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ST. FRANK'S IN
SOUTH AFRICA!

A corking long complete school-adventure yarn featuring
the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 141.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

January 12th, 1929.



Umlosi seized one of the ruffians and, lifting him above his head, threw him with terrific force on to the table. "Shoot him!" snarled Vanhoek, who was struggling with Nelson Lee; and he withdrew his own revolver.

The Second Yarn of Our Amazing New Adventure Series!

ST FRANK'S IN SOUTH AFRICA!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

Edward Oswald Handforth is never content unless he's mixed up in a lot of thrilling adventures. In this week's fine story he certainly gets his fill, what with railway bandits and exciting happenings on a mysterious ostrich farm in the heart of the South African veldt!

CHAPTER 1.

Nelson Lee's Quest!

CLANG-clang!
 "Rats!" said Handforth, of Study D. "That's the bell for bed!"
 He rose from an easy-chair in the Remove Common-room, and Church and McClure, his faithful chums, rose, too. They were all dressed in white flannels, with open necks—and although it was a January night this attire was not really unsuitable.

"Let's go out and have a breather before turning in," suggested Nipper, the Remove captain. "Coming, you fellows?"

"Begad, rather," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

A number of juniors drifted out of the Common-room, and went out on to the wide promenade deck. The twinkling lights of the city of Durban greeted them, with the rippling waters of the great harbour near at hand. Overhead the velvet sky was studded with a myriad twinkling stars. The air was warm, with just a gentle breeze.

"January!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, slightly different from the good old winter at St. Frank's, what? The poor old lads at home are probably wallowing about in poisonous masses of mud."

"Or snow," said Vivian Travers languidly. "Well, well! I rather think that we fellows have got the best of it."

The "Common-room" was really one of the big lounges of the liner, St. Francis, and she was at present at rest in Durban Harbour, South Africa. The School Ship was making a brief call at this port, on her way to Australia.

Half the school had come on this trip—all the occupants of the Ancient House and the Modern House. Ever since the beginning of the trip the school routine had been carried on in exactly the same way as at St. Frank's. There were class-rooms, studies, laboratories—everything, in fact, exactly the same as at home.

It was all an experiment on the part of the St. Frank's governors. They were taking the fellows on a world trip, in order to give them first-hand geographical education.

Later, no doubt, the other half of the school—the West House and the East House—would go on a similar voyage.

The great vessel had been in Durban for three days, and it had been very much of a holiday period, for a big cricket match had been played at Kingsmead, the great International sports ground in the heart of Durban. St. Frank's had won that memorable match by a single run, and, in consequence, there was much jubilation on board.

Yet, at the same time, a good many of the fellows were looking concerned and worried.

Lord Dorrimore, the famous millionaire peer, was the cause. A good many of the St. Frank's juniors looked upon "Dorrie" as one of their own particular pals. He was always so genial, so friendly, so thoroughly boyish. Moreover, Dorrie and the St. Frank's chaps had had many stirring adventures together.

Before arriving at Durban, news had reached the liner that Lord Dorrimore, accompanied by Mr. Hobart Manners, was attempting to make a non-stop flight from the Cape to Cairo; and they were using the gigantic monoplane which the St. Frank's boys knew so well—since it was the one which had carried them to India during the summer holidays.

A fleet of these 'planes was being got ready, so that a regular passenger service could be inaugurated. But on this first trip Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners were going alone, carrying only a huge mail and a load of general cargo. Dorrie's aim had been to land at Cairo to re-fuel, and then fly straight on to London in another non-stop flight.

But something had gone wrong.

When the St. Francis reached Durban, the school ship was startled to hear that Lord Dorrimore had completely disappeared! He and Mr. Manners and the giant aeroplane—known as the Wanderer of the Skies—had failed to turn up at Johannesburg.

She had started her flight well, she had been observed at various towns. And then, during the night, all trace of her had been lost. She had been missing for three or four days now, and still there came no word. Mysteriously, unaccountably, this great liner of the heavens had vanished!

It was only natural that Nipper and Handforth and a number of other St. Frank's boys should feel concerned—and worried. Dorrie was such a good sport—such a real corker. It was awful to think that he had met his death on some lonely mountain top, perhaps—or in some fever-ridden valley. The strange part about it all was that the great machine could have disappeared so utterly, without leaving any trace.

"It's an absolute mystery," Nipper was saying, as he leaned over the starboard rail, with Tregellis-West and Watson by his side. "If Dorrie had got off his course, surely he would have been spotted at different towns or settlements? But the whole Transvaal and the whole of the Orange Free State have been scoured, and no clue has turned up!"

"And we're sailing for Adelaide to-night!" growled Tommy Watson. "Why can't we stay on a bit?"

"Even Dorrie's fate can't interfere with the general schedule, old man," said Nipper, shaking his head. "Besides, what could we do, even if we did stay here? There are thousands of people, all over the Union, on the look-out for news. If they can't locate the missing 'plane, it's pretty certain that we can't!"

"It's frightfully upsettin', dear old boys—it is, really," said Sir Montie dolefully. "I'm afraid there's not much chance of poor old Dorrie bein' still alive."

"And yet Umlosi is absolutely certain that Dorrie is alive," said Nipper keenly. "And Umlosi doesn't make many mistakes, you know! His instinct is something more than we can fathom. It's—it's mysterious. I tell you, I feel a bit desperate. The gov'nor's talking about staying behind, so that he can go on a search for old Dorrie. And we've got to carry on—to sail to Australia! It seems to me that it's all wrong!"

Nipper spoke with feeling. He did not want to go ahead with the ship—knowing that Nelson Lee was to stay behind in South Africa. Nipper was all in favour of remaining behind, too.

As for going to bed without seeing Nelson Lee again, the very idea was ridiculous. Nelson Lee, as Nipper knew, was now in his own cabin, holding a conference. For this matter had to be decided at once. The St. Francis was sailing late that night, while everybody slept.

Would the famous schoolmaster-detective sail with the school ship, or would he remain behind, to search for his friend, Lord Dorrimore?



CHAPTER 2.

Umlosi's Instinct!

THE gathering in Nelson Lee's roomy cabin was a distinguished one. At home, Lee was the Housemaster of the Ancient House, but on board the St. Francis he was in sole charge of the trip. In a word, he was the Head!

The other gentlemen in the cabin were Mr. Arthur Stockdale, the Housemaster of the Modern House; Professor Sylvester Tucker, the science master; Mr. Langton, of the Sixth; Mr. Pycraft of the Fourth; and Mr. Norton, of the Remove. The latter was a newcomer, but the Remove rather liked him.

"We quite appreciate your anxiety to search for your friend, Lord Dorrimore," Mr. Stockdale was saying. "And really, Mr. Lee, there is no reason why you should not stay behind, if you wish. I will gladly take nominal charge of the party until you join us again."

"Thank you, Mr. Stockdale," said Lee quietly. "If I decide to remain, it will be easily possible for me to catch the next boat to Adelaide. I shall only arrive a week or two after the main party. And I really do feel that I would like to stay in South Africa for a bit—at least, until something definite is discovered."

Mr. Horace Pycraft sniffed.

"If you ask me, sir, you will merely be wasting your time," he said. "There is not the shadow of a doubt that Lord Dorrimore is dead. Obviously, his machine has crashed."

"I am sorry to contradict you, Mr. Pycraft, but I cannot see how you arrive at that conclusion," said Nelson Lee. "We have received no news of a crash—"

"But the machine has vanished," said Mr. Pycraft. "It set off from Capetown, was observed at various points, and then it was seen no more. Is it not clear that the aircraft came down in some isolated spot—and probably out of control?"

"I must admit, Mr. Lee, that I am inclined to agree with Mr. Pycraft," said Mr. Stockdale slowly. "The aeroplane was equipped with a very efficient wireless, and if the descent had been a safe one surely Lord Dorrimore would have wirelessly his position. This utter silence indicates, more than anything else, that disaster has occurred."

Nelson Lee studied the map which was spread out before him on the desk.

"I have been wondering if the machine could have come down in the wilds of the Kalahari Desert," he said thoughtfully. "If the machine, through some error of judgment on the pilot's part, turned north-west after passing over Bloemfontein, it would almost inevitably find itself over the Kalahari Desert."

"Then they are lost, indeed," said Mr. Langton, shaking his head.

"Yet I cannot see how such an error of judgment could have been made," said Nelson Lee. "I am only suggesting this as a mere possibility. We know that the machine was observed over Bloemfontein, but after that no sign of it was seen. Supposing it flew into the region of the Kalahari Desert? A forced landing might easily have been made, and, conceivably, the wireless apparatus was disabled. I certainly do not give up hope."

"Even if the aeroplane descended in the Kalahari Desert?" asked Mr. Stockdale, in surprise.

"Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners may have realised that there was no hope of them getting back to civilisation," said Lee. "Their only course, therefore, was to remain, hoping that rescue would come. Any attempt, of course, to trek out of the Kalahari on foot would be doomed to failure."

"Is this desert so bad, then?" asked Mr. Norton mildly.

"Until recently the Kalahari has been more or less impenetrable," replied Nelson

Lee. "But last year it was crossed by motor lorries—a very risky undertaking indeed. It is a waste of sand and scrub, and practically the only occupants are the Bushmen, probably the lowest form of human being now alive."

"And yet I feel somewhat sorry for the Bushmen," said Mr. Stockdale thoughtfully. "For many years they have been harried by the white men in all parts of Africa—particularly south of the Zambesi—and the Kalahari is their last refuge. I understand that a rather wonderful ranching country has been found in the heart of this desert?"

"Yes," replied Nelson Lee. "Vast plains of grassland—with water just below the surface. It would support great numbers of white settlers—if only some method could be discovered of getting over the waste of difficult desert which surrounds this sanctuary."

"Sanctuary?" repeated Mr. Langton.

"Yes," replied Lee. "It is the sanctuary of the Bushmen—and of big game. Herds of giraffes are to be found in the heart of the Kalahari Desert. Zebra, wildebeest, antelope, lions, elephants. All are to be found in the Kalahari."

"Not a very pleasant spot to drop into, by the sound of it," said Mr. Pycraft.

"The country is also infested by the huge black mamba snake," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You are quite right, Mr. Pycraft; it is not a pleasant country to drop into. And, as I have said, there is a distinct chance that Lord Dorrimore's aeroplane has made a forced landing in the heart of this desert. It would account for the absence of news—"

"Thou art wrong, Umtagati!" rumbled a deep voice.

They all looked round, and found Umlosi, the great Kutana chieftain, in the doorway.

"I am glad you have come, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "It is mainly owing to your presence in Durban that I am considering this rescue trip."

"Wau! Think not of the great wasteland country," said Umlosi. "Lord Dorrimore, my father, is not there. In my dreams I have seen him amidst civilised surroundings. There are enemies. He is not far distant, Umtagati."

During that afternoon Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's fellows had been astonished to see Umlosi—and they had been struck by Umlosi's great confidence. He was convinced that Lord Dorrimore was alive and safe. For years Umlosi had shared perils with the sporting peer, and now that Dorrie was in trouble Umlosi had come to help him. If he had been nearer to his own country, he would have mobilised the entire Kutana-land army to help in the search.

But Kutana-land was thousands of miles north, and Umlosi, in this emergency, had urged Nelson Lee to throw himself heart and soul into the quest for the missing plane.

And Umlosi's instinct was unerring!



CHAPTER 3.

The Decision!

UMLOSI did not claim to be in any way abnormal. Yet undoubtedly there was something remarkably strange about him. On many occasions Nelson Lee had had positive proof that Umlosi's instinct was as reliable as the tides. It was no mere guesswork on his part. When Umlosi's "snake" told him anything, it could be looked upon as a fact.

Umlosi was a warrior—a valiant fighter of the old school. Durban did not suit him. He preferred to be up in the wilds, in the forest regions, where there was a chance of getting some fighting.

"Thou art talking of the Kalahari Desert," said Umlosi scornfully. "Wau! Cease this idle talk, Umtagati. It is bad talk. It is needless talk. N'Kose, my father, is near at hand."

"How do you know this?" asked Mr. Stockdale curiously.

"I know not how I know—but I know," replied Umlosi.

"That's all very well," said Mr. Pycraft, with a sniff. "But you cannot expect us to believe——"

"I have faith in Umlosi, at all events," broke in Nelson Lee. "You think, then, Umlosi, that it would be advisable to dismiss the idea of penetrating the Kalahari Desert?"

"'Twould be a waste of time, my master," said the Kutana chief. "The ship that flies was seen over Bloemfontein. It was not seen at Johannesburg—or even at Kroonstad. 'Tis easy. For the ship that flies came to earth in the night, between Bloemfontein and Kroonstad. Perhaps some miles west—perhaps some miles east. But 'twas there that Lord Dorrimore, my father, came to earth. And he lives. He awaits help."

"Much as I would like to believe you, Umlosi, I find it difficult to do so," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "The region you speak of is absolutely civilised. There are white settlers everywhere. Towns—railways—telegraphs. If the great ship that flies had descended anywhere there news would have been received of its landing."

"Yet no news has come," said Umlosi in his rumbling voice. "There has been evil work, Umtagati. And thou, the wizard, must seek out the evil. I have seen not, and no man has spoken to me. Yet this I know."

"You mean, you guess?" asked Mr. Langton.

"I know!" insisted Umlosi quietly. "My snake has told me so. And in my dreams I have seen strange things. I have seen N'Kose, my father, imprisoned with his companion. Therefore, Umtagati, I urge that you should lose no time."

Nelson Lee turned to the others.

"I must go on this trip," he said quietly. "I have had too many proofs of Umlosi's unerring instinct. He knows what he is talking about—although he cannot explain. I shall take the night train to Ladysmith and Kroonstad. From that centre we will start working. Alone I should not have much chance of success, but with Umlosi with me it will be different. Gentlemen, I cannot expect you to understand my faith in this man. You probably think that I am going on a wild-goose chase. But I know differently."

"Go, by all means, Mr. Lee," said Mr. Stockdale. "You may be quite certain that everything will be perfectly normal aboard ship. And you will join us at Adelaide later?"

"The very moment I can," promised Nelson Lee.

And, except for a little further discussion, during which time many details were thrashed out, the matter was settled.

When Nelson Lee came out on deck with Umlosi, he was immediately faced by Nipper and Handforth and Travers and a number of others.

"What does this mean?" asked Nelson Lee severely. "You ought to have been in bed long ago!"

"We couldn't go to bed, sir, without seeing you again," said Nipper. "Are you sailing with us to-night, or are you staying behind?"

"I am staying behind—to look for Dorrie," replied Lee. "Mr. Stockdale will be in charge of the school, and I will join you at Adelaide a week or two after you arrive."

"Have you heard any definite news about old Dorrie, then, sir?"

"No definite news, but Umlosi is convinced that Dorrie is alive," replied Lee. "I am afraid that Mr. Stockdale and the other masters cannot understand my decision."

"But I can, sir," said Nipper, nodding. "Umlosi's a marvel. If he says that Dorrie is alive, you can bet your boots that he *is* alive!"

"Why shouldn't we all go to look for him?" suggested Handforth brilliantly. "Why not keep the ship here for a week or two, so that we can go into the jungle on this search?"

"Jungle?" said Nipper. "There's no jungle, ass!"

"Well, into the deep, impenetrable forests, then," said Handforth.

"You'll all sail to-night!" said Nelson Lee decisively. "Apparently you boys think that this is a holiday trip. It is nothing of the sort. You are at school—in just the same way as if you were at St. Frank's. I can't allow any such latitude."

"But it's a special occasion, sir," urged Tommy Watson.

"Special occasion or not, the school must carry on," said Nelson Lee. "My own absence will not be noticed much. During the voyage from here to Adelaide lessons will be given daily, in exactly the same manner as at St. Frank's. To-morrow the school will resume its ordinary routine—and a very good

thing, too. Visits to these interesting ports are not conducive to hard study."

"But we've had some good cricket, sir," said Handforth brightly.

"Never mind about the cricket," said Nipper. "Old Dorrie is alive—and I'm jolly glad that you're staying behind, gov'nor, to go in search. If you've got Umlosi with you, then everything will be all serene."

"You need not worry about me in the least," smiled Nelson Lee. "Well, boys, I'll bid you good-night. You had better go to your cabins at once."

"Good-night, sir—and the best of luck!" chorused the juniors.

And, after another brief delay, everybody went to bed.



CHAPTER 4.

Nipper's Decision.

YOU here again, young 'un?" Nelson Lee turned away from the rail as he heard a footstep near him. He found Nipper there, and Nipper was looking eager and excited.

"I thought I'd steal back, gov'nor," he murmured. "Look here, why can't I come with you?" he added, coming directly to the point. "Oh, do dry up, sir! I know you're going to say that it's impossible and impracticable, but listen!"

"I am afraid I cannot listen," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I realise your eagerness, Nipper, and I am sorry that you can't come with me."

"I'm not like the other chaps, sir," urged Nipper. "You and I have been through all sorts of adventures together. I—I mean, you're my gov'nor. This is a bit like a detective case—I mean, in search of a missing man. Why can't I come? The other fellows will understand."

But the famous schoolmaster-detective shook his head.

"You are the captain of the Remove Form, Nipper," he said. "This is school time—not holiday time. You must remain. I'm sorry, but I must be very firm on this point."

"I thought you would be, sir," grunted Nipper. "Oh, well, I tried hard, anyway. When are you going to start off, sir?" he added casually.

"Almost at once."

"Going by car?"

"No; by train," replied Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "There is a night express which leaves in about a couple of hours' time. Umlosi and I will travel via Ladysmith, and we shall probably leave the train at Kroonstad Junction. For some inexplicable reason, Umlosi seems to think that Dorrie is not very far from that centre."

"What's the country like there, sir?"

"I don't know. But I have been given to understand that it is fairly open—a cattle

country," said Lee. "Maize is grown, too, I believe—in large quantities."

"It seems rummy to me," said Nipper, shaking his head. "If Dorrie came to earth in a place like that, he must have been seen. Yet that tract of land has been scoured by aeroplanes and by motor-cars and I don't know what else! And there's not a trace!"

"It is all very mysterious," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "If Umlosi fails me, I shall lose faith in his precious instinct. Yet I cannot believe that the old fellow will be so badly at fault. It's no good trying to understand how he arrives at his conclusions. Well, Nipper, you'd better get to bed."

