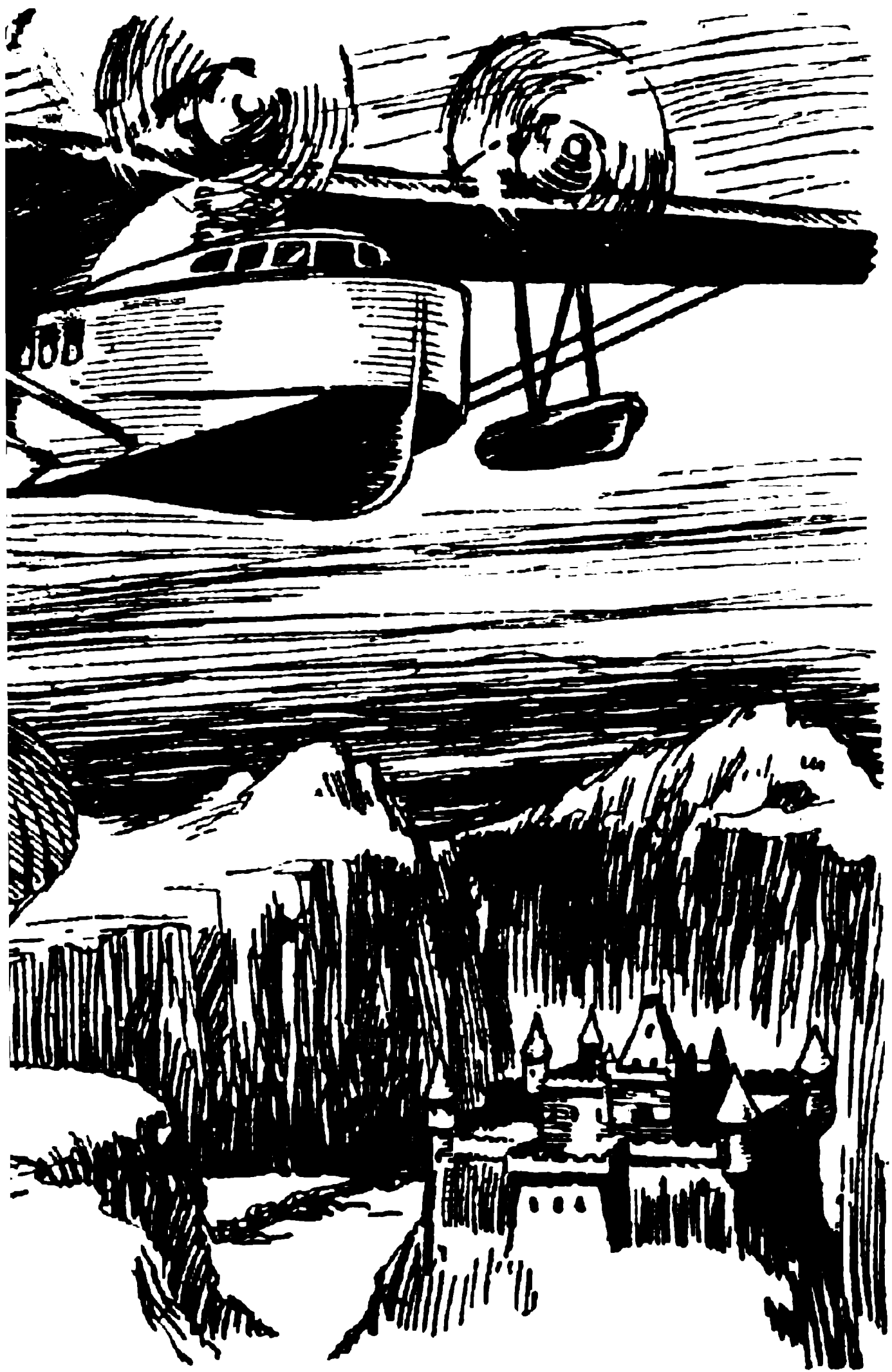
Craaaaaash!

The impact was terrific. The long, rakish

motor-boat charged full tilt into the very centre of a white launch, and it seemed to smash into two distinct pieces, and the fragments leapt into the air, carrying two men with them. The other boats were either smashed or sunk.

And the fugitive seemed to take a wild leap right out of the water; it rocked and swayed and then plunged down again amid a smother of foam, the propeller racing madly and creating a terrific din.

Back in the water, the fleeing craft swerved



the, the drugged figures of Nelson Lee and his of the machine. As their parachutes opened dily earthwards.

dizzily, and for one tense second it seemed that it would charge a wharf; but in the nick of time the pilot regained control.

On it went—on into the harbour, on towards the Channel.

The efforts to stop the runaway craft had failed—but only just. Travers had done his best, and the Caistowe police had backed him up famously. It was a pity that success should not have rewarded their efforts.

Yet this incident alone proved the extreme desperation of the kidnappers. From the very first minute of the raid there had been no certainty of success; the fellowship agents had won clear now, because of their recklessness, their daring.

But had they won clear?

As the black craft shot out across the harbour, making for the open bay, two powerful racing motor-boats set out in chase. They belonged to a Mr. Fielding, a wealthy sportsman who was on very friendly terms with many of the St. Frank's boys. Mr. Fielding, getting word of the excitement, had raced down to the harbour, half-dressed. He brought a mechanic with him. They selected two of Mr. Fielding's most powerful boats, and with hastily gathered crews—volunteers all—they set off.

Here was another contingency which the fellowship had not bargained for.

There was no other seaside town along the south coast which boasted of such powerful craft as those belonging to Mr. Fielding. The wealthy sportsman's idea was to outpace the fugitive, head it off, and compel it to surrender.

From the beach and from the promenade the scene was a breathless one. The great black motor-boat, with its searchlight blazing, tearing out towards the harbour mouth; and the other two motor-boats, smaller, looking very much like miniature destroyers, setting forth in full chase.

Suddenly, at the harbour mouth, the searchlight on the fellowship's boat was shut off. The sea ahead was instantly plunged into pitchy darkness.

But the pursuers were ready.

Mr. Fielding's boats, too, were equipped with searchlights. They flashed on, swam about, sending their beams criss-cross over the surface of the sea. And soon the fugitive was picked out, easily discernible because of the foaming wake.

The sea, which had been somewhat choppy in the early evening, had now settled down, and appeared quite smooth, but there was a considerable swell, and at times the speeding motor-boats were sent hurtling upwards on the crest of a swell; at other times they would cleave right through the water, sending the spray cascading in dense showers.

One thing soon became obvious.

Mr. Fielding's boats were faster than the fugitives'! Slowly but surely the fellowship craft was being overhauled. Normally, perhaps, she would have been able to outstrip her pursuers; but now she was heavily laden, and she plunged clumsily and awkwardly on the open sea.

Caistowe had been left behind; the twinkling lights of the fronts were soon a blurry haze, and all about the motor-boats darkness clung like a cloak. Far away, in the Channel, the lights of passing steamers could be seen here and there. But they were far distant, and no help could be expected from any of them.

The chase ended dramatically.

One of the pursuing boats—that piloted by Mr. Fielding himself—was making the better speed, and she was creeping nearer and nearer to her objective. Mr. Fielding had not lost sight of the fact that the kidnappers might fire upon him, but he was taking the

chance. He figured that automatic pistols would be used.

And then—

Zurrrrrrh! Put-put-put—put-put-put!

The unmistakable bark and patter of a machine-gun sounded above the screaming roar of the racing engines. A bullet shattered the windscreen behind which Mr. Fielding was crouching. Some of the tiny fragments of glass cut him. He was startled—even dismayed. But with dogged tenacity he carried on.

Put-put-put! Put-put-put!

There came another burst; shouts went up from Mr. Fielding's volunteer crew. And the craft, plunging crazily, dug her bows into an oncoming swell, and she shuddered from stem to stern, rolling heavily.

Clouds of steam arose. The hull was riddled with machine-gun bullets, and it was a miracle that nobody was badly injured or killed. Down she went—down, down! Mr. Fielding and the men with him were flung into the sea.

And that was the end of the chase.

For the other boat—it was a mercy that two came on the chase—swung round with throttled engine, and the rescue work was soon accomplished. But this delay had enabled the fugitive to get well away, and not even her wake was now in sight. She had gone—she had passed farther out upon the broad, black bosom of the English Channel. She had gone, taking her captives with her, to vanish for all time.

CHAPTER 7.

The Night of Excitement.

“THE infernal scoundrels!” said Mr. Fielding furiously.

He knew that he was lucky to escape with his life; but he was enraged, nevertheless. His favourite motor-boat had been sent to the bottom in deep water, and was a total loss. When he had commenced the chase he had done so, of course, without any definite information as to the ruthlessness of the enemy. The fact that they carried a machine-gun had come to him as a shock.

The return to Caistowe was a dismal business—for failure is never pleasant.

In Caistowe there was further excitement. A number of boats had been wrecked here, too. The fellowship agents had left a trail of destruction behind them. Naturally, the police had not lost a moment; they had set the telephones and telegraphs to work, and, up and down the coast, pursuing and searching boats were setting out.

Not only at St. Frank's, but throughout the whole district, it was a night of wild excitement.

The police made one or two minor captures. In Bannington, for example, one of the fugitive cars, going at full speed, found itself confronted by a cordon of police-

officers which was stretched right across the road.

The car driver took not the slightest notice, but drove straight on.

The police leapt for safety, infuriated by this ruthless attempt to run them down. One of the constables, hurling his truncheon, was lucky enough to obtain a direct hit. The truncheon smashed through the windscreen of the car and struck the driver. The car, which was a big saloon, swerved crazily, struck the pavement, skidded right across the road, spun round and, by a miracle, avoided crashing into a great lamp standard. It hit the other kerb, and toppled over, quite gently.

“Quick! This way!” shouted Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington Police, who was on the spot.

There was a rush of officers. A number of other people, who had been aroused in the middle of the night by rumours of the excitement, ran up, too.

One of the fellowship agents, climbing out of the overturned car, started work with his automatic, but he was half dazed, and his aim was wild. A moment later he was seized and dragged out.

The other prisoners—five of them—were not badly injured, but they were half stunned. They were not able to put up any real resistance. They were all dragged out, handcuffed, and taken to the police-station.

Even while this was in progress, two other fellowship cars came tearing through the town at sixty to seventy miles an hour. And it was reported that other fugitives were fleeing along different roads.

Two other cars, in fact, were stopped, and their occupants arrested. In one case there was a grim fight, in which two constables were badly injured. But it could not be denied that the great majority of the men who had raided St. Frank's had escaped.

The prisoners in Bannington were typical of the others who had been captured; they refused to talk.

The inspector, having charged the six men, looked them over grimly. They were not of the ordinary criminal type; they were young, mostly, and one or two of them were obviously foreign.

“Well, you've got yourselves into a fine mess,” said the inspector. “What have you got to say about it? Who paid you for this job?”

The prisoners were sullenly silent.

“It won't pay you to be stubborn,” continued the inspector. “Come, if you will talk, and give us some information about your superiors—”

“We will say nothing,” interrupted one of the men, giving his companions a warning look. “We know nothing.”

“But somebody must have given you the orders”

“We had orders, but we do not know who gave them to us,” said the man defiantly. “We do not know any names.”

