The Boys of St. Frank's on the trail of treasure! See the grand long yarn of amazing schoolboy adventure in Arizona—complete in this issue.

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THE SCHOOLBOY GOLDSEEKERS!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER 1.

The Land of Thirst!

THE expedition moved across the blazing desert slowly, and, except for an occasional word here and there, in silence.

Overhead, the sun was beating down with overpowering force. The sky was brazen, and the horizon flickered and shimmered with the heat.

Desert all round—desert everywhere—without a blade of grass, without even a cactus. Far away, to the north, mingled with the haze of the horizon, the land seemed to drift away into uncertain, indistinct slopes. Here there was a little dabble of whiteness, and it was difficult to realise that this was the snow, high on a mountain peak.

Across the sun-parched desert the St. Frank's party wends its weary way. Nearer and nearer looms their destination—where, according to old Hookey Webb, they will find a cliff of gold. And then comes the shock—startling, horrifying!

It was more difficult to appreciate that that mountain peak was fifty or sixty miles away.

Nearer, there was a great butte sticking up out of the desert, lonely, stark, and looking very much out of place. It was like some derelict in that sea of sand and alkali. It was a great mass of rock, rising straight up from the desert, hundreds of feet in height, and in the pitiless glare of the sunshine it showed red, and yellow, and orange.

"We've got to make that butte by nightfall," said Dicky Siggers, the gaunt old desert man. "Thar's water close by, an' if we don't hev water we're as good as done fur."

"There's no sign of water, so far as I can see," said Lord Dorrimore, shading his eyes with his hand. "I mean, there's no indication of greenstuff; no trees or bushes."

"They're hid—until we're right near the butte," replied Siggers. "Down in a steep gully. Not as you'd see any trees, anyway, at this distance."

"Why, the butte isn't very far off, is it?" asked Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove. "Not more than four or five miles, anyway."

Siggers laughed deeply in his throat.

"Waal, thet's a good 'un!" he said dryly. "Say, young pard, thet butte's all o' fifteen miles from here, if it's an inch! Looks less, eh? Waal, I'm figgerin' thet it's a mighty difficult thing to judge distances up here on the Mesa."

"Fifteen miles!" said Handforth, with a whistle. "But it—it seems impossible!"

IT was a comparatively big party. At the head trudged Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective, and with him were Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi. The faithful Kutana chieftain was taking no notice of the heat and the hardships of the desert. He was with his beloved "N'Kose," and he was satisfied.

Dicky Siggers walked side by side with Hookey Webb, the old seaman who had

a metal hook in place of a left hand. Hookey was as hard as nails, and he was standing the strain well. Siggers himself, of course, was so accustomed to this kind of trail that he was quite comfortable. He had lived most of his life on the Arizona desert.

It was difficult to believe that this could be Arizona—this great barren wasteland of sand and desert. It was the Chichon Mesa—a vast, flat tableland, in a wild region where white men seldom penetrated.

But not only were white men penetrating it now, but white boys and white girls, too. For in this party there was a number of St. Frank's juniors, and they were accompanied by Irene & Co., of the Moor View School.

It had been intended, at first, that these youngsters should be left behind at the main camp—down on the desert proper, at the foot of the hills, beyond the edge of the Mesa.

But recently the party had been attacked by the Apaches, and they had been through so many adventures together that Nelson Lee had consented to allow the young people to continue the trail to the end.

They had been eager enough for it at the start; but now some of them were beginning to wonder if they had been wise. It was a tremendous ordeal, this "hike" across the barren tableland. The great plateau stretched out on all sides with acrid starkness. The sun was sapping the strength of these travellers; their blood seemed to be drying in their veins.

Nelson Lee would not have allowed the youngsters to come, only Dicky Siggers had sworn that there was plenty of water to be found near the big butte, and that a comfortable camp could be made there. Furthermore, that big butte, according to Hookey Webb, was close to the end of the trail.

Resting was almost worse than keeping on. Once or twice, during the march, a halt had been called for food and drink. But in country like this, where the sun blazed down with such merciless intensity, inaction was almost a torture. There was not a scrap of shade of any description. When the march temporarily halted, the heat seemed worse than ever. The travellers' eyes were smarting, their throats were parched, and their loads seemed so unbearably heavy that they longed to cast them off.

Dicky Siggers was the only man who felt no effects. He was desert-salted, and this sort of thing was as familiar to him as cycle-riding was to most of the St. Frank's fellows.

Now and again little puffs of wind would come, causing miniature whirlwinds. They would arise suddenly, blowing the sand into the smarting eyes of the travellers. Then, just as abruptly, the wind would die down, and a complete calmness would drop.

Lord Dorrimore was quite content to see the boys and girls plodding on. In fact, he was rather amused. They had pleaded to come, and now they were tasting the delights of the desert. It wouldn't do them any harm, and it would certainly give them an experience which they were not likely to forget in a hurry.

And what was all this for?

Gold!

Gold by the ton—gold in vast quantities. If Hookey Webb's story was to be believed, the true mother-lode was to be found in this barren part of Arizona, close to the Blue Mountain Indian Reservation. Hookey Webb was a queer old fellow, and the St. Frank's boys had found him on Brighton beach—on August Bank Holiday. He had been a Punch and Judy man then, and it seemed that he had been a Punch and Judy man in Brighton for about fifteen years. Previous to that he had lived his life at sea, on all manner of ships.

It was in his younger days that he had indulged in a prospecting trip. Forty years ago, he and a man named Ben Dalton had come up on the Chichon Mesa, and they had found—gold. But the Apaches had attacked them, and then Dalton was fatally wounded.

Back in the settlement, after Dalton's death, Hookey Webb had found nobody to believe in his story of the gold. He was no prospector—he was not even an American citizen. He was a British sailor, and he knew no more about prospecting than a Hottentot. So people had smiled at his story, and, broke, he had drifted back to the sea.

Only once had he managed to get back to Arizona again. After twenty years he had found himself in Phœnix, and he had met Dicky Siggers—only to find that Dicky was completely out of funds. They had not been able to get up an outfit. And to penetrate this desert without adequate equipment, was little better than suicide.

So the years had rolled on, and Hookey had never been able to get back to the scene of that great discovery. It was near the Indian reservation, and white men seldom went there. Even to-day the Apaches could be dangerous.

LORD DORRIMORE'S party had had evidence of this. For they had been attacked by the Indians, and had had a grim fight. Nature, in the form of a tremendous thunderstorm, had come to the rescue of the besieged white party, and the Indians had been washed away. Scores of them had been killed.

Now there was little or no danger of another attack, and so the gold-seekers were pressing on. Their destination was close at hand.

This last march was the most difficult of all—the most arduous. Every hundred yards seemed like a mile; and always that big

Butte loomed ahead, apparently mocking them. It seemed to grow no nearer as the hours passed.

Nelson Lee was beginning to get rather anxious. He and Dorrie had trusted Dicky Siggers implicitly; they relied upon the desert man's judgment. Siggers had said that the butte could be reached by nightfall, and that there was plenty of fresh water to be obtained close by.

What if Siggers was wrong? The situation would become rather serious, with so many in the party. They all carried a certain amount of water in their kits, but in a land of thirst like this water was far more essential than food.

The desert was beginning to tell upon the schoolboys and schoolgirls. Irene and Co. were reluctant to confess that they were getting weary, but it was obvious that this trip was proving hard for them. And even the enthusiasm of the boys had waned a lot during the past few hours.

It was all so monotonous—all so drab. Nothing but the barren desert, and the glaring sun, and the brooding silence. For up here, on this tableland, there was no sound of any kind.

WHO'S WHO AT ST. FRANK'S.

WILLY HANDFORTH.

The cheery and audacious leader of the Third Form, which he rules with a "rod of iron." Is the younger brother of the celebrated Edward Oswald, from whom he makes a practice of extracting "five bobs." Shrewd and quick-thinking, good at sports, and a passionate lover of animals.

The St. Frank's adventurers felt that they were cut off from the entire civilised world. They were in some wilderness, with a barrier of sun-parched desert between them and their fellow creatures.

Now and again there was a slight diversion when perhaps a Gila monster would start up from the sand, and puff at them. There were many of these Gila monsters on the desert—flabby, bloated things, horrid to look at. They were dangerous, too, since their bite was poisonous.

Once or twice the party had seen asps—deadly snakes these, stubby and grey and hideous. Rattlesnakes, too, lizards, and great, fearsome tarantula spiders, furry and awe-inspiring.

But these were the only creatures they saw, these things that dwelt under stones and in holes. They saw no animals, although there were always the ravens overhead.

"The boys and girls are sticking it well," remarked Dorrie, towards evening.

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "I think they're now getting very tired, but they won't admit it. All the better, because it won't do to show tiredness just yet. We've got to get to that butte, Dorrie."

"Well, it's getting nearer now, thank goodness," said his lordship. "By glory! I'd rather trek through the African jungles than march in this kind of country."

They had spoken very little, for it required a certain amount of effort to engage in conversation, and they required all their strength for the journey. But occasionally they would chat for a few minutes as they walked along.

"Pity we couldn't bring the tractor cars up here," continued Lord Dorrimore. "Plenty of comfort in them, and progress is pretty swift, too."

"Excellent as those tractors are, they could not get up the mountain passes on

to the Mesa," replied Lee. "We were obliged to come this last lap on foot."

The sun was getting low, and before long there came a chill wind sweeping over the Mesa—a cold breath, surprising after the blazing heat of the day. But it was like this on the Arizona desert. Appalling heat by day, and icy coldness at night.

The sun was growing coppery as it descended towards the edge of the plateau, far, far away. The shadows were long and grotesque. And there, immediately ahead, lay the towering bulk of that grim butte.

The sun was glaring upon one face of it now, lighting up the vivid colouring of the rock—yellow and orange and brown and red. The sunlight showed up all the irregularities, all the quaint formations. There was a tremendous shadow cast over the desert from that monstrous chunk of rock. It arose sheer from the flat tableland, hundreds of feet in height, its top practically flat, its sides jagged and torn.

It was a strange formation—a freak of Nature—a relic of the dim, distant past, when this whole region had been an inferno of volcanic activity.

CHAPTER 2.

The End of the Trail!

"MY only hat!" said Handforth, in a low voice. "Now that we're getting closer to it, it looks—— Well, it looks tremendously formidable!"

"It almost frightens me," whispered Irene.

"I feel the same way, too," admitted Winnie Pitt. "Silly, isn't it? There's nothing to be frightened of, of course. It's only a great mass of rock."

"Yet it's so mysterious—so frightfully big," said Harry Gresham. "It just stands there, like some enormous sentinel, watching over something. I don't wonder that you girls are scared."

"We're not scared!" said Irene indignantly. "Only—only there's something about that huge pile of rock which makes me uncomfortable."