"Yes, sir," said Nipper reluctantly. "It's a dirty trick, though. I've got to sail off, and go right across the Indian Ocean to Adelaide with all the other chaps, and you will be here in South Africa—"

"That's enough—that's enough!" murmured Nelson Lee, with a chuckle. "School comes first, Nipper."

But Nipper did not think so, and this was made very clear a little later on when he joined Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West in their cabin.

"Chuck it!" said Nipper, as he saw that his chums were undressing.

"Chuck what?" asked Watson.

"Get into your togs again," said Nipper briskly. "Better still, change from those flannels and get into something a bit less conspicuous. We're going on a journey."

"What!" gasped Tommy excitedly. "You—you mean that Mr. Lee has agreed—"

"The gov'nor's agreed to nothing," broke in Nipper.

"Then, begad, what are you gettin' at, dear old boy?" asked Sir Montie, open-eyed.

"The gov'nor thinks that he's going off on this hunt for Dorrie without us—and I think something else!" replied Nipper grimly. "The nerve of it! Leaving us behind!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Tommy Watson, staring. "You—you don't mean—"

"Yes, I do!" said Nipper, with a stubborn set of his jaw. "We're all tremendously fond of Dorrie, and if he's in danger we want to go to his help. We've been in danger sometimes—and he's come to ours!"

"That's true, Nipper, old boy," said Sir Montie. "But, begad, there's liable to be a frightful bust up later on, isn't there? I mean, Mr. Lee won't allow us to go with him, will he?"

Nipper grinned.

"You bet he'll allow us!" he said. "He'll want to keep his eye on us, and the only way for him to do that will be to take us with him. Don't forget, the ship will have sailed—"

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Tommy.

"We'll take care not to allow ourselves to be seen until the train has got well on the way," proceeded Nipper. "Then it'll be too late for us to be sent back. The boat is sailing at about midnight, and we shall sup-

posedly be in bed. Nobody will suspect anything. And in the morning it'll be too late."

"I say, it's a bit thick, isn't it?" asked Watson dubiously.

"I mean it to be thick!" replied Nipper. "It's the only thing to be done. We're going after Dorrie—we're going to help in this search."

A dreamy look came into Sir Montie's face. "Begad! The other fellows will be as mad as hatters when they discover that we're missin'," he observed. "They'll kick themselves for not havin' thought of the same idea."

"Supposing we're spotted?" asked Watson excitedly.

"We're not going to be spotted—and there's not much chance of it, either," said Nipper. "It'll be easy enough for us to sneak ashore. Then it'll be just as easy to get to the station. We know where it is—quite near the post office and the Town Hall."

"What about money for our fares?" asked Watson.

"I've got plenty," replied Nipper.

"Same here," nodded Sir Montie. "No need to worry about money."

"And if the gov'nor wants to be so jolly strict on lessons, he can act as our Form-master when we're travelling on the regular liner from here to Adelaide—after we've found old Dorrie," grinned Nipper. "We'll make up for lost time—he'll see to that, I expect! Anyhow, we're going on this trip!"

And Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West enthusiastically entered into the spirit of the thing.



CHAPTER 5.

Handforth, Too!

"THE night train!" said Handforth dreamily.

"Eh?"

"Which?"

Church and

McClure, who were undressing in Cabin D, looked at their leader in wonder. Handforth was standing at the open port, with the night breeze ruffling his mop of unruly hair. His eyes were filled with a fixed determination.

"Why not?" he said interrogatively. "I don't see any reason why it couldn't be done!"

"What are you babbling about, Handy?" asked Church. "What's that you were saying about the night train?"

"Nothing!" replied Handforth, with a start.

"Thinking about Mr. Lee, I suppose?" said McClure. "Well, you'd better forget him. He's going off in search of Dorrie, and I jolly well hope that he's successful."

"There's been a lot of talk about Dorrie," said Handforth coldly. "but what about Mr. Manners? It's all Dorrie! Nothing but

Dorrie! And yet Mr. Manners has vanished, too."

"That's true enough," admitted Church. "Still, Dorrie is the main one——"

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Dorrie has always been a reckless sort of chap. He'll never die a natural death—he's too adventurous. But Mr. Manners is different. He's an engineer—and he was practically pitchforked into this flight by Dorrie."

"Don't talk rubbish!" said McClure impatiently. "Dorrie and Mr. Manners went into it together. Dorrie supplied all the capital to build the aeroplane, but Mr. Manners designed it, so it was only natural that he should go on the first Cape to Cairo trip."

"But why bemoan Dorrie's fate, and leave Mr. Manners out in the cold?" asked Handforth accusingly. "Think of poor old Irene, at the Moor View School at home! Mr. Manners is her father——"

"By Jingo, yes!" said Church, with a glance at Mac.

They understood now. Handforth naturally gave far more thought to Mr. Manners than to Lord Dorrimore. He was very keen on Irene Manners, and it was only natural that he should be filled with wild anxiety regarding her father's disappearance.

"Thank goodness she doesn't know anything about it!" said Handforth suddenly. "That's the only point that cheers me up."

"What do you mean—she doesn't know anything about it?" asked Church, staring. "Do you think we're in the middle of the Borneo Jungle, or somewhere like that?"

"Eh?"

"I'll bet all the London newspapers are full of the affair," said Church. "Great headlines across the pages—'No News of Missing 'Plane'—Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Hobart Manners Vanish Off the Face of the Earth'—'Hope Dwindling.' They're the kind of headlines that are appearing in the English papers to-day."

Handforth looked blank.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "I—I suppose you're right! Then—then Irene must know all about it?"

"Naturally she knows," said McClure. "Poor old girl! She must be worrying her pretty head off!"

Handforth compressed his lips.

"That settles it, then!" he said fiercely. "I hadn't quite made up my mind before—but I've made it up now! I'm going!"

"You're going?" said Church. "Going where?"

"I mean, I'm not going!" said Handforth hastily. "It's no good you chaps questioning me, because I'm not going to tell you anything! Understand?"

"Right-ho!" said Church promptly. "We don't want to be inquisitive. Phew! It's pretty warm in this cabin, you know. I think Durban is a ripping town, but you can't call it a cool spot at this time of the year."



Nipper found himself confronted by Nelson Lee, and Nelson Lee was looking very grim and very angry. "Nipper! What does this mean? What are you doing here?" the schoolmaster-detective snapped.

"They're dotty down here!" said Handforth disparagingly. "Fancy having the summer in January!"

He spoke as though the good people of South Africa ordered the seasons to their own liking.

"Well, anyhow, I've found out that Mr. Lee's leaving on the night train," continued Handforth gloatingly. "A jolly good thing I made inquiries. Plenty of time yet." He turned, and looked at his chums. "Well, aren't you chaps going to get into bed?" he added. "Better hurry up!"

"Why" asked McClure.

"It's after lights-out—that's why!"

"Aren't you coming to bed, too?" asked Church.

"Yes, of course—that is to say, no," replied Handforth hurriedly. "I—I— Well, the fact is, I don't feel much like sleeping. I think I'll get dressed in some different togs, and go for a stroll ashore."

"That's a wonderful idea!" said Church. "Have you forgotten that the ship is sailing at about midnight?"

"All the better."

"What!"

"Once I'm left behind, it'll be too late to —" Handforth paused, and started.

"You needn't try to pump me!" he added gruffly. "I'm not going to tell you of my plan."

"Your plan!" said Church, wide-eyed.

"My plan!" insisted Handforth. "It's like Mr. Lee's nerve to think that he can go off in search of Mr. Manners and leave me behind! Still, you needn't question me—"

"Hold him!" gasped Mac. "Grab him, Churchy! The silly ass is talking about following Mr. Lee—and going on this hunt."

"He's mad!" said Church. "Handy, you mustn't have any dotty ideas like this! If you go after Mr. Lee, he'll only bring you back by the ear!"

Handforth looked dumbfounded.

"Who—who told you that I was going after Mr. Lee?" he asked breathlessly.

"Cheese it!" said Church. "You've been telling us all the time. And it can't be done, Handy!"

"Can't it?" said Edward Oswald. "You'll see whether it can or not! Oh, well! Perhaps it's just as well that you fellows have tumbled to the wheeze."

"It is just as well," agreed McClure. "We're going to lock the door, and we're going to tie you in your bed, and —"

"In fact, it'll be all the better," added Handforth firmly. "There's no telling what you fatheads will get up to if I leave you on board by yourselves. So you're coming with me!"



CHAPTER 6.

Quite a Party!

FOR a moment or two Church and McClure stood silent. They could hardly credit that their leader was serious. Yet a glance at his resolute face told them the truth. He meant every word of what he was saying!

"Great Scott!" breathed Church. "You—you mean that we're going to slip ashore, and go with Mr. Lee on this hunt for poor old Dorrie?"

"Or this hunt for Irene's father!" corrected Handforth.

"It's the same thing," said Church. "Ye gods and little fishes! I thought it was a crazy idea at first—but, now I come to think of it, it's not so bad. The ship will sail, and we shan't be missed until the morning. Then Mr. Lee will be compelled to keep us with him until he follows on, in the ordinary liner."

"Exactly!" grinned Handforth. "That's the whole wheeze. Of course, we mustn't let Mr. Lee see us—and we shall be in Lady-smith by the morning."

"Good old Dorrie!" murmured McClure. "It's really up to us, isn't it, to go in search of him?"

It was remarkable that Handforth & Co. should have come to exactly the same decision as Nipper. But it was still more remarkable that Vivian Travers, in another cabin, should be talking very earnestly to Archie Glenthorne and Jimmy Potts at that same minute.

"It's a cert.!" Travers was saying. "No need to tell the others, of course. We'll keep this just to ourselves. But why shouldn't we go after Dorrie, too?"

"Of course, it's a frightfully bright scheme, and all that sort of thing; but Mr. Lee is liable to jump off the deep end, what?" said Archie Glenthorne mildly. "I mean, dash it, we shall give him something of a shock when he finds us on the good old train."

"It'll take more than that to give Mr. Lee a shock," said Travers. "Well, what about it, dear old fellows? Are you game?"

"I'm game, anyhow," said Sir Jimmy Potts eagerly. "We know the Wanderer of the Skies—and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners are two of our best pals! It seems a shame to sail away from South Africa and leave them in the lurch."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean, good gad! A heartless sort of scheme, what?"

"You fellows had better leave this to me," said Travers. "We'll wait a bit—until the

ship has settled down. Then, at the right moment, we'll slip ashore and hide."

"Why hide?" asked Jimmy.

"Until the ship moves off into the channel," replied Travers. "I've been making inquiries. She won't stay here long. She's sailing at midnight, and before long she'll clear off in readiness to get out of the harbour. So unless we act at once—or nearly at once—we shall be too late!"

"Why not tell some of the others?" suggested Jimmy.

"Hear, hear!" murmured Archie. "That is to say, absolutely! A dashed party of us, what? The other chappies will probably hail the suggestion as a ripe and juicy scheme."

"And ruin everything!" said Travers. "The only chance we've got is to get off quietly, without anybody spotting us. But if there's a whole crowd we shan't stand one chance in a thousand. If the other fellows want to go after Dorrie, let them think of it for themselves."

Curiously enough, at that very moment, three figures were moving silently and softly along the deck. They were Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

They had taken note of the fact that the ship's officers were busily engaged elsewhere. They had been awaiting their opportunity for some little time—and now they made a dash for it. It was the most direct method, and it would probably be the most successful.

Quick as a flash the three figures nipped down the gangway; in another few moments they were on the dock, and it did not take them long to find concealment behind some stacks of packing-cases.

"Done it!" breathed Nipper exultantly.

"Phew! It was a risky thing, though!" murmured Tommy Watson. "Even now somebody might come after us!"

"Don't think so!" said Nipper. "Nobody saw us come ashore, and, naturally, there won't be a roll-call before the ship sails. The masters think that we're in bed, and the ship's officers are too busy on their own jobs to bother about the passengers."

That was true enough, and, after an anxious spell, the three juniors were satisfied that they had not been missed.

On deck three other figures were lurking.

They belonged to Handforth & Co. As usual, Edward Oswald was rather incautious. He crept along with exaggerated stealthiness, and took a look over the rail now and again.

"Better not go down the gangway!" he was saying. "Too open—too risky. My idea is to get to the bows, and then swarm down a rope. There's a boat somewhere about—"

"Why bother about a boat?" asked Church. "Why not just slip into the water and swim ashore? A wetting won't do us any harm."

"By George! That's a good wheeze!" said Handforth. "We shall soon get dry. Then, when we sneak to the station and get on that train, we shall—"

"Not so loud, you chump!" murmured Church. "Somebody might be listening!"

As it happened, somebody was listening; and that somebody was Willy Handforth, of the Third!

Willy had come on deck because he found sleep difficult on this warm night. He wanted a breath of fresh air, and he was tucked away in a dark corner, enjoying the comparative coolness. And he had heard every word that Handforth & Co. had been uttering.

"Oh-ho!" he breathed. "So that's the wheeze, is it? Ted's going ashore—so that he can join in this hunt for old Dorrie! What ho! I don't see any reason why the Third shouldn't be in this, too!"

Five minutes later the Third was fully represented by Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. It had only taken Willy a couple of shakes to arouse his two chums, and he did not argue with them. He merely said that they were going ashore, and there was an end of it!



CHAPTER 7.

All Ashore!

WILLY HANDFORTH'S decision was crisp and swift. The redoubtable leader of the fags never lost any time in making up his mind. If his major could go on this expedition, so could he. Willy's reasoning was simple.

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were not allowed to have any say in the matter. Willy simply ordered them to get ready, and they got ready. They knew, from past experience, how futile it would be to protest. Indeed, not merely futile, but dangerous.

It did not occur to Handforth minor to put a stop to Edward Oswald's plan. Such a thing would be tantamount to sneaking. No; the only thing to do was to follow, so that Handforth would have somebody to look after him. Willy did not place much trust in Church and McClure. They were too much under his major's thumb.

"Ted needs somebody strong to look after him," Willy decided. "So I'll go along. Besides, it's a pretty good scheme. Dorrie is one of the best, and it's the duty of St. Frank's to go to his rescue."

There was plenty of activity on board now. Members of the crew were hurrying about, intent on their work. They took no notice of any schoolboys who happened to be on deck.

Just at this time an incident happened in the harbour which helped the schoolboy plotters to a very considerable extent. Nipper & Co. had managed to get ashore in safety, but it was very doubtful if all the other conspirators would be equally successful.

However, just then a number of wild yells sounded from across the water, and the next moment there was a loud explosion, followed by bursts of flame.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth, turning to his two chums. "What's that?"

They stared out across the water. There was a tremendous blaze, and in the glare they could see two men swimming desperately away from the conflagration.

"It's a motor-boat!" said Church breathlessly. "The engine must have exploded or something. My hat! Look at it blazing!"

The sight was indeed an unusual one, and practically everybody on board the St. Francis was staring out across the harbour. Men were running about, getting a boat ready.

Willy, at least, was alive to the possibilities. "Come on, my sons!" he said briskly. "Now's our chance! Nobody will see us slipping ashore!"

But somebody did see them—Handforth and Church and McClure. The chums of Study D caught sight of the three figures as they went skimming down the gangway. A minute later Handforth & Co. were in full pursuit.

They overtook the three fags some little distance down the dock, and none of them noticed Travers and Archie and Potts coming down the gangway, too. Considering that there was such a lot of activity on board, and on the dockside, too, the way in which these twelve juniors had got ashore was rather remarkable. If they had attempted to do anything secretive they would probably have been discovered. But as they went boldly down the gangway nobody took the slightest notice of them. After all, it was nobody's business to question them, and so they were not questioned.

They would only have been pulled up if a master had happened to see them; and none of the masters thought of the startling possibility. They took it for granted that the boys, seniors and juniors, were sound asleep in their cabins.

"You—you young blighters!" panted Handforth, as he faced Willy & Co. "What are you doing here, ashore?"

"The same as you, Ted," replied Willy, grinning.

"You young ass! You'd better get back, quick—or the boat will sail!" said Handforth.

"That's exactly what we want," nodded Willy. "The sooner it sails, the better. We're going to be left behind, so that we can search for Dorrie."

"But that's my idea!" roared Handforth indignantly.

"For once, Ted, you've had a brainwave," admitted Willy. "In fact, it was so good that I decided to adopt it."

"What do you think this idea is—an orphan?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"You've hit on the right word, Ted, old man—it's an orphan," said Willy. "Anyhow, it's the first bright idea I've ever known you to have, so it must be an orphan."

"Why, you—you—"

"Keep your hair on," murmured Willy. "If you shout like that, somebody will hear,

and then we shall all be dragged back on board."

Handforth was about to grab Willy by the coat-collar, when Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson appeared.

"What are you chaps doing here?" asked Nipper, in astonishment.

"If it comes to that, what are *you* doing?" retorted Handforth.

"Well, well!" came another voice. "A remarkable coincidence, dear old fellows. Three of us came ashore on a secret mission, and I'm hanged if there aren't a round dozen!"

"Well I'm hanged!" said Nipper, scratching his head, and looking round. "Handy—Travers—Archie—Willy——"

"No need to count us all up," said Travers coolly. "There are twelve of us, exactly. Of course, there might be some more before long, but who cares? The more the merrier!"

Nipper's face broke into a grin.

"By Jove!" he chuckled. "Perhaps you're right, Travers! I suppose we've all got the same wheeze, eh? We're all going after the gov'nor, so that we can help in this search for Dorrie?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding.

"You mean, the search for Mr. Manners?" said Handforth. "Dorrie's all right—one of the best. But what about Irene's pater?"

Even Handforth was inclined to feel satisfied, after he had got over his surprise. There were twelve of them, and it was hardly likely that Nelson Lee would take any drastic action when he discovered what was in the wind. It was far more likely that he would consider it his duty to take them under his wing, and to look after them.

Anyhow, the die was cast, and the twelve juniors now wondered if there would be any more additions to the party.

The minutes slipped by, however, and nothing else happened. But, from the dock, the juniors watched with satisfaction as the liner was prepared for sea.

They had deliberately elected to remain behind, and they were gloating over the prospect.



CHAPTER 8.

Just in Time!

"**T**HERE she goes!" murmured Nipper, with satisfaction.

"My hat! What a rumpus there'll be in the morning!" chuckled Handforth. "And won't the other chaps be mad when they find out!"

"I rather think, old article, that Mr. Lee will be somewhat peppery, too," said Archie Glenthorpe. "I mean, dash it, he'll have a frightfully frightful shock when we ooze into the picture."