"Ever heard of the Fellowship of Fear?" asked the inspector abruptly.

"No."

"You deny belonging to the fellowship, then?"

"We do not know what you mean," said the man.

"Don't you? Why were you wearing long cloaks and hoods when you raided St. Frank's?"

All the prisoners looked astonished, and the spokesman shrugged.

"We do not know what you mean," he said. "We were not wearing cloaks or hoods. We were driving to London. Why have you arrested us? You have made a mistake. You have no evidence against us."

"So that's it," grunted the inspector. "All right—lock 'em up!"

He was baffled. He could prove easily enough that the prisoners had been driving at excessive speed through Bannington. But what else could he prove? No cloaks or hoods had been found upon the men, or in the car. There was no definite evidence that they were members of the party which had raided St. Frank's.

"It's going to be a ticklish business," said the inspector, later, as he talked things over with his sergeant. "We know that these men were mixed up in the St. Frank's raid; but what evidence can we produce when we put them in the dock?"

It was just the same with the other stray prisoners who had been captured.

No evidence was found which could actually identify them with the St. Frank's raiders. They refused to talk. They expressed absolute ignorance of the Fellowship of Fear. The only positive charges which could be brought against them were of driving at excessive speed and unlawfully carrying firearms.

It was a proof of the fellowship's brilliant organisation. Not one of the leaders was roped in. The men under arrest were stray members of the rank and file. Their capture meant little or nothing.

The fellowship, in fact, was as strong as ever—and even stronger. For it had brought off its most spectacular raid in England. And that raid had been a complete success.

It was a case of wholesale kidnapping.

Nelson Lee's name was not mentioned—for it was generally believed that the headmaster and his butler had been taken away, together with eight junior schoolboys. Why the eight boys should have been kidnapped was one of the unfathomable mysteries of the whole affair. For there was nobody at St. Frank's, now, who knew any of the real facts. All those who had been in the secret were gone—spirited away.

At the school the excitement lasted a long time. Mr. Wilkes, as senior Housemaster, immediately assumed control. He managed to get the other masters to help him, and, gradually, something like order was restored.

The boys of each House were ordered back into their quarters; the school was hastily

lighted by means of candles. Police came, and the grounds were scoured. But it all came to nothing.

After the boys had been marshalled back into their own Houses, a roll was called. Then it was definitely established that nobody was missing except Nipper & Co., Handforth & Co., Archie Glenthorne, Willy Handforth, Mr. Kingswood and Phipps. The excitement was revived when news trickled in from Cais-towe—news of the motor-boat chase, and its barren ending. It was known, now, that the raiders had been successful.

"Well, we did the best we could," said Travers, with a shrug. "It seems to me, dear old fellows, that we're jolly lucky to have escaped so lightly."

"Rather!" said De Valerie. "If any of us had lost our heads while those crooks were here, the machine-guns would have opened fire. We should have been mown down like rabbits."

"But what's going to happen about those chaps—and the Head?" asked Fullwood helplessly. "And why the dickens did the blighters take Phipps away? It—it's so mysterious! Are they going to hold them to ransom, or what?"

"We shan't know anything definite until to-morrow," said Travers.

"Anyhow, we've had some excitement," remarked Somerton, with a yawn. "There's nothing we can do, so why not get back to bed? Might as well take the thing calmly."

Soon afterwards the prefects came along, and ordered the boys back to bed. Not that they were likely to get much sleep. This night would live in their memories for many terms—indeed, for many years. St. Frank's had seen some hectic adventures, at various times, but this affair capped all.

MEANWHILE the fellowship was consolidating its victory.

The black motor-boat, now travelling at half-speed, and showing no lights, was making its way to a previously arranged rendezvous. This had been very cunningly chosen, for it was in the neighbourhood of a treacherous and wide-spread sand-bank—which was naturally avoided by all shipping.

Yet the water, although shallow, was of sufficient depth to enable the motor-boat to float in safety. There was enough depth for another craft.

This was a big flying-boat.

It rested there, on the slowly-rolling swell, practically invisible. Low in build, the flying-boat was painted dull black, and in design she was after the style of the famous Dornier Do. X. She was a multiple-engined monoplane, with a hull like that of a big motor yacht. Her cabin, now in complete darkness, was commodious, and capable of accommodating between twenty and thirty passengers in comfort.

She floated placidly, and the two men aboard her—the pilot and assistant pilot—had left the control-cabin and were standing on

the upper surface of the great 'plane, holding on to the engine supports as the vessel rolled to the sea. They were scanning the dark surface in the direction of the far-distant shore.

"It is good," muttered one of the men, in Russian. "They come."

The motor-boat, as it approached, was almost invisible. The fellowship men in control of her were feeling intensely satisfied. They knew that they had eluded pursuit; the monoplane was within sight, and they were now safe.

"Better have a look in the cabin, and see what's doing," suggested the man at the wheel, and addressing the man who had been in charge of the searchlight. "I expect they're still 'under,' but you'd better make sure."

"All right," said the other man.

In the cabin, the prisoners were huddled together in confusion. They had been piled in roughly, whilst quite unconscious, and the chase down the Stowe, and out into the open

sea had been so strenuous that the fellowship men had not had another chance of giving another look at their prisoners.

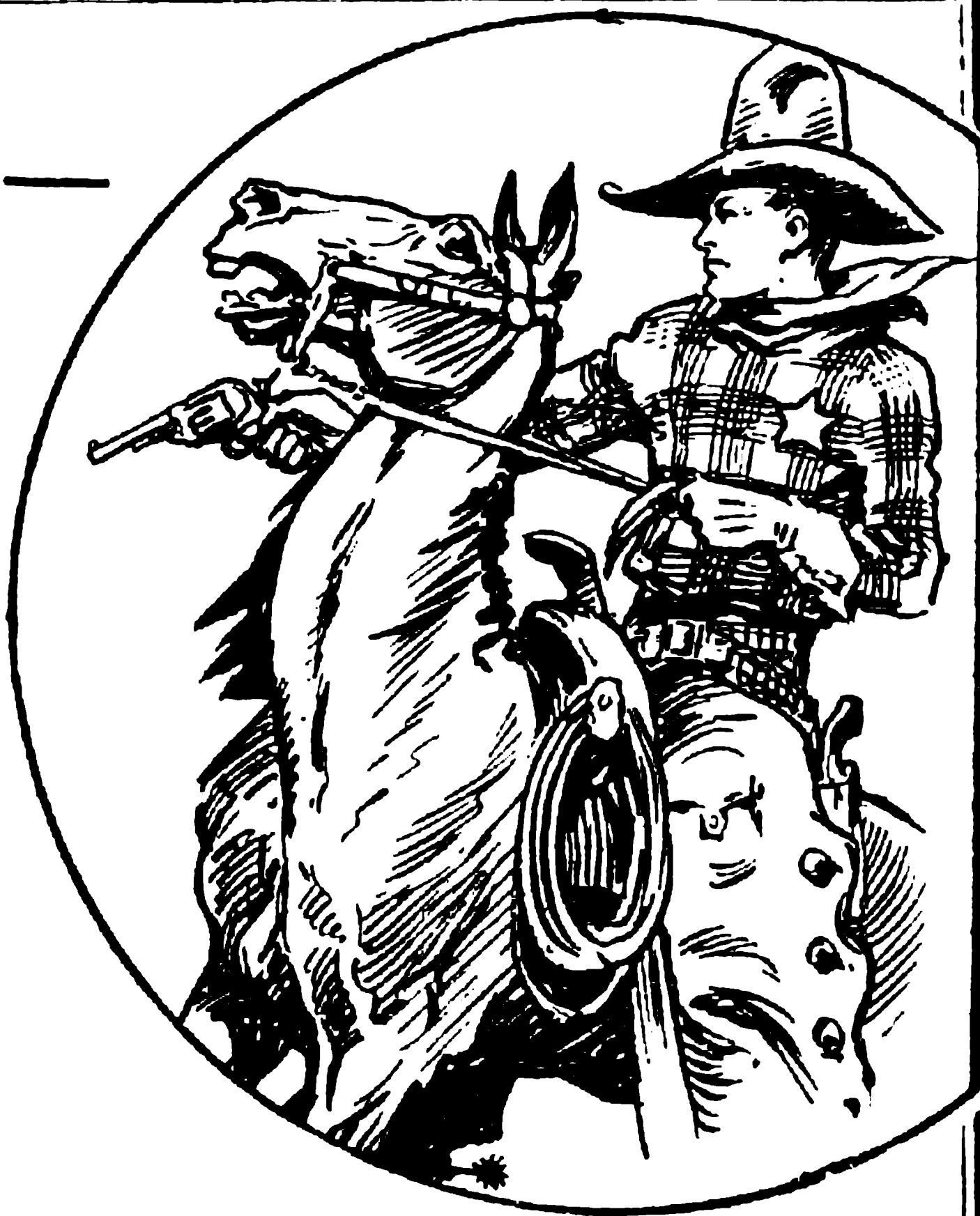
Not that there was any possibility of them escaping.

For the cabin was confined, and the door was locked. The windows were so small that even if they had been open, not even Willy Handforth, the slimmest prisoner, could have squeezed his way out. In any case, Willy was still "under."

But there were three of the other prisoners who were not "under." Nelson Lee had been the first to recover the use of his wits. At the time when the gas-guns had been discharged, both Lee and Nipper, in fact, had held their breath as long as possible. They had been half prepared for the attack. The gas they breathed in, finally, had been more or less weakened. Thus, although they succumbed, the dose they received was less effective. Mr. Kingswood, too, remembering Nelson Lee's oft-given advice, had done his utmost to avoid breathing in the gas.

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Lee's recovery was of no help, however. When he found sufficient strength to heave one of the other prisoners off him, he made the discovery that his hands and ankles were encased in manacles of steel. His movements, and the metallic clinking of the handcuffs, helped Nipper to come to himself.

"Hallo! What's happening?" muttered Nipper, struggling up into a sitting position, to find Handforth sprawling across him. "Why, what the dickens——"

He broke off, puzzled by the incessant throbbing and vibration. He could see nothing, owing to the intense blackness of the cabin's interior. But in spite of the engine's throb, he could hear, faintly, the deep breathing of other people about him.

"We seem to be in a fix, young 'un," said a quiet, steady voice.

"Guv'nor!" gurgled Nipper, straining his eyes into the darkness.

"And we are the only ones who have recovered," continued Nelson Lee. "Apparently, our genial friends of the fellowship have carried us aboard a motorboat of some kind. I don't know how many hours have passed since that dramatic scene in the Triangle, at St. Frank's—but I do know that we are now at sea."

"Why, yes—I was thinking the same thing, sir," panted Nipper. "No mistaking this rolling. We must be out in the Channel. I say, what's the game?"

"I think the game is quite obvious," replied Lee, his voice soft, but grim. "In some unaccountable way the fellowship learned that I had discovered their greatest secrets. So they risked everything in a daring raid—and while they were seizing me they thought it advisable to kidnap Mr. Kingswood. They must have known that you eight boys were 'in the know,' so they took you, too. It's a bad business."

"Ye gods and little fishes! I—I'm beginning to think more clearly now," said Nipper. "What a game, guv'nor! It's war to the knife, now, eh?"