It was rather courageous of the girl to confess this. But all of them were experiencing the same sensation. Even Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were impressed. They felt something of the same effect. Perhaps it was the solitariness of this immense rock structure which created that impression of eeriness.

It was evening, too, and in the fading light the butte looked solemn enough. It was indeed a relic of the dim, forgotten ages.

Old Hookey Webb was strangely excited. During most of the journey he had been animated and active, and he had never shown any signs of lagging behind. Ever since leaving England, indeed, he had been as happy and as talkative as any of the schoolboys.

But now he was different. There was a gleam in his small, beady, bright eyes—an unusual gleam. It was impossible for his face to be flushed, because his face was bronzed and weather-beaten and lined until it somewhat resembled a chunk of old mahogany. Yet, in some indefinable way, his face showed a difference.

"Like it was on'y yesterday!" he muttered, as he stared fascinatedly at the butte. "Ain't changed a bit! Just the same—big an' liable to scare a feller. Even old Ben Dalton, wot was used to these 'ere things, was sort of scared."

"It's only because the thing's standin' by itself," remarked Siggers. "Way back behind the Blue Mountains, other side o' Circle City, thar's a whole heap o' buttes. Thar ain't nothin' in 'em, pardner. But I'll allow thet this feller kinder 'gets' you. I ain't seen him so close as this before."

"Why, I thought you knew the Mesa as well as you know the palm of your own hand?" asked Nelson Lee. "And didn't you assure us that there is water——"

"I sure did," agreed Siggers, nodding. "An' thar is water, too. I've bin near this butte before, but not from this side. He looks sorter different when you come on him from the other way. Besides, thar's the Injuns."

"There aren't any Indians here, are there?" asked Dorrie.

"Thar ain't likely to be," replied Siggers. "But thar's never any tellin' with them blamed Apaches. Seein' what happened back thar in the canyon, I don't calc'late thet we'll be troubled wi' the Redskins any more this trip, but don't bank on it, pardners. Injuns is queer critturs!"

Before any of them could make any other comment, a shout came from some of the St. Frank's fellows, who had got on ahead. They had stopped, and they were apparently looking straight across the desert at the butte, which was now only a mile away—a vast monstrosity, rising up sheer, as though barring any further progress.

"Here, I say!" sang out one of the juniors. "Come and have a look at this!"

"What have you found?" asked Nipper, running forward.

He came to a halt soon, and stared in surprise. Unexpectedly, the flat tableland was broken. There was a great jagged slit in it just here—a shallow gorge, quite invisible until one was practically on the lip of it.

A hundred yards back, one would never believe that any such gorge existed; one could only see the flat desertland, stretching straight onwards towards the butte, and beyond.

But now, in this moment, came the revelation. There was this shallow gorge, its sides steeply sloping, but not sheer. From edge to edge it was perhaps half a mile across, and the bottom of the gorge was two or three hundred feet down, and comparatively narrow. A little stream wandered

along down there, and there were trees, and grass, and bushes. It was a glorious sight to see this green, after having seen nothing but drabness for so many hours.

"Oh!" cried Irene, clapping her hands. "Isn't it glorious! And we didn't know anything about it until we were right on it!"

"It's—it's a kind of oasis in the desert," said Sylvia Glenn.

"Sure thing, missie," said Siggers, nodding. "Didn't I say thet thar was water near the big butte? Kinder good—eh? I figgered we'd make it before nightfall."

"Well done, Siggers!" said Nelson Lee heartily. "I must confess that I had begun to doubt your information. I thought perhaps that you were unduly optimistic."

"Thar's no sense in bein' optimistic on the desert, mister," replied Siggers. "No, siree! 'Tain't healthy. When your life depends upon water bein' at the end o' the day's hike, you've gotter be sartin thet thar is water. Optimism won't quench your thirst."

They all stood on the edge of the gorge, looking down—feasting their eyes upon that greenery in the fading evening light. And, towering above all, on the other side of the gorge, stood the butte—silent, massive, impressive.

"Waal, we'd best make a move," said Siggers. "It'll sure be dark soon. Thar's supper to be got, an' fires to be lit."

"Supper!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "By George! I hadn't realised it until now, but I'm as hungry as a giddy hunter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "What-ho! A spot of grub, what?"

"If there's any cooking to be done," said Irene firmly, "we girls will do it."

THEY were all cheerful and gay, and they went hurrying down into the gorge light-heartedly. It was the end of the day's trail, and the thought of food and drink and rest gave them fresh strength.

Before long there was a big camp fire roaring, and the shadows had increased. Darkness began to creep over the desert, and one or two stars were peeping out in the purple canopy overhead. There was something extraordinarily peaceful about the night hours on the desert. Silence—loneliness—a sense of being completely and utterly isolated from all worldly things.

A big camp fire was necessary, too—to say nothing of warm blankets—for, hot as the desert was by day, it became icily cold at night.

It was astonishing how the spirits of the party revived under the influence of the camp fire and the sound of bacon sizzling merrily in the frying-pans. There was the odour, too—exhilarating, luscious. Added to this was the perfume of freshly-made coffee.

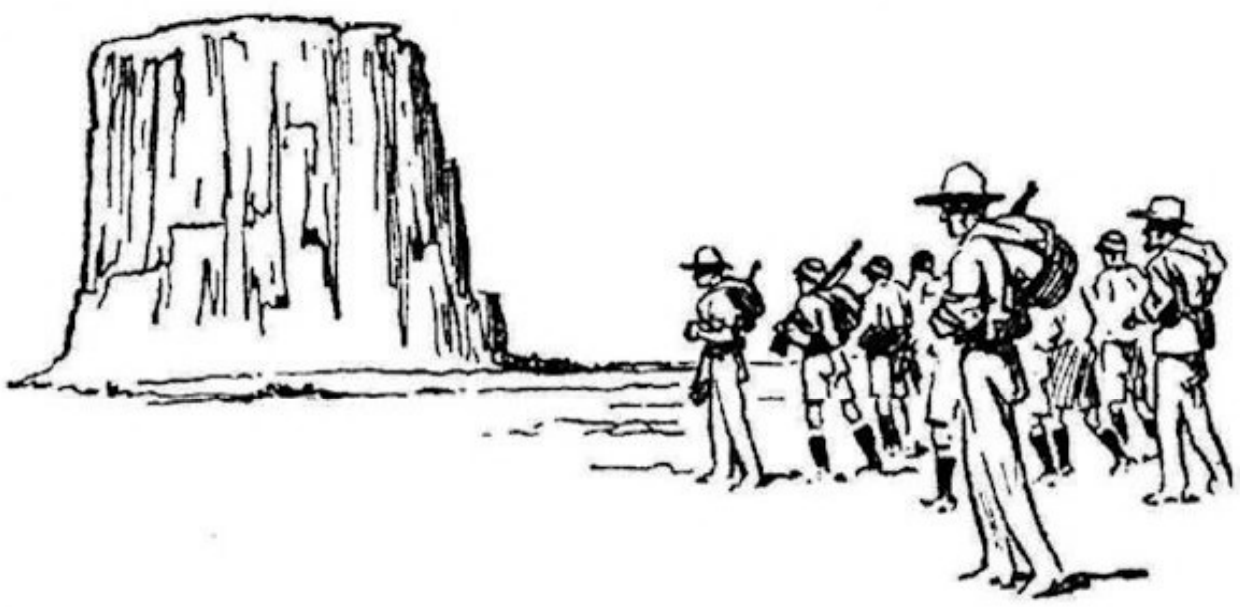
Dicky Siggers was as busy as a bee making bannocks—which served the party for bread. After a day on the desert, and after a hard march, bannocks proved to be the sweetest kind of food imaginable—especially when there was hot, crisp fried bacon to go with it.

"Well, gents, this is the end of the trail," said Hookey Webb, as he sat with Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Siggers, after the meal was over. "We don't need to go no farther."

"You've been rather mysterious about it all, Hookey, old man," said Dorrie. "I'll admit that you've been frank up to a point, and you've been certain of your direction, but you haven't given us many details."

"Afore I gave you any details, sir, I wanted to make sure that everything was the same as I left it forty years ago," replied Hookey. "An' it is, too. This 'ere butte ain't changed a bit."

"That's not surprising," said Nelson Lee dryly. "If it were possible for us to come back in about five hundred years, we should



still find it the same, I dare say. I expect it's been standing here for countless centuries—changing its contour slightly, perhaps, throughout the ages."

"Yes, I s'pose you're right, sir," said Hookey. "Forty years is just like a minute, eh? I remember me an' old Ben Dalton campin' in this very gully—not a 'undred yards from this 'ere spot."

He pulled absentmindedly at his pipe. All the men were sitting round the fire, smoking. The boys and girls were collected round the other camp fire—the bigger one—and they were yarning about the experiences of the day. Many of them were yawning, for they were tired out and quite ready to roll themselves in their blankets. Nelson Lee had indicated that nothing further would be done until the morrow. A night's sleep was essential.

"An' thar's gold here?" asked Siggers sceptically.

His voice was full of doubt; he spoke like a man who indulges a child. This desert-salted old fellow had been hunting for gold all his life; he was a born prospector, and so far as he knew there was no gold within a hundred miles of this spot.

"Think it's all a yarn, eh?" said Hookey. "Think I'm barmy, don't you?"

"Waal, pardner, I might as well tell you thet I'm darned disbelievin'," said Siggers. "I've prospected in these parts fer years. Thar ain't a smell o' gold around here. Plenty o' likely-lookin' quartz, mind you, but——"

"You ain't looked in the right place, matey," said Hookey. "Listen, gents! I'll tell ye now," he added, bending forward and speaking in a confidential tone. "I'll tell ye where that gold is!"

"We shall be most frightfully interested to know," murmured Dorrie.

"It's there—in that blamed hunk o' rock," said Hookey, pointing. "I ain't told ye before, in case you thought I was mad. But we're 'ere now, an' once I show you the way in, you'll soon find out the truth. Old Ben an' me traced it forty years ago——"

"In the butte?" asked Lee wonderingly. "Do you mean that this great rock formation is hollow?"

"As holler as a mole 'ill," replied Hookey. "Looks a bit like a big mole 'ill, too, don't it? An' it's full o' caverns an' passages, an' there's man-made places in there, too. All sorts o' relics. Skulls an' skeletons an' rummy-looking implements. Me an' Ben explored it proper, an' we could make nothin' of it."

"No doubt a prehistoric race of cliff-dwellers," said Nelson Lee. "Are you suggesting, Webb, that this gold is a store of hidden wealth? A treasure? Do you mean that the gold was mined by some ancient tribe, and hidden away——"

"Not on your life, matey," said Hookey. "That gold wasn't mined by nobody. It's there—the mother-lode, I tell ye. Cliffs of it—white-looking quartz, with the gold stickin' out in chunks so's you can chip it off. I never see'd anythin' like it in all my life! Why, me an' Ben filled our pockets an' knapsacks with gold in about an hour, chippin' it off that quartz wall wi' our hack-knives."