"All the same, it'll be like old times," said Handforth. "A regular party of us

going to the rescue of Dorrie. Through the jungles—into the unknown interior of the cannibal country!"

"Where they have ostrich farms and railways, and telegraphs, and post-offices," nodded Travers. "But perhaps you know best, dear old fellow. I wouldn't presume to contradict you."

Nipper, who had been looking round keenly, turned to the others.

"It strikes me that we'd better get away from here as soon as we can," he said. "There might be a packet of trouble if somebody in authority comes along. He'll want to know what we're doing off the boat—and as we can't give him any reasonable explanation, a few fireworks might go up."

"Where shall we go to, then?" asked Jimmy Potts. "If we hang about the station, Mr. Lee might spot us—and then the fat would be in the fire!"

"We'd better not get to the station until the very last minute," suggested Travers wisely. "Dash in about two minutes before the train pulls out, you know. Grab our tickets, barge into the train, and then we shall be safe."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Nipper thoughtfully. "The chances are that the gov'nor won't arrive at the station until ten minutes before the kick-off. He hates waiting for trains to leave. So if we get there well in advance, we can get aboard, and——"

"Wait a minute!" said Handforth. "Mr. Lee might spot us."

"That's not possible," said Nipper. "There are bound to be sleeping-cars on the train."

"Sleeping-cars?" repeated Handforth. "Here—in South Africa? I didn't know they had luxuries like that!"

"Poor old chap!" sighed Church. "He will think that South Africa is a kind of wilderness. He probably expected to ride in a cattle truck!"

"There'll be plenty of sleeping-cars on that train, Handy," said Nipper, with a smile. "We can get safely into our compartments, and we shall be private then."

"Supposing Mr. Lee doesn't go on that train, after all?" asked Willy. "What then? We should be in a fine fix, shouldn't we?"

"Somebody will have to keep watch all the time," replied Nipper. "Not that there's much doubt about it. The gov'nor told me what train he was going on, and he's not likely to change his mind."

The School Ship was already moving away—out into the Channel—and none of these juniors regretted her departure. They had decided to go upon this adventure, and although, strictly speaking, they would be "playing truant," they did not give much thought to the consequences.

Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners were missing—and Umlosi believed that they were still alive. So these St. Frank's juniors were determined to go on that search. Dorrie was one of their oldest pals, and they felt it was their duty to rally round in this time of extremity.

So far, they had been exceedingly lucky, and their luck held, too.

For when they got to the big railway station of Durban they found the train ready. They had no difficulty in booking sleeping berths, and they met with a bit of added luck, too.

For one of the station officials, looking at them curiously, asked if they had come from the School Ship.

"Well, yes," admitted Nipper.

"Going along with the tall gentleman and his coloured friend, eh?" asked the official. "They've booked on this train. Taken tickets for Kroonstad."

"Yes, of course," said Nipper casually.

He got away from the official, and he quickly informed the others.

"By George, this is pretty good!" said Handforth. "So Mr. Lee and Umlosi have booked for Kroonstad, eh? Then we now know what to do—and we shall feel safe after the train has started. No need to worry until we get to Kroonstad, wherever it happens to be."

"The best thing we can do, you chaps, is to get straight into bed," said Nipper shrewdly. "Once the train starts, we'll turn in. The gov'nor won't see us until the morning, and then it'll be altogether too late to take action."

"Let's hope he thinks the same," remarked Travers. "He won't be able to send us back on board the School Ship, anyhow, because she'll be well out to sea."

"Oh, we'll be all right," said Handforth confidently. "You'd better leave everything in my hands, my sons!"

"Ahem!"

"When Mr. Lee discovers us, I'll do all the talking!" went on Handforth.

"You'll try to, old man, but we shan't let you," said Nipper gently. "Well, come along. We'd better be getting on board the train."

They had no difficulties. And Handforth, at least, was astonished to find that the train was positively luxurious—as up-to-date and as perfectly equipped as any British crack express.

The sleeping accommodation was excellent, and before long the twelve juniors were settled comfortably. Ten minutes before the train was due to pull out, Nipper, who was watching, espied Nelson Lee and Umlosi. They both boarded the train—and then Nipper breathed a sigh of relief and satisfaction.

"Well, we're all going together," he murmured. "Good old Dorrie! If we can't find you with a crowd like this, it'll be a pity!"



CHAPTER 9.

Discovered!

SOMEWHAT cramped cover, laddies, but decidedly comfortable," commented Archie Glenthorne languidly. "What-ho! If one of you coves will kindly shove out the light, we'll sample a dose of the good old dreamless."

"Plenty of time, Archie," said Nipper.

The train hadn't started, and the twelve St. Frank's juniors were occupying three compartments—four in each—in the same carriage.

Nipper & Co. and Archie Glenthorne occupied one, Handforth & Co. and Travers another, and Willy & Co. and Jimmy Potts the third. They felt perfectly secure now. After a good deal of uncertainty their troubles were over. They were on the same train as Nelson Lee and Umlosi, and when Kroonstad was reached, Nelson Lee would get the surprise of his life!

Here was an adventure in all truth. The voyage had been wonderful all

along; all the fellows were enthusiastic about this floating school idea. But to be in this search for Lord Dorrimore was an added attraction which came unexpectedly and enjoyably.

Nipper, although he did not show it, was worrying a trifle, however. His original plan had been for Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and himself to come on this trip. He wondered what Nelson Lee would say when he found that there were a dozen fellows in the party. Three of them might have passed muster. But twelve! Nipper was rather dubious. However, there were really four parties, and each had thought of the wheeze independently. And the others had just as much right to be there as Nipper. So, naturally, he had uttered no word of complaint.

Tap-tap!

"Good gad!" breathed Archie, from his bunk. "Discovered already, what?"

"Don't you believe it," grinned Watson. "It's only the steward, I expect."

"You mean the attendant," said Nipper, as he opened the door.

Then he looked blank—for facing him was Nelson Lee! And the famous schoolmaster-detective was looking very grim and very angry.

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"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Lee. "So the information I received was correct!"

"Information, gov'nor?" blurted Nipper.

"I was told that twelve English schoolboys were on this train, and I could not credit the truth of the statement," said Nelson Lee curtly. "Nipper, what does this mean? What are you doing here?"

"We—we—I mean, I—I—"

"Absolutely!" came a murmur from Archie.

"We thought we'd come, sir," said Nipper lamely.

"Oh, indeed!" replied Nelson Lee. "So you thought you'd come, eh? Where are the others?"

"In the next compartment, sir," replied Nipper. "Here, look here, gov'nor! You're not going to cut up rusty, are you? It's for old Dorrie's sake—"

"That will do!" interrupted Lee.

There was something in his tone—something in his expression—which made Nipper's heart feel heavy. Seldom, indeed, had he seen Nelson Lee looking so angry.

Handforth & Co., Travers, Potts and the three fags were commanded to emerge. They all came crowding out into the corridor, clutching at the partitions and the window-rails as the train rocked.

"Are you all here?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir—twelve of us altogether," said Nipper.

"And whose idea was it to—break bounds in this fashion, and to come on this outrageous trip?"

"Mine, sir!" replied four voices in unison.

Nipper, Travers, Handforth and Willy all spoke at once, and Nelson Lee looked at them with cold eyes.

"What am I to understand by that reply?" he asked.

"Well, as a matter of fact, sir, you're looking at four parties, not one," said Travers coolly. "Nipper and two other chaps decided to come on the trip, and I advised Archie and Jimmy Potts to come with me; and Handforth—"

"I think I understand," said Nelson Lee. "You acted independently at first, but joined forces later?"

"Yes, sir," chorused the juniors.

"And your object, I assume, is to join Umlosi and myself in this search for Lord Dorrimore?"

"Yes, sir."

"I admire your loyalty to Dorrie, but, at the same time, I cannot possibly allow this situation to continue."

"But we're on the train, sir!" said Handforth, with a note of triumph in his voice. "And the St. Francis has sailed."

"And you assume, therefore, that I am helpless?" asked Nelson Lee. "But I am not helpless. You will all be sent back on board, and you will be severely punished for this gross act of insubordination. How many more times must I tell you that the St. Francis is, to all intents and purposes, St. Frank's College? Rules and regulations are exactly

the same—and the transgressors will be punished just as at school."

"But—but the ship has sailed, sir!" said Nipper, staring.

"The St. Francis carries wireless," said Nelson Lee. "The instant we arrive at Ladysmith I shall have a wireless message sent to the liner recalling her."

"Good gad!"

"But—but—"

"You will all be sent back to Durban by the first train from Ladysmith—under escort," continued Nelson Lee relentlessly. "If no immediate train is available, I will charter a special. That is all. You can go to sleep now."

And Nelson Lee turned on his heel and walked away.



CHAPTER 10.

An Unexpected Development!

NIPPER gave a kind of gulp.

"Just a minute, gov'nor!" he panted.

"Here, I say! You—

you don't mean this, do you?"

"Of course he doesn't," shouted Handforth.

"He's just trying to scare us."

Nelson Lee turned and came back to the excited and dismayed juniors.

"In order to settle your minds at once, I will assure you that I am in earnest," said the schoolmaster-detective. "When this train reaches Ladysmith you will be removed from it and sent back to Durban."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Crumbs!"

"We're dished then!"

"How frightfully frightful!"

There was no mistaking the inexorable note in Nelson Lee's voice.

"Won't you change your mind, gov'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly. "It's—it's because of Dorrie, you know. We look upon him as one of ourselves almost. We've been to so many places with him and we've shared so many perils with him. Won't you let us come now when he's in danger?"

"We'll make up for lost time when we get to Australia, sir," promised Travers. "We'll work extra hard—"

"With the Test matches in full swing, eh?" broke in Nelson Lee. "It would be difficult enough to make the school work ordinarily, so there'll be precious little chance of getting in any extra time. No, I am not going to relax!"

"Can't you send a wireless to the ship saying that we're safe, and that we're with you, sir?" asked Handforth. "Mr. Stockdale won't worry then, and we can go to Australia later—on the same ship as you. And we'll work like troopers on that voyage."

"By Jove, yes, sir!" said Tommy Watson eagerly. "Can't we make up for lost time then?"

"Be a sport, gov'nor!" urged Nipper.

Nelson Lee's anger was subsiding. He really had been extremely infuriated at seeing all these juniors on board the train. For Nelson Lee was in sole charge of the School Ship, and to find a dozen fellows flagrantly ignoring the regulations in this way had startled him. The fact that one of them was Nipper made absolutely no difference.

"We might be of some help, gov'nor," said Nipper. "And you know how we like Dorrie. You don't know how anxious we are——"

"I appreciate the position thoroughly, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I am not condemning you for being so anxious to go to Dorrie's rescue. If this were a mere holiday trip I would not have much to say."

"But if we make up for lost time, sir——"

"I will not promise you anything, but I will leave the matter in abeyance until we reach Ladysmith," said Lee quietly. "You had better go to sleep now. We are blocking up this corridor, and other people may be desirous of using it. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!" chorused the juniors.

When Nelson Lee had gone they all crowded into Nipper's compartment until there was hardly an inch of space left.

"Woll?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Do you think he'll change his mind?"

"I'm doubtful about it," said Nipper. "Generally when the gov'nor says a thing he means it."

"Leave him to me," said Willy. "Let me have five minutes alone with him in the morning, and I'll guarantee some success."

"Cheeky young ass!" said Handforth, glaring at his minor. "What the dickens can you do? I'm the man for the job!"

"For the love of Samson!" murmured Vivian Travers. "I'd rather put my money on Willy."

"We'll leave the matter just as it stands," said Nipper. "The chances are that the gov'nor will send us back. I hadn't thought of the possibility of recalling the School Ship."

"If we had been undiscovered until the morning, everything would have been all right," grumbled Handforth. "I wonder who the dickens told Mr. Lee that we were on the train?"

"What does it matter?" asked Nipper. "Let's get back into bed—and hope for the best."

The others all crowded out, leaving Nipper & Co., and Archie Glenthorne, in peace. Archie dropped off to sleep at once, but Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson discussed the situation for some little time. They were all feeling depressed. It would be an ignominious ending to their adventure if they were sent back under escort, and handed over to Mr. Stockdale.

"The rest of the school will yell its head off when we are taken on board," said Watson gloomily. "I say, what a frost!"

"Oh, let's get to sleep," said Nipper.

They climbed into their bunks, and the lights were extinguished. Within ten minutes

they were all sound asleep, and the train went rolling on into the velvety night.

It seemed to Nipper that he had only been asleep for a few minutes when he was awakened by a tremendous jar. It seemed to him, too, that a loud thud had sounded. He had collided with the partition next to the bunk, and groans were sounding in his ears.

"Hallo!" he gasped, sitting up. "What's happened?"

The brakes were grinding and shrieking, and the train was being pulled up with excessive violence.

"Odds knocks and bashes!" came Archie Glenthorne's complaining voice. "Good gad! They might at least give a chappie a bit of warning before they stop the dashed train!"

Somebody switched on the lights, and Archie Glenthorne was found on the floor—where he had been violently pitched, owing to the sudden application of the brakes.

"Well, I don't think much of these South African railways!" said Watson, rubbing a bruised elbow.

"Rats!" said Nipper. "Something exceptional must have happened. Any train is liable to chuck you out of bed if it pulls up too suddenly."

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"What—what was that?" asked Watson, staring

"Rifle-shots!" ejaculated Nipper. "I say, something exciting must be happening!"



CHAPTER 11.

Held up!

CRACK! Crack! Crack! The shots came again, and this time loud shouts were intermingled with those ominous cracks. The train had come to a complete standstill, and from a distance came the sound of loudly-hissing steam.

Nipper flung open the window, and leaned out. Overhead the moon and stars were shining brightly, and it seemed to Nipper that the train was standing on the open veldt. Ahead, many dim figures could be seen moving about. Flashes came from that direction, followed by the "ping" of bullets hitting metal, and now and again there was the splintering of glass.

"Great Scott!" panted Nipper. "We're held up!"

"What!"

"Bandits!" came a yell a few moments later.

Handforth was leaning out, and he was thoroughly excited.

"We're being held up by bandits!" he went on. "By George! Come on, you fellows! There's a fight going on——"

"Stay where you are, Handy, you idiot!" broke in Nipper. "You don't want to get shot, do you? This is a job for the train officials—not for us!"

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "If there's a scrap, I want to be in it."

He flung open the carriage door, and dropped to the permanent way. Church and McClure had tried to stop him, but they were a shade too late.

Zurrrrrrrrh!

"Come back, Handy!" shouted Nipper. "There's a machine-gun going now."

"Machine-gun?" echoed Handforth, aghast.

"Didn't you hear it?" asked Nipper. "Listen! There it is again—and more rattle shots!"

Handforth only paused for a moment, then he ran on again. Church and McClure dropped to the ground, and gave chase. Their idea was to grab Handforth, and drag him back. They were not cowards, but it would be sheer madness to venture into the fighting zone, at the head of the train. They were all unarmed, so how could they expect to scrap against these desperate bandits?

But it seemed to the others that Church and McClure had joined Handforth in his reckless dash, and a moment later they were all tumbling on to the line, and hurrying off.

In the meantime, there was a hot fight going on near the engine. It was perfectly true that the train had been held up by bandits—and Handforth could be excused, perhaps, for thinking that such an event was commonplace on the South African railways.

Yet, actually, this occurrence was very much out of the common. It was only by pure chance that this particular train had been held up. Yet the bandits had an excellent reason for their choice—since it transpired, afterwards, that there was a big consignment of gold bullion in the front baggage car.

But there were armed guards on that car, too, and these men were putting up a desperate fight.

Other people were dropping down on to the line, excited and eager, and Handforth found himself mixed up with a number of men.

"Come back, Handy!" gasped Church, as he managed to grab Handforth's arm. "There's danger up there."

"I'm not afraid of danger!" retorted Handforth recklessly.

"But these machine-guns——" began McClure.

Zurrrrrrrrh!

The sound of the machine-guns came again—a wicked, shattering rattle. And then came the crack-crack-crack of the rifles.

"Ugh!" grunted a man, not two yards away from the Study D trio.

He seemed to pitch forward, his knees gave way under him, and he crumpled up.

"Get back—get back!" shouted one of the

train officials, running up. "Somebody's been hit here!"

Handforth stared fascinatedly. That man near him had undoubtedly received a bullet—and it might just as easily have hit Handforth himself! A stray bullet, probably—but deadly, nevertheless.

"Here, lend a hand, you fellows!" panted Handforth.

He dropped to his knees beside the fallen man, and the other juniors collected round him. In a moment they had lifted the stranger off the ground, and they were carrying him towards the back of the train—out of the danger zone. On the way they met Nelson Lee.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, boys?" asked Lee anxiously. "Is anybody hurt?"

"Not amongst us, sir," said Nipper. "There's a gentleman here who was hit—and we were going to get him back into safety. Do you know what's happening, sir?"

"I know very little," replied Lee. "Two men have been killed, I hear, and the fighting is still going on. Let me come! I will attend to this unfortunate fellow!"

They laid the stranger down on the grass, and Nelson Lee produced an electric torch, and Nipper held it. Then, gently and carefully, Lee loosened the man's clothing. A bullet wound was found in his chest—an ugly, dangerous wound.

"Get into one of the carriages, somebody, and bring some water!" ordered Lee. "Towels, too! Hurry!"

Two or three of the juniors dashed off, and at the same time a great chorus of shouting came from the front part of the train. Then followed the noise of a motor-car, speeding away with its engine roaring at full power, and then comparative silence. The raid appeared to be over, and apparently the bandits had bolted.

"Let me get up!" said the man whom Nelson Lee was attending to. "What are you doing? Why are you holding me down like this? Confound your infernal nerve——"

"Steady!" said Lee. "You have been hurt. Do not exert yourself——"

"I've got to get to Vanhoek's Farm," muttered the stranger dully. "Vanhoek's ostrich farm. Have we got there yet? Vanhoek needs me urgently. I've got to get there, I tell you——"

And he babbled on incoherently.



CHAPTER 12.

The Mystery Airman!

"HERE'S the water, sir," said Handforth breathlessly.

"Good!" said Nelson Lee. "Set it down—here!"



The first volley from Vanhoek and his accomplices was erratic and wild, and before they could fire again the juniors had swept down upon them like an avalanche.

He was soon bathing the stranger's wound, but he was convinced that the only hope for the man was to have the bullet extracted, and that was a hospital job. The most that Lee could do now was to make the patient as comfortable as possible.