"With the odds all against us," said Lee. "The fellowship has scored a big triumph, and——"

He broke off, for muttered words came to his ears from nearby. Presently, Mr. Kingswood managed to sit up; after that his recovery was fairly rapid. With Lee and Nipper talking to him he threw off the mists which muddled his mind. And he, too, came back to realities.

"I think the other chaps are well 'off,' sir," said Nipper. "They must have breathed a lot more of that gas than we did. It might be hours before they awaken. But can't we do something? By Jove! Wouldn't it be possible for us to surprise the men in charge of this boat, and grab it for ourselves?"

"It's a brilliant thought, but I'm afraid that nothing can be done," replied Lee. "Single-handed, Nipper, you could never overpower the fellowship men. We don't

know how many there are aboard, but it is certain they are armed——"

"What do you mean—single-handed?" asked Nipper. "You and Mr. Kingswood could help."

"Not in these, my boy," said Mr. Kingswood, as he tapped at his manacles.

And then Nipper understood. Until that moment he had not known that Lee and Fighting Jim were handcuffed and ankle-cuffed. It came as something of a shock.

"We cannot even stand upright," said the detective. "The clamps round our ankles are tight, and if we attempted to stand we should break our bones. The fellowship is taking no chances with us."

"The rest of us are only kids—just school-boys—so we don't matter," said Nipper fiercely. "By jingo! That's an insult, you know! Why shouldn't I creep out and see if I can——"

"No, Nipper, it would be plain suicide," broke in Lee sharply. "In any case, how can you creep out? The door is locked on us. In attempting to break it down you would inevitably attract attention."

"That's true," admitted Nipper. "But what a sell it seems! Here we are, conscious, and those rotters outside don't even know——"

"Hush!" warned Lee. "Pretend to be still unconscious."

A key was turning in the lock. The sound of it was distinct. A shadowy figure entered, standing just inside the door, where there was a tiny scrap of space.

The fellowship man closed the door behind him, and then he flashed on an electric torch. He had not dared to do so whilst the door stood open. He surveyed the helpless prisoners, flashing his light from one to another.

"You go on a long journey, my friends," he said mockingly.

Without warning, and with the speed of a striking cobra, two hands leapt out from the shadows. They gripped the man's ankles, and with a sudden jerk he was thrown off his balance. He fell with a crash.

"Guv'nor—it's me!" hissed a voice.

But Nelson Lee knew, in that flash, that Nipper had taken this daring step. Before the man could utter any outcry, Lee flung himself sideways over his body; and at the same moment he brought his manacled wrists down with all his strength on the fellow's head.

"Rough and ready—but effective!" he muttered. "I think he's 'out' for some minutes."

"Good work!" murmured Mr. Kingswood, in wonder and admiration.

Nipper, having freedom of movement, leapt at the fellow and relieved him of an automatic pistol. He hoped to find one of those gas guns, too—for such a weapon would come in remarkably handy. Unfortunately, this fellowship agent was not carrying one. But Nipper found something else—as he had

hoped. It was a key to unlock the handcuffs and the ankle irons!

"By Heaven! This is an amazing piece of luck," said Nelson Lee, in a low voice, as Nipper operated the key. "Well done, lad! That's fine!"

His hands were free now, and in a moment his legs were free, too. He took the key and liberated Mr. Kingswood.

It was then only a matter of moments to snap the handcuffs and ankle-irons upon the fellowship man—and to bind a handkerchief round his mouth so that he could make no outcry.

"What are we going to do, guv'nor?" whispered Nipper, his voice throbbing.

"Give me that gun," replied Lee grimly. "Here is a chance for us to seize this boat—and to take it back to shore, and turn the tables on the fellowship!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Fight for Liberty.

NEVER had Nelson Lee been more grim than he was now.

In the darkness he carefully felt the automatic pistol. It was of an unfamiliar type, but he located the safety catch, and he pulled it back. Then he turned to the door.

"We can help, guv'nor, can't we?" whispered Nipper eagerly.

"Later, perhaps," replied Lee. "My object is to get out at once and see how the land lies. We don't know how many men there are on this boat."

"All the more reason for us to go with you," said Mr. Kingswood.

"No; if I go alone, the others will mistake me, in the darkness, for their own comrade," replied Lee. "If two or three of us emerge they will know the truth in a moment. Leave this to me. And then, if a fight develops, you can join in."

Without another word he softly opened the door, and passed out. There was a tiny deck just outside, a narrow strip between the low-built cabin and the side of the vessel. Nelson Lee passed along for'ard.

After the intense blackness of the cabin he could faintly see a shadowy figure was at the wheel; another man was standing up on the cowed forepeak. And Nelson Lee realised that there were only three men in charge of the fellowship motor-boat—two out here, and one, a prisoner, in the cabin.

The outlook was bright.

Lee took a step forward, and the next moment the muzzle of the automatic was pressed hard into the back of the pilot.

"Hands up, my friend!" said Lee gently. "And don't make a sound."

The man turned a horrified face.

"You!" he gasped. "But—but——"

"You heard what I said!" exclaimed Lee tensely.

The man raised his hands from the wheel, and held them aloft. It was at this moment that the other man looked round, sensing, perhaps, that something unusual was happening. He stared hard. Nelson Lee, at the same moment, made another discovery—a most uncomfortable one. Right ahead, in very close proximity, was another vessel, shadowy, vague. But Lee, in spite of these disadvantages, immediately recognised it as a floating flying-boat. He knew the truth then. He and his fellow prisoners were to be transferred to the flying-boat and carried, perhaps, to the central headquarters of the fellowship.

"What are you men doing down there?" asked the man on the forepeak. "We're veering off. Get hold of that wheel, you fool——"

"I can't!" shouted the pilot, in a sudden loud voice. "It's Lee—he's escaped! He's got Miller's gun——"

"I warned you!" snapped Lee.

He pulled the trigger ruthlessly. This was no time for half measures. But he did not intend to kill; he pointed the weapon so that it would be discharged into the pilot's shoulders.

But nothing happened.

Again and again Lee pressed the trigger, and the pilot, knowing that Lee was in difficulties, suddenly spun round. They grappled, and the fury of the pilot's attack sent the automatic flying out of Lee's hand, and it plunged into the sea. As a matter of fact, that particular weapon was fitted with a double safety catch, and Lee had not known this. Within another second or two he would have known the truth, but he was not given the opportunity.

As he grappled with the pilot, the cabin door burst open, for Nipper and Mr. Kingswood had heard the shouting. They leapt out to join in the fight. And it was at this moment that the man on the forepeak hurled himself straight down upon the struggling pair in the cockpit. It was sheer chance—the worst of ill-luck—that caused him to bring the heel of his left shoe hard against Nelson Lee's forehead. The detective reeled under the blow, staggered back, and fell against the motor-boat's side. To add to his misfortunes, the craft heaved on a swell at that moment, and dipped alarmingly. It was just enough to send Lee, in his semi-conscious state, toppling overboard. He fell into the sea with a loud splash.

"Guv'nor!" ejaculated Nipper.

Mr. Kingswood was attacked by the two men—and now, seeing that the situation was desperate, the men on the flying-boat flashed their electric torches. They were genuinely alarmed—for the motor-boat was drifting so near that there was danger of a collision. The light served the motor-boat men well, for one of them, without compunction, brought his automatic pistol down with devilish force on Mr. Kingswood's head. Fighting Jim collapsed.

Everything had happened at lightning speed. Nipper, seeing Lee fall overboard,

had dived. The detective had partially recovered, owing to his sudden immersion; he was now treading water with Nipper, and they both realised that their fight for liberty had failed. Well, they had done their best—and they would certainly have succeeded but for one fact.

They had not known of the close proximity of the flying-boat. If this incident had happened only five minutes earlier, they could have seized the motor-boat and got away. It was just ill fortune.

With Mr. Kingswood hors-de-combat, the fellowship agents were free to devote their full attention to Lee and Nipper. Not that they need have been concerned; for Lee and Nipper were far too sensible to attempt any further activity. They might have swum away from the motor-boat, but such a move would have been futile—for the craft could easily have overtaken them and picked them up. Quite apart from this, the water was icily cold, and, good swimmers though they were, they could never have reached land.

"Hard luck, guv'nor," muttered Nipper despondently.

"That infernal pistol let me down," growled the detective. "Not that it really matters; even if I had fired it, I doubt if we could have won the battle. We knew nothing of the seaplane and its occupants."

"Look, sir," whispered Nipper suddenly.

He was staring across the sea. At that moment they had both been lifted to the crest of a rolling swell; and, for a moment, they saw, in the far distance, the unmistakable beam of a big searchlight, sweeping to and fro across the dark sea.

"Significant," said Lee.

"Think that's anything to do with us, sir?"

"A destroyer, no doubt—with special instructions to search for the motor-boat," replied Nelson Lee. "But it is many miles away, and I fancy we shall be quite beyond their reach within a few minutes."

The motor-boat was drifting nearer to them now; the engine was purring again.

"Hey, you two!" came a harsh voice. "You think you can play such tricks with us? We let you drown, yes?"

"You don't blame us for trying to escape, do you?" retorted Nelson Lee.

"But this is a man!" exclaimed one of the others. "Why should we be angry because he reveals such courage? I am almost sorry you failed, Mr. Lee, for your efforts deserved greater success. It is the fortunes of war."

As the boat came close, one of the men leaned suddenly over, and he discharged the contents of a gas-gun right into the faces of Nelson Lee and Nipper. It was an effective move; for the pair were breathing hard, owing to the coldness of the water. The result was inevitable; they gulped in enormous breaths of the stupefying gas.

They both sank like stones, and effectually assisted the gas by taking water into their lungs. When they came to the surface again, after a moment or two, they were like logs. And it was easy enough for the motor-boat

men, with a grappling-hook, to pull them alongside and haul them inboard.

"Better to have let them drown!" said one of the men savagely. "They have caused us enough delay. See! A warship is out—looking for us, no doubt."

"It matters not," said one of the others.

Then the task of transferring the prisoners commenced.

Lee and Nipper were the first to be taken aboard the flying-boat. It seemed a great, towering vessel in comparison to the motor-boat. The latter was moored alongside. Just above the big cabin door was standing wide open; so it was only necessary for the kidnappers to hoist the prisoners up and then carry them into the saloon.

Mr. Kingswood followed; then Handforth and Church and Tommy Watson and the others were brought out one by one and carried limply into their new quarters.

When they were all aboard, the saloon door was carefully closed. The injured fellowship man was left in the saloon, too. One of the others remained on guard. The third man—the motor-boat pilot—now made some curious preparations.

He lashed the wheel securely, so that the boat, once started, would speed onwards in a fixed direction.

Having done this, he set fire to a little fuse, which was trailing ready. The motor-boat was headed down the Channel—so that it would make off in the open sea. The pilot's last task was to suddenly fling the throttle wide open. The next moment he leapt on to the flying-boat.

Zurrrrrrh!

The motor-boat's engines, revving up with great power, roared defiantly. The craft fairly leapt away, and soon got into her stride. Pilotless, without a soul on board, she roared off into the night.

"Good!" said the seaplane pilot. "We are ready now, yes? We go!"

With alacrity he slid down into the control cabin, and a moment later the multiple engines of the seaplane spluttered and roared into life. Soon they were purring evenly, and the great propellers were roaring and whistling.