"Sounds like a fable, pardner," said Siggers, shaking his head. "Darnation! I've bin lookin' for pay-dirt all my life, an' I never seen gold like thet!"

"Well, you'll see it to-morrer," said Hookey. "I'll show ye! We're 'ere now—an' I know the way inter that butte. Looks solid enough, but it ain't. Like one o' them pyramids of Egypt—all full o' passages an' caverns."

He was very excited, and Nelson Lee was glad that the boys and girls had not listened to any part of this conversation. It would only have disturbed them for the night.

NOT that the night was to close down without a disturbance.

For, before Nelson Lee or Dorrie could make any comment on Hookey Webb's last remark, a sudden outcry sounded amongst the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls. Lee glanced across to the other camp fire, and he saw that the youngsters were leaping to their feet. They were collecting round a certain spot, and they were shouting excitedly.

"'Tain't nothin'," said Siggers. "Probably found a spider, or a lizard, mebbe."

"I hardly think there'd be so much commotion over a lizard," said Lee, frowning. "They seem to be wildly excited."

"I tell you it came hissing down here from the direction of the butte!" Handforth was saying. "I saw it hit the ground—and I heard it whizz past my ear, too. It must have missed me by about a foot! By George! It's those rotten Indians again!"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet, and went over to the other fire.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Look at this, sir," said Nipper tensely.

Nelson Lee looked, and his expression changed.

"An arrow!" he ejaculated sharply. "Where did this come from, Nipper?"

"I didn't see it arrive, sir, but Handforth swears that it came shooting out of the air from the direction of the butte," replied Nipper. "When I saw it it was sticking in the ground."

"Oh!" said Lee slowly.

He stared up the gully, towards that great shadowy mass which loomed up on the Mesa. An arrow, shooting mysteriously out of the night! Here was something dramatic! Nelson Lee and the other men had been positive that all the Indians were left behind for good. They had been beaten, and the remnants of that Redskin force had wandered back to the reservation.

But was this true?

If so, where had this arrow come from?

Whizz-whizz!

Lee jumped. Without warning, something came out of the night, and it flashed past his face and struck the ground several yards farther on. He twirled round, and saw an arrow. Another one arrived almost at the same second, several feet away.

And everybody stood staring up silently at the butte. Not a sound broke the uncanny stillness of the desert except the crackling of the fires.

CHAPTER 3.

The Mystery of the Butte!

DICKY SIGGERS, gaunt and lean, stroked his stubby chin as he plucked one of the arrows from the ground and inspected it.

"'Tain't poisoned," he commented. "Reg'lar Injun arrow, though. Same sort

Whiz-whiz !' Without warning, something came out of the night and flashed past Nelson Lee. to bury itself in the ground only a few yards away. It was an arrow—proof positive that the St. Frank's party was being followed by Indians !

as them critturs used against us 'way back in the ravine. I'm figgerin' that the Apaches must have trailed us."

"But I can't believe it, Siggers," said Lee. "We saw no sign of them on the desert, and it's possible to see for miles. They couldn't have overtaken us——"

"Them Injuns hev got a way o' hangin' around without you knowin' it," said Siggers wisely. "They don't seem to want no cover. Cunning critturs, Injuns. Anyway, here's proof thet they're somewhere around. Can't be many of 'em, but I don't reckon it's healthy fer us to stand right here in this firelight."

"I was thinking the same thing," said Lee. "You boys and girls had better get back."

"We're always being ordered out of danger, sir!" said Handforth indignantly. "If there are any Indians about, we'll jolly well fight them!"

But Nelson Lee was insistent. The boys and girls were made to retire from the vicinity of the fires.

Lee and Sigger lost no time in climbing the side of the gully. By now the moon was shining, and it was possible to see, after a fashion, for a considerable distance. But, in all that expanse of desert, there was not any indication of human life.

"Well, we can be certain that there isn't a strong force of Indians against us," said Lee, frowning. "Yet where did those arrows come from, Siggers?"

"You kin search me!" said the desert man.

"Look!" said Lee, indicating the desert. "There's no cover here for any enemy force. In this moonlight, too, they daren't show themselves. Yet where could they hide?"

Whizz!

"Waal, I'm a rattlesnake!" ejaculated Siggers, spinning round. "See thet, mister? Another o' them darnation arrers! Shot clean past me from overhead, an' went down into the gully! Came from the butte, I reckon!"

"By Jove!" muttered Lee tensely. "So that's it!"

He remembered Hookey Webb's story of caverns and tunnels, and skeletons and man-made "places." Perhaps the Indians were lurking within the butte! They were guarding it—and they were warning the newcomers that they had better keep their distance!

Perhaps there was some sort of superstition about this gold. All along, Lee had felt that the Apaches had been actuated by some superstitious fear. As Siggers himself admitted, it wasn't usual for the Redskins to get so excited or violent. They must have had some tremendously acute reason for attacking the white party.

"Yes, Siggers, that arrow came from the butte," said Lee. "And for us to make any attempt to search the butte by night would be madness. We must wait until the morning. You had better remain up here, and I will make some fresh arrangements down in the gully. Get behind that rock, and you'll be safe from any stray arrows. And keep your eyes open."

"You said it!" grunted Siggers. "I'll sure keep my eye open, pard!"

Lee hurried down, and he was quickly surrounded by the schoolboys and schoolgirls.

"Are the Indians there, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Have they followed us?"

"I think not," replied Lee. "As far as we can see, there are no Indians at all. But I imagine that a few of them must be lurking somewhere on that butte. As you know, it overlooks this gully, and we are too close to be comfortable. We'll shift the camp farther up—completely out of range of these stray arrows."

"Aren't we going to search for the Indians, sir?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

"Not to-night, my boy."

"But why not, sir?" asked Edward Oswald. "The Indians might make an attack——"

"There is very little chance of that," interrupted Lee. "Whatever Indians there are, they are perched on that butte. We cannot take any action until daylight comes. You boys and girls had better get into your blankets, and go to sleep."

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"We can't go to sleep now, sir!"

"You'll go to sleep quickly enough when you find that there is no excitement," said Nelson Lee dryly. "Come along! All of you lend a hand in shifting the camp. We shall have to move several hundred yards—to be certain of getting out of range."

WITHIN half an hour the camp was pitched farther up the gully, and under the shadow of one of the steep sides. Here, at all events, there was no possible chance of any stray arrows from the butte entering the camp. In the old spot the danger had been quite acute. The camp fires had been built under the very shadow of the butte, for nobody had looked for danger from that direction.

Umlosi and Hookey Webb had joined Siggers on the edge of the gully, and they were keeping a kind of watch. Not that they saw anything suspicious. No more arrows had come; the butte was silent and dark, and as mysterious as ever.

"Now, you youngsters had better get to sleep," said Nelson Lee. "You've had a hard day, and you'll probably have another hard day to-morrow. Sleep is essential. Don't worry yourselves about those arrows; if there are Indians, they can only be a mere handful."

"All the same, sir, don't you think we'd better keep a strict watch?" asked Nipper.

"We shall do so," nodded Lee.

"But we'd all like to help," said Handforth eagerly. "You men need sleep just as much as we do."

This was unanswerable, and Nelson Lee did not try to answer it.

"It's only fair that we should take it in turns to watch, sir," continued Handforth, pressing his advantage. "Why not set sentries all round the camp? I'll do my share, sir, and I know the other chaps are just as keen. Let's take it in spells—five or six of us at a time, and we'll post ourselves round the camp. We'll take an hour each—or perhaps two hours."

"Absolutely!"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Let's do our share, Mr. Lee!"

"And don't forget us, either!" said Doris Berkeley.

"I absolutely insist upon you girls getting to sleep!" replied Lee, his tone eloquent of finality. "Please don't argue with me and point out that you are just as capable as the boys. In most things, you are. But it is highly important that you should rest and sleep and prepare yourselves for the morrow."

"And what about the boys, sir?" asked Marjorie Temple.

"The boys will sleep, too—but I think I shall take advantage of their offer," replied Lee. "Some of them can keep guard. They'll take it in turns. It will be all the better if the camp is entirely encircled by a strong ring of sentries, and we men alone are not sufficiently numerous for that."

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "That's the stuff, sir! Just give us our orders, and we'll carry them out!"

NELSON LEE was rather glad of the boys' offer. He did not fear any attack during the night. These Indians, whoever they were, were evidently not in a big force. They remained mysteriously in the background, and not even the stray arrows continued to come over.

Lee decided to post sentries in different spots all round the camp, up and down the gully, and on the edges of it.

If half a dozen of the fellows were constantly on duty they would be able to watch successfully. The Indians would have no opportunity of creeping upon the camp unawares.

Lee arranged everything. It was agreed that Browne and Stevens of the Fifth, and Nipper and Tommy Watson and Gresham and Fullwood should stand the first watch. They were to be relieved after a couple of hours by Handforth and Church and McClure and Reggie Pitt and Travers and Archie Glenthorne.

Then six others would come on duty after this second lot had done their spell.

Throughout the night, this watch would be kept. Lee and Dorrie and Siggers and Hookey would sleep in turns, two of them constantly patrolling the camp.

In this way any surprise attack would be frustrated. There was hardly any chance that there would be an attack, but it was as well to be on the safe side. And on the morrow, in full daylight, the source of those arrows could be investigated.

Handforth was rather wild because he was not allowed to keep guard first. He retired into his blanket near one of the camp fires, and he did his utmost to keep Church and McClure awake.

"It's all rot!" he grunted. "It was my idea to keep watch, and those other chaps are having first whack!"

"You ought to be jolly pleased about it," said Church, yawning. "I can do with a couple of hours' sleep, I can assure you! I'd rather do my spell a bit later on."

"Same here," said McClure drowsily.

They felt safe and comfortable in the knowledge that the camp was closely guarded, and they knew that they would be able to sleep freely.

"I'm not so sure about Mr. Lee's policy," said Handforth severely. "In my opinion, it would have been better to rout these Indians out at once. Why wait until the morning?"

"Better go and tell Mr. Lee that," said Church sarcastically. "Why the dickens can't you be quiet, Handy? Let a chap get a nap!"

"What if the Indians spring on us in the darkness?" asked Handforth. "What chance shall we have? It might be a good idea to do a bit of scouting," he added thoughtfully. "By George! That's it! Supposing we creep up to the butte and make some investigations on our own?"

Church yawned noisily.

"Cheese it!" he grunted. "If you want to go and investigate, Handy, you'll have to go alone. Mac and I aren't having any of it."

"Not likely," said McClure, yawning, too.

With a few moments Handforth himself was yawning. It was a catching complaint. He little realised that his chums were doing this deliberately—just to set him off. They were inwardly alarmed by the prospect of being compelled to seize Handforth and hold him down.