All sounds of strife had now ceased, but there was plenty of excited shouting and talking. The passengers were tumbling out of the carriages by the dozen, and standing about in animated groups.

"It seems to be all right, you chaps," said Handforth, after he had caught a few words from one of the other passengers. "The rotters didn't get the bullion! They were beaten off after a tremendous fight, and two of them were killed. It's a lucky thing we weren't all in a smash."

"How do you mean?" asked Church.

"Why, these rotters shoved a lot of boulders on the track," said Handforth indignantly. "The engine driver only just managed to pull up in the nick of time."

"Great Scott!"

"Not so much noise, boys," said Nelson Lee, looking up. "Hold the light a little more to one side, Nipper. Yes, that's better."

"Don't maul me about!" muttered the patient. "What's the matter with you? I'm not hurt, am I?"

"Yes, to an extent," replied Lee soothingly. "No, you must not attempt to sit up—"

"But I will sit up!" said the other. "I've got to get to Vanhoek's ostrich farm, I tell you. He's expecting me. I've got to pilot a big aeroplane."

"Exactly," murmured Lee. "Then I dare say Mr. Vanhoek will be willing to excuse you for—"

"He won't—he won't!" interrupted the other frantically. "I've got to get there! Vanhoek needs me—he's paying me big money for this job. I've got to get there, confound you! It's urgent—it's vital! The big aeroplane—the big aeroplane! Vanhoek is expecting me!"

"Big aeroplane?" repeated Nipper, flashing a curious glance at Nelson Lee.

"I'm the only man who can pilot her," muttered the stricken man. "There's nobody else—nobody else. Vanhoek wrote urgently, and promised me five hundred pounds. Yes, five hundred pounds. It's not often I get such a chance. So I've got to get there. I've got to get to Winsdorp. Yes, that's the place—Winsdorp. Vanhoek's ostrich farm."

The unfortunate man was positively babbling. He was more or less delirious, and later he would probably remember nothing of what he had been saying.

"Mr. Vanhoek will get another pilot," said Nelson Lee gently. "You must not strain yourself in this way—"

"I'm not hurt!" shouted the other, with sudden violence. "Let me go, you fool! I've got to take that great machine north. Vanhoek wrote to me, and offered me five hundred pounds. He'll be frantic if I don't turn up. He can't engage any ordinary pilot—the man wouldn't know how to manage such a machine. If you don't let me go—ugh!"

He broke off with a grunt—a long, sighing groan. Then he suddenly became limp, and a trickle of blood came out of his mouth.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Lee. "He's in a bad way."

"What does he mean about this big aeroplane, sir?" asked Nipper keenly. "Do you think he meant it? Five hundred pounds to pilot a 'plane! It's—it's unheard of!"

"It all depends how far the 'plane is going, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "I shall make it my business to get into touch with this Mr. Vanhoek, so that I can inform him of this mishap."

"It looks a bit suspicious to me, sir," said Nipper. "There can't be many big aeroplanes in South Africa, and I'm wondering about Dorrie's machine——"

"You must not get fantastic ideas into your head, young 'un," said Nelson Lee sharply.

Yet, at the same time, he was aware that he had been thinking on the same "fantastic" lines. For undoubtedly this man's behaviour was strange; and his words, uttered in semi-delirium, were significant. But on the other hand, perhaps they meant nothing, for nowadays aeroplanes were by no means uncommon on the veldt. They were being used more and more, in fact, for flying is increasing in popularity throughout the dominions.

"What's the trouble here?" asked one of the officials as he came along with a big lantern.

"This man was hit by a stray bullet, I think," said Nelson Lee, as he rose to his feet. "We have done all we can for him—but I fancy there is a bullet in his lungs."

"H'm! Bad job," said the official, as he looked down at the unconscious man. "It's a good thing you were here, sir, to attend to him. We'd better take him along, and make him comfortable. There are two or three doctors on the train, thank goodness."

Several men helped to carry the stranger away, and he was safely bestowed in one of the compartments and put to bed.

In the meantime, Nipper and Handforth and the other fellows had been ordered back into their compartments by Nelson Lee.

"It's a very lucky thing that none of you boys was hit," said Lee gruffly. "You ought not to have jumped out of the train like that."

"The danger's over now, sir, isn't it?" asked Handforth.

"Yes, I think so," said Lee. "Now, you'd better remain here, and I will see you again when we get to Ladysmith. Don't attempt to leave your carriage again."

Lee went out, and, passing along the train, found a number of men gathered together in the dining saloon talking animatedly. The sole topic of conversation was the hold-up.

One of the sleeping-car attendants was passing at the time, and Nelson Lee called him.

"Do you know of a place named Winsdorp?" he asked.

"Why, yes, sir," said the attendant. "It's only a small place, nine miles from the railway. You get off the train at Vierstad."

"You don't happen to know of a man named Vanhoek, who runs an ostrich farm?"

"I seem to have heard of the name, sir, but I can't quite recollect——"

"Vanhoek?" put in one of the passengers in the dining saloon. "Who wanted to know anything about old Vanhoek? I can give you some information, if you want it."



CHAPTER 13.

Suspicious!

NELSON LEE nodded to the sleeping-car attendant, and the latter passed on, carrying a large pile of blankets—obviously for some of the injured.

"Vanhoek?" said the man in the dining saloon. "Queer bird, he is. Runs an ostrich farm over by Winsdorp."

"Winsdorp," repeated Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Wasn't Lord Dorrimore's aeroplane supposed to fly over that town?"

"It was supposed to fly over Vierstad—not Winsdorp," replied the other. "But I don't think the 'plane was seen there. Something mysterious about that trip, you know. Queer how a great aeroplane like that could vanish without leaving a trace."

"Very queer indeed," agreed Nelson Lee. "By the way, talking about aeroplanes, I understand that Mr. Vanhoek runs one?"

The stranger laughed uproariously.

"See here, Mr.—Mr.——"

"My name is Lee," said the detective.

"English, eh?" nodded the other. "Good! Put it there, Mr. Lee! My name's Simmons. Sheep raising is my business. Vanhoek with an aeroplane, eh? You've got it wrong there, Mr. Lee."

"Possibly," smiled Nelson Lee. "I must admit that I don't know anything about Mr. Vanhoek. But one of the injured passengers on this train was inquiring about him, and I wanted to get in touch with Vanhoek if possible."

"That ought to be easy enough," said Mr. Simmons. "Winsdorp has got a telegraph, and you can get in touch with the ostrich farm easily enough. I happen to know Vanhoek. His ostrich farm is the most unprofitable proposition in South Africa, I should imagine. I don't know how the man carries on. As for owning an aeroplane, he wouldn't risk himself up in the air unless he kept one foot on the ground. Besides, there's no use for a 'plane in that district. No, sir, you've got it wrong."

"So it seems," admitted Nelson Lee.

He remained in conversation for some little time, but he could gain no more information—except for the fact that Mr. Vanhoek was a bit of a character. Indeed, Nelson Lee judged, from Simmons' talk, that Vanhoek was hardly on the square. At all events, his ostrich farm was a financial failure, and yet the man continued to carry on year after year.

When Nelson Lee left the group of men he ran into Nipper, who had been standing in the corridor waiting for the detective.

"You here, young 'un?" said Nelson Lee gruffly.

"Chuck it, guv'nor," protested Nipper. "You've got a clue—and a hot one. You're not going to be ratty any more, are you? If it hadn't been for us, I don't suppose you would have come into contact with that injured man at all. And it was he who gave you the clue."

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"There's a great deal of truth in that," he confessed. "At the same time, Nipper, it doesn't excuse your conduct——"

"Come off it, sir," said Nipper. "You know jolly well that our conduct isn't bad. We're all anxious about Dorrie, and we want to help him. You're not really going to send us back, are you?"

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"Come with me," he said briefly.

They went along the corridor into the next carriage, and Nelson Lee led the way into his own compartment.

"Where's Umlosi?" asked Nipper, as Lee closed the door.

"In the next compartment," said Lee. "We don't need to disturb him now. Look here, Nipper, about this man Vanhoek. Did you hear what that sheep man was saying?"

"Sheep man, sir? Do you mean the fellow in the dining-saloon?"

"Yes."

"I heard him saying that Mr. Vanhoek wouldn't keep an aeroplane——"

"There's something fishy about it, Nipper," said Lee grimly. "Vanhoek runs an ostrich farm, and according to Simmons there's not the remotest chance that he would use an aeroplane. Yet that injured fellow kept insisting that he had to get to Mr. Vanhoek so that he could fly the 'big aeroplane.'"

"And Vanhoek had offered him five hundred quid for the job, sir," nodded Nipper.

"It may be a wild-goose chase, but I am inclined to travel to Winsdorp straight away," said Nelson Lee. "It is almost on the direct line of Lord Dorrimore's route. And now, quite unexpectedly, we hear of a big 'plane being there—and this ostrich farmer sending urgently for a pilot. Why should Vanhoek send for a pilot? If he had an aeroplane, one would imagine that he would pilot it himself—or, at least, that he had a man qualified for the job on the farm."

"That's what I've been thinking, sir."

"The injured man was talking in a delirious kind of way, but that is no reason to doubt the truth of his assertions," continued Lee. "He was certainly travelling to Winsdorp. And there is no other pilot, it seems, who can handle this mysterious big machine—which, according to Simmons, does not belong to Vanhoek. What machine is it, then?"

"Dorrie's, sir!" said Nipper tensely.

"Such is the inference, but it would be very foolish of us to jump to conclusions," continued Lee. "I must admit that this is a

very astonishing stroke of luck. Only by the merest chance did we come upon this information."

"As you say, guv'nor, it may be a wild-goose chase, but we've got to follow up the clue," said Nipper keenly. "Dorrie has been missing for nearly a week now, and there's still no trace. Yet that airman chap said that——"

"Yes," interrupted Lee, "it is certainly very strange. We shall remain in this train until we get to Winsdorp, or, at least, Vierstad, which is the nearest station."

"We, sir?" repeated Nipper. "Do you mean all of us?"

"Yes, all of you, you young rascals!" said Lee, with a frown. "I cannot waste any time over sending you back. I don't want to lose a minute in following up this clue, for there may be something important in it after all. And so you youngsters had better come along with me."

"You're a brick, sir," said Nipper, gripping Nelson Lee's arm. "Thanks awfully, sir! Somehow I've got an idea that we're on a hot scent!"

"I believe so, too," said Lee grimly. "Yet, at the same time, there are many points which I cannot understand. The mystery, if anything, is only increased."

There was much jubilation amongst the other juniors when Nipper reported Nelson Lee's decision, and, after that, with their minds at rest, they managed to get a little sleep.

The train was now rolling on again, and the exciting hold-up incident was over.



CHAPTER 14.

On the Veldt!

VIERSTAD proved to be a very small town on the railway, set in the midst of a rolling veldt country.

When Nelson Lee and Umlosi and the twelve St. Frank's juniors got out of the train they found themselves sweltering under the broiling sun of the South African morning. The heat was tremendous, and everything was looking parched and dusty.

The train rolled on; the little party left the station and made inquiries concerning Vanhoek's ostrich farm. They learned that the place was situated not far from Winsdorp, which was ten miles away over the veldt.

While they were talking an old Ford car rolled up, and the man at the wheel, a burly-looking specimen with a low forehead, hailed them.

"You just come off that train?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes," said Nelson Lee, turning.

"Know anything about a man who was bound for this town?" asked the other. "I came along here to meet him, but he didn't get off the train."

"Possibly you mean a man named Chadwick?"

"That's the feller!" said the man in the Ford car in an eager voice. "What's happened to him?"

"He is at Ladysmith—in hospital," replied Nelson Lee. "The train was held up during the night, and Mr. Chadwick was unfortunate enough to be hit by a stray bullet."

"Gosh!" said the other blankly.

Without a word he drove off, still looking startled.

"Who is that?" asked Nelson Lee, turning to the Vierstad man he had been questioning.

"That?" said the man. "One of Vanhoek's hands. Feller named Schmidt."

"Does Vanhoek keep an aeroplane at the ostrich farm?" inquired Lee abruptly.

The townsman stared.

"An aeroplane?" he repeated. "Here? One might come overhead now and again, but we don't keep aeroplanes in this locality. As for Vanhoek having one, you make me laugh."

The man was obviously curious about Nelson Lee, and particularly about Umlosi and all these schoolboys. He made one or two inquiries, but Lee gave him no real satisfaction.

At last the little party moved off, and took the rough track across the veldt which led in the direction of Winsdorp.

"Well, gov'nor, what are we going to do?" asked Nipper curiously.

"I don't know—yet," replied Lee. "But I really think that all you boys had better remain behind here in this township. You'll only be in the way if you come along—"

"In the way!" echoed Handforth, aghast. "But we want to be on the spot, sir—to help if we're needed."

"That's a very good idea of yours, Handforth, but I sincerely hope that you will not be needed," replied Lee.

"'Tis well that the young white masters should bear us company," said Umlosi, "for methinks, Umtagati, that there will be fighting ere long. Thou art truly a wizard to come hither. I feel that we are growing nearer to N'Kose, my father."

"Look here, Umlosi—and you, too, boys," said Nelson Lee suddenly. "I'm very suspicious of Vanhoek and this ostrich farm. I have every reason to believe that there is an aeroplane at the farm—and yet the very people who should know of this machine laugh at the idea of it."

"You think it's Lord Dorrimore's 'plane, sir?" asked Handforth excitedly. "You mean, there's been foul play?"

"That is what I fear," replied Lee gravely. "I cannot even venture to guess at the nature of this foul play, but it is all very suspicious."

"I should think it is, sir!" said Nipper. "That airman chap—Chadwick's his name, isn't it?—was obviously telling the truth. Otherwise that Ford car wouldn't have come from Vanhoek's farm to meet the train."

"I noted the verification myself, Nipper," said Lee, nodding. "They were expecting that airman. Why? Of what use will he be

on that ostrich farm, unless there is an aircraft to pilot? And, since nobody knows of any aircraft, it must necessarily be a secret one. And it is a very significant fact that Lord Dorrimore's great 'plane vanished in this very district. It was last seen towards the south, and after that all trace has been lost."

"Let us press on, my master," said Umlosi. "I need not your clues or your information. My snake tells me that N'Kose, my father, is near. Wau! It shall go ill with any dogs who have dared to harm him!"

"I do not think that he is harmed, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "At all events, the aeroplane itself must be undamaged, or Vanhoek would not attempt to secure a pilot for it."

"It looks jolly serious to me, sir," said Nipper. "What about Dorrie and Mr. Manners? They're both capable of piloting the machine. Perhaps they've been killed—"

"Nay, my father lives!" broke in Umlosi fiercely. "I feel it—here!" he added, thumping his great chest. "My father lives, but he is in danger. That I know."

Nelson Lee's suspicions were more acute than ever now. Everything seemed to indicate that the great aeroplane—the Wanderer of the Skies—was at Vanhoek's ostrich farm. Why it should be there none could say. But there was evidently something grim about the whole business.

If Vanhoek was keeping the aeroplane a secret, it would explain, too, the reason for the absence of news. For naturally Vanhoek would not give any information, and thus it would seem that the machine had never been over this region at all.

"I am wondering about you boys," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "I do not want to take you into any danger, and I fear there will be plenty of trouble at this ostrich farm."

"Trouble, sir?" said Handforth. "That's what we want! And if it's going to help old Dorrie—"

"There is liable to be some very fierce fighting," said Nelson Lee. "For I intend to thrash this matter out to the very end. I think you had all better remain behind here, in Vierstad. There is a small hotel near the station—"

But he was interrupted by a chorus of excited protests. The St. Frank's fellows wouldn't even hear of it!

CHAPTER 15.

The Mysterious Ostrich Farm!



"E'D better all go, sir," said Nipper firmly.

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth. "We've

come so far, and we

want to be in at the finish. If there's anything to be done, you can count on us!"

"Absolutely!"

"I'm afraid you don't realise the nature of this fighting," said Nelson Lee, in a troubled voice. "There is liable to be a lot of shooting—and I can't allow you to be exposed to such perils. However, we will all press on, and we will make our plans later, according to the circumstances."

They went into the town, and they had no difficulty in hiring a couple of motor-cars, and in these they drove across the sweltering veldt. It was a lonely, barren sort of country—and Handforth, at least, was thoroughly disappointed.

"Why, I thought we should be in a deep forest by now," he said, after they had been driving for some miles, "and instead of that there's nothing to be seen but grassland, and scrub here and there. Not even a decent tree!"

"There are lots of these great plains in South Africa, Handy," said Church. "We're not on the Congo, you know."

Umlosi was another one who looked discontented. He longed to be in his war-paint, and to have his great spear in his hand, but in a country like this it was impossible for Umlosi to indulge in such fancies. He was out of his native element, but at the same time he was ready enough to go into battle. Umlosi was convinced that a battle would develop. There was something rather uncanny about his instinct. He knew—he positively knew—that Lord Dorrimore was alive and well, and that he was in great trouble. And by now everybody was becoming certain that the missing Dorrie—and the equally missing Mr. Manners—were at the mysterious ostrich farm.

Windsorp was reached after a dusty, hot, bumpy journey. It was afternoon now, and Nelson Lee appeared to be in no hurry. Windsorp was only a very small place—just a post office, and precious little else. However, the party managed to get something to eat there, and they learned that the ostrich farm was only a couple of miles away. They learned something else, too.

"I reckon you're up here about that English lord feller?" asked one of the Windsorp inhabitants, after he had inspected the party with obvious curiosity. "You're English, aren't you?"

"I am merely a schoolmaster, and these boys are touring with me," explained Nelson Lee, without giving any direct reply. "Talking about Lord Dorrimore, though, do you know anything about him up here?"

"Precious little," said the man. "We heard the machine come over that night."

"You heard it, eh?" said Nipper keenly.

"Saw it, too," said the man. "Leastways, we saw the lights. The rummy thing is the 'plane wasn't sighted further on. Yet it's not about here, I'll swear. Couldn't be. We've made inquiries for miles around."

"Not in the neighbourhood of Vanhoek's ostrich farm?" asked Lee.

"Ostrich farm, you call it?" jeered the man. "Precious few ostriches! The farm is

only a shack, anyway, and Vanhoek is a drunken ruffian. There's no aeroplane within twenty-five miles of this spot—and you can take my word for that. We've made inquiries until we're sick of it."

"How do you account for it, then, that the machine was not heard after passing over this place?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Nobody can account for it," said the man. "Queerest thing we've ever heard of. Lord Dorrimore didn't come down in this district—that's been settled. He passed over here, and he's not been seen since. Must have got off his track, I suppose, and probably come down hundreds of miles away."