The big craft moved steadily across the sea, gathering speed. Once or twice she bumped somewhat alarmingly, but after only a comparatively short run she lifted herself clear of the water, bumped against the top of another swell, shuddered, and then got completely clear.

She was in the air, and now she was rising steeply, zooming up in triumph.

From below, and now full two miles distant, came a flash of lurid fire. The motor-boat's pilot grunted contentedly.

"It has worked," he said. "The blaze will be seen from a great distance. People will think that we have sunk, and are all dead."

"Including the prisoners," said one of the others. "It may be many days before they guess they have been tricked."

It was an ingenious plan.

The time-fuse that the pilot had ignited connected with a spare petrol-tank, situated in the forepeak. The result was inevitable. As soon as the fuse had burnt through, the petrol had exploded, setting fire to the entire bows of the speeding craft. Now she was leaping along, her engines uninjured, her main petrol tank untouched. She was roaring across the surface of the dark sea like a flaming torch.

Something happened now which the fellowship had not bargained for.

All manner of craft were out in the Channel, searching, for the alarm was general now, and the situation was so serious that at least three destroyers had been told off to scout up and down the Channel, with searchlights blazing, on the off-chance of sighting the fugitive motor-boat, with its prisoners.

One of these destroyers—whose searchlight Lee and Nipper had seen—sighted the motor-boat right enough!

The first knowledge the sailors had of the motor-boat's presence was a sudden burst of fire. It seemed to come from the sea itself, and was four or five miles distant—a ruddy, lurid spot of light in the far distance.

"What's that?" said the destroyer's commander, as he stood on the little bridge with another officer.

"Just what I was wondering," said the other. "Boat on fire, by the look of it. By Jove! It's moving fast."

Orders were given, and the searchlight swung round. The flare of light was moving nearer, streaking across the sea in the most extraordinary manner. And when the searchlight was swung round, the officers could see, through their glasses, that the flames were coming from a rapidly-moving boat.

"In Heaven's name, it's the boat we're after!" said the commander huskily. "There must have been an explosion or something. I wonder if those kidnapped people are aboard. If so, they'll all be roasted alive!"

"Poor beggars!" said the other officer.

They watched, fascinated.

And in this little incident, seemingly so trifling—for, indeed, at first sight it appeared to be a mere caprice on the part of the fellowship to destroy the motor-boat—there was evidence of brilliant strategy. For not only did the flaming craft distract attention from the sky, but the roar of the motor-boat's engine, growing ever louder, disguised the throbbing of the monoplane's motors, far overhead. All eyes were concentrated upon that streaking flame. Meanwhile, the flying boat rose higher and higher, until she vanished through the curtain of low cloud. It was a clever enough trick.

On the destroyer, the officers and men watched with intense interest. The flaming motor-boat had shown no sign of decreasing its speed, proving that the engines were still working perfectly. On her present course

"HERO AND CAD!"



When young Wally D'Arcy, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, starts chumming up with Dudley everyone tries to stop him, for Dudley has a bad reputation. But Wally has his head screwed on the right way and he knows more about Dudley than anyone. When the others find out what Wally knows—they get a shock! Get a copy of this week's GEM and read this ripping yarn of thrills, fun and laughter. It's a wow—and how!

Ask for the

G E M

Now on Sale 2d.

she would pass the destroyer with half a mile to spare.

But then something happened.

There was a sudden loud explosion, and flames leapt high into the air from the doomed craft. She swerved madly, thrown off her fixed course by the shock of the explosion. And now, to the consternation of the destroyer's officers, it was seen that the flaming boat was making a bee-line for the warship. She was still running at full speed—a tearing, roaring mass of flames. Although the main petrol tank had exploded, there was still enough spirit in the feeding apparatus, apparently, to keep her going. She was alight from stem to stern now, a terrifying spectacle.

The commander of the destroyer gave sharp orders. The vessel reversed engines, attempting to clear in time. But that manœuvre, sound though it was, had just the opposite effect. For again the motor-boat changed direction, and now she charged full tilt right into the broadside of the destroyer.

Craaaaaaash!

A wall of flame leapt up, higher than the destroyer's funnels. But the very force of the collision prevented a serious disaster. For the motor-boat, already a partial wreck, was shattered to fragments. She sank like a stone, the flames giving one final burst of fury as the wreckage vanished beneath the surface.

A dense pall of black smoke remained. Flames from the splashed and burning petrol were leaping up the destroyer's side; but they extinguished themselves within a minute. Orders were being shouted; men were running.

It was soon found that the destroyer's plates, amidships, had been strained, and some of them badly buckled. Fortunately, she was not holed, and her searchlights were now concentrated on the surface of the sea, near at hand.

Scraps of wreckage were floating; patches of oil could be seen. But there was no sign of any human body; nothing but the charred remains of the motor-boat herself.

The destroyer stood by, boats were lowered, and an intensive search was made. The commander was satisfied, later, that the motor-boat had been empty at the time of the collision. Yet he could not be certain of this; he could only state it as his opinion. There was still a chance that the victims, imprisoned in the motor-boat's cabin, had been taken down to the bottom of the Channel.

Thus another sensational incident was added to the night's excitement.

The Fellowship of Fear, this time, had struck a blow which would echo round the entire world.

AND far above the clouds, the fellowship's secret flying-boat was winging her way over sea and land.

This craft bore none of the usual identification marks; she was, indeed, a

pirate; an unauthorised, unregistered aircraft. When she flew she did so by night.

As the hours passed, so the flying-boat left the sea well behind; she was now speeding across the continent of Europe—and, in fact, she was heading for a wild, deserted mountain range of Bavaria.

Fortune was unquestionably favouring the wicked to-night.

The weather conditions were ideal for the fellowship's plan. Clouds obscured the sky in continuous masses for hundreds and hundreds of miles. There was not even a rift through which the earth could be seen. The flying-boat was well above the clouds, flying in clear air, and her pilot, a skilled man, kept to his course unerringly. He needed no landmarks, for he was flying by compass. Furthermore, he would have a very excellent landmark when he was nearing his destination.

And below, on the ground, none saw the passing of the aircraft; few heard it, even, for the cloud masses masked the rhythmic throb of the engines.

The injured fellowship agent had now recovered; he, with his companions of the motor-boat, were making some remarkable preparations.

They were working in the big saloon. The lights were switched fully on now, for there was no fear of their being seen from the ground. All about, in the commodious saloon, were the prisoners. They were all unconscious—even Lee and Nipper. The fellowship men were making no more mistakes. This time they meant to deliver their prisoners.

The delivery, apparently, was to be made in a novel fashion.

The helpless boys were placed together in pairs. Harness was secured to them, round their shoulders and round their waists. Nipper was paired with Nelson Lee; Willy Handforth was paired with Mr. Kingswood.

And to each pair, in their harness, was attached an oversize parachute!

Two prisoners to each parachute—five parachutes in all. It was an obvious solution to a problem; for the flying-boat, naturally, could not make a landing in the mountains. Had there been a lake she might have descended; but there was no lake, or any other stretch of water.

The fellowship agents, having finished their work, went from pair to pair, making certain that the harness was tight, and that the parachutes were in perfect order, ready to open up at a touch.

Dawn was breaking by the time the last inspection had been made. And one of the men, looking out of a window, pointed to a snow-covered peak which rose grotesquely out of the cloud-bank. It looked unreal, it seemed to be floating on the top of the clouds.

"We are in good time," said the man. "Soon we shall be rid of these fools. Pah! Why is it that our people require schoolboys to be delivered to them?"

"It is not for us to ask questions, Carl," said one of the other men, with a shrug. "We are obeying orders—and for that we shall get our reward. This work carries treble pay. We have done well to-night."

"But it was risky," grumbled the other. "Twice we were near to disaster. We should get more than treble pay, I think."

"Let us be thankful that we have saved the fellowship from disaster," replied the first man. "Ha, the pilot has already throttled down! We shall dip through the clouds."

The sky in the east was flooded with reddish, golden light. The sun was rising. It was a magnificent spectacle. The sky, right overhead, was of a steely, hard blue, and a few stars were still gamely trying to shed their light.

And below, a great sea of cloud, with a single snow-capped peak jutting upwards. It was a scene of utter and absolute desolation. One might have supposed that one was at the extremity of the world, cut off from all civilisation.

With muffled engines, the big craft was now dipping—diving gracefully.

Presently she plunged into the cloud, and was immediately surrounded by a dense, impenetrable white fog.

CHAPTER 9.

Into the Terrorist Stronghold!

DOWN—down!

The seaplane pilot knew just where he was. There was no danger in making this downward plunge. There were other mountain peaks in the neighbourhood, other treacherous hills, but the pilot had judged his distance and his direction by that one outstanding peak. He knew, within a mile, his position.

At last, with surprising suddenness, the great 'plane dropped out of the cloud-bank. She took with her a mass of wreathing mist, but it soon cleared away. The machine was gliding down, now, in clear air.

But what a difference in the scene!

Immediately below stretched a great basin amongst the upper crags of the mountain range. Rocky hills arose on all sides; to the south a glimpse could be seen of the lower ground—a great valley, with pine-clad hills, and, in the misty distance, meadows, fields and a gleaming river. But it was a drab scene, for the clouds, overhead, prevented the sunshine from playing upon the earth.

No matter in which direction one looked there was no sign of life. Not a house, not even a mountain hut. It was a scene of arctic desolation, with the snow-covered basin below—a kind of level plateau—surrounded by cruel-looking crags, which raised their summits in jagged, serried masses to the dull sky.

The assistant pilot came through from the control cabin. The machine was now banking round in a wide circle.

"You are ready?" he asked shortly.

"We have been ready for some time," said one of the others. "We are waiting."

"Good! They can be thrown out."

"You have had the signal?"

"Yes."

There were two doors in the saloon—one on either side. They were both opened now, and securely fastened. The air which rushed in was biting cold.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were the first to go. One of the men pulled the rip-cord of the parachute. The next moment Lee and Nipper were sent hurtling through the open doorway. Only for a few feet did they fall sheer. Then the tiny pilot-parachute opened out, dragging the main mesh of silk from its folds. It opened out.

At the same moment, Mr. Kingswood and Willy were sent hurtling through the other doorway. Then followed Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, Handforth and Church, McClure and Archie Glenthorne.

The whole thing was done within a minute. Each pair was flung out quickly. They went dropping, every parachute opening perfectly, and the sight, from above, was curious. Five parachutes, dropping gracefully down to the large expanse of snow.

The flying boat, at a word from the assistant pilot, was now zooming upwards with engines roaring. The saloon doors had been closed. Presently, the big machine bored her way through the ceiling of cloud, and she vanished, the throbbing of her engines growing fainter and fainter.

She had discharged her cargo—she had done her work.

This time, neither Nelson Lee nor Nipper recovered consciousness. They had had a nasty dose of the stupefying gas; and, on the top of that, they had taken in a certain amount of sea-water into their lungs. Fortunately, the flying boat's saloon had been heated—overheated, in fact—and Lee and Nipper had had time to get nearly dry.

Being the first out of the aeroplane, they were the first to strike. They plunged limply into thick, soft snow. They went in deeply, but were quickly dragged out, owing to the billowing action of the parachute, which dragged them along for some feet.