Actually, however, Edward Oswald was thoroughly weary and, after one or two yawns, he fell back to consider the whole position. Within a minute he was sound asleep. Nature had asserted herself.

So Church and McClure slept, too—peaceful in the knowledge that their leader would not get into any mischief whilst they slumbered. Handforth would not have felt complimented if he could have known his chums' thoughts.

Before long the camp was quiet and still. The fires were kept going, and they were cheerful and warm. Their friendly crackle acted soothingly upon the sleepers.

Up against one side of the gully a kind of shelter had been made—especially for the girls. Brushwood had been brought up, and blankets had been stretched across. The chill night air could not get to them, and the face of the shelter was open and facing one of the fires. Irene & Co. were cosy and warm and secure. They were wrapped in their own blankets, and sleeping soundly.

Further along, near one of the other fires, the St. Frank's boys were stretched out, also sleeping. And, at various intervals, the sentries were on duty. Further afield, at least two of the men remained on the alert, their rifles handy.

But nothing happened. There came no alarm.

And so, at the end of the first spell, the original sentries came off duty—only too glad to get into their blankets and sleep. The next set, aroused from slumber, took their places. Handforth was not nearly so enthusiastic now. Aroused from a glorious sleep, he felt appallingly tired. But not for the world would he admit it. He was ready, like the others, to stand his share of the work.

"I don't like putting you boys to this job, but it's safer for us all, and your spell will soon be over," said Nelson Lee, as he inspected the changed sentries. "Keep your eyes open—and your ears on the alert. If

you hear anything unusual, or see anything suspicious, send the word along and let all the other sentries know."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth. "If we spot anything, shall we yell out or pass the word along quietly?"

"Pass it along quietly," replied Lee. "There's no need to arouse the ones who are sleeping unless there is something very special."

"Right you are, sir; we're game," said Handforth. "Now, you fellows, remember that duty comes first."

"What do you mean, fathead?" asked Church, who felt rather irritable.

"I mean that you mustn't sleep at your post!" said Handforth severely. "And that applies to you, too, Mac. A sentry who sleeps at his post is guilty of an awful crime, and he deserves to be slaughtered!"

"You'll get slaughtered soon—without sleeping at your post!" said McClure darkly. "What do you think we are, you ass? If Mr. Lee trusts us to keep guard, we'll keep guard. It's like your nerve to suggest that we shall go to sleep!"

"Well, I'm warning you, that's all," said Handforth. "You might bring disaster upon the whole camp if you doze off, or anything. It's only for two hours, anyhow."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Church. "And mind you don't go to sleep yourself!"

They went to their respective posts, and Church and McClure were rather glad that Handforth was now unable to "jaw" them. He was compelled to remain at his own sentry duty, and, of course, he was isolated from all the others.

Each sentry had his own particular section to watch and guard. Handforth's section, rather to his satisfaction, was in close proximity to the girls' shelter. He felt that this responsibility was worthy of him. It was up to him to see that no harm came to Irene & Co.; and he vowed to himself that he would do his duty like a true soldier.

And, vowing thus, Handforth went to sleep!

CHAPTER 4.

While Handforth Slept!

THERE was, of course, absolutely no excuse for Handforth.

From the first the leader of Study D had been insistent that he should be entrusted with sentry duty. He had even warned Church and McClure against the crime of going to sleep on duty. So there was utterly and positively no excuse for him. His offence, indeed, was aggravated.

Naturally, he had had no intention of neglecting his duty.

He found that everything was quiet, and the peace of the whole scene and the silence of the desert had a lulling effect upon him. Not that the others were affected differently. They were lulled, too—but they fought their weariness, and they remained true to their trust.

Handforth, having assured himself that the girls were slumbering peacefully, and having made certain that there were no lurking Indians prowling about, propped himself against a wall of rock, and stood there ruminating.

He was wondering if there was any truth in Hookey Webb's story. What a swindle it would be if there was no gold at all!

Handforth knew well enough that Lord Dorrimore had taken a chance on this trip. Nelson Lee had been rather sceptical from the first, and Dicky Siggers was plainly sceptical, too. And he was a man who ought to know, since he had spent his life on these deserts.

Yet it was rather significant that Indians should be guarding the butte. Why were they guarding it if it contained nothing valuable?

Thinking in this way, Handforth took another look round, and decided that it would be safe for him to sit against the rock. It was more comfortable; he could see just as well, and his hearing was in no way hampered. He yawned, closed his eyes, and dozed.

It was only for a moment. Then he came to with a start, and shook himself.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "This won't do, you silly fathead! Pull yourself together!"

He pulled himself together, and within a minute his head was nodding forward again. He knew that this was all wrong, and he decided, then and there, to get to his feet and pace up and down. It was the only safe thing to do.

But he was so comfortable, and he was feeling so tired, that he decided he would remain seated for another moment or so. After that he would get up and do his pacing.

THAT hesitation on the part of Handforth was fatal.

This time his head nodded forward, and remained there. He did not jerk into wakefulness again. He slumbered, and, at the expiration of five minutes, he was sleeping as soundly as a log. He had committed the unpardonable offence—he had gone to sleep while he was on duty!

Not that it seemed to matter.

The other sentries were on the alert—fighting with themselves to ward off sleep, it is true—and either Lee and Siggers, or Dorrie and Hookey, were patrolling up and down, too. Yet none of them came near to the girls' shelter. It was felt that there could be no kind of danger there, and the men were naturally reluctant to disturb the girls. For, in spite of Irene & Co.'s repeated statements that they could stand any hardships as well as the boys, it was generally felt that the girls should be allowed extra privileges. They wouldn't accept them

(Continued on page 14.)

"Don't Shout—I'm not Deaf!"

n which a cheery and optimistic representative of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY *sets out to interview Cornelius Trotwood, the deaf junior of the Remove at St. Frank's, and returns a sad but much wiser man.*

Scene: The Triangle at St. Frank's.

Time: Wednesday—lessons are just over.

General Theme: As a representative of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, I have just trotted along to St. Frank's to get an interview with Cornelius Trotwood, of the Remove, on behalf of the Old Paper.

TROTWOOD is just coming towards me, and I nobly brace my shoulders. Trotwood is afflicted with deafness, but that does not deter me. I advance.

"Good-morning, Trotwood!" I shout genially.

"What for?" he replies in surprise.

"Eh?" I gasped at the other's startling reply to my greeting.

"You said something about a warning, didn't you?"

"A warning? Certainly not! I wished you good-morning."

"Oh, I'm sorry! An awning, eh? Yes, it is rather hot. Come into the shade then, my dear fellow."

I reeled dizzily. The ordeal had started. Should I ever survive it? I felt terribly embarrassed, too, for we were surrounded by a big mob of grinning juniors.

"I want to thank you——" I began in my best foghorn voice.

"Spank me! Sir, how dare you?"

"Nunno! Not spank you—thank you, for allowing me this interview——"

"No, it's not a bad view, is it? If only Handforth would remove himself——"

"I'm not talking about views, you—— Ahem!" I pulled myself together just in time. "Er—er—are you interested in sport?"

"Port? I never touch the stuff."

"Who's talking about port?" I bellowed indignantly. "Sport. Cricket, you know—football."

Trotwood looked at me pityingly.

"Thicket—is our cook tall? Are you quite well, my dear fellow? You seem to be rambling——"

"You're driving me mad, if that's what you mean. If I have much more of you I shall throw myself in the pool."

"Are you alluding to me as a fool, sir? Don't think that because I'm slightly deaf ——"

"Slightly deaf!" I howled, exasperated. "I like that. Strikes me you're just as deaf as a door."

"I certainly won't dust the floor! What do you take me for——"

"A babbling lunatic!" I shrieked.

"Why, where are you going?"

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"You said you wouldn't be a tick——"

"No, you fool——"

"What about the pool?"

"Oh, help!"

My scattered thoughts were interrupted by Trotwood seizing hold of my shoulder.

"Look here, my good sir! I distinctly object to being called a whelp! I must ask you to apologise!"

A roar of laughter went up from the onlookers. I turned red. I felt discomfited. And then I remembered. In my pocket I had one of those special trumpet affairs for deaf people.

I took the thing out of my pocket and gave it to Trotwood. He solemnly held it to his ear, whereat I bellowed into the trumpet:

"I didn't call you a whelp at all. Now look here! About this interview——"

"Don't shout—I'm not deaf!" came Trotwood's reply. And then he gave a huge guffaw, and said: "Look here, you chump, you've been spoofed! You're supposed to interview Cornelius Trotwood, aren't you? Thought so! Well, here he comes! *I'm* Nicodemus, his twin brother!"

But one Trotwood was enough for me; I fled while the going was good!

THE SCHOOLBOY GOLDSEEKERS!

(*Continued from page* 12.)

whilst they were awake, but they could at least have them whilst they slept.

By the end of an hour, Handforth had slithered forward and he was sprawling on the ground, still slumbering soundly, and now so thoroughly asleep that a thunderstorm would not have awakened him.

Over by the edge of the gully a shadowy figure appeared. Or was it merely the shadow of a rock? It was difficult to tell. For long minutes it hardly moved; then, slowly, insidiously, it came forward, followed by two or three more of these shadows! Inch by inch they came nearer. Even if Handforth had been awake and fully on the qui vive, he might not have seen them. He certainly would not have heard them, since they made no sound.

Slowly, with infinite patience, they continued to creep nearer—making, all the time, for the girls' shelter.

Once, when Lord Dorrimore came patrolling over in this direction, the shadows flattened themselves against the surrounding rocks and became as still as the inanimate things about them. Not until Dorrie had passed away did they move again. His lordship had not come very near; he had only paced along the top of the gully, and had turned whilst still twenty or thirty yards away.

But as he receded in the moonlight, the mysterious figures moved once more. There was no moonlight here, for this side of the gully was in complete shadow.

At last the shadows came near to the rear of the girls' shelter, where the brushwood was piled up in a kind of protective barrier.

The brushwood was eased aside—so slowly and so insidiously that anyone standing nearby would have been ready to swear that not a twig or a leaf had moved. Yet it was moving all the time—so cunningly, so stealthily, that the thing was almost beyond belief.

Whoever was responsible for this activity was possessed of infinite patience, for a full half-hour elapsed before the shelter of brushwood had been penetrated. And now a kind of narrow opening was made. Three dark shadows slipped through, and still that uncanny silence was maintained. There was something appallingly sinister about these slowly-moving forms. They were so deadly in their evil purpose; so thorough in their methods. They were like spectres of the night—ghostly shadows of the blackness!

IT happened that Irene Manners was sleeping nearest to this selected spot. She looked very peaceful as she lay there, rolled in her blanket, only her pretty face showing. She was breathing quietly and evenly. Something hovered over her—and it was something which might have been a human hand. It came nearer and nearer to her face. And then, when it was within an inch or so, it remained perfectly still, hovering there.