But Nelson Lee had a very different idea. Considering all the circumstances, he felt certain that Lord Dorrimore's machine was on Vanhoek's ostrich farm. How it could be there, and nobody know about it, was one of the little mysteries that had to be cleared up.

Nelson Lee had the benefit of information which none of the other searchers had obtained. For Lee had spoken with that injured airman, Chadwick. That man had been going to Vanhoek's farm—to take charge of a big aeroplane; his mission was obviously a secret one, and, but for his injury, he would not have mentioned the subject to a soul. It was in this way that Nelson Lee had a big advantage.

It was evening by the time the party approached the ostrich farm. Nelson Lee had deliberately dallied, for he did not want to reach his destination until the swift South African evening fell. And at last, in the shadow of a sharply rising kopje, the party came to a halt.

Just beyond that flat-topped hill, down in the hollow, was Vanhoek's ostrich farm. Nelson Lee and Umlosi, venturing on slightly in advance of the others, took stock of the surroundings.

The "farm" consisted of a roughly-built shack, with a wide veranda in front of it. There were one or two outbuildings, too, and a lot of enclosed yards, with wire netting all round. Here and there a few ostriches were to be seen. The whole place had an air of desolation—of neglect. It was very different from what one might have supposed.

"What think you, Umlosi, old friend?" murmured Lee, as he and the Kutana chief lay in the grass, looking down into the valley below.

"I feel within me, my master, that we are very, very near to N'Kose," replied Umlosi, in a deep rumble. "Do thou stop here, with the young white masters. I will venture down into this valley, and methinks I will gain some useful information."

"I had better go with you," said Lee.

"Nay, my master, let me go alone," said Umlosi. "'Tis well that you should remain with these boys who are young and eager for fighting. Let mee go, and let me find out how things are standing. Have no fear, Umtagati. I will return."

Nelson Lee at last agreed. And when the gloom of the evening swept down over the veldt, Umlosi crept forward!



Nipper and Handforth looked out of the carriage window. Further down the line could be seen vaguely-moving figures. There was the crack-crack of rifle and revolver shots. "Great Scott! We're being held up by bandits!" exclaimed Handy excitedly. And for once he was right!



CHAPTER 16.

What Umlosi Saw !

THE situation was rather curious. In spite of everything that Nelson Lee had learned, his suspicions were only suspicions. He had no definite information. There was really no reason why he should not boldly go up to the so-called ostrich farm and interview Mr. Vanhook. Yet Nelson Lee was reluctant to take this direct course. He felt that it would be better for Umlosi to do a little scouting in advance.

Umlosi himself was keen on this programme, too. He took very little notice of the clues that Nelson Lee had obtained. He went solely by his instinct, and, within him, he knew that his beloved "father" was near at hand. Exactly how he knew was quite unaccountable. But then it is also unaccountable how a faithful dog, taken from home on a long railway journey, will find its way back after weary days of wandering over country that it had never previously seen. How can such things be explained?

Instinct? Perhaps so. Umlosi was no dog, yet his instinct was more faithful, more unerring, than the instinct of any dog.

Now, as he crept forward over the coarse grass, and dodged from one patch of scrub to another, his every fibre was quivering. He felt that Lord Dorrimore needed him. This was not the kind of attack that Umlosi liked. He was all for bold action. Yet he realised that it might be fatal to do anything precipitate.

The darkness had come down very suddenly. There were clouds overhead now, and no stars were visible. Bright lights streamed out from the window and doorway of the shack.

Umlosi, edging his way cautiously round, arrived at last near an angle of the building. He was like a shadow; silent, mysterious, stealthy.

Not the slightest sound did he make as he advanced. In spite of his bulk, he was catlike in all his movements. Not a twig snapped under his feet—not a pebble sounded. There was something extraordinarily ghost-like about this huge black. He was a part of the night itself—moving slowly, but nevertheless certainly.

At last he reached the roughly-made veranda. Inch by inch he advanced towards the lighted window, which stood wide open. Voices came out to him now—and he could see, too, an occasional puff of tobacco smoke.

Nearer and nearer he went—until he crouched right beneath the window itself.

Men were talking, but Umlosi could not understand anything they were saying, for the language they were using appeared to be Dutch.

Almost at the commencement of his scouting trip Umlosi had shed nearly all his clothing. He wore nothing but a cloth round his middle. His feet were bare, and his black limbs merged with the night.

Inch by inch he raised his head, and



Nipper and Handforth looked out of the carriage window. Further down the line could be seen vaguely-moving figures. There was the crack-crack of rifle and revolver shots. "Great Scott! We're being held up by bandits!" exclaimed Handy excitedly. And for once he was right!

presently he was able to see into the shack. He saw a rough room, with some cheap furniture. There were four men in there, and three of them were talking in earnest tones. They all looked anxious and worried.

They were not prepossessing specimens. One of them was a biggish man, with a great black moustache and a shaggy head of hair. He was smoking a huge pipe, and pacing up and down, talking volubly. Now and

again he gesticulated, and his tone was filled with anger and concern.

Two of the other men were quite young—but they were ugly-looking beggars. They were wearing breeches and open shirts. And every man carried a revolver in his belt. This was a rather significant fact—for it is not usual for the peaceful inhabitants of the veldt to walk about with revolvers.

Umlosi was disappointed.

He had been hoping that he would overhear some useful conversation. Yet, with

On the other side of the room there was a rough sideboard—a kind of home-made affair—and resting at one corner of this was a revolver.

It was not actually a revolver, but an automatic pistol—a businesslike weapon. It was, however, different from most automatic pistols. The grip was inlaid with a different-coloured metal from the rest of the weapon. In this respect it was distinctive. On the flash, Umlosi recognised that pistol as the property of Lord Dorrimore!

Umlosi had seen it too many times to be mistaken. He had cleaned it, he had polished it. Without doubt, it was Dorrie's!

And here it was, on this sideboard—contemptuously flung aside as though it were of no use. These men, no doubt, regarded it as a mere toy, for their own weapons were much heavier; were, in fact, service revolvers.

Umlosi's one desire was to leap through that window, and to fell these men. They had laid hands on his beloved "father"! The presence of this revolver was significant enough!

But Umlosi, although as brave as a lion, was no fool. He was unarmed, and he knew well enough that if he made his attack he would be shot down ruthlessly.

So he turned, crept away, and vanished into the night. Ten minutes later Nelson Lee saw a black form loom up near him, and he found Umlosi by his side.

"Wau! 'Tis true, my master!" rumbled Umlosi. "N'Kose, my father, is yonder!"

"You have seen him?" asked Lee quickly.

"Nay, but I have proof of his presence," said the Kutana chief. "Listen, Umtagati, and I will tell ye what I have seen."



these men talking in Dutch, he was more or less helpless. It was a language that he could not understand.

Still, Umlosi made good use of his eyes, and only a bare minute had elapsed before he made a startling discovery—a discovery which caused even his heart to beat more quickly; and Umlosi was a man who had faced a thousand perils, who was cool in the face of any danger.



CHAPTER 17.

Action I

NELSON LEE was looking resolute after Umlosi had given him the details. "Dorrie's automatic—on that sideboard!" he muttered. "It looks bad, Umlosi, old friend. I pray that we shall be in time. My only fear is that Lord Dorrimore has been killed—"

"Nay, Umtagati, thou art surely wrong!" said Umlosi. "Were N'Kose dead, as thou sayest, I would know. Here, within me, I would know!" he added, tapping his huge chest. "But my father lives. He is there, and he lives."

"Wau!" came a thunderous shout from outside.

Umlosi sprang in, and the next second a terrific fight was in progress. All four men had flung themselves upon Nelson Lee—a clear indication that the famous schoolmaster-detective was on the right track. But these men did not use their revolvers—they were no murderers. However, they intended to make a prisoner of this audacious stranger.

And they simply flung themselves upon Lee in one overwhelming attack.

But they had counted without Umlosi!



CHAPTER 18.

Trouble With Handforth Again!

THOU dogs and sons of dogs!" shouted Umlosi. "Wouldst lay dirty hands upon Umtagati, my master? Wau!"

Nelson Lee was already down, completely overpowered by the strength of that fourfold attack. But then Umlosi came into the picture—and when Umlosi started fighting with his bare hands, the fur generally began to fly!

The giant black seized one of the ruffians, and he lifted him clean into the air, as though he were a featherweight. Screaming madly, the fellow went clean over Umlosi's head, to crash with terrific force on the table, and then to sprawl helplessly on the floor.

"Shoot him!" snarled Vanhoek. "Shoot this black pig!"

His revolver came out, but Umlosi was as quick as a flash. He twirled round, his fist shot out, and Vanhoek toppled over backwards, his senses reeling, his jaw nearly dislocated.

Nelson Lee was on his feet again by now, and he was filled with wild anxiety. At any moment he expected to see Umlosi fall.

Even Lee had not expected that these men would show fight so quickly. His plan had been boldly to demand the release of Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners—and he had anticipated that Vanhoek would either crumple up or bolt.

However, the issue was settled less than ten seconds later.

For, before Umlosi could be shot down, one of the men whirled a chair round, and, more by accident than design, the heavy back of it struck Umlosi on the side of the head. And, hard as that head was, it could not stand that sort of treatment with impunity.

Umlosi stumbled, fell forward, and in a moment two of the men were on him. Before he could recover his dazed wits, his wrists were bound with rope. Nelson Lee, in the meantime, was helpless—with a revolver jabbed into the small of his back.

"Better not move, stranger!" said the man who held the revolver. "If I pull this trigger, you'll be well ventilated."

"Get his gun!" snarled Vanhoek, staggering to his feet.

In the circumstances Nelson Lee could do nothing. His revolver was taken from him, his wrists were bound, and he was flung into a chair and held there.

"You think you can come here and order me about on my own property?" demanded Vanhoek thickly. "I'm holding two prisoners, so I might as well hold two more."

"Ah, then you admit that Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners are here?" said Nelson Lee quickly.

"I admit nothing!" retorted Vanhoek fiercely.

The other men, after dusting themselves down, were now standing round, startled and uneasy.

"Boss, we'd better be quitting!" said one of them, looking at Vanhoek. "Maybe there's a crowd of other men coming along. We'd best get clear while we're safe!"

"We're safe!" retorted Vanhoek. "D'you think I'm afraid of this English dude? A friend of Lord Dorrimore, eh? That's him! Nobody but a fool would have come here alone."

"He's the stranger I saw in Vierstad today," said the man named Schmidt. "It was he who told me that Chadwick had been injured. How do we know it's true?"

Vanhoek looked dangerous.

"What do you know about Chadwick?" he demanded, glowering at Nelson Lee. "Out with it! I need Chadwick badly. He's injured, eh? What do you know about him?"

"This is all very foolish, Mr. Vanhoek," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "You won't do yourself any good by acting like this. If you are holding Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners prisoners, you had better give them up to me!"

"Give them up—to you!" bellowed Vanhoek. "What do you take me for—a madman? You'll stay here until it pleases me to let you go!"

While Nelson Lee and Umlosi were thus helpless, Nipper and the other St. Frank's fellows were anxiously waiting behind the shadow of the kopje.

A full half hour had already elapsed, but nothing had happened. No signal had come, and there was no sign of Nelson Lee's return.

The juniors had crept up to the top of the hill, and now they were looking down upon that strange ostrich farm. They could see the lighted window, and the gleam streaming out from the open doorway.

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Handforth, breathing hard. "We haven't heard any revolver shots, so it proves there's been no fighting. Why doesn't Mr. Lee give a signal? Are we going to stay here all night?"

"Take it easy, old man," murmured Church. "No need to get impatient. I expect Mr. Lee knows what he is doing."

"He ought to have taken us all with him," grunted Handforth. "It was a dotty thing to go into the place like that with only Umlosi. By George! I'm going to do some scouting."

Handforth & Co. were a little in advance of the others, and before Church or McClure could grab him he had run off into the valley.

"Hi, Handy!" panted Church. "Don't be an idiot, you know! Don't forget what Mr. Lee said——"

"Hold him!" sang out Nipper, running up. "We might spoil everything if we butt in now!"

But Handforth had gone—and he leapt over a kind of sharp hillock in the darkness and stumbled.

"Hi! What the——" he gasped. "Great Scott!"

For that "hillock" had moved under him, and the next second it heaved up, and before Handforth knew what had happened he was careering onwards, clinging on for dear life.

"Handy!" gasped Church frantically.

Handforth was not in a position to answer. Unknown to him he had stumbled over an ostrich! And the startled bird, leaping forward, was now carrying Handforth on its back—and Edward Oswald was clinging to its great neck. The other juniors could see fairly clearly in the moonlight—and, in any other circumstances, they might have thought the situation comical.

But it did not strike them as being in any way humorous now.

For the great bird was loping onwards towards the lighted shack—carrying Handforth with it. If the other juniors were surprised, Handforth himself was staggered. If he had tried to get a ride of this sort, he would never have succeeded.

But then, Handforth generally had a knack of pitchforking himself into trouble.



CHAPTER 19.

Handy's Free Ride!

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth.

It wasn't until he had been riding for two or three hundred yards that he realised the nature of his mount. An ostrich! He remembered having seen a man riding an ostrich on the films, but never, in his wildest dreams, had he believed that he would one day be riding one himself!

The extraordinary part about it was, he had not intended to ride an ostrich, and now that he was on the creature's back he could do nothing but cling there. For it was dashing along at terrific speed, and Handforth felt that if he dropped off he

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would be considerably hurt. He also felt that he would be considerably hurt if he clung on.

However, he clung on. It seemed to him to be the lesser of two evils.

As it happened, there was a certain amount of activity outside the shack just then. Figures were moving about. In fact, Vanhoek and Schmidt were carrying Nelson Lee between them, and the other two men were struggling on with Umlosi, half-carrying, half-dragging him.

They reached a rough outhouse, and the door of this had just been opened, and the two prisoners were about to be thrust inside, when the ostrich appeared, with its human freight.

Handforth, whirling along, had a clear vision of Nelson Lee and Umlosi—bound hand and foot—being forced into that outhouse. And Handforth was so surprised that he nearly fell off the ostrich. He let out a wild yell, startling his mount so much that it swerved madly, veering off in terror.

Exactly what Vanhoek and his companions thought, it was impossible to judge, but they were considerably startled. One of the men pulled his revolver out and fired.

Crack!

There was a spurt of flame, and a bullet kicked up the dust near the ostrich's feet.

The frightened creature ran round in a half-circle, and then loped off at full speed again, taking Handforth back to his starting-point, it seemed. Luckily enough, nothing better could have happened.

For the great bird, suddenly finding itself confronted by a crowd of boys, veered off at right angles again, and Handforth was flung violently off, to roll head over heels in the grass and dust.

"Oh, you hopeless ass!" panted Church, as he ran up. "You might have been killed, Handy!"

"I am killed!" groaned Handforth, sitting up, and spitting out a quantity of grit. "Oh, corks! Oh, crumbs! Both my legs are broken, and I haven't got a sound rib left!"

"What was that revolver shot?" asked Nipper quickly.

All the juniors had swarmed round Handforth now, and they were excited and eager. Handforth leapt to his feet—which was a surprising performance, considering that both his legs were broken! He swayed for a moment or two, for that ride, to say nothing of the fall, had made him dizzy.

"They've been collared!" he panted. "Mr. Lee and Umlosi! They're prisoners!"

"What!"

"Prisoners!" said Handforth. "I saw 'em! Mr. Lee and Umlosi were being shoved into an outhouse by four men! Bound hand and foot, you know! Come on, you chaps! Rescue, St. Frank's!"

"Good gad!"

"On the ball, Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Wait a minute!" shouted Nipper urgently. "These men are armed! And they fired at

Handy! If we rush at them they might shoot at us, and—"

"Let 'em shoot!" roared Handforth. "The rotters! They'd better not try any of those tricks with us!"

This was sheer folly, but he and the other juniors were far too excited to act reasonably. They went pelting across the rough grassland towards the shack, and Nipper, when he saw that the charge was inevitable, joined in, and took the lead.

Everything was happening speedily, and in that soft moonlight appearances were very deceptive.

Vanhoek, for example, made a natural blunder. When he saw all those figures rushing down upon him and his companions he took them to be men—and probably armed men at that. And although there were only a dozen of them there seemed to be scores. They were swarming up at the double, and they came out of the soft light with a noisy rush of feet.

"The police!" gasped one of the other men.

"Shoot—shoot, you fool!" snarled Vanhoek.

"If we're taken it'll mean twenty years!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Revolver shots rang out, and Nelson Lee and Umlosi, lying helpless on the ground, just where they had been flung outside the shed, were filled with anguish. They heard those shots, and they knew what it meant. The juniors were attacking—and they were being fired at!

"I was afraid of it—I was afraid of it!" muttered Lee. "Heaven help the boys now!"

And it really seemed that Providence was on the side of the juniors, for those first shots went wide. A bullet struck the ground near Nipper, sending the dust flying upwards. Another bullet shot past Travers' head, and he even heard the hum of it as it sped through the air.

If those men had remained cool they could have killed half those boys during the first moment or two. But they were not merely scared but panic-stricken. For, believing these attackers to be men, they expected a fusillade of shots at any moment, and their own aim, in consequence, was erratic and wild. They felt far more like bolting than standing their ground.

Then, before they could pull their triggers again, the boys were upon them. They swept up like an avalanche, carrying all before them. Vanhoek went down with Handforth and Nipper on the top of him. The other men were swamped. By great good fortune their revolvers were knocked out of their hands and sent flying into the dust.

During that first moment of battle every man was disarmed. This was more by accident than design, but it was a piece of extraordinary good fortune.

"Got 'em!" yelled Handforth triumphantly, "Buck up, the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hold 'em down!"

"Absolutely!" gurgled Archie, as he sat resolutely on the face of one of the prisoners.

"What-ho! Tally-ho, and so forth! I mean to say, we've absolutely got the blighters!"

"Boys—only boys!" ejaculated Vanhoek in stupefied amazement. "Fools—fools! We've been scared by a crowd of boys!"

"Dry up, you!" said Handforth truculently. He brought his right round, and Mr. Vanhoek subsided!



CHAPTER 20.

On the Run!

THE air was filled with dust, and everybody was shouting at once. Vanhoek and his companions had appar-

ently vanished—they were hidden beneath the pile of juniors. Nipper, when he saw that the enemy was down, rushed off to Nelson Lee and Umlosi.