Exactly the same happened to the other pairs.

Now, for the first time, other figures made themselves visible. At first it had seemed that the basin, or plateau, was the most desolate place on earth. But figures were now appearing from amongst the rocks, along the edges. They were heavily-clothed men, wearing furs and great caps which came down over their ears. Each man was wearing skis, and they made quick, smooth progress across the unbroken snow.

There were over a dozen of these men, and when they spoke to one another, they spoke in German. They reached the fallen victims of the fellowship. There was scarcely any wind here, and the parachutes, for the most part, had collapsed.

MY DEAR CHUMS,
—You will be jolly pleased to know that the solution of our recent "Home Cinema Competition" appears in this week's issue of our grand companion paper, the "Gem," which means that all of you who entered this fascinating contest should make certain of seeing a copy of this week's "Gem" to discover how near *the* solution your efforts were. When you have seen this solution, check *your* attempt with it, for you will have kept a duplicate of that, and then, if you have six errors or less you are entitled to send in a claim. But for full details buy a copy of the "Gem," on sale to-day, price twopence.

I want you all to be particularly careful not to miss next week's chat as I have some very important news for you. To let you into a secret, next week's issue contains a full announcement of a Grand New Programme. More than that I shall not say this week.

Now something about next week's stories. The long complete school and detective thriller deals with the last sensational and surprising round in the fight between Nelson Lee and the Fellowship of Fear. Nelson Lee and his schoolboy companions, Nipper & Co., have been kidnapped. They have been taken to a lonely castle in Bavaria, and there they meet the all-powerful head of this band of terrorists.

All manner of amazing and perilous adventures befall the schoolboys in this castle of dread—adventures that will thrill you when you read of them in "THE CASTLE OF DOOM!" in next week's issue.



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

Included also in next Wednesday's grand number will be further chapters of the "The Green Button!" our fine Great War story.

Altogether, next week's issue is well worth the little trouble of going round to your newsagent's and putting in an ad-

vance order. Are we agreed? WE ARE —and how!

— PEN PALS!

D. Noble, 22, Green Hill, Longwood, Huddersfield, Yorks., wants correspondents in Scotland and overseas.

A. Harman, 4, Kenmure Mns., Pitshanger Lane, Ealing, W. 5, wants correspondents—13—14—interested in the making of films and in poster art.

Edward Harris, 13, North Street, Boughton, Chester, wants correspondents for his Pen Pals Club.

Miss Madge Chambers, 75, Wimborne Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, wants girl correspondents.

Miss Edna Grier, Iona, Portsmouth Road, Lee-on-the-Solent, wants a girl correspondent in India, China, America, Canada, or New Zealand. Also a French correspondent. Can write in French.

Miss Jorn Pulleyn, Iona, Portsmouth Road, Lee-on-the-Solent, wants a girl correspondent—India, U.S., etc.

Miss Gladys Harris, wants girl correspondents, ages 16—20, interested in films, music and books.

The men got to work in a business-like fashion—clearly proving that they were acting under definite instructions.

The unconscious prisoners were not released from their parachute harness. In pairs, they were wrapped in the parachutes themselves, and the silken folds protected them from the snow and the cold. They were all trussed up efficiently, ropes were attached, and then they were dragged like sledges over the snow.

The journey which followed was one of considerable length, and it took a good deal of time. Soon after leaving the basin, a gully in the mountains was reached, and it was steep, and snow-covered. Progress was quicker here, for the prisoners slid along so easily that they needed no hauling. It was necessary, in fact, to check their progress.

Once down this gully, the party came upon another level stretch; then down again, this time descending a snow-covered hillside.

The direction was downwards all the time.

The prisoners, in fact, having been dropped on one of the higher, snow-covered slopes of the mountain range, were being taken down to the lower levels.

And all this was being accomplished in open daylight—but beyond the vision of mankind. The only witnesses were the fellowship agents who were engaged upon the work.

For the mountains, here, were barren and empty. Strangers were never allowed upon these higher slopes. This property belonged to the wealthy Baron von Holtz, and it was notorious that he never allowed tourists or mountain climbers to use his land.

At a given spot, some thousands of feet down the mountainside, big sledges were waiting, with other men. The prisoners were placed upon the sledges, and the journey recommenced. The entire scene was now blotted out by a snow flurry. But later, when it cleared somewhat, a scene of rugged grandeur was in full sight.

It mattered not, now, whether the party was observed. They were men belonging to Holtz Castle, and they were coming down from the mountainsides, after having been on a mission for their master. Their loaded sledges meant nothing, for they were covered with furs, and might contain logs, or something similarly innocent.

The hillsides were steep, and, for the most part, they were pine-clad. When the snow cleared a magnificent view was obtained. A valley stretched away for many miles, winding and twisting; and, far below, the red roofs of a little Bavarian town could be seen—the redness now mottled by white patches, owing to the snowfall. Church spires rose upward, too, and a film of blue smoke gave evidence of the many fires which were burning.

But up here, at the top end of the valley, where the pine-clad hills closed in, a great, jagged rock rose like a sentinel.

On the very top of it was perched Holtz Castle.

It was a magnificent structure—a medieval German castle such as one sometimes sees in old prints, or on the cover of fairy-tale books. A castle of round towers and lofty turrets; of battlements and barred windows.

It stood, perched there—just as it had been built a thousand years earlier.

On three sides it was utterly inaccessible, owing to the sheer precipice on the edge of which it had been built. Thus, it faced the valley, and could be seen, on a clear day, twenty or thirty miles away. It dominated the valley completely, and Baron von Holtz was able to gaze out of his windows, on his primeval domain. From those same windows his guards could keep a constant watch upon the only road which led windingly round the hillsides and the bluffs, to the castle. There was only one approach—and that road sometimes wended its way with a sheer precipice on one hand and a wall of rock on the other.

The men with the sledges approached the castle along this recognised roadway; they came from the upper hills, ploughing through the snow. They joined the road just above the spot where the road itself turned sharply, and led towards the castle entrance.

This, in itself, was impressive. There was an immense drawbridge, rugged and picturesque. When raised, a great gap was left—a chasm, hundreds of feet deep, and the castle, perched on its rocky eminence, was left isolated, so that no enemies could even approach.

Only when the drawbridge was in the "down" position was the road completed, and the castle was linked up with the outer world.

The drawbridge was down now, and, singing lustily, the men crossed into the walled courtyard, with its cobbles and its great flagstones. One might have supposed that the men were returning triumphantly from the hunt. The scene, in all conscience, looked innocent enough.

Yet it was inexpressibly grim.

For no sooner had the party got across than a great clanking noise made itself heard. The drawbridge, creaking and groaning, was drawn upwards. It formed a wall of itself, shutting out every glimpse of what took place within the courtyard.

And now, within that walled enclosure, shut off from the world, the sledges were unloaded.

The victims of the fellowship were carried into lofty, gloomy halls. And in a great chamber with an arched roof, in which a fire blazed in an enormous grate, the prisoners were released from their harness. They were laid out in a row, like so many ninepins. The parachutes and the harness were cleared away, and the floor was swept.

Then it was that a big man—fully six feet in height, and broad in proportion—came striding into the chamber. The other men bowed stiffly before him. For this man was the Baron von Holtz himself; his face was big and florid, his head almost square, with stiff, bristly hair.

"It is well," he said, as his eyes glinted upon the prisoners. "So! The night's work has been a success."

His voice contained a note of relief. For the Baron von Holtz was the Terrestrial Master of the Fellowship of Fear—the supreme leader of the terrorist organisation. And he had known, by the secret wireless, how close to destruction the fellowship had come. But that danger was over now.

Nelson Lee, the man who had caused so much harm, was here, in the central headquarters of the fellowship—and the Baron von Holtz was determined that Lee should never see the outer world again. There were others with him—and they were similarly doomed.

"Take them away," said the baron, pointing. "Everything is ready for them. See to it."

Men sprang to his command, and the prisoners were locked away. Little did the baron realise that by bringing Nelson Lee to Holtz Castle he had taken the first step in the destruction of the Fellowship of Fear.

THE END.

*(Here's a fine detective-thriller for you—
"The Castle of Doom!" a sensational
story of Nelson Lee, Nipper and Co., and
the Fellowship of Fear—in next week's
issue.)*

ALL READERS who entered our recent **"HOME CINEMA COMPETITION"** should get this week's issue of **"THE GEM,"** on sale today, price 2d., which contains the **SOLUTION OF THIS CONTEST** and full details of how and when to send in claims.

The GREEN BUTTON!



Monty Merriman, a British Secret Service Agent, and Captain Dick Seton, are fleeing across Germany for the frontier. Monty has been instrumental in rescuing Seton from a prison camp. Many miles and great perils separate the two Britishers from safety, but their indomitable courage carries them far along the road in their desperate bid for freedom.

Touch and Go!

HOUR after hour, Monty and his companion plodded along, hungry, tired and thirsty, yet not daring to pause at any wayside inn for refreshment, not knowing just what sort of trouble that half-wit lad had stirred up behind them.

Monty was still heading north. If he had been forced to make this move before he was really ready, he was at least moving in the right direction. He half expected to see Heinrich Kahn go shooting past in a big car, but he was disappointed over that. It would have helped to have had some idea where Kahn was.

It was about four in the afternoon when they sighted the town of Uhlsdorf. It was a fair sized place, dominated by towering factory chimneys, and seemed to be a big railway junction, for the gleaming metals converged on the town, coming from all directions.

A pall of smoke hovered over the place, and Monty frowned at the sight. It might be easy to outwit people at Arnstein and in the villages, but Uhlsdorf was a different proposition. The railways, too, spelt danger, for the permanent ways were guarded by the civic guards, and there was a constant watch for spies wherever there was a railway.

Just outside the town itself was a barrier across the road, and the police questioned all who came and went. Monty and Dick did not hesitate. With heads lowered they plodded forward at a slow, but steady pace. A policeman barred their way, and they halted, slowly raising their heads.

"What do you want?" asked Monty.

At first the man looked aghast at such a question. He had an idea that any one would guess what he wanted.

"Your permit to travel, of course, old man!" he growled. "Don't you know you can't go waltzing all over the country in these days, without a permit? Why, you might be escaping Englishers. How are we to know?"

Monty feigned righteous indignation.

"Me—an Englisher!" he cried shrilly. "Out of my way, schweinhund. I come with my wife to make shells to fight the Englishers."

The policeman gasped, then, placing his hands on his hips, laughed uproariously, swaying backwards and forwards on his toes.

"Ho, ho! That's good, that is! It takes strong men to make munitions, old man! In any case, where are your permits?"

Monty took no end of a time in fishing for his papers. He hoped to make the policeman so impatient that in the end he would merely glance at the details and wave them on.

But this policeman was different, although Monty was not to know it. He took the papers and glanced at them casually. Then he stiffened, and studied them again.

"You are old Siegfried Eberhn, of Muhlshausen, and this is Anna, your wife—hein?" he queried. "Whereabouts did you live in Muhlshausen?"

Monty sensed danger.

"What is that to you?" he queried irritably. "We want to make shells for our armies, and you would stop us with your silly questions. We come from Muhlshausen. It is only a tiny village."