Irene seemed slightly disturbed in her sleep for a moment or so. Her breathing was not quite so even; she gave a long sort of sigh, and stirred slightly. Then, after that one sigh, she became still again, and her breathing was once more even. But now it seemed to take on a different character; it was softer and rather quicker.

The shadowy hand was withdrawn.

Nothing happened after that until a further three or four minutes had elapsed. Then the other Moor View girls might have noticed—had they been awake—that Irene was vanishing, inch by inch, through that gap in the brushwood!

Mysterious as everything else had been, this seemed the most mysterious of all. Irene was still breathing evenly, she was still sleeping, and yet she was being edged out. She was being taken away—from the midst of her girl friends; and so silently and cunningly was it being done that they knew nothing.

At last she was dragged completely through that shelter, and the brushwood was gently replaced in position. Then the girl was lifted from the ground. Those three shadowy forms seized her, carrying her wrapped in the blanket. The girl did not awaken. It was impossible for her to awaken. That hovering hand, held so close to her face earlier, had contained some kind of drug which had rendered her insensible!

Like evil spirits these shadows had come and had borne Irene away with them. They went as they had come, up one of the rocky sides of the gully. And having arrived at the top they hastened their movements. Not until then did they change their tactics. But now that the camp was left behind, they bore Irene off swiftly, running fleetly and silently.

They had chosen their moment well, too, for by now the moon had drifted round behind the great bulk of the butte, and this part of the desert was in complete shadow.

THE two-hour spell was over, and the next set of sentries were aroused by Nelson Lee for their spell of duty.

"Everything's all right, boys," murmured Lee. "I hate waking you like this, but it is only fair to the others——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted one of the juniors. "We'll all do our bit."

"Yes, rather, sir!" said somebody else.

"Good boys!" said Lee approvingly. "It won't be long before dawn now, and I'm pretty certain that there'll be no trouble. When daylight comes you can all sleep for a spell. Now you'd better get to your posts."

He gave them instructions as to where they should go, and it was Jimmy Potts

who found himself looking down at Handforth a minute or so later.

"All right, Handy, old man," whispered Jimmy. "I've come to relieve you."

There was no answer from Handforth.

"I say!" ejaculated the schoolboy baronet. "What the dickens—Handy!"

Jimmy Potts was startled. He had not expected to find Handforth asleep on duty like this. It fairly took his breath away. Handforth of all fellows!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Potts. "He's a fine kind of chap to leave on sentry-go! Not that it much matters—nothing's happened, anyhow. All the same, he's a fraud. He deserves to be court-martialled."

He bent down, and shook Edward Oswald by the shoulder.

"Hallo!" grunted Handforth, rolling over. "Clear off, you fathead! The rising-bell hasn't gone yet!"

"There's no rising-bell, Handy," whispered Potts. "Easy, old man! I won't let on."

"Eh?" mumbled Handforth.

"I won't give you away, old son," breathed Sir James Potts. "Nobody need know about this. Only, for goodness' sake, don't make a fuss. If you wake anybody up——"

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "Who's that? Is that you, Potts? What are you doing here, in this dormitory?"

"We're not at St. Frank's, you sleepy-head!" grinned Jimmy. "This is the desert—in Arizona. And you've been asleep on duty!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" gasped Handforth, with a jump.

He looked at Jimmy Potts dazedly; he glanced at the crackling camp fire, which had been replenished. Then, in a flash, everything came back to him. He staggered to his feet, clutching at Jimmy Potts' shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" he asked hoarsely. "It's not time for me to be relieved yet! I haven't been asleep."

"Oh, no!" said Jimmy. "It's only a rumour!"

"I tell you I haven't!" insisted Handforth. "I might have dozed for just ten seconds——"

"Ten seconds be blowed!" said Jimmy. "You came on duty two hours ago, and goodness only knows how long you've been sleeping."

"Two hours!" breathed Handforth aghast. "But—but it only seems like two seconds!"

"It generally seems like that when you go to sleep," nodded Potts. "But it's all right—nothing's happened. Don't get the wind up, Handy. It's my turn now, and I'm on duty at this post."

"No fear!" said Handforth. "You go back to bed. I'll do this spell. I say, what an ass I was to go to sleep! Me, you know! After what I said to Churchy and Mac, too!"

"Yes, it's a bit thick," admitted Jimmy Potts.

"I can't understand it," went on Handforth, bewildered. "I remember squatting down against that rock, and——"

"And you closed your eyes and told yourself that you wouldn't go to sleep," finished Jimmy. "Yes, I know! But don't let it worry you, old man. I'll keep your dark and sinister secret."

"I don't deserve to have it kept!" said Handforth bitterly. "I've failed! I've made a mess of it! Me!"

"Awful!" said Jimmy solemnly. "But for goodness' sake don't take it to heart so much. The camp's been quiet, and nothing has happened!"

"That doesn't alter the fact that I've failed," argued Handforth. "Supposing some of the Indians had come—just at this spot? Supposing they had attacked the camp, and I was asleep like that and unable to give the warning? We might all have been wiped out—and all my fault!"

"Well, buzz off, or some of the other chaps will begin to suspect things," said Jimmy pointedly. "If you do this spell of sentry-go, the rest will know what happened. I shan't say anything, and they needn't know at all. We'll keep it dark, old son."

"Well, it's awfully good of you," said Handforth humbly. "Thanks, Jimmy. I don't deserve it, though—I'm a wash-out!"

He went off miserably, leaving Jimmy

Potts chuckling. Little did either of them guess what had happened during Handforth's stolen slumber!

CHAPTER 5.

The Discovery!

IRENE MANNERS, knowing absolutely nothing of what has happened to her, was really having quite an exciting journey.

The distance was not very great—only on to that great butte, which towered so overpoweringly near at hand.

Complete success had rewarded the efforts of the men who had penetrated the camp.

They had seized one of the girls. It had not mattered to them which one. She was their prisoner now, and they were taking her with them back to their lair.

The shadows were black and mysterious on this side of the butte. Not a sound did these Indians utter as they hoisted Irene from rock to rock, from ledge to ledge. They were Apaches, these men—naked to the waist, slippery and agile and sinewy. From first to last they had not spoken, and they did not speak now. They knew only too well how sounds would carry on the desert air; and their very movements were so cautious that not a loose stone was disturbed, not a sound of any kind was made.

The butte was ragged and torn from the effects of countless storms throughout the ages. The prevailing winds were evidently on this side, and the rock was uneven and scarred with crevices and slits. These agile men had no difficulty in hoisting their prisoner up, foot by foot.

At last they reached an extra-wide ledge, nearly half-way up the butte. It was almost like a great platform, and it was obvious that this was not entirely the result of nature. Men's handiwork was evident here—men of a bygone age it was who had constructed this platform by hewing it out of the solid rock.

Irene was taken through a black opening in the limestone rock, and it seemed that her journey was over.

And there, far below in the gully, the camp fires gleamed and flickered and glowed. Everything was peaceful there. There had been no alarm.

DAWN came and found the schoolboy sentries tired and weary. Soon after the daylight had strengthened, Nelson Lee himself came round and told the boys to get into their blankets.

"You've done your work well, and I'm pleased with you," he said. "There has been no disturbance during the night, and everything is safe and sound. Now that daylight has come there's no need for such a careful watch. We men can manage now."

"But what about your sleep, sir?" asked Jimmy Potts.

"I've had some, young 'un," smiled Lee. "And before long I'll snatch another hour or so."

"Do you think the Indians are likely to make any move, sir?"

"As they have steered clear of us during the night—when they could easily have made an attack—I should say there's no danger now," replied Nelson Lee. "It indicates, indeed, that the Indians are afraid to show themselves. Perhaps there are no more than half a dozen of them here. A mere handful."

"It looks like it, sir, doesn't it?" said the schoolboy baronet. "That explains why they haven't had a go at us."

"So it appears," said Lee. "Well, Jimmy, you'd better run along. Have a look at the fires before you roll in your blankets——"

He broke off, and turned his head. Some of the girls were stirring, and one or two of them were calling out. Nelson Lee frowned. He did not want the girls to be aroused until the sun was well up. There was really no need for them to be awake yet.

"I can't understand it!" Doris Berkeley was saying. "She was here when we went to sleep, wasn't she?"

"Right next to me!" replied Ena Handforth. "Where can she have got to?"

Several of the girls had thrown their blankets aside, and now they were standing up, their hair untidy, their eyes still showing signs of sleep.

Nelson Lee went over to them.

"What's all this about?" he asked, with mock severity. "It's only a little after dawn, and the sun hasn't appeared yet. You'd better sleep for another two or three hours and then you'll be ready for a hearty breakfast."

"We can't find Irene," said Winnie Pitt. "Do you know where she is, sir?"

"You can't find Irene?" repeated Lee, looking round. "Nonsense! She must be here somewhere. Where else could she be?"

"That's what we can't make out, Mr. Lee," said Marjorie Temple. "When we went to sleep last night Irene snuggled up between Ena and me. Ena woke up not long ago, and she found that Irene wasn't there!"

"I thought that Irene had moved," explained Ena. "I didn't worry a bit——"

"This is extraordinary!" broke in Nelson Lee, frowning. "Where can the girl have got to? And why should she move away from you others?"

They were all on their feet now, and Lee looked them over closely. It was obvious, at the first glance, that Irene Manners was not there. Neither could she be anywhere in that shelter. The daylight was strong enough to enable him to see every inch. He turned, and looked over the rest of the camp.

Some of the boys were lying near the fires, wrapped in their own blankets; the others, who had been doing sentry duty, were preparing to roll themselves up, too. Everybody was visible. There were no rocks behind which the missing girl might be hiding. And, in any case, why should she hide?

"I don't like this at all," said Nelson Lee abruptly. "You didn't miss Irene until a few minutes ago?"

"That's right, Mr. Lee," said Ena. "When I woke up——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Lee. "But Irene was here when you all went to sleep?"

"Yes, of course," said Marjorie.

"I think we'd better have a look through the camp and find out what has become of

her," said Lee. "She cannot be very far off. Dorrie or some of the other men must have seen her if she had wandered out of the gully. And that's improbable, too. What I don't like is that she should steal off so quietly, and so mysteriously, without telling any of you others."

"It isn't like Renie to do that," said Doris. "Oh, I'm beginning to get worried! Supposing something has happened to her during the night?"

"That's most unlikely," said Lee. "There were guards all round—every inch of the place was watched throughout the night. Irene must have taken a fit into her head and gone off somewhere. But she cannot be far away."

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "Is that you, Potts? What are you doing in this dormitory?" "We're not at St. Frank's, you sleepy head!" grinned Jimmy. "This is Arizona—and you've been asleep while on sentry duty!"