"All right, gov'nor!" he said breathlessly. "Here we are!"

"Well done, Nipper!" said Lee. "Is anyone hurt?"

"Nothing much, sir—no bullet wounds, anyhow," said Nipper. "They must be rotten shots. What happened? How did you and Umlosi get into this fix, sir?"

"Never mind that now, Nipper," said Lee, as his bonds were cut. "Good! That's better! We'll secure these men at once, and then perhaps we shall be able to accomplish something."

"Well, we haven't done badly so far, gov'nor."

A series of shouts came from the other boys. Nelson Lee and Umlosi had just been released, and they both came running up. And Nelson Lee was now ready to admit that it had been all for the best that these twelve boys had come along on this quest. For they had certainly made themselves very useful.

However, the episode was not yet over.

Vanhoek, by a terrific effort, had managed to shake Handforth off, and he had kicked out so violently that the unfortunate Edward Oswald had collapsed, winded. A kick below the belt is not a pleasant sort of blow.

Church and McClure leapt furiously at the man, but he was running now—running madly. Two of the others had managed to get free, too; they had gained their liberty by similar tactics—by kicking and by biting. Momentarily released, they had leapt to their feet and had bolted.

"After them!" yelled Nipper excitedly. "Come on, gov'nor! They've escaped!"

It was a stern chase. With Nelson Lee and Umlosi in the lead, the pursuers went dashing after the fugitives. The fourth member of Vanhoek's party, luckily, had been already bound securely, and so he was helpless. Lee half-expected that Vanhoek would make for one of the sheds with the idea, no doubt, of getting into the Ford car.

But this did not happen. The men were running out on to the open veldt, and they were racing away in the moonlight. Yet they did not proceed very far. For suddenly they went plunging down into a steep hollow—a kind of great gash in the veldt. It was a gully, and it was choked with dead brushwood.

On the very edge of it Vanhoek turned, and he stood at bay. The other two men ran on, plunging into the brushwood and vanishing.

"Stand back!" thundered Vanhoek, holding out his hand. "The first one who advances will drop dead! I've got you covered! Stand back, I tell you!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Travers. "He's armed!"

The moonlight gleamed on the object which Vanhoek held in his grip, and instinctively the juniors pulled up. They stood there, panting.

"Hold still, boys!" said Nelson Lee anxiously. "Don't make a rush. We don't want any tragedies now."

"There'll be a tragedy if you come any nearer!" snarled Vanhoek. "If I shoot, I shall shoot to kill!"

"Don't you think it would be better, my friend, to surrender?" asked Nelson Lee. "This game is doing you no good at all. You don't want to add murder to your list of crimes."

"If I shoot—I kill!" retorted Vanhoek fiercely.

Yet he withheld his fire. Nelson Lee had a suspicion that the man was not carrying a revolver at all—that glittering object in his hand was probably a cigarette-case or some other metal object. But it was impossible to be sure. At such a distance the shape of the weapon could not be seen. And it was certainly not worth the risk.

As a matter of fact, Lee was right.

This was a desperate ruse on Vanhoek's part. His two companions, plunging desperately into that dead brushwood, were flinging it aside, and now the shimmering gleam of metal was revealed—the great metal body of the Wanderer of the Skies!

"Look!" shouted Handforth suddenly. "There's something under all that stuff. Those bushes are faked! It's—it's Dorrie's aeroplane!"

"Good gad!"

"Keep back—keep back!" thundered Vanhoek. "Fools! Do you want to be shot down?"

They watched, fascinated. Without doubt, the great monoplane was hidden beneath that mass of brushwood. And now the mystery was partially explained.

The machine had come down near this ostrich farm, and Vanhoek had promptly concealed it in the big, deep gully—covering it with these masses of brushwood. Even in broad daylight the machine had been completely hidden, and nobody had guessed that it was there. In that moment Nelson Lee was



Some instinct seemed to warn the man of his peril. He spun round, and was just in time to see the lion leaping upon him from the rear!

sorely puzzled. For it seemed to him that these men must have made tremendous preparations in order to have that brushwood ready so that the machine could be hidden promptly and effectively. This in itself was another mystery.

But this was no time to think of such matters.

There was Vanhoek, standing at bay, while his companions worked desperately amidst that great mass of brushwood. What were they doing? What was the object of this strange move?

It seemed so pointless—so unnecessary. Surely it would have been better for the men to make a dash for liberty across the veldt? Why were they wasting time here? What could they hope to gain by spending their time frantically exposing the Wanderer of the Skies?

A thought had occurred to Nelson Lee. He believed that these men were about to set fire to all this dry wood so that the great 'plane would be burnt.

It was an act of revenge, perhaps—a senseless move. Yet even this explanation did not seem to hold water. For if these men had had such an idea in mind they could have set fire to the brushwood long since.

"Let's rush them," muttered Handforth. "Come on, Umlosi!"

"Wau! I am ready, young master!" said Umlosi promptly. "Thou hast spoken good words. Wise words."

"Stay!" commanded Nelson Lee. "Umlosi, you are as bad as Handforth—you are both needlessly reckless. It would be folly to take unnecessary risks!"



CHAPTER 21.

A Shock for Vanhoek!

VANHOEK was a mass of nerves—jumpy, agitated, desperate.

But he still stood his ground—he still remained on the edge of that gully, a threatening, menacing figure in the moonlight. Meanwhile, the other two men were burrowing under the vast mass of brushwood, getting nearer and nearer to the main door of the buried 'plane.

This work of concealing the Wanderer of the Skies had been well accomplished. Not a trace of the machine had been left exposed. Every inch had been covered. Thus it was no easy task for these two men to now fight their way through. And what was their object? They could have no idea of flying the 'plane. It would take hours to free it from these encumbrances—and, even so, it was obvious that they could not pilot the machine, otherwise they would not have gone to such trouble to hire the man Chadwick.

At last the pair succeeded. They reached the door of the 'plane. It was high up in the body, and in order to reach it the men were obliged to climb on to the wing. This was a huge machine—with four engines, with cabins, state-rooms, lounges. The St. Frank's fellows were familiar with this wonderful aeroplane, since they had travelled in it themselves. It was the machine which had taken them to India during the summer holidays.

Since then, however, a new type of engine had been installed, and these engines used a

fuel that was both non-explosive and non-inflammable. It was in order to test these wonderful new engines that Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners had essayed the flight from the Cape to Cairo.

Just as the men reached the big door a movement came from within. The door itself was half open, apparently having been left in this condition. And now suddenly a lithe form sprang out.

A lion!

The men were so surprised—so terrified—that they fell clean from that great 'plane, and crashed to the ground amidst the tangled brushwood. The lion, probably more terrified than the men, leapt out, bounded up the great gully, and took Mr. Vanhoek in the rear.

Some instinct seemed to warn the man of his peril. He spun round, and he had a clear vision of the lion leaping upon him. He dropped like a stone, uttering a hoarse cry.

Crack! Crack!

Nelson Lee's revolver spat viciously. It was not really his weapon—but one of the revolvers that he had picked up after the men had bolted. He had not used it until the present crisis, however, realising that Vanhoek held the upper hand—or, at least, appeared to hold the upper hand.

The lion, screaming in its death agonies, thudded to the ground, quivering. The juniors stood there watching, startled, dumb-founded.

"Great Scott!" muttered Nipper. "That was a near thing!"

Vanhoek was prostrate—helpless with terror. With a sudden rush Handforth and Umlosi and a number of the other boys ran up, seized Vanhoek and held him. At the same moment the other two men came scrambling out of the brushwood, panting with fear. They were seized and held.

No doubt that lion had crept into the body of the aeroplane the previous night—perhaps even earlier—and, once there, the animal had been afraid to emerge. Or perhaps he had considered that this new home was rather to his liking. At all events, he had tried to escape at the first sign of disturbance.

Nelson Lee made sure that the animal was dead, and then he turned to Vanhoek.

"So you were bluffing, eh?" he said, as he picked up a cigarette case. "Very clever, Mr. Vanhoek, but it would have been better all round if you had surrendered at first."

"You are lucky!" snarled Vanhoek. "If I had been holding a real gun I would have shot most of you dead!"

"I can quite believe it," said Nelson Lee. "Not that such a move would have done you any good."

The three men were rapidly roped up and rendered quite helpless. The other man, who had not joined in this flight, was already a prisoner. He had been bound previously, and had been brought on to the scene by one or two of the juniors. While Umlosi stood guard over them, Nelson Lee penetrated into that mass of dead brushwood, and Nipper and

Handforth and a few others accompanied him.

"What's the idea, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "Why are you examining the 'plane now? Why not look for Dorrie and Mr. Manners?"

"Just what I was thinking!" said Handforth.

"I am looking for Dorrie and Mr. Manners," replied Nelson Lee.

"My only hat! You think they're in the machine, sir?"

"I do."

"But that lion!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "That lion was hidden here. There might be others, too!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"That is hardly likely—but we'll be careful nevertheless," said Nelson Lee. "This machine was very carefully concealed, and there would be no better hiding-place for the two prisoners. At all events, we shall soon know the truth. If they are not here, we will look elsewhere."

With considerable difficulty they managed to climb up on to the wing, and from there they got through the doorway. Nelson Lee's electric torch was flashing, and there were many indications, inside the saloon, that the lion had been in occupation. The whole place was filled with the odour of the animal. The metal door at the end was closed, however, so it was clear that the lion had not been able to get beyond the saloon.

Nelson Lee led the way, opened the door, and walked through into a narrow passage. They were now right in the great wing of the

aeroplane. On either side there were narrow corridors leading to the tiny state-room, for these cabins were built into the very wing itself.

"Dorrie!" shouted Lee, at the top of his voice. "Dorrie, old man!"

They all held their breaths. Then their hearts beat more rapidly when they heard a startled, muffled ejaculation from somewhere forward in the giant 'plane. A few moments later came the welcome sound of Lord Dorrimore's voice.

"By the Lord Harry! It's Lee! Good old professor! This way, Lee!"

"TRAPPED BY BUSHRANGERS!"

Bushrangers in Australia!

It seems ridiculous, and when Edward Oswald Handforth makes the suggestion his chums laugh at him.

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"Hurrah!" yelled Nipper and the other juniors.

"This way, boys," said Lee, as he strode forward. "By Jove! I'm thankful indeed to hear Dorrie's familiar voice!"

The quest was ended—and it was crowned with success!

was a small apartment, with levers and dials on every hand, and with a great glass frontage.

And there, on the floor, side by side, were Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Hobart Manners. They were tightly bound, with their arms behind them; they were both looking haggard and worn and weary. But their eyes were eager—sparkling at the sight of their rescuers.

"Lee, old man, you're about the last man in the world I expected to see!" exclaimed Dorrie gladly. "Gad, and the boys, too! Manners, are we dreaming? Good glory! The St. Frank's youngsters!"

"It seems hardly possible," said Mr. Manners hoarsely.

"We're real enough, Dorrie!" shouted Handforth. "By George! I'm glad we've found you! The whole of South Africa has been searching for days—but it's left to us to do the trick!"

"Easy—easy!" murmured Lord Dorrimore, as his bonds were cut. "Whoa! I'm as stiff as the very deuce! Thanks, Lee! I don't know how you performed this miracle, but you're a marvel!"

"You've got to thank Umlosi mainly," said Nelson Lee. "He came to me in Durban, and swore you were alive—whilst everybody else was bemoaning your tragic fate. I believed him, and I came out in search of you."

"Good old Umlosi!" said Lord Dorrimore. "He's a good 'un. Whew! We've had a rotten time!"

"Well, don't trouble to explain just yet," said Nelson Lee. "Get your circulations into working order again, and then we'll adjourn to the house and get this whole thing straightened out."

"What about that lion?" asked Nipper. "Did you know you had a lion to keep you company in the 'plane?"

"A lion!" exclaimed Mr. Manners, surprised and considerably startled. "No, we didn't know anything about it. Good heavens! We only knew we had a pig," he added grimly. "I hope to heaven you have captured Vanhoek! He deserves twenty years' penal servitude! The infernal brute!"

It was clear that the lion had been unable to penetrate into the machine. The animal might have heard some movements from the other side of that metal door, but he had not taken fright, it seemed. The control-room was quite a distance from the saloon, in any case.

Umlosi was overjoyed when, ten minutes later, Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners emerged. The other juniors cheered wildly, and there were scenes of great enthusiasm. Umlosi leapt forward, and clasped Dorrie's hand.

"Wau! 'Tis well, N'Kose, my father!" he rumbled. "Did I not know that thou were safe?"

"Safe, old friend—but darned uncomfortable," said Dorrie, nodding. "I was hoping to be rescued—but to be rescued by you, and by Untagati, was something I had not dared to dream of."



CHAPTER 22.

Lord Dorrimore's Story!

PASSING through the wing passage, Nelson Lee mounted some steps, opened another metal door, and then found himself right in the nose of the aeroplane—within the control-room, in fact. It

"All is well, N'Kose," said Umlosi simply.

He was not demonstrative, but there was a world of feeling in his tone—and in his look. And later, when the entire party had gathered in the shack, the two rescued prisoners were feeling a lot better.

Vanhoek and his evil companions were outside on the veranda, and Umlosi, perfectly contented, was standing on guard over them. Umlosi wanted to hear no details regarding this affair. He was content to know that his beloved "N'Kose" was safe.

"Well, I suppose you want to hear the yarn?" asked Dorrie at length. "It's a pretty surprising one, I can assure you."

"I think Mr. Lee's yarn is surprising, too," said Mr. Manners. "It was truly remarkable how he got on our track—and how he came to our rescue."

"We all had a share in it, sir," remarked Handforth happily. "By jingo! Won't Irene be pleased?"

"At the first opportunity we must get the news abroad," said Mr. Manners, nodding. "People think we are dead, I suppose? They have concluded that we have perished?"

"I'm afraid so," said Nelson Lee. "The newspapers gave up hope a day or two ago. It is generally assumed that the machine crashed, and that you and Dorrie met your fate in some inaccessible spot. Personally, I thought that you might have descended in the Kalahari Desert."

"Then you must think I'm a rotten sort of pilot," said Dorrie lightly. "Man alive, how on earth do you suppose I could get so far astray as the Kalahari Desert? I was dead on my course."

"Sorry, old man, but in the absence of any other explanation—"

"Yes, I suppose you're right," broke in Dorrie. "Well, here's the yarn. Everything went as smooth as could be until night came on. This was during the first day of our flight, you know—we didn't get into any second day! We recognised Bloemfontein, and then we flew over one or two smaller places, and we were carrying along splendidly when Manners spotted something that looked like a bush fire."

"Wasn't it a bush fire?" asked Nipper.

"Well, it was a fire of some kind, on the veldt," replied Dorrie. "It was five or six miles away over to the west of our course, and it came as a bit of a shock to us when we discovered that it was no ordinary fire. To put it bluntly, we read the word 'Help!' in letters of fire!"

"A remarkably clever dodge," nodded Nelson Lee. "You fell into the trap?"

"Naturally," said his lordship gruffly.

"There it was—staring up at us from the black veldt. The word 'Help!' Well, hang it, we knew that the message was for us. Somebody was in distress—somebody knew that we should be flying overhead, and that fire had been set going for our especial benefit. What else could we do but come down?"

"And you were on a non-stop flight from the Cape to Cairo, sir!" said Travers mildly.

"It couldn't be helped," replied Dorrie. "There was that silent appeal for help, and we felt compelled to answer the call!"

CHAPTER 23.

The Truth!



NELSON LEE nodded.

"I fancy I should have done the same, in similar circumstances, Dorrie," he

said. "You could not very well fly on, after seeing that poignant appeal. Moreover, it was so strange, so unusual."

"That was just it," nodded his lordship. "We succeeded in making a perfect landing, but no sooner had we stepped out of the machine than we were grabbed by a number of hulking great brutes, and we were trussed up like a couple of chickens!"

"We realised it was a trap—but what could we do?" said Mr. Manners. "Once captured by these men, we were helpless!"

"We watched the good old 'plane being stowed away," continued Dorrie. "They used a couple of motor-cars—hitched them on and towed her. She was taken down into that gully, and for a time I thought that they were intendin' to destroy her completely. Then, later, I saw the dodge. Enormous piles of brushwood were ready, and as soon as the machine was in position, she was smothered—concealed completely. Wonderful bit of work, when you come to think of it—a huge 'plane like that being completely concealed. I shall have to congratulate Vanhoek when I get a chance," added his lordship cheerily.

"You weren't hidden in the control-room at the first, then?" asked Lee.

"No; to begin with, we were taken into this cheerful mansion," replied Dorrie. "In the morning, of course, the aeroplane had completely vanished. There was nothing but that enormous pile of brushwood—and nobody could have the faintest idea that the machine was here!"

"But what was the object of this?" inquired Lee curiously.

"It's no good asking me—although I might be able to guess a few things," said Lord Dorrimore. "During that first day Vanhoek did nothing. Inquiries were made, I believe, and he told everybody that the machine had flown overhead at the correct hour. So, of course, no other inquiries were made. It was assumed that we had got well beyond this part of the country, and so it seemed obvious that we must have got off our course somewhere farther north."

"Exactly," said Lee. "And what happened after that?"

"Vanhoek evidently knew that we should pass almost directly over his precious ostrich

farm," said Lord Dorrimore gruffly. "That's why he prepared that special fire. That's why he got the brushwood all ready. Anyhow, he put a proposition to me. He wanted to get to Europe—quickly. In other words, he suggested that we should take him along as a passenger. But he wasn't ready to go just yet—but would be all settled in about a couple of days' time."

"You mean a couple of days' time from then?"

"Yes," said Dorrie. "He's been ready for three or four days now—but Manners and I simply refused to have anything to do with it. We told him to go to the dickens. He threatened us, he pleaded with us, but it made no difference."

"But wouldn't it have been better all round if you had complied?" asked Lee. "In that way, at least, you would have gained your liberty, and—"

"We didn't trust the brute," said Lord Dorrimore. "Besides, I'm hanged if I'll be ordered about in that way! Vanhoek's plan was to make me pilot the machine straight from here, right across into Greece. Cairo wasn't far enough for him—he had to go a step farther than that."

"So Vanhoek held you prisoners—and, in the meantime, he attempted to get another pilot," said Lee.

"Did he, by gad!" ejaculated Dorrie.

"Chadwick—the man I was telling you about," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "This fellow, Chadwick, was engaged to pilot the aeroplane. Vanhoek's idea, no doubt, was to get Chadwick here, and to fly off without any further delay."