"I know that!" exclaimed the policeman hoarsely. "I lived there all my life till I came here six weeks ago. And I never knew you lived there! This wants looking into. Hi—lend a hand here! Take these into the guard-room, there!"

"That's done it!" muttered Dick in the depths of his shawl.

There was a wooden hut by the side of the road which was used as a temporary guard-room, and they were hustled inside, not over gently.

"Mind—my wife is delicate!" protested Monty.

"If we hurt her she can yell," retorted the policeman. "She hasn't said a word yet. Hey, old lady, what's your name?"

Dick only shook his head, and looked silly. "Deaf as a post," said Monty. "You'll have to shout, and then she won't hear you!"

"She doesn't matter," growled the senior policeman. "Listen, old man. I am a native of Muhlshausen—lived there all my life until

six weeks ago. I never knew anyone there of the name of Eberhn. If you've forged these papers——"

"The papers are in order," protested Monty. "What do I care how long you lived at Muhlshausen! We were there only a fortnight."

"A fortnight—hein? That sounds fishy, to me."

"But, listen, mein herr. We lived further eastward—at Polsenkirche. Our only son was in the army, in Flanders. We came more westward, to Muhlshausen to be nearer the headquarters of his regiment. We were there only a fortnight, and yesterday we had news he had been killed. We cannot rest, now. We feel we must do something to help beat the Englishers. So we come here."

The policeman rubbed his chin and began to sneer.

"What a story!" he said. "Whereabouts in the village did you live?"

Monty did his best.

"In that cottage—the one with the white palings—down by the church!"

Dick was filled with anxiety. His German was not good and he could not get the gist of all that was said, but he sensed trouble. He sat down by the policeman's desk, and buried his face in his hands as if he were sobbing his heart out. But between the elbows that rested on the desk was a heavy ebony ruler.

The policeman laughed, and clapped one hand on Monty's shoulder.

"There is not a church at Muhlshausen, old man! We worship at the next village, a mile away!"

"What do you mean?" cried Monty, backing away.

Both policemen went after him, and grabbed his arms.

"You're a spy. Something funny here. Now I come to look closer at you I don't think you are so old, and——"

"Let me go!" cried Monty, having seen Dick rise to his feet behind the policemen. He wanted to keep their attention on him. "I will complain to your officer! I am an honest man. I——"

"You shall cool your heels in prison, you dog, unless you can explain things. You are under arrest, mein——"

But the old woman, whom they had almost forgotten, had become very active. Dick was behind them and the ebony ruler was in his strong hand. Twice it rose—twice it fell—crashing on the heads of the policemen, who had placed their helmets on the desk.

Dick had made short work of them. They slumped down in two heaps on the floor. Monty closed the door, and knelt over them.

"Their great coats!" he snapped. "That rope there!"

He had them bound and gagged in the twinkling of an eye.

"Come on!" he said breathlessly. "It's touch and go! The one chance in a million, and we had to bump into it. Steady, now. I'll go first!"

He cautiously opened the door. The road was deserted. They went out, closed the door and turned the key in the lock, tossing that same key over the hedge. The barrier was across the road. It was only a painted scaffold pole on supports. They took it down and tossed it into the ditch, then bolted for it.

Monty reckoned the game was up, but fortune favoured them. The road remained deserted. There was no traffic about of any description.

Of course, that would not remain so for more than fifteen minutes at the outside, for it was a main road. They owed the respite mainly to the fact that it was tea-time, and therefore there was a lull in the comings and goings.

As for the barrier, travellers would think that perhaps the cordon had been lifted because the escaped Englanders had been recaptured. Not until the police went to relieve the guard on the road would the truth be known. Monty had to reach the house of the Secret Service man in Uhlsdorf and get rid of their present disguise before that happened.

Dick lifted his bedraggled skirts and pelted along beside Monty for a hundred yards. Then they stopped and gazed up and down the long stretch of road. There was still no one in sight. But close at hand was a footpath leading over the fields. They took to that, and hastened on their way, but more sedately. The hedges now hid them from the view of anyone on the road, and that was something.

"This is what comes of having to make a move without time to prepare the ground beforehand," growled Monty.

"We've come through worse things," said Dick.

"True, but the net is bound to close now that we have given the show away by banging those policemen on the head. It is lucky that all the really fit men are at the front, or you wouldn't have had such good fortune with that ruler, old man. Try and walk faster."

"It isn't easy in skirts," said Dick.

He did his best, though, and they increased their pace. The footpath brought them out on a quiet road on the outskirts of the town, and it was not long before they were walking more sedately along a busy thoroughfare. They passed several policemen there, and half expected to be arrested at any moment, but nothing happened.

"The news has not reached them yet," said Monty. "Another five minutes and I'll breathe more freely."

They went right into the heart of the busy manufacturing town, then dived off into a residential neighbourhood, dingy and grimy. In a rather sordid street they paused at a door that looked no different from the doors of all the other houses.

Monty knocked—three times—and waited; then knocked again. They heard footsteps coming along the passage. The bolt was

drawn back, the door opened, and a man stood in the shadows on the other side of the threshold.

"Good-afternoon," said Monty. "I think it will be a fine day."

The man drew back, one hand extended. On the palm lay a green button.

"Yes, I think it will," he replied. "The wind has changed!"

Monty sucked in his breath sharply, and his eyes glowed in his head like coals of fire. He knew he had come to the right house. He had seen the green button in the man's hand. But the pass-word in reply to his had been wrong!

But there was no time to argue about it then. Danger was waiting for them out in the street as much as in that house.

Monty stepped over the threshold without another word. Then, like a cat, he pounced. His fist crashed without warning full in the man's face. He made no mistake about that blow. It had to be swift and accurate—and it was. The fellow went down with a moan and lay still.

Then, from downstairs, came gruff cries and the thudding of feet. Monty dragged Dick into the house and slammed the front door violently, as if they had both turned tail and bolted into the street.

In the passage close to the front door was the door of the sitting-room. It was unlocked. Monty dived into the room, dragging Dick after him, and closed the door.

Panting, they waited, standing behind the door, ready to fight for it. Men were thundering down the stairs from the rooms above. They leapt over the form of the senseless man in the passage, tore open the front door, and dashed out into the street.

"What's it mean?" gasped Dick, bewildered.

"Treachery—or just bad luck!" snapped Monty. "The enemy have somehow got hold of our man's house, found the green button, and tried to use it to trap us. The enemy have rushed out to find us, and we're here—in the trap—like rats!"

They went out into the passage.

"Bolt that front door," said Monty. "It will give us a little time to think what to do next. But it means, Dick—we're cornered!"

Checkmate!

"WHAT are you going to do?" asked Dick Seton, in awed whispers.

Monty was stooping over the form of the senseless man in the passage and ransacking his pockets. Suddenly he rose, with a grunt of satisfaction, and in his hand was a green button.

"Got it!" he said softly, but tersely. "We're in a fix, Dick, but we've got both the buttons they took from you in the castle. That's something. The enemy cannot now use these green buttons against us. Two you had, and we have them both."

Despite the tight corner they were in, Monty could not help feeling triumphant

over the recovery of the buttons. Unfortunately, he was still ignorant of the fact that he had dropped one accidentally in the hotel where he had floored Kahn at the feet of a German general. Kahn, himself, had that green button, but Monty did not know it!

"But, if the enemy collared your man who ran this house, they would have got hold of another green button," argued Dick.

But Monty shook his head grimly.

"Any one of our men would have lost the button in some way, rather than have allowed it to fall into Kahn's hands. You needn't worry about that."

"But we're in the trap."

"Yes. Listen!"

Monty's hand was half raised. They could hear the patter of feet outside on the pavement.

"They've realised we've fooled 'em, and they're coming back."

"And what's your move?" asked Dick.

"Out by the back way, of course. Come on!"

Their conversation had been in whispers, scarcely audible, for they could not tell who might be in the house.

Monty led the way on tip-toe, along the passage and down the stairs to the basement. Although it was broad daylight outside, the staircase was dark enough. There was a door at the bottom, and it was closed.

Monty had been in the house before, in the course of his duties, and knew that the door opened into the kitchen. He paused and listened, but beyond the stairs creaking slightly under Dick's feet, there was not a sound. If there were men upstairs they were remarkably quiet.

They both came to the conclusion that no one was upstairs. They did not risk speaking, but a gesture served to reassure them both. Monty continued noiselessly down the stairs, until he came to the closed door, where he hesitated, then put his ear to the panel.

He stiffened, and one hand was stretched out behind, warning Dick to keep still. He could hear the breathing of a man—the rather wheezy, stertorous breathing of a man who was out of condition through good living—unless, of course, whoever it was in the kitchen was breathing hard through excitement and the tension of the moment, as he waited for the arrival of the fugitives.

It was hard to say which was the real cause of those faint sounds, but one thing was certain—there was a man in the kitchen. Monty knew he could not get out into the back-yard except through the kitchen.

He reached out and, placing his hand on Dick's shoulder, pressed hard. In the gloom they could hardly see each other's faces.

But Dick understood. He crouched down low on the stairs. Monty was already on the last stair by the closed door, huddled up in a heap, as close to the stairs as he could get. One hand was raised up to the door handle. He was turning it, slowly—cautiously.

There was a click—only slight, but to their straining ears it cracked like a revolver shot in the tense silence of the house. Monty heard yet another click from the kitchen, that was not caused by the door handle. He smiled grimly to himself.

He gave one wrench at the handle, unlatching the door, then with one violent thrust he swung the door open. It swung on its hinges and banged back against the parti-wall.

At the same instant, a revolver exploded. The sudden, lurid flash dazzled them. Two bullets whined over Monty's head and plugged into the wall behind him.

He had gambled on the fact that the man in the kitchen would fire at the height of an average man's heart. And he was right. He owed his life to his crouching posture alone.

The man fired twice in as many seconds. Then Monty flung himself forward, thrusting himself away from the stairs in a kind of Rugby tackle. The attack was as swift as it was unexpected. He went head first, like a torpedo, and his outflung arms grabbed the man's legs and brought him down with a crash. Monty shot forward, the man fell sprawling over his back, striking his head with ghastly force on the bottom stair.

There was a hoarse cry, a moan—and then silence.

Monty struggled to his feet, a wan smile on his face.

"Easier than I had hoped," he said.

Dick came from the stairs and stared down at the senseless man. He was a German officer, and his still smoking revolver was clutched in his right hand.

Monty wrenched it away and searched him for ammunition. There was no time to do more. The revolver shots had given the alarm, and the silence was shattered by the furious banging of men on the front street door. The men had come back, they had heard the shots, and secrecy and cunning would avail the fugitives no longer.

"Out of this!" snapped Monty.

He opened the back door, and Dick dashed through to the yard. Monty paused to close the door, lock it, and fling the key away. He forgot nothing likely to hinder pursuit.

"Which way?" asked Dick hurriedly.

"Over the end wall," said Monty.

"What's on the other side?"

"Haven't the faintest. I've only been here at night. Come on. We mustn't give them time to surround the show. Hustle!"

Dick was still in his disguise as an old woman, and his skirts hampered him. He picked them up and ran down the yard to the end wall.

Monty was close behind him and helped him up with a vigorous thrust. Dick didn't look. His one and only idea was get over the wall. For a brief second he lay along the top, then he allowed himself to slide over and drop down on the other side.