He hurried off towards the other camp fires, and Lord Dorrimore joined him. They spoke for a few minutes, and then commenced a thorough search of the camp. Jimmy Potts and two or three other juniors and all the girls joined in. They did not say much, but a feeling of alarm was growing.

It became acute when the search revealed no sign of the missing girl. Without a doubt, she was not in the camp. Neither was she up on the desert, beyond the gully.

"Oh, she's gone!" said Marjorie breathlessly. "Something has happened to her, you girls! She wouldn't go off like this—without telling anybody! She must have been taken away by those Indians——"

"Oh, I say, cheese it!" protested Doris. "There's no need to——"

She broke off as she caught sight of Jimmy Potts' face. The schoolboy baronet was standing near by, and he had suddenly turned pale; an expression of alarm and consternation had leapt into his eyes. He stood there like one dumbfounded.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" asked Doris, looking him straight in the eye.

"Eh? The—the matter?" stammered Potts. "Oh, nothing! I mean—— Well, of course, it's a bit alarming, Irene being missing like this!"

"Isn't there something else?" asked Doris.

"What else could there be?" replied Jimmy, pulling himself together with an effort. "Isn't this bad enough?"

He managed to get away, and he was glad. His heart was thumping madly, and he was filled with uneasiness and dread. For he had remembered Handforth's lapse.

And it was Handforth who had been on guard at that particular part of the camp—near the girl's shelter—during the fatal period when Irene must have disappeared! Handforth had been there—sleeping at his post! What had happened whilst he slumbered? What terrible thing had occurred to Irene?

Nobody could tell, for the one fellow who should have been awake and on the alert had been sleeping.

The alarm became general a few minutes later, and one by one the rest of the fellows were aroused. The whole camp became awakened. Sleepy-eyed juniors were running about, hearing the story.

Handforth, of course, heard it with the rest. He and Church and McClure received the startling information from Nipper, and they were thoroughly alarmed.

"But it's so jolly rummy!" said Church. "Why should Irene go off like that?"

"That's what we can't understand," said Nipper.

"Perhaps she didn't go off," put in McClure. "Perhaps she was grabbed by some of those Indians! We know that they were prowling about last night—because they sent some arrows into camp. Perhaps they took Irene away——"

"I don't see how that's possible," said Nipper, shaking his head. "There were sentries all round the camp throughout the night. There wasn't a single yard unprotected. You were near the girls' shelter, weren't you, Handy?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"Didn't you take two hours of sentry-go there?"

"Yes," panted Handforth. "I—I mean —— Yes, of course! Oh, my hat!"

He was nearly overwhelmed.

"And then Jimmy Potts took your place," continued Nipper, giving him a curious glance. "Jimmy says that nothing happened while he was on duty, and—— But what's the matter with you, Handy? Great Scott! You've gone as white as a sheet!"

Handforth tried to speak, but he seemed nearly to choke. He stood there, clenching his fists and trying to control himself. He was dumbfounded by the enormity of this calamity—and by the knowledge that he was to blame. Irene had been stolen away from the camp during those fateful two hours when he had neglected his duty!

"I suppose the poor old chap is a bit cut up," said McClure gently. "Irene is his own particular girl chum, you know. Still, I dare say she'll turn up all right. If a watch was kept all night——"

"It wasn't!" broke in Handforth harshly.

His voice was so strained that the others looked at him in startled surprise.

"What do you mean?" asked Nipper.

"A watch wasn't kept all night!" said Handforth, almost wildly. "I failed! I went to sleep! When Jimmy Potts came to relieve me, he found me snoring like a grampus. Or, if I wasn't snoring, I was sound asleep!"

"You!" ejaculated Church, staring. "Don't be an ass, Handy! And don't look so—so funny!"

"This isn't funny—it's tragic!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"I didn't mean funny in that way," said Church. "Don't look so strange. I don't believe you went to sleep on duty——"

"I did!" panted Handforth. "Ask Jimmy! Where is he? Hi, Jimmy! Come here! All the rest of you, too! I've got something to tell you!"

They came crowding round, attracted by Handforth's strained, high-pitched voice. Even Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came up.

"Isn't it a fact, Jimmy, that I was asleep when you came to relieve me?" demanded Handforth, seizing Jimmy Potts by the arm and holding on so tightly that the schoolboy baronet winced. "Come on! Out with it! Tell them!"

"I wasn't going to say anything——" began Potts.

"You've got to say it!" insisted Handforth relentlessly. "I'm not going to let these chaps think that I did my duty when I didn't! I failed—I deserve to be horsewhipped! It's all my fault! Irene must have been kidnapped while I slept at my post!"

Nipper stared at Jimmy Potts.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Well, I wasn't going to say anything," repeated Jimmy uncomfortably, "but if Handforth insists——"

"Was he asleep at his post?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. But I wasn't going to sneak——"

"Sneak be blowed!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "It's not sneaking, you idiot! I'm telling them myself, aren't I? I told them before you came up. I had to tell them! Do you think my conscience would have allowed me——"

"Handforth," broke in Nelson Lee, striding forward, "I have heard what you have been saying. How long were you asleep at your post?"

"All the time, I think, sir," muttered Handforth.

"Aren't you sure?"

"It only seemed like a couple of seconds, sir," said Edward Oswald wretchedly. "I remember leaning against a pile of rock, and then I sat down."

"A fatal thing to do," said Lee sternly.

"I know it, sir—now," groaned Handforth. "I even remember telling myself that I was an ass, and that if I didn't get up I should doze off. And—and then I don't seem to remember anything until Jimmy shook me by the shoulder. I thought I'd only been sleeping for a bare minute, and when he told me that two hours had passed I thought he was mad."

"Two hours!" repeated Nelson Lee, glancing at Dorrie. "Good heavens! Anything might have happened during those two hours! Think of it, Dorrie—for two solid hours that particular part of the camp

was unprotected. There was nobody on the watch! And now, this morning, we find that Irene has vanished. Isn't it obvious that the girl must have been stolen away?"

"Looks like it," admitted Dorrie, with a whistle. "Those blighters of Indians, you mean, eh? They spotted that Handforth was asleep, and selected that part of the camp for the job. But why on earth should they take one of the girls away like that?"

"I don't suppose it mattered to them who they took—so long as they seized a member of this party," said Nelson Lee grimly. "This whole affair looks ugly, Dorrie. I'm worried. The girl has been taken, and you can be quite certain that she was taken for a very definite object."

"You mean——"

"I mean that the Indians now have a hostage in their hands," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "Think what that means, Dorrie! It renders us helpless—utterly and absolutely helpless!"

CHAPTER 6.

Handforth's Remorse!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH felt stunned.

Now that Nelson Lee had given a probable explanation, the whole thing seemed as obvious as daylight. A hostage! Of course! What else? And the very fact that they required a hostage indicated that they were a very small force. Unable to attack the white party with any hope of success, they had resorted to stratagem. And so successfully had they carried out their plans that they were now the masters of the situation. Irene Manners was the victim—she was in the hands of these bloodthirsty Redskins!

"And I'm to blame!" panted Handforth chokingly. "It's all my fault!"

"Easy, old son," murmured Willy. "It was pretty careless of you, but you needn't look so stunned. We're all liable to make

mistakes, and last night we were all fearfully tired——"

Handforth spun round on his minor almost like a tiger.

"Don't make excuses for me!" he said, his voice more hoarse than ever. "I don't want to be excused! I failed, and I ought to be kicked from here to Halifax! I'm no good—I'm a wash-out—I'm a rotten, good-for-nothing failure!"

"Steady on, Handy——" began Nipper.

"I'm a failure!" roared Handforth in agony. "If it hadn't been for my blunder in going to sleep, Irene wouldn't have been kidnapped. I should have been able to give the warning! It's all my fault—and I ought to be kicked! I ought to be horse-whipped! I ought to be slaughtered!"

His anguish was heartrending, and his remorse was obviously sincere. He stood with drooping shoulders, beating his knuckles on his forehead. He was a figure of tragedy.

The other fellows looked at him in some alarm—and the girls, who had at first been angry with him, now collected round, full of sympathy. Handforth's self-condemnation was so sincere, so thorough, that it was impossible to be angry with him. He was suffering tortures, and his brave acknowledgment of his failures was sufficient to earn him immediate forgiveness. Not that he wanted forgiveness. He backed away when some of the schoolboys and schoolgirls crowded round, trying to console him.

"Don't—don't!" he panted. "While I was lying there like a senseless dummy, Irene was kidnapped! It's all my fault that it happened—and I've got to find her! Do you hear? It's up to me! I've got to find her and bring her back! It's my job! If I don't find her I shall go mad——"

"Now, Handforth, you must pull yourself together," said Nelson Lee kindly, as he laid a hand on Handforth's shoulder. "It was wrong of you to go to sleep like that, but you must not carry on in this way. It won't do any good."

Handforth nearly choked.

"I'm sorry, sir!" he breathed. "I'm sorry I made such a mess of things! I always make a mess of things!" he added bitterly. "I'm no good! Everything I do, I do wrongly! I'm a clumsy fool, and I don't deserve to be trusted! What can I do to put things right, sir?" he added, clutching at Lee's sleeve. "How can I——"

"I'm not pretending, Handforth, that the situation is not grave," said Lee. "If that girl is really in the hands of the Indians—as we have every reason to believe—she is in great peril. And we must, of course, do everything in our power to rescue her. But we must keep our sense of proportion—we must remain calm. The trouble is, we do not know where to look. There can be no tracks on this hard ground, and we can be sure, too, that the Indians would not leave any traces. They may be farther down this gully, or they may be concealed somewhere on that butte. Probably the latter. It was from the butte that the arrows came last night."

"Can't we search the butte, sir?" asked Handforth tensely. "Let me go! Let me have a try——"

"You'll only make things worse if you go on like this," broke in Lee. "It would be madness to rush hastily into this thing. We've got to think—we've got to plan—and we must remain level-headed. All I want you to do, Handforth, is to control yourself, and to leave this matter in my hands. If I want you to help, I will call for you. But until then, you must remain patient."

HANDFORTH was inconsolable.

Willy tried his hardest to comfort him, and Doris and Marjorie and some of the other girls tried their hands at it, too. But it was no good. He was like a fellow demented. He wandered about the camp, wild-eyed, gazing continuously and fascinatedly towards the great frowning mass of the butte.

Irene had been kidnapped—and he was to blame!

Nipper and the rest stood about in groups. The boys and the girls mingled together. Irene's disappearance was the only subject of conversation. Nothing else mattered. Breakfast was forgotten—sleep was out of the question. The mysterious way in which Irene had been spirited away intrigued everybody.

There were all sorts of conjectures, too, as to her fate.

"These Apaches are cruel rotters!" said Church. "Perhaps they're torturing her now—before putting her to death!"