"But what was it all about, sir?" asked Nipper. "If these men wanted to get to Europe, why couldn't they go by steamer, in the ordinary way?"

"Diamonds, I imagine," said Nelson Lee.

"You've hit it, of course," nodded Lord Dorrimore. "Illicit diamonds, without a doubt. It's been Vanhoek's game for years, I imagine. This ostrich farm is only a blind. An exceptionally big consignment of stones came into his hands two days after he grabbed our 'plane. Don't you see? His wheeze was to fly straight out of Africa, carrying these diamonds with him. It meant a direct get-away."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"He heard that you were coming over in this direction, and he made his plans accordingly," he said. "And no doubt the game was worth the candle. I expect this consignment of stones is of tremendous value. But it was hopeless to try to get them out of the country by any ordinary methods, since the watch would be too keen. It is no easy matter to smuggle diamonds out of South Africa."

"Vanhoek knows that better than we do," said Mr. Manners. "Still, a great deal of this is only guesswork."

"It won't be guesswork much longer," said Lee. "Why did Vanhoek and those two men make such desperate efforts to

get into the aeroplane after they'd escaped from us, just before we rescued you? Not to kiss you good-bye, Dorrie!"

"No, I suppose not," said his lordship dryly.

"These men were madly anxious to escape—but they did not want to bolt until they had got their precious consignment of diamonds with them," went on Lee shrewdly. "And it's perfectly logical that they would hide these stones in the aeroplane itself. They expected to fly off to-night—or at dawn, at the latest. This man, Chadwick, was on his way—and they anticipated his arrival. So they had everything in readiness."

"I rather think we had better search the aeroplane," said Mr. Manners.

Later, when a search was instituted, the result was most enlightening.

Diamonds were found—uncut stones of all sizes, but most of them were superb specimens. The entire collection must have been worth an enormous fortune.

"It was a big game, and Vanhoek took big chances," said Nelson Lee. "He has probably been collecting these stones for years. He was afraid to dispose of them—and he found it well-nigh impossible to get them out of the country. Then you came along with your Cape to Cairo flight, and Vanhoek's difficulty was solved. At least, so he thought."

"Why, it would have been dead easy for him, sir," said Nipper. "If the machine had flown straight into Europe, there wouldn't have been any trouble at all. Vanhoek could have got away, and he would have been in Paris or Berlin or Amsterdam within thirty-six hours."

"As it is, the blighter is outside, on the veranda, with good old Umlosi lookin' after him," said Dorrie cheerfully. "And for the next few years he'll have an intimate acquaintance with the inside of a choice South African prison!"



CHAPTER 24.

—Dorrie's Startling Plan!

EARLY the next morning the world was stupefied, and then delighted, to learn that the great Manners' 'plane was safe—and that Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners were alive and unharmed. The St. Frank's fellows could easily imagine the sensation that was caused in London—and at St. Frank's, too. For the telegraph did not omit to flash the news that a party of St. Frank's boys had taken part in the rescue.

Scores of men were obtained from neighbouring sheep farms, and from Vierstad and Winsdorp. The giant aeroplane was gently pulled out of that gully, wheeled on to the open veldt, and one or two minor repairs were effected.

In the main, however, the Wanderer of the Skies had come to no real harm.

The police were now in charge of the ostrich farm. Vanhoek and his associates had been lodged in gaol, and they were now awaiting their trial. There wasn't the slightest doubt that they would all receive severe sentences—not merely for their criminal conspiracy with regard to the aeroplane, but for their illicit dealing in diamonds.

There was no need for the rescue party to find accommodation in any hotel. They were well acquainted with the cabins of the Wanderer, and they were comfortable enough on board.

That night, after the excitement had settled down, Lord Dorrimore was entertaining the party in the aeroplane's sumptuous saloon.

"I've been thinkin', you fellows," said his lordship cheerfully. "Rather a rummy thing for me to do, but I have these spasms occasionally. Yes, I've been thinkin'."

"With what result?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Well, look here," said Dorrie, coming straight to the point. "I understand that you're contemplatin' gettin' straight back to Durban, or to Capetown, where you'll take the first available liner for Adelaide?"

"Yes," said Lee. "We want to go as quickly as possible. And I assume that you are anxious to be continuing your flight, too——"

"Bother the flight," said Dorrie, in his usual irresponsible way. "The flight is messed up, anyhow. Might as well postpone it for another month or two."

"Really, Dorrie!" protested Mr. Manners. "What on earth——"

"Well, a week or two, then," amended Dorrie. "But look here, old man. Lee and these boys have put themselves out tremendously in order to rescue us. They've allowed their School Ship to go on ahead, and they might not be able to get a liner for a week or two. Well, I've got a wheeze."

"What is it, Dorrie?" chorused the boys eagerly.

"Well, I'm going to suggest that, instead of continuing this flight to Cairo, we should all fly to Adelaide," said Dorrie coolly.

"Adelaide!" repeated Nelson Lee. "You're joking, aren't you?"

"I was never more serious in my life!"

"But, my dear man, the distance is nearly six thousand miles!"

"And the range of the engines on this machine—that is to say, the range of the fuel—is between eight and nine thousand miles," replied Dorrie. "So what's the matter with you? If you're so sceptical, we can stop half-way, if necessary, at Amsterdam Island. It's only just a matter of arrangement. Anyhow, what's wrong with the wheeze?"

"Nothing!" yelled the juniors.

"Good old Dorrie!"

"But what about all your plans, Dorrie?" asked Nelson Lee. "We can quite easily go by boat—and we don't want to ruin your programme."

"It's ruined already."

"All the same, it won't be much trouble for you to fly back to the Cape, and then start again," argued Lee.

"Oh, cut it out!" sighed Dorrie. "Man alive, can't you see that I'm as keen as a kid to get on with this new flight? Nothing will please me better than to trot you across to Adelaide. And what real difference does it make? Manners and I wanted to make a test flight. Well, it'll be just as good if we go to Adelaide and back. Perhaps better. Anyhow, you can regard it as settled!"

"You'll agree, won't you, sir?" asked Nipper, turning to Nelson Lee.

The famous detective chuckled.

"What else can I do?" he said dryly. "And when do you propose to start on this hare-brained flight, Dorrie?"

"To-morrow morning," said his lordship promptly. "There'll be hordes of newspapermen here to-morrow, I expect—cinematograph Johnnies, and all the rest of 'em. I want to escape before they arrive."

"By George!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "I've just thought of something! If we fly to Australia like this, we shall get to Adelaide long before the School Ship!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

"Of course we shall!"

"Nearly a fortnight ahead of the School Ship," said Lord Dorrimore, smiling. "That'll make the other St. Frank's chaps sit up, won't it? You kids spend three or four days in South Africa, have all sorts of stirrin' adventures with bandits, and diamond robbers, then you fly to Australia, and I'm darned if you don't get to Adelaide days and days before the big crowd. When you come to look at it, it's a bit of a nerve."

"What a lark if we fly directly over the good old St. Francis!" chuckled Nipper. "I dare say you can wangle it, can't you, Dorrie? Perhaps we can fly low, so that we can wave!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the meal proceeded in the highest of spirits.

The St. Frank's fellows had something glorious to look forward to now. They had stayed behind in South Africa to save Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners. Now they had the prospect of a flight in the Wanderer of the Skies to Australia, and if all went well they would get there many days in advance of the big crowd!

It really seemed that the excitement was only just beginning! At all events, Nipper & Co. agreed heartily that this world tour was one of the best wheezes that the St. Frank's governors had ever thought of!

THE END.

(Next week Nipper and his chums arrive in Australia. What a wonderful time they have, too; what a gloriously exciting time! The story is entitled, "Trapped by Bush-rangers!" Don't miss reading it on any account, chums! And don't forget to write and tell your editor what you think of this new series. All letters are welcome, you know.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR READERS

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.



REG. T. STAPLES

IT'S quite likely that lots of readers are curious to see your dial—Reg T. Staples (Walworth)—so here it is, this week, gazing out upon you.

* * *

And speaking of dials, I expect a lot of you are wondering when your own is going to appear. The truth is, so many readers have given me permission to publish their photos, and I have so many in hand, that it is taking a long while to publish them. Only one a week can appear, you know. At the same time, every reader who sends me a photo promptly gets mine in return—which may be some sort of compensation or not. No doubt some of you regard it as a punishment.

* * *

I haven't had time to get out the exact figures in the Character Popularity Voting—Rosamond Woods (Bricket Wood)—but I can tell you, at least, that the Handforth brothers were easily at the top of the poll. Later on I may be able to give the order of popularity of the others.

* * *

The Old Paper first appeared—Dennis Heselton (Harrogate)—on June 12th, 1915, although the first St. Frank's story did not come out in it until July 28th, 1917.

* * *

If you want to correspond with readers in France—Phyllis Clarke (Dorchester)—you had better join the St. Frank's League, and then you can have a notice printed in the Old Paper to get you in touch with such readers. There are quite a number in France, as I know, for they often write to me. Look out for the application form; it does not appear every week, but it is bound to pop up every now and again. As soon as you see it, bag two copies, and the rest is as easy as A B C.

* * *

You tell me — Gwendoline Norman (Dalston)—that you have two friends, aged

14 and 15, who think themselves too old to read the Old Paper. And further on in your letter you say that you pass your copy every week to "a gentleman over 30, who says he never enjoys any book as much as the NELSON LEE SCHOOL STORY LIBRARY." Why don't you tell your two friends about him? And let them read this quotation from a South African reader's letter which reached me this week: "I have just turned 21 years of age, and am still as keen on reading 'em as I was when I first started. And, mind you, I have not confined myself to reading only your yarns. Far from it. I have read dozens upon dozens of books, from nearly every popular author's pen, and I am still interested in the 'wee bonny' N.L." So I hope your two friends will put this in their pipes and smoke it, Gwendoline. I hasten to add that I am only speaking metaphorically, as I doubt if they have yet learnt to smoke pipes—particularly if they are girls. I am afraid that I can't introduce an Arabian family, as you wish. An Arabian boy, perhaps—but when it comes to the whole family, I'm afraid the general run of readers would consider it a bit too thick.

* * *

I'll give you a full answer—"Criticiser" (Liverpool)—when you send me your full name and address. I don't require these for publication, but because I do not generally give any answer to anonymous letters. As for daring me to publish your letter on this page, I'm not to be drawn like that. But I'll print every line of it, word by word, if you will send me your name and address, with permission to publish these also. Let's see if you have the courage of your convictions. Your letter, far from being caustic, is on the whole complimentary, but at the same time, I won't repeat it in these columns unless your words have the support of your name and address.

What's Wrong with the Rovers?



An invitation to a footer match would please most followers of football, but it doesn't please Nelson Lee any too much, for he's convinced there's something sinister behind the invitation extended to him.

Nipper Comes a Cropper!

THE big crowd on Halston United's ground watched the referee and linesmen anxiously. It was time to start, but the three officials were examining the ground, and some argument seemed to be going on between the two linesmen who had been called in for consultation.

The Rovers' players, who had travelled thirty miles or so, much of the distance being over lonely, rough moorland road, also watched anxiously. They did not relish the idea of having made the journey in vain, infinitely preferring to take the risk of playing on the frost-bound ground.

"Land of my fathers!" said Dave Williams, the Rovers' Welsh goalie. "It will be a lively ball!"

"The ball bounces," said Rutherton, the veteran back, who was not so keen to play on the hard pitch as his younger colleagues. "Players don't!"

"Wind up!" asked Grogan rudely.

"Absolutely!" was the calm rejoinder, and men laughed good-naturedly, and Grogan looked rather sheepish.

Nipper wanted the match to start. He looked a little excited, but it was not only football that excited him. He knew that in the Granite Fort, which overlooked the Rovers' ground in Northmouth, trained observers with powerful glasses kept a constant watch upon the football ground, and

within the walls of that old-fashioned fort stood a small, but speedy aeroplane.

Nipper wanted to play football, but it was the promise of a thrilling night chase in the air, and the possibility of the solving of the mystery that surrounded the Northmouth Rovers, that so excited him now.

Pheeeceep!

A roar of cheering came from the crowd. The referee had decided that the ground was fit to play upon, and was beckoning the teams to come out. One linesman walked off triumphant, the other glum.

The referee called the players up to him. He said the ground was very much on the hard side, but he had not wanted to disappoint a large crowd, and so the game would be played. But the players must remember that they were playing upon ground with a lot of bone in it, and that there must be no rough charging.

"I warn you that any player using violence that I consider dangerous on the present state of the ground, will be sent off," he concluded.

Big Dick Ridley grinned at Nipper.

"Ought to have issued out crash helmets and padded suits!" he said, as the players lined up.

There was no doubt about the ground being hard. It was the fourth day of an intense frost, and the new ball was so lively that it was some little time before the

players got the knack of controlling it, by which time both goals had had narrow escapes from fluky shots. Rutherton was not the only man who did not relish a fall on such hard ground, and the warning from the referee, who was clearly a little doubtful as to the wisdom of his decision, also had an effect.

But Nipper forgot danger, and after the game had been in progress about a quarter of an hour he snapped up the lively ball from the toe of the United's centre-forward, saw Ridley was marked, dashed between two Halston men—none to sure on their feet—and then was going through on his own. He saw a Halston man bearing down upon him; Grogan was coming to his aid. Then, while still running at full pelt, Nipper's foot struck something. There was a cry of horror from the stand, a whistle was shrilling in his ears. Something seemed to rise and hit him violently on the head, there was a blur of red, and then Nipper seemed to be falling down a black, bottomless pit!

Nipper Shows His Pluck!

NIPPER became vaguely conscious of eyes gazing down at him, and the blackness of the pit into which he seemed to have fallen was giving place to a dull grey.

And then a voice said quite clearly:

"He's coming round!"

"Great Scott!" said another voice. "He must be as hard as nails!"

"Or the ground on which he crashed!"

Someone laughed.

The ground on which he'd crashed! That gave Nipper a clue. Of course, he had been playing football on a hard, frozen ground, and had been going at full speed when Grogan and a Halston man had borne down upon him, and he had fallen heavily.

One of them had tripped him!

Nipper opened his eyes and blinked up. An ambulance man was bending over him, supporting his head. Beside him was Coles, the Rovers' surly trainer, and the genial-looking trainer of Halston United.

"Drink some more of this," said the ambulance man, and held a flask to the lad's lips.

Mechanically Nipper obeyed, and gulped some of the brandy that was hot to his throat, and made him cough. All around him was a dull, excited roar. He half-turned his head, and saw men speeding after a bouncing ball, and a man with a flag went dashing past him.

Nipper was lying on the ground outside the touchline. He put his hand to his aching head, and felt a bump as big as a hen's egg.

"GOAL!"

There was pandemonium round him, and he knew that the home team had scored against the Rovers. Nipper sat up and saw David Williams retrieving the ball from the back of the net, a disgusted expression upon his face.

"He's fit to move to the dressing-room now," said Coles.

"Dressing-room be blowed!" said Nipper. "I'm going back to play!"

He was staggering to his feet.

"Don't be a fool, lad," said the Halston trainer, but there was a glint of admiration in his eyes.

"I like your pluck," said the ambulance man, "but I'm afraid you won't be much good. By rights you ought to have had severe concussion, and I warn you that if you get another fall it will mean a hospital job."

"I'll watch points!" said Nipper weakly.

The ground seemed to be going round, a steam hammer seemed to be pounding against his forehead. For a moment he stood swaying slightly on the touchline, biting his lower lip, fiercely fighting against

What's Gone Before.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous detective, and his assistant

NIPPER, are investigating the strange disappearance of James Ridley and Mark Mayhew, two directors of Northmouth Rovers, the famous First Division football club. Lee fears that they have been kidnapped, and suspects

STEPHEN LANGTON, the Rovers' chairman, and a keen airman, of being responsible. He also thinks that Langton is smuggling illicit goods between England and Holland. Others who seem to be implicated in the mystery are

DICK RIDLEY, nephew of James Ridley, and International centre-forward of the Rovers, and Bert Barter, Minter, and Coles, the club's centre-half, manager and trainer respectively. Nelson Lee arranges that he and Nipper shall fly over the Rovers' ground one night. On the way to the aerodrome, they succeed in frustrating an attempt to kidnap Lord Denver, the steel magnate. Later, when flying over the football ground, they see Langton putting his 'plane back into its hangar. The chairman is cancelling his trip because Lord Denver has not arrived! The detective accepts an invitation to accompany the Rovers to Halston for their away match, but he tells Nipper—who is playing for the Rovers—that he's certain dirty work is afoot, and, further, that if they come through unscathed, they will go in pursuit of Langton the next time the chairman goes for a night trip in his 'plane!

(Now read on.)

his faintness. There was a mist before his eyes; he had to stare hard before he saw the referee, and then, with unsteady steps, he made for him.

From round the ground came a great roar of cheering. Although the return of that clever young centre-half would certainly not help the home team, the sportsmen of Halston appreciated pluck, and paid the youngster a tribute that any man might have envied.

"I've come back, sir," said Nipper to the referee.

"So I see," replied the official shortly; "but you'd have been better off the field."

And for the first few minutes Nipper was inclined to agree with him. All he seemed to do was to get in the way, and he scarcely got a kick at that very lively ball on the hard ground. Then he began to get a little better; a fine pass from him got Ridley away, and it seemed certain that the centre-forward would equalise, but the ball just went over the cross-bar.

Phceeeeeeep!

Nipper rejoiced at the signal for half-time, and as he made for the dressing-room, David Williams joined him, pulling off his goalkeeping gloves, and blowing on chilled fingers.

"It was a dirty trick that laid you out, yes indeed it was, I tell you," the goalie said in a low voice. "Grogan must have thought there was a chance of scoring, and he meant to do it himself, for he tried to take the ball from you, and somehow tripped you Land of my fathers! You did fall hard!"

"I thought it was Grogan!" said Nipper grimly.

"Look you, he must have been mad!" went on Dave Williams. "He told the referee that he was afraid the Halston man was going to rob you, so he thought he had better get possession. The ref. said that if it had been an opponent he had brought down he would have sent him off, but he did not want further to penalise a team that had already lost a player. Of course, Grogan did not intend to trip a member of his own side—it was just his selfishness—but Dick Ridley chewed him up, yes, indeed he did. Before everyone he told him what he thought of him, and Grogan can put that in his pipe and smoke it."