Monty heard him cry out in alarm, and then came a prodigious splash. He had fallen into water.

Monty was on the top of the wall a second later, staring down at the turgid waters of a canal. He saw the bubbles and rings where Dick had gone down, and it seemed ages before his head appeared above the surface.

"All right?" called Monty. "Swim to the towing path!"

Dick tried to nod. He was swimming as best he could, but he was wearing skirts—voluminous skirts of a heavy material. Now that they were soaked with water they were terribly heavy, and he had all his work cut out to remain afloat.

Monty dived in and swam towards him, but

as thick as soup and he could see nothing. He fumbled this way and that, and eventually was forced to break surface to breathe.

By that time Dick had come up again, but his face was ghastly, and his eyes staring. Twice he had gone under. If he sank a third time it might be the end of him.

Monty forged towards him through the water, swimming with long, powerful strokes.

"Hang on, old man!"

Dick managed to wave one hand weakly.

"No—you go on! I'm done! They'll get you if you stay!"

"I'm not leaving you," said Monty tersely.



Monty knew he would never get his half-drowned companion to the bank before the pursuing German soldiers were upon them, but he stuck to Dick Seton, dragging him nearer and nearer to the shore.

he was yards away when Dick began to sink again.

"Hold up!" called Monty.

"I—I can't—the skirts——"

He sank, and Monty swam like one possessed.

The dive into the canal meant nothing to him. He had had time to see what he was doing, and although he wore peasant's clothing that was not such a terrible handicap as sodden skirts.

But Dick had fallen into the canal without expecting it. The cold water had come as a shock to him, and after his imprisonment in Arnstein Castle, together with the ardours of the escape, he was not in too good a condition to withstand such experiences.

He struggled hard, but it was of no avail. The weight of his sodden skirts dragged him under.

Monty dived frantically, but the water was

He almost flung himself through the water. Dick was leaning his head back, and his eyes were staring up at the sky. He began to sink. The water lapped his chin, covered his mouth, crept up to his forehead.

Monty groaned in despair. He could hear the men forcing the back door of the house they had just left. But he could not leave Dick to drown in that muddy canal.

It was true that the missing formula had been memorised by them both. If either of them won through the result would be triumph for the British Government. They both put country first, come to that. Yet Monty refused to leave Dick to drown. He just couldn't do it.

He half rose out of the water, and dived under. He made no mistake this time. His grasping hands clutched Dick's clothes, and he fought fiercely to get him to the surface.

He had no idea until then just how heavy

those water-logged skirts could be. It took all his strength to get Dick's head above water.

But the air failed to revive the half-drowned man. Dick was unconscious. But for Monty he would never have risen to the surface again. As it was, Monty held his head free of the muddy water, and swam vigorously for the towing path on the other side of the canal.

Being single-handed it took more time than he cared to think about to reach the side, and then to haul himself and Dick out of the water. He struggled desperately, until his breath came in gasps.

He had to lift Dick, get under him, and thrust him up and over the edge on to the path. Then he clawed himself out, and lay down in the puddle he caused, panting and fighting for breath.

The precious minutes ticked on relentlessly. He grew calmer and staggered to his feet. Dick lay there as still and white as any corpse.

Monty turned him over and got the water from his mouth and nostrils, then lay him on his back again and started artificial respiration. He tore the clothes from his breast and massaged the heart.

Dick had been an expert swimmer before the war. But for that he would have lost his life in that canal. He had had the wit to keep what water he could out of his body, and that saved him. He was weak, done up, cold, beaten by circumstances, and all he had gone through.

But he was alive! He sighed and drew the air into his lungs, then coughed and spluttered. His eyes opened, and he stared up at Monty, who knelt over him.

"All right, old man?"

"Ne-never better!" faltered Dick, game to the end.

Then his eyes closed once more, and unconsciousness had him again in its merciful grip.

But he was alive. He would recover. Monty knew that, and was so far satisfied. He had done all he could—all, and more than might have been expected of him.

He heard the back door of the house they had left smash open with a rending of wood. He heard the hoarse cries of the men who pursued him, heard them running, heard them climb the wall, and saw a bullet head come over the grimy bricks on the far side of the turgid canal.

He straightened and turned to run for it. He could do no more now for Dick Seton. His job was to save himself.

But there was a cry, a flash, a report, and something struck him violently on the arm. The force of it swung him round and flung him against the wall. He recoiled, and only just saved himself from falling into the canal. Then he steadied himself and ran for it along the towpath in a zigzag fashion.

The man on the garden wall went on blazing away with his revolver, but he never registered another hit. Monty saw to that.

Other men leapt into the water, swam

across, and clambered out on the towing-path. Two bent over Dick. Two more raced after Monty, calling to him to halt.

By that time the sun was sinking in the west behind the factory chimneys. A haze rose from the surface of the canal and persisted in all the hollows and amongst the clustered houses. The light was dim and uncertain.

Monty felt thankful for that. It might help. He could feel warm blood trickling down his arm to his hand, but he could move his arm, even if it hurt, so he reckoned that his wound was not serious. He couldn't help it if it was.

He had to escape. If he were caught, then all chances of the British Government obtaining the missing formula would be gone for ever.

He had no idea what to do or where to go. The headquarters of the British Secret Service in that town was in the hands of the enemy. He had to trust to himself alone now. It was checkmate, with a vengeance. Kahn's men were close on his heels, he was in the centre of an enemy town, with only himself to rely upon.

For Dick Seton recapture meant simply rigorous imprisonment. Despite Kahn's threats to have him shot if he did not reveal the contents of the missing formula, Monty knew the Germans would still hope the Britisher would speak—they would hold him, rather than kill him.

But Monty knew that his fate would be short and sharp. He was ranked as a spy, and he could not really blame the enemy if they placed him at once with his back to a wall and shot him. The Government officials at home would sigh, remark that they had lost a good man, and forget him. They could do nothing else about it.

In addition to all that, and of far more importance, was the fact that now Seton had been recaptured the only chance of the British Government ever receiving the missing formula rested on Monty escaping.

For that reason he redoubled his efforts. He risked a glance over his shoulder, and saw that more men had crossed the canal. One remained kneeling by the unconscious Dick Seton. Three were running furiously along the towing-path after the fugitive, while another straddled the garden wall of the house they had left, blazing away with his revolver in a reckless fashion.

Monty ran in zigzag fashion, and the bullets went wide. The light was far too dim by that time to make marksmanship very accurate. But if the bullet missed, the reports aroused the whole neighbourhood, and it may have been that the enemy counted on this.

Monty sought a way of escape. The towing-path stretched away ahead of him in a straight line beside the muddy canal, dwindling away in the misty distance. There was no possible chance of concealment if he kept running to the end of the canal, wherever that might be.

Consequently, the first wall he came to beside the path he seized upon eagerly. He

had to get away amongst the houses and hide, if he could. He leapt up at the seven-foot wall, grabbed the coping with his fingers, and hauled. A bullet flattened against the bricks within six inches of his head. The next instant he was on the top, lying there prone for a second. Then he rolled over and dropped on the other side.

"Got you!" gasped a guttural voice almost in his ear.

There was a working man grappling with him. But Monty made no attempt to shake off those clawing hands. Instead he just allowed himself to crumple up as if the fall had dazed him. The hands failed to get a real good hold on his wet clothes, and he slid away a few feet, came upright with remarkable alacrity, and attacked the newcomer.

The man had obviously heard the shots and was out to win favour with the military authorities by stopping the fugitive. That the fugitive would attack him he had not considered for a moment, and Monty gave him no time to realise what was happening. A clenched fist struck him squarely on the jaw and shot him backwards half-senseless.

Monty turned and fled. He found himself on a stretch of waste ground. On the side he had left was the wall bordering the canal towing-path. On two sides were the grim walls of factories. On the fourth side was a six-foot wall, on the other side of which were arc lights just beginning to glow in the dusk of evening.

The last thing Monty wanted then was light, yet that wall represented his only way off that waste ground. He headed for the wall, despair beginning to grip at his heart.

Then from the other side came the sound of a great commotion, and he saw the steam and smoke from a railway engine. Above the wall appeared the top of a locomotive, that was apparently hauling a goods train at a fair speed.

Monty increased his speed. Railways meant sentries and patrols in the ordinary way, but now that train showed him a possible means of escape, and he was prepared to try for it, even if he failed.

His strength was leaving him. He badly needed rest. Already his pursuers had scaled the wall from the canal towing-path and were thundering after him with hoarse cries.

Puffing and panting, Monty charged at the wall, gave a terrific leap, and clawed at the top, pulling himself up and over. He had to drop as close to the bricks as he could, for there was a line of stationary trucks on the metals close to the wall, and the tops of them were flooded with light from a nearby standard.

Monty fell in a heap beside the trucks, then he crawled under them, hoping against hope that there was not an engine at one end liable to pull or push at the wrong moment and crush him to death under the wheels.

In that particular he was lucky. There was no engine attached to the trucks. He scrambled out on the other side, to see the laden trucks of the moving train speeding

along twenty yards from him. He ran towards the blurred lines, stumbling over sleepers and rusty metals, bruising his shins on point levers.

He was aware of an excruciating pain in his side. His heart was pumping as if it would burst, his lungs were almost on the verge of collapse.

But he nerved himself for the final effort. He saw the bulky shape of the last truck loom black against the garish rays of an arc lamp. He leapt madly up at the speeding thing. His body crashed against the wooden side, his fingers clawed at the grimy planks, and found no hold. His strength had petered out at the last minute. He had not leapt high enough.

He cried out aloud in his despair. He fell, slithering against the wooden side and the iron undercarriage of the truck, then dropped with a crash on the permanent way. It was a mercy he fell clear of the thundering wheels.

As it was, the fall shook him considerably. He raised his bruised head and stared foolishly at the tail-lights of the speeding train. He had tried, and he had failed. He could scarcely realise it. He lay there barely half-conscious, trying to steady his reeling mind.

Then guttural shouts from the wall he had climbed aroused him to his danger. He scrambled to his feet and staggered away up the line towards the goods sidings.

The brilliant electric standards made the open ground as light as day, but they served also to cast dense shadows behind every platelayers' hut and every standing truck.

Monty was quick to take advantage of this fact. In the goods sidings there was a sporting chance of concealment, but nowhere else. He ran for all he was worth, taking risks which, under more normal conditions, he would have scorned.

He knew he was at the end of his tether. If he did not soon find some place in which to hide and rest, he would drop in his tracks, utterly exhausted.

As he ran he heard a shout, and, glancing sideways, saw an armed sentry on a goods platform on the far side of the mass of gleaming metals. The man blazed away with his rifle, but he couldn't shoot straight to save his life, although his lack of skill certainly saved Monty's life.

The bullets whined past his ears and over his head. He dived for the shelter of a line of trucks, raced round the end, and away in the dense shadows they formed. He was racing along a corridor between two lines of goods trucks. There seemed no end to them, but they were all open, empty trucks, offering no reasonable concealment at all in the event of a thorough and organised search.

Still dissatisfied of his chances there, Monty held on as best he could, but even his vision was blurred and uncertain now. He staggered as he ran. He saw a larger truck, and darted round one end of it. On the other side the door of it was open. He felt suddenly

cold, but that was only natural. It was a refrigerating truck, laden with frozen carcasses of meat.