"I dare say they've scalped her," put in Chubby Heath, of the Third.

"You young idiot!" said Nipper sharply. "Don't talk such rot!"

"But these Indians do scalp people," said Chubby defensively.

"In the old days they indulged in that sort of thing, but scalping is out of date," said Nipper. "The very fact that Irene was carried off so quietly proves that she is safe."

"How does it prove it?" asked Harry Gresham.

"If they had wanted to kill her, why didn't they kill her in camp?" retorted Nipper. "Can't you understand? If they've grabbed her as a hostage, it's as clear as daylight that they must keep her safe and sound—and absolutely unharmed. Hostages are never hurt. They'll only do something drastic if we refuse to obey their ultimatum."

"What ultimatum?" asked Tommy Watson, staring.

"There isn't one yet—but it's pretty certain there will be," said Nipper grimly.

THE ST. FRANK'S QUESTIONNAIRE!

Here are twelve testers for you, chums—questions which refer to St. Frank's and its members. Give them the "once-over," jot down the answers to those which you know, and then compare them with the correct list which will be given, together with another set of questions, next week.

1.—What is the name of the Bannington police inspector who is frequently seen in the St. Frank's district?

2.—Who is the Vicar of Bellton?

3.—Who are the occupants of Study C, in the Ancient House?

4.—Who is the head prefect of the Modern House?

5.—What is the name of the big football club in Bannington?

6.—Who is the owner of this football club?

7.—Who is the best goalkeeper in the Junior School?

8.—What is Harry Gresham's father famous for?

9.—What is the name of the seaside town near St. Frank's?

10.—Who is the noted peer who resides near St. Frank's?

11.—Where is Archie Glenthorne's home?

12.—What is the name of Handforth's father?

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTIONS.

1. *The River Stowe.* 2. *Dr. James Brett.* 3. *Horace Stevens.* 4. *Moat Hollow.* 5. *On the edge of Bannington Moor, about a mile past the Moor View School.* 6. *Christopher.* 7. *Brown.* 8. *Joan Tarrant.* 9. *Arthur Hubbard and Teddy Long.* 10. *Edgar Fenton.* 11. *Mr. Edward Sharpe.* 12. *Nicodemus and Cornelius Trotwood.*

"That's why the guv'nor is so worried. He's not afraid of Irene's safety now—but he's wondering what'll happen when these Indians come out into the open."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Brother Nipper," said Browne, of the Fifth. "Not that I am despairing. I have greater faith in Brother Lee's ingenuity. For is it not probable that he will match strategy against strategy, and prove himself to be the greater master?"

"It's decent of you to think so, Browne, but where is the opening for strategy?" asked Nipper. "What can the guv'nor do? The Indians have got Irene, and we're all helpless. If we don't toe the line, Irene will be used to force us into submission!"

DICKY SIGGERS chewed a hunk of tobacco off a black slab, and thrust it into the side of his mouth.

"Waal, it don't look healthy," he remarked. "Darnation, but it's a pity thet gal wus took like that. I'm figgerin' thet thet boy has sure put his foot in it!"

"I'm not blaming the boy so much as myself," replied Nelson Lee. "I should have taken stronger precautions, Siggers."

"Aw, what's the good o' talking thet-aways?" asked the desert man. "The Injuns hev got that gal, an' I reckon they'll soon show themselves in camp. They'll come along, insolent an' all puffed up wi' their own durned importance. It kinder puts us in a mess."

"Not 'arf it doesn't," said Hookey Webb, his lined old face full of worry. "Lummy, just when we've got to the end o' the trail, too! Them Injuns mean to keep us away from that butte! That's why they've took the gal."

He looked at the great mass of rock in consternation.

"Cuss 'em!" he went on fiercely. "Don't ye understand, gents? That gold's there, inside the butte! Didn't I tell ye? An' the Injuns don't mean to let us git in. Cuss 'em!" he repeated savagely. "Arter we've come all this way—arter we've bin through so much! We ain't goin' to be bested like this, are we?"

"If it is a question of that girl's safety, yes," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "If we cannot come to terms with these Indians—or if we cannot rescue that girl—then we shall have to go away without even moving a step nearer to the butte. Gold or no gold, Webb, the girl's life is more important than anything else. Her safety must come before all else."

"I ain't sayin' but wot you ain't right, mister—but, gosh, it comes 'ard on a bloke," said Hookey gloomily. "Arter all wot we've bin through! Like as not, you'll think I was yarnin' all the time——"

"Not now, Hookey," put in Lord Dorrimore. "It's very certain that these Indians have something to protect—or they wouldn't go to these lengths. I'm not doubting your story of the gold. If we needed anything to convince us, we've got it. But, by the Lord Harry, it goes against the grain to forsake the quest at the last hurdle!"

"Let me go forth, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "Let me attempt to rescue the young white maiden. If I die, no matter."

"No, Umlosi, you mustn't attempt it," put in Nelson Lee. "We're not going to sacrifice your life for nothing. These Indians are watching—they're on guard. We know that from what happened last night. They won't hesitate to fire on you,

Irene sat up, and then she uttered a scream. Standing over her was the tall figure of a man—an Indian! With a feeling of horror Irene realised that she had been captured by the Redskins!

or to send their arrows into your heart. It would be madness, old friend, for you to go."

"Wan! Are we to remain idle then?" asked Umlosi.

"Until the Indians make some sort of move—yes," replied Nelson Lee. "It's exasperating, and it's galling—but we daren't take the risk of precipitating any drastic activity. I only hope that these Indians will do something quickly, so that we can know for certain what has happened to that girl."

They all scanned the butte for some sign, but none came. The sun was just peeping over the desert now, and the morning was growing light. Another hot day was promised, for there was not a cloud in the sky, and there was scarcely a breath of wind.

It was difficult to believe that there could be any Indians in this vicinity. The big butte looked barren and stark and deserted in the morning light. That human beings could be within that apparently solid mass of rock seemed incredible.

"Well, we'd better be thinking about breakfast," said Nelson Lee practically

"Breakfast," echoed Dorrie. "Man alive, we can't eat yet! Food would choke me——"

"But food is necessary, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "It's no good talking like that. I'm satisfied that Irene is safe so far—and, as I have already told you, we can't do anything until the Indians make the first move. So, in the meantime, we might as well have a square meal. There is no telling what might transpire during the morning. We must be ready."

And after the bacon was fried and the bannocks made, and the coffee prepared, the party was surprised to find how heartily they partook of food and drink. Nelson Lee's influence was good; he succeeded in reducing that feeling of alarm and fear which had been so acute.

Handforth was the only one who ate nothing or drank nothing.

He remained aloof—alone—sitting dejectedly on the ground, with his head in his hands. Church and McClure attempted to draw him into the circle, so that he could have his share of the breakfast, but he would not listen to them.

Willy tried his hand, too, but with no greater success.

Church and McClure were miserable and worried; they knew that their leader had failed in his duty, but they argued that Irene might have been kidnapped just the same, whether Handforth slept or remained awake. Nobody else had noticed anything wrong, and yet the other sentries were all on the alert. This proved that the Indians must have adopted some exceedingly secretive tactics. What proof was there that Handforth would have prevented the abduction if he had kept awake?

Not that these arguments were of any use where Handforth was concerned. He thrust them all aside; he maintained that he was entirely to blame, and he would not spare himself.

While the rest partook of their food, Church and McClure remained on the alert; they were waiting for some sign from the butte; and they were making sure, too, that Handforth did not steal off. In this desperate mood of his, he was capable of any rashness.

But perhaps Handforth knew that he would be stopped if he made any attempt to leave the camp. He instinctively felt that he was being watched.

So he kept within the camp, remaining aloof from all the others, alone in his agony and remorse.

Irene sat up, and then she uttered a sc over her was the tall figure of a man—ar a feeling of horror Irene realised that sh tured by the Redskins !

CHAPTER 7.

The Ultimatum!

IRENE MANNERS opened her eyes and stirred slightly.

She was conscious of being rather uncomfortable, and her head was aching throbbingly. This was so unusual that she

vaguely wondered what was the matter. It was very seldom that she had a headache. And this was a peculiarly distressing one.

She wondered why the night had turned so hot. When she had gone to sleep the air had been chilly, and she had been compelled to wrap her blanket well round her. But now she had no blanket, and yet she was feeling almost stifled. Perhaps she was too near the fire——

Her thoughts seemed to come to a jarring stop. Looking round, she saw that there was no fire. But there were some peculiar lamps burning on a rock ledge not far away, sending forth a flickering, yellowish light. She could not remember that rocky ledge. It was unfamiliar to her. Besides, where was the camp fire? And what about the rest of the girls—and the schoolboys?

She sat up, and a movement near her caused her to turn quickly. Then she uttered a short little scream, and sat there as if transfixed.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, terrified.

In that first fleeting second she was convinced that this was some horrid nightmare. There, standing quite close to her, was the tall figure of a man—an Indian! His face was brown and immobile—indeed, mask-like. Only his eyes indicated that he was very much alive. He was dressed in the same way as the Indians Irene had seen previously. There was a single feather sticking up out of the headgear that he wore.

"Oh!" repeated Irene, shrinking away.

She knew, then, that this was no dream. She felt the hard floor, and her full senses came to her in a flood. She saw that she was in a kind of cavern—a place of rock, where the atmosphere was hot and stuffy and filled with chokey fumes. She remembered smelling the same kind of fumes when she had once stood near the crater of a volcano.

But the girl was just as bewildered as before. Where was she? What had happened? She had gone to sleep peacefully, with the other girls by her side. Now she was alone—except for this immobile Indian. And, instead of being in the camp, she was in this place of rock, where the flickering lamps were casting mysterious shadows.

"Who are you?" she asked, trying to speak steadily. "Where am I?"

"White girl keep still," said the Indian, in quite good English. "No harm. Keep still. Soon you go back to your people."

The words tended to reassure her, but the Indian's voice filled her with dread.

"But why?" she asked, looking at the man with wide-open eyes. "How did I get here? Where are the others?"

"Too many questions not good," said the Indian briefly.

"You must answer me," insisted the girl, with some show of spirit. "What am I doing in this—this place?"

"Soon you go back to your people," repeated the Indian. "You carried here in night. See? You keep still, and no harm. You make trouble, and Apaches shut you in dark. If you wish—drink. Eat."

With a sweep of his hand, he indicated a vessel of water and a kind of plate which contained some food. But Irene gave these things only a glance.

"Where am I?" she demanded insistently.

"In butte," replied the Indian. "In big cave. Daylight, way off. Big tunnel to get here. Try to escape, and you get lost. Make no trouble, and soon you go back to your people."

Irene was about to ask some further questions—for she was still battling with her bewilderment—when voices sounded. She turned, and saw three other Indians enter through a kind of gap in the side of the rock. They only spoke a few words to the man who was on guard, and then they went out again.

"They go to your people," explained the Indian impassively. "Tell them you here. They agree to go away, and you go back with them."

Irene made no reply. Already she was beginning to get a glimpse of what all this meant. She had a dim realisation of the fact that she was a hostage. The Indians had somehow captured her whilst she slept, and they had brought her here. And they meant to keep her a prisoner until they had gained their own ends.

She wondered if it would be possible for her to make a break for liberty. Yet, almost at the same time, she knew that any such thing would be out of the question. She did not know which way to go; she had no idea how to proceed. And there was that Indian, guarding her. He would not hesitate to drag her back by force if she made a sudden bolt, and the very thought of that Indian's hands clutching her made her shudder.

NELSON LEE scanned the face of the big butte for the hundredth time, and the lines of worry on his face were more pronounced.

"Not a sign!" he muttered. "What does it mean, Dorrie? Not a sign of any kind!"

"They're bound to make a move before long," said Lord Dorrimore. "Glory! I've never felt so helpless in all my life!"

"This waiting is agonising," admitted Lee. "Yet what else can we do? If we attempt to search for the girl we may precipitate a tragedy. We can't risk it, Dorrie. This time, the odds are overwhelmingly against us. If we go anywhere near that butte we shall have a flight of arrows in the midst of us. Amongst those jagged rocks, twenty men could keep an army corps at bay!"

"That's the deuce of it!" said his lordship, frowning. "We didn't bargain for anything like this—— Hallo! By the Lord Harry! Look there! There's something doing at last!"

"Injuns!" grunted Dicky Siggers, nodding. "Waal, thar's somethin' on the move at last!"

Over two hours had elapsed since breakfast, and the sun was now mounting high into the sky and beating down its fierce rays upon the anxious party. The gully was becoming excessively hot, and out on the desert the heat was even more intense.

Everybody had been on the look-out for Indians, but none had been seen. The big butte, towering high into the sky, had seemed deserted and barren of life. Now, however, as Dorrie pointed, some figures came into view.

They were high up on a great ledge, nearly half way up the butte. They looked puny and insignificant, perched there on that precarious rock. It could be seen that one of them was carrying something white, which stood out boldly against the background of brown and red stone.

"Just as I expected," muttered Lee. "A flag of truce!"

"You said it, pardner," nodded Siggers. "The Injuns are comin' down fer a powwow!"

A flutter of excitement ran through the camp. Everybody had seen those figures by now. The schoolboys and schoolgirls were pointing, and they were talking animatedly. They were also aware of an enormous sense of relief. Something was doing at last! Perhaps they would hear about Irene.

"Handy!" said Church, as he and McClure approached Handforth. "There are Indians up on the butte. They're climbing down. I expect they've come to tell us that they've got Irene——"

"I've seen them!" interrupted Handforth, his voice dull and listless. "But what does it matter? I can't do anything to help Irene. She's in the hands of these devils—and Mr. Lee won't let me go out of camp!"

"But perhaps the Indians will tell us——"

"I wish I could do something!" broke in Handforth fiercely. "They had the nerve to lay hands on Irene and to carry her off. And it was all my fault——"

They let him ramble on, repeating the complaint that he had been making for the past hour or so. Left alone, he would have rushed towards the butte, and he would have got an arrow in his chest in next to no time. Once, indeed, he had attempted to make a dash for it, but he had been quickly headed off and brought back.

Now he stood watching, a wild, desperate look in his eyes. He was glad of this diversion—or of the diversion that would come soon. Perhaps he would be able to get away then. His expression became less anguished as he thought of this. If only he could get away!

Edward Oswald Handforth undertakes to answer, in his own unique fashion, any question "N.L." readers care to submit to him. But, although of a certainly the results will be amusing and entertaining, the Editor takes no responsibility for their veracity. Write to Handforth, c/o the Nelson Lee Library, to-day.

J. PARKER (Southampton). — I have many potty questions asked me every week —and yours is one of them. "Why did the chicken cross the road?" To get to the other side, of course! Your remarks to the effect that when the Trackett Grim yarns return to the NELSON LEE LIBRARY you will stop buying the paper, I treat with contempt. They are utter piffle. (Hear, hear! All your yarns are utter piffle in fact, Handy.—Ed.)

N. VAN PERLSTEIN (London). — You want to learn how to write your name, my lad. I've never seen such a ghastly signature in all my life before. It looks just as if a fly got one of his legs in a blot of ink and then went for a walk. So you're of the opinion that I was lucky to go on the School Train trip when I came so low in the exams. You mustn't think I'm a dunce because of that. I didn't want to show up all the other chaps, you know.

"SPARKS" (Bexhill). — Yes, McClure has been getting jolly cheeky lately, and I agree with you when you say that I ought to impress upon him the fact that I'm boss. Thanks for the tip. I'll go and do the "impressing" now.

H. W. STEFF (Kettering). — I disdain even to acknowledge your letter. You can't call my hair a wet mop and then expect me to give you the benefit of my marvellous intellect.

RAYMOND WILTSHIRE (Dorchester).—Here's another of you making inquiries about my hair. What it is, I suppose, you're all jealous of my locks. Try a little cart-grease, Raymond. That might do *your* hair some good.

BASIL ADAM (Newcastle-on-Tyne).—Go and eat coke!

H. R. GILES (Stratford-on-Avon). — See previous reply.

ERNEST S. HOLMAN (Leyton).—So here you are again, eh? They say you can never get rid of a bad egg, and I agree. Although I must admit that you're not so cheeky this time. What I can't make out, however, is that you seem to regard this as a humorous feature, and that I'm a humorous sort of chap. Nothing is farther from the truth. Kindly remember that in future, please.

EDWARD OSWALD.

THE Indians took their time.

They descended the butte slowly, coming down unseen paths in the rock. Now and again they would be compelled to lower one another down the face of the cliff. At length they reached the level of the desert and came forward towards the gully.

There were three of them, and they looked impressive and picturesque as they advanced. They carried no weapons, and they held the white flag prominently in front of them. They were apparently satisfied that that flag would be respected. They knew the white man's code, and they felt certain, no doubt, that they were taking no risk.

"Shall we go forward to meet them?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Lee. "We'll leave the boys and girls here——"

"Better not, mister," interrupted Siggers. "I'm figgerin' that it would be kinder wrong. Let the Indians come right up inter camp."

He shifted his plug of tobacco, and grunted.

"Darn thar hides!" he went on. "They'll be insolent enough as it is, without us doin' them any doggone favours! Let them do the walkin', mister!"

"I think you are right," said Nelson Lee, nodding.

So they waited, and presently the three Indians descended into the gully. They took their time about it, moving deliberately and leisurely. At long last, they came right into the camp and stood before the men. The boys and girls crowded round, watching and listening with eager ears and eyes.

The Indians raised their hands in salute.

"Howdy!" grunted one of them, stepping in advance of the others.

"Howdy!" returned Lee, deciding that it would be better to be civil. "What do you want with us?"

"White flag," said the Indian. "You not keep us, or fire on us?"

"We shall respect the white flag," replied Nelson Lee. "You are safe!"

"Uh-huh! We safe, anyway," said the Indian indifferently. "White flag good, but Indian plan better. Harm us, and white girl die. Keep us here, and she dies, just same. White flag only to get us here safely. We safe now without flag."

He flung it down with a contemptuous gesture. As Dicky Siggers had said, the insolence of the Indians was very pronounced. They held the trump card, and they were not hesitating to play it.

"You took white girl in night?" asked Lee.

"We took white girl," replied the chief, staring boldly into Lee's eyes. "White girl safe. Food, drink. She not harmed."

A sort of sigh went round the party.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Doris. "Renie's safe, anyway!"

The chief began to speak again.

"You go!" he said, pointing over the desert. "Go away from this land. You not stay here any longer. We say you go—and you go!"

"It's like your infernal nerve——" began Dorrie.

"We go when we please," said Nelson Lee curtly. "Take no orders from Indian."

"This Apache land," said the chief, suddenly bursting out into a passionate shout. "This not white man's land! You come for gold—as other white men have come. They die. You go now, and you live. You go now, and white girl go with you."

"And what if we refuse to go?" asked Lee.

"White girl die!" retorted the chief promptly. "You understand? We got white girl. She safe now. But you not go by noon, when sun high in sky, and white girl die!"

CHAPTER 8.

Handforth's Opportunity.

THE Apache chief was sure of himself. He knew that he held the upper hand, and he was the very embodiment of insufferable insolence.

"You hear?" he said. "You understand?"

"We understand what you say—but you not understand us," replied Nelson Lee. "We do not mean you any harm."

"You come for gold!" shouted the Indian.

"If we do, what of it?"

"Indian gold—not white man's gold!" said the chief hotly.

"That's a lie, too!" broke in Hookey excitedly. "It was me an' old Ben Dalton wot found that gold! There wasn't no Injuns there then! Forty year ago we found that gold!"

"Yep, thet's so!" said Siggers. "You can't pull this stuff, you Injun! White man found thet gold first."

"Forty years!" said the Indian chief scornfully. "This Indian gold for more than forty years! Ten times forty years! Take this gold, and my tribe wither and die of disease and pestilence! This gold keep us healthy. Plenty papoose—plenty strong young men. You not take this gold!"

It was as Dicky Siggers had imagined. These Indians regarded the gold with superstition. They believed that if the white man came and mined this precious metal, disaster would befall the tribe. And so, throughout the years, the Apaches had mounted guard over that lonely butte of the desert.

Whenever a prospector had happened to come along, they had either scared him away or had killed him out of hand. Never once had a white man been able to secure that treasure. Hookey Webb and Ben Dalton, back in '89, had managed to penetrate to the interior of the butte. Perhaps that had been a piece of luck; perhaps the Indians had been off their guard for once. But Ben Dalton had paid with his life, and Hookey Webb had been waiting for forty years to get back to this sinister spot.

And now, at last, the Indians were face to face with something which they had never had to deal with before. A big party—an organised party. A lone prospector here and there had been easily dealt with, but it was different to handle such a party as this one.

"This Indian land," repeated the chief obstinately. "Already you kill many braves. You bring destruction and ill-luck."

"Your braves were killed because of their own folly," said Nelson Lee sternly. "We demand the return of the white girl. There must be no conditions. You bring her back to us safely, and then we talk. Then we tell you what we do."

The Indian laughed with contempt.

"Not bring white girl," he replied. "Unless you go, white girl die. You go—now! When you camp for night, miles away, we bring white girl. You not do this, and she die. We throw scalp down to prove."

Nelson Lee compressed his lips.

"Sit down," he said, indicating the ground. "We talk."

"Talk no good," said the Indian. "You go. That's all!"

EVERYBODY was so interested in the Indians—everybody was so intent upon hearing all that was said—that Handforth's movements were