In the dressing-room, Grogan, looking very surly, found only the trainer would have anything to do with him. Dick Ridley and the other players gathered round Nipper, and the centre-forward was very indignant.

"If it didn't seem so mad, I'd have sworn that Grogan deliberately tripped you, though, of course, it can only have been selfish recklessness on his part," Ridley said.

Nipper had his own views. It flashed upon him what Nelson Lee had said about a desire to keep both of them away from Northmouth, as there was likely to be something doing there that night. By badly crocking him, Grogan would have kept him away, and no doubt the full-back had reckoned on Nelson Lee staying with the lad.

Very thoughtfully Nipper sucked his lemon. His head was not aching so badly now, but the big bruise on his forehead was all colours of the rainbow. He would certainly not have taken a prize in a beauty competition when he went out for the second half of the match against Halston.

It was freezing hard again now, and players on both sides were cautious. The ground was becoming a little slippery towards one of the ends, and the referee, coming a sudden, violent cropper which nearly caused him to swallow his whistle, had grave doubts about playing out time, but allowed the game to continue.

And it was in the last few minutes that Nipper, taking the ball from the Halston centre-forward, sent in a perfect pass to Dick Ridley, who was unmarked.

"On him!" came a raucous shout, and people leaving the ground, confident of Halston's victory, turned back apprehensively.

Plop!

The Halston goalkeeper sprang across the goalmouth, but he was just too late. The ball was in a corner of the net, and before it could be replaced on the centre-mark, the whistle was shripping out for full time.

In the last minute of the game Northmouth had equalised, and Nipper had justified his return to the playing pitch, when according to all ordinary rules, he should have been lying in the dressing-room in a state of semi-consciousness.

And after a hot tub he felt almost himself again, though he had to wear his hat on the back of his head. The team crossed over to an hotel, where a high tea had been ordered for them, and Nelson Lee, as a guest of the directors, was with them. Nipper got him on one side.

"Your deduction was correct, guv'nor," he said, with a grin, and pointed to the big lump on his forehead. "They reckoned to keep us at Halston, and here's the evidence!"

"You're very well out of that, Nipper!" said the great detective quietly. "But I think that was a private affair of Grogan's. He has no love for you, and seized an opportunity to get a bit of revenge. If I'm any judge of Stephen Langton, he would not have relied upon such a clumsy method as that, and he would take a step that would detain the pair of us. Of course, I may be wrong, but I think we shall see the real game on our way home!"

Held Up!

IT was about half-way across a great stretch of lonely moorland country that the bus containing the Northmouth Rovers began to spit and splutter, and then came to a stop. The driver immediately got down and opened the bonnet.

"Sounds as though he's run out of juice," said Dick Ridley, and Nipper, who had been half-dozing after the excellent meal at Halston, sat up with a start, and began to take an interest in things. Was this what

his chief had meant by that curious remark earlier on?

But Nelson Lee seemed entirely unperturbed. He was looking at an evening football paper he had bought in the town, and he went on reading after a casual glance up from the pink sheet.

Minter, the manager, looked nervously out of the window. David Williams was gloomily watching the driver from his seat at the front of the 'bus.

"Land of my fathers, what a place to be stranded!" he said. "I tell you that man is getting out tools, and something serious is the matter, and indeed there is no knowing what time we shall get home."

"I'll go and see what the trouble is," said Ridley, and Nipper rose to follow him.

Nipper knew now that this was the hold-up that Nelson Lee had expected. He guessed that the driver would deliberately injure that delicate piece of mechanism, and the 'bus would thus be stranded on the moor for hours. And the lad was fuming at the thought of it, for, despite the very un-beautiful bump on his forehead, and the shaking-up he had received, he was longing for his visit to the Granite Fort and his trip in the aeroplane that was to pursue the "Bat" if the latter ascended from the Bleakridge ground that night.

But his chief still sat in the 'bus, calmly reading his paper, apparently not in the least concerned.

"I don't believe that ass of a driver knows what he's doing," growled Dick Ridley in a



Dick Ridley stared in blank amazement when he saw that pretty Clarice Colton was the occupant of the two-seater car.

"Don't bother the driver!" said Minter snappily.

"May be able to give him a hand," retorted the centre-forward, and he and Nipper stepped from the warm 'bus out into the chilly air of a frosty, moonlit night. The moor looked a picture, with the white frost on the gorse-bushes and dried heather, but neither of the two footballers were in the mood to appreciate the picturesque.

"What's the trouble?" asked Ridley.

"Mag.," said the driver shortly. He was a rather sullen-looking fellow, and he was taking out the contact-breaker, though Ridley felt certain, from the symptoms, that the 'bus had stopped because of either shortage of fuel, or a choked jet.

The driver had turned his back on them and was studying the make-and-break in the light of one of his headlamps.

low voice. "Some of these chaps are jolly good drivers so long as things go right, but are hopeless as mechanics. Still, we can't interfere. It's his funeral, and I suppose the only thing we can do is to sit in the 'bus and make the best of it. He's not exactly an affable sort of chap."

"Here comes a car!" said Nipper. "That means that if we're broken down, the driver will take a message to— Great Scott! It's Miss Colton!"

Nipper, with his wonderful eyesight and his sense of observation, had recognised the car. A moment later Ridley was staring in blank amazement at pretty Clarice Colton, who pulled her fast two-seater car up behind the 'bus; and then Nelson Lee rose leisurely from his seat and came out into the icy air.

"Good-evening, Miss Colton!" the detective said casually. "I must say I am

delighted to see you. No doubt Ridley will be your passenger, but I wonder if you would mind taking my assistant and myself in the dickey seat?"

Nipper could have sworn that a swift, meaning glance travelled between the detective and the girl.

"I'll be delighted to!" said Clarice calmly. "I hope the others will soon get going. Good job I stopped in Halston to do some shopping, and——"

"Miss Colton," said Minter, hurrying up as the three were taking their places in the car, "I wonder if you would mind going back to Halston? The driver says there is a man there who is an expert at this sort of engine."

"Oh, I can't do that!" said the girl, a little impatiently. "I'm nearly half-way home now. I tell you what I'll do; I'll stop at the next garage, and send out a car to tow you in. Good-night!"

She pulled her fur coat closer round her, let in the clutch, and the car moved away, with Dick Ridley sitting beside her, and Nelson Lee and Nipper shivering in the dickey seat, which struck icy cold after the warmth of the 'bus.

The detective was silent. His eyes were fixed upon the straight, lonely stretch of road bathed in the silvery moonlight.

Suddenly he leant over the folded hood and touched the girl on the shoulder.

"I fancy there's something wrong ahead," he said. "Don't stop, but be ready to swing off into the heather."

An exclamation of surprise came from Dick Ridley, who was clearly startled by the quiet statement, but Clarice, fur-gloved hands gripping the wheel, nodded understandingly.

And then came the command, rapped swiftly, sharply:

"Take to the heather on your left! Go behind the second gorse-bush. Hold tight, Nipper!"

The girl took the slight rise from the road at an angle; the car heeled over dangerously, but righted itself, and then came the scrunch of the tyres upon the frostbound heather, and they were shooting through a clear space between two gorse-bushes, swaying and slithering a little.

"Get on the road as quickly as you can," said Nelson Lee.

As he spoke, a man who had been crouching by the gorse-bush suddenly leapt to his feet.

"Stop or I fire!" he shouted after them.

"Keep down!" said the detective.

There was a flash behind them, followed by a loud report, and a bullet whistled over their heads.

Bang!

"Crumbs!" said Nipper, for a bullet had hit and glanced off the side of the car. Then, with a bump, they were back on the road, and Clarice Colton, pale but plucky, had her little foot hard down on the accelerator pedal, and the icy wind was cutting the faces of the two passengers in the dickey seat.

Dick Ridley looked round, his face blank, his eyes wide with astonishment.

"What on earth does this mean?" he gasped. "Why did you tell Clarice to take the grass?"

"Because there was a wire rope across the road," was Nelson Lee's calm reply. "Miss Colton, you have my permission to take that young man into your confidence with regard to matters I have asked you to keep secret. And I should like to add, Ridley, that you'll be a very lucky man when you win the prettiest and pluckiest girl I have ever met."

The Rovers' brilliant amateur centre-forward was staring blankly from one to the other. Miss Clarice Colton, a flush on her cheeks, was staring straight ahead as they began the descent of a steep hill.

"But I don't understand——" began Ridley.

"Dick," said the girl, "this is Mr. Nelson Lee, the great detective whom uncle engaged when he believed that you were responsible for your uncle's disappearance. I don't think he believes that now, and this shows that Mr. Lee is no longer suspicious of you."

"Not a bit!" said the great detective genially. "But," he added, half to himself, "I wish you'd taken that aeroplane engine you invented to someone else!"

Nelson Lee Springs a Surprise!

NORTHMOUTH police-station was not a cheerful place. There was something grim and sombre, even in the chief inspector's cosy room, where a fire burned with a steady red glow that told of the sharp frost outside.

Nelson Lee was talking to Detective-sergeant Stone, of the C.I.D., and two local police officials. In the yard a car was waiting for them, but they in turn were waiting for a telephone message. Police had gone off to the scene of the attempted hold-up, not with much hope of making an arrest, but hoping to get some clue that would enable them to track the man.

Driving to the station, Nelson Lee had told Nipper that he had been on the look-out for a trap, feeling certain that Stephen Langton had more than one string to his bow. The detective had arranged with Clarice Colton to follow the 'bus, but he had felt certain that an attempt would be made to hold up any car that stopped and picked up any passenger from the stranded motor-'bus, and his surmise had proved correct.

Trrrrrrring!

The man from the Yard was across to the telephone in two long strides.

"Hallo! Yes. They'll come immediately!" He hung up the receiver, and turned to the others. "It looks as though your theory was right, Mr. Lee, but I'm hanged if I can understand how a 'plane has been regularly crossing the North Sea, and landing in Holland, without the authorities getting wind

(Continued on page 43.)

BIG THRILLS IN THE TESTS!

There have been many thrills and close finishes in the games played between England and Australia. Read all about them in this interesting article.

Thrills at Leeds!

EVERY series of Test matches has its big thrills; its tense moments, and its periods of almost breathless excitement. I know of nothing more impressive than the "hush" of the watchers as the first ball of the match is sent down. It seems as though the world has stopped revolving, waiting for something thrilling to happen.

And there have been thrills associated with first balls in Test matches, too. Never shall I forget one moment at Leeds in 1926. England had won the toss and sent Australia in to bat—a decision which caused a hubbub of talk. But as Maurice Tate sent down the first ball of the game to Warren Bardsley the talk ceased as if by magic. And then a mighty roar went up, for Warren Bardsley had snicked that first ball of the match into the safe hands of Herbert Sutcliffe, fielding in the slips.

How we talked again until the next batsman came in, and then fell into silence once more, waiting for something else sensational to happen. It did, for in that first over of Tate's, Macartney, one of the greatest of all Australia's great batsmen, also snicked a ball, but this time the catch was not accepted. It was a thrill all the same, though.

The biggest thrills of all, of course, are associated with close finishes; those games when everything hangs on a few runs. In the course of the Tests between England and Australia there have been many such finishes, and I will recall a few of them here.

Having mentioned the name of Maurice Tate in connection with a thrill at Leeds nearly three years ago, I cannot do better than refer to a thrilling finish—one of the most thrilling of all—in which Tate's father, Fred, played a leading part.

Won by Three Runs!

Fred Tate was played by England for his bowling, and the match at Old Trafford in 1902 ran such even course that when Tate,



This is popular "Patsy" Hendren, the famous cricketer who plays for England not only because of his brilliant batting, but for his superb fielding, too.

last man in for England, went to the wicket, the mother country wanted eight runs to win. The excitement was intense. He had no sooner got to the wicket than rain came on and held up the game for half an hour. Imagine the nerves of the men who had to wait all that time.

Eventually the rain cleared off, and the match restarted. Off the first ball he received Tate scored a boundary—leaving only four more wanted to win. Two balls later he tried to make that other boundary, but missed the ball. His wickets were scattered, and Australia had won by three runs.

When it was all over somebody asked Fred Tate why he wasn't just content to play the ball back to the bowler, and wait for the other batsman to make the runs. And Tate, who had tears in his eyes, replied: "But suppose I had hit it." If Tate had hit that ball England would have won the match.

It is rather surprising, when you think of the large number of times England and Australia have met, that never in the whole series of games has there been a tie. But there has been at least one occasion when a mere fraction of a second stood between an England victory and a tie.

This particular game was the second of the series of 1907-8, and was played at Melbourne. The fortunes of the match swayed this way and that—first in favour of one side and then the other. Finally, the last two England batsmen were at the wicket, and 39 runs were still required for victory. The batsmen were Sydney Barnes and Arthur Fielder, both of them played for their bowling, mind you.

One Run to Win!

The people of Australia, and the players of England, too, probably thought that the match was as good as finished; it could never be expected that two bowlers would hit off thirty-nine runs. It was almost like asking Jack Hobbs and Sutcliffe to score five hundred. Slowly, however, the score mounted up; crept nearer and nearer the Australian total—the winning point.

At long last the scores were equal; England wanted one run to win and Australia wanted one man out to make a tie of it. The two batsmen had a little chat in mid-wicket. A ball was sent down amid silence which was described as painful. Barnes hit the ball in the direction of mid-off and away the batsmen went for that winning run.

Actually, the ball had not been driven far enough for a run to be made safely. Hazlitt, fielding at mid-off, picked up the ball and banged it towards the wicket. Would the batsmen get it quickly enough? The wicket-keeper whipped off the bails, but the batsman was just there, but it was such a close thing that if Hazlitt had actually hit the wicket as he threw the ball in Barnes would have been out and the match a tie. No wonder people on the ground fainted with excitement.

The Vital Test of 1924-5!

During the last series of Tests in Australia—those of 1924-5—there was a close finish, which, had things just gone a little bit the other way, might have affected the destination of the "Ashes." England had lost the first two games of the series, but in the third game—the vital one—they made a splendid fight, so much so that when the last day's play started England required only twenty-seven runs to win and had two wickets still to fall.

I don't know whether Arthur Gilligan, the captain, Tich Freeman and Bert Strudwick, the three men on whose shoulders lay the task of getting those twenty-seven runs, slept on the night before the last day, but it is not difficult to imagine their sleep being somewhat disturbed by thoughts of the task awaiting them.

However, skipper Gilligan and Freeman tackled the job manfully, in the presence of many thousand spectators who did not mind the certainty that they would only see a few minutes cricket at most. They had come for the excitement; the thrills of the finish. Nine of the required twenty-seven were obtained before Gilligan was out, and little Strudwick came in to take on a giants' task. A round dozen only were wanted for victory when Freeman just touched one. "How's that?" yelled every man in the Australian team as Bertie Oldfield, behind the wickets, snapped the ball. And when the umpire's hand went up to signal "Out," there was a scene the like of which has seldom been witnessed on any cricket ground. Not only had Australia won the match by eleven runs, but they had also gained the "Ashes," for that was their third victory of the series.

To add an extra touch of the dramatic to the conclusion, Oldfield, the wicket-keeper who had made the catch to dismiss the last batsman, was at that moment playing with two broken ribs.

Gilbert Jessop!

The name of Gilbert Jessop is known to all, and he has played his part in thrilling Test Matches of the past. I have already referred to one of the matches of the 1902 series in England, and that campaign was distinguished for two exceptionally close finishes.

The last of the five of that year was played at Kennington Oval, and at one time seemed to be going hopelessly against England. Set to score two hundred and sixty-three in the last innings, on a badly damaged wicket, the home country didn't seem to have a chance.

Especially did every vestige of a chance appear to have gone when five of England's best batsmen were back in the pavilion with only forty-five runs scored. The match was as good as finished. But Gilbert Jessop was just the sort of player for such an occasion, not knowing the meaning of the word "nerves." He went to the wicket, and in that inimitable way of his went for the Australians bowlers as if he hadn't a care in the world. He knocked them all over the field, scoring one hundred and four before being caught. He had given England a chance; lifted his country out of a seemingly hopeless position.

But there was still work to be done, however, for there were still fifteen runs wanted to win when Wilfred Rhodes joined George Hirst for the last wicket.

If ever Yorkshire grit, of which people have talked, was needed, it was needed then. It was forthcoming, too. As his Yorkshire colleague came to the wicket Hirst met him, and said to him: "We'll get those fifteen in singles. Don't try to hit boundaries."

And in singles they got them—one, two, three, and right up to fifteen. England had won by one wicket. Thrilling? I should say it was!

I believe it was his nerve-racking experience in that match which caused Wilfred Rhodes to make a grim resolve: "I'll be played for England for my batting before I finish my cricket career," he vowed to himself. Perhaps he didn't want ever again to have to go in as last man when England wanted fifteen runs to win. And the resolution made by Rhodes that day was duly fulfilled. There came in due course a day when he was not only chosen to play for England for his batting, but when he also went in first—regularly. Great moments make great men!

(Another specially-written Test Match article will appear in next week's issue entitled "Brains Tell in the Tests!" All readers ought to read this series of articles, especially as the games between England and Australia are now being played "down under.")

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ROVERS ?

(Continued from page 40.)

of it. It's not as though the Dutch officials were slack. They're a keen crowd, not out to lose anything in customs, and for the past few weeks the police have been keeping a strict look-out, too."

"I know, Stone," said Lee. "That's what puzzles me, but if we have any luck to-night we ought soon to solve the mystery. Come on, Nipper, we'll be getting off! I suppose they hadn't got the 'plane out?" he added, turning to the C.I.D. man.

"The message was that three men had entered the football ground, and were making for the hangar," replied Stone.

Nelson Lee nodded and, followed by Nipper, went out into the yard behind the police-station, where a four-seater car, with the hood and side-screens up, was waiting for them. The driver took a rug from the radiator; Lee and Nipper settled themselves in the back of the car, and then it drove out into the busy streets of Northmouth.

Nipper, though his head still ached, was tingling with excitement at the thought of the adventure before them.

"We ought to be in plenty of time, gov'nor," he said. "They've got to get the 'plane out and load up."

"I rather fancy to-night's load will go in Stephen Langton's pocket!" was his chief's calm reply.

Nipper gazed at him a little blankly.

"Of course," went on Nelson Lee, "they may have kidnapped another millionaire, there may be some more gun-running; but I'm inclined to think that it is the Dimston diamonds that are going to Holland by air to-night!"

(Watch out for plenty of thrills in next week's stunning instalment of this fine serial, chums!)

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