But by the open door stood a man in the dingy uniform of a minor railway official. He was calmly lighting his pipe. He lowered the match to stare at Monty.

"Wie gohts?" he inquired, as calmly as if he were meeting an acquaintance on the street in broad daylight.

Monty came to a swaying halt, not sure what to do. He ought to dart at the man and floor him, but he doubted his own strength now. Besides, the man was not trying to grab him, either, despite the fact that he must have heard the frantic shooting and the cries of the pursuers.

He stood there holding the match to his pipe. Then, with one quick movement, one hand left his pipe and moved the lapel of his uniform jacket, underneath which, in the flickering light of the match, Monty saw a green button!

He gasped, but there was no time to explain matters. The man jerked his head towards the door of the refrigerating van.

"Get in! Quickly!" he snapped in a whisper.

Monty scrambled as best he could, crawled to the far end amongst the terribly cold frozen carcasses, and lay still, puffing and panting and hoping that the wheezing of his over-wrought lungs could not be heard outside.

Through a chink between the horrible carcasses he could see the railway man. He was still lighting his pipe, with a hand as firm as a rock. It was amazing how long it took him to light that pipe. The pursuers found him still puffing away as if nothing had happened to alarm him.

They questioned him volubly, fiercely.

"Didn't you see anyone come this way?"

"No. If I had I'd have collared the man," he retorted angrily.

"But surely you heard the shots?"

"Yes. But I thought whoever you're chasing went down the line. Anyway, I've seen no one here. Try over the other side by the engine sheds and the coal dumps. He'd be sure to head that way."

"Ach, ja! The coal dumps. Forgot those!"

Monty sighed with relief. One green button had played him false that day, and he had to chance this one. But he knew now that he had found help when he had least expected it.

He allowed himself to relax. Dimly he realised that the pursuers had gone pounding away across the permanent way. The man with the green button behind his lapel was still lighting his pipe with a steady hand.

Then the terrible icy chill of the refrigerating van began to steal over Monty's senses and his brain reeled.

He came up with a jerk, however, at the sound of voices. One of the pursuers, more suspicious than the rest, had returned.

"Wait a bit, my friend," he said. "How

do we know he didn't dive into this van when your back was turned?"

The man with the green button laughed loudly.

"If he wants a nasty sort of death he'll get it in there," he retorted. "Poke your head in and feel the temperature. Would you hide in a place with the temperature below zero?"

"You mean——"

"I mean that no man could stay in there more than five minutes unless he wanted to be hauled out as dead as cold mutton—or as cold as dead mutton. Have it which way you like. But—if you have any doubts—well, get in and see for yourself."

For one awful moment Monty suspected treachery. The pursuer clambered up into the van and gazed about him. He made no attempt to advance farther than the doorway. He saw the carcasses hanging from the hooks, stiff, stark and frozen solid. The bitter chill stung his flesh and curdled the blood in his veins.

He backed out and clambered down again to the permanent way.

"You're right," he said. "Only a madman would hide in there."

He raced off into the gathering dusk, and the man with the green button chuckled with amusement as he went on lighting the pipe that actually had no tobacco in it!

But the danger past, the truth realised that this man was a true ally, was too much for Monty in his exhausted condition. The icy chill of the van gripped his brain, his head sagged forwards and he plunged into unconsciousness.

The Guard!

MONTY had dreams—pleasant dreams, too. He was dreaming that he lay on his feather bed in his luxurious West End flat in London. But the pleasure suddenly went. He had an idea that a terrible earthquake was shaking all London—or else it was an air raid, and a bomb had dropped in through his window, and he was being blown sky-high. He couldn't be sure which it was.

One thing only was certain. He was moving. His brain was too muddled for him to be sure what the movements were. There was a violent bump, and he was extremely cold.

Then he thought that he was back in bed again, and was pulling the covers over him. He was warmer, and the warmth set the blood coursing through his veins.

After that came more movement, and this time he thought he was in an aeroplane, but couldn't make out why he should think that. He hung limply, and was bumped this way and that, although the bumping did not hurt.

He came to rest, and whatever it was that had half smothered him was drawn away. He felt fresh air on his face, and a new kind of warmth. Then something was pressed to his lips. He drank a fiery liquid. It burnt his throat. He opened his eyes and stared up at

a strange face. It looked like a green button at first. He tried to cry out, but in a flash a hand was pressed over his mouth.

"Steady, old man!" sounded a quiet voice. "It'll all come back in a minute."

Monty blinked. He was beginning to remember that this was the man who had the green button behind the lapel of his jacket.

He lay still, and gradually he remembered everything.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"About a stone's throw from that refrigerating van," said the man. "If I'd have known you were so done up I'd never have told you to get in there. The cold got you. Another five minutes and you'd have been done for."

"Where else could I have hid?" asked Monty.

"Hanged if I know. We had to be quick. Ah, well, the van served, so we mustn't grumble."

"But—who are you?"

"Denton—sent here to help Bryant."

Monty sat up and gazed about him.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Where am I, exactly?"

"Platelayer's hut. It's foggy to-night. I'm working the fog signals, but traffic is not thick just now. Got a fire here, which helps. So long as no one comes along. If they do, get under the seat and I'll sit on you."

"It was luck, hitting up against you."

"Not all luck," said Denton. "I saw you try to jump on that train and miss it. I was running ahead of you. If there had been no other way I would have drawn off the pursuit."

"They'd have put you before a firing party," said Monty.

"We all take that chance," replied Denton.

Monty gripped his hand in sympathy and understanding.

"But what about Bryant?" he asked.

"Seton and I reached the house. The enemy were there. We got away by the skin of our teeth, but the canal was too much for Seton. They got him."

"Then the formula is lost completely," groaned Denton.

"It is not!" cried Monty, in hoarse whispers. "Seton had memorised it. He taught it to me. So long as one of us gets through—understand?"

Denton nodded thoughtfully.

"It isn't going to be easy," he remarked.

"Kahn knows now what the green buttons are for."

"How did he find out?" asked Monty.

"By sheer luck. It was this way. Bryant had been busy in the barracks here. He has been posing as a hawker and sells odds and ends to the soldiers—postcards, buttons, tapes, cottons—things like that. He heard talk about the green buttons taken off Seton in Arnstein Castle, and how an officer was sand-bagged one night and had one button taken from him. That meant that there was still another button missing. It made us both nervous, I can tell you.

"And then, early this morning, while going to the barracks to sell things, Bryant was run down by a military lorry, and badly injured. I went to the hospital with him. He'll be months before he can get about again. But, in his delirium, he began to talk in English!"

"He gave the show away?"

"Yes," Denton nodded. "You can't blame poor Bryant. He wasn't in a fit condition to know what he was saying. I heard him, so did the doctor. I did the only thing I could do, I bolted from that hospital and had to knock down the doctor to get away scot free. But I dared not return to the house, and within an hour Kahn's men were there, and I guessed they had a button. I saw Heinrich Kahn in the town myself. At the moment I am taking the place of a railway man who lies drugged and tied up in his own cottage. I was hoping to intercept you and stop you going to the house, but I was just too late, but I heard the firing, and did what I could."

"Which saved me," added Monty grimly. "They've got Seton, but he'll only get rigorous imprisonment. The formula might still reach home. Listen, Denton—no one will blame Bryant for what has happened. It is the fortune of war. In any case, we need not worry so much because I got the green button back off the man who admitted us. The two buttons taken from Seton have been recaptured."

But Denton shook his head.

"The danger is not over. Heinrich Kahn has a third button."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Monty.

"But I have seen it. I was in disguise, watching the hospital when he arrived to listen to poor Bryant's ravings. I saw him leave, and he was chuckling triumphantly, talking to another officer, and showing him two green buttons. One of those you took from the man in the house, but that still leaves a third which Kahn himself has."

Monty stared at the fire in the bucket.

"Where on earth did he get it from, then?" he muttered.

"I can't tell you that. But we must be on our guard."

"I've got to think this over," said Monty.

Denton took down a basket from a hook on the side of the hut and produced food and tea in a flash.

"Better eat while you're thinking. There goes the signal. I'll have to take off the percussion caps on the fog signals."

He went off to his levers a few yards outside the hut. Monty watched him working, but he was thinking of other matters.

A passenger train came thundering out of the fog, passed on the near line of metals, and slackened speed as it approached the station.

Denton worked once more to replace the percussion caps on the lines, then came back to the hut, jerking his head in the direction of the train that had gone.

"The North Express," he said. "It stays here an hour. I reckon that if Seton is fit

to be moved he will travel with Kahn on that train."

"Going north?" queried Monty. "Surely they would either take him to Berlin or back to Arnstein?"

Denton shook his head.

"They have a special camp now—only opened a week ago—set in the marshes at the back of Danzig, although not inside the borders of Danzig, which is a free town. No one can escape from this new camp unless they know the secret passage through the marshes. It is designed for prisoners who attempt escape, or must be kept safely. You get me?"

Monty rose to his feet and steadied himself.

"Another five minutes and I'll feel more like myself," he said.

"That refrigerating van nearly finished you. Your clothes were like boards when I hauled you out. I had to get you into a sack and carry you here as if you were potatoes. The sentry watched me all the time. His beat is only twenty yards from here, so we've got to be careful."

Monty, again, was thinking of other things.

"If Kahn and Seton travel north on that train, then I must go with them," he said. "In any case, I've got to go north. Listen, Denton. Can you pass the word round to the others?"

"Bryan's way was to get out on the railway track, two miles north of here, where the line passes through a wood, and then to tap the telephone wires. He could talk, then to Smithers, who is signalman at Kopfe, twenty miles away—"

"On the same line?"

"This train will pass his box," said Denton.

"Good. Now, listen. Can you get me a railway uniform?"

"As a guard, for instance?"

"Yes. Anything so long as I can get on the train without exciting suspicion."

"Don't know that I can. I got this uniform by putting the real owner to sleep."

"Could I board the train?"

"And hide in the luggage van? That ought to be easy, as you won't have to pass the cordon at the ticket barriers."

"Right. I'll handle that myself. You leave this post. Get along to the wood, tap the wires and talk to Smithers at Kopfe. Tell him I am travelling north. The password must be altered. The challenge will be: Is it raining. The answer is: No, it is fine. Got that?"

Denton repeated it, word for word, and Monty nodded.

"Smithers is to pass that along, and also to send word that either Seton or I will be on the rocks to-morrow morning at sunrise. We may both be there, but I can't guarantee that. One of us, though, must be there, and everything must be ready for us. Understand?"

"Yes," said Denton. "And afterwards?"

"You and Smithers had better vanish. Go to Berlin—to headquarters. But ask Smithers to make the train slacken speed at his box. He can keep his distant signal at danger. That will do all I need."

Denton nodded and poked his head out of the hut.

"The train's in at the platform. The soldiers are searching it, as they always do. They start at the back and work up towards the engine. I'll clear off right away, and the fog signals can take care of themselves. I don't expect another train for an hour or more. Mind the sentry on the wall at the back of the hut when you leave. Good-bye, sir—and good luck!"

"Good luck to you," Monty gripped his hand, and Denton vanished into the darkness outside the hut.

(Monty makes one last desperate bid for freedom. Is he successful. See next week's chapters of this stirring Great War Story.)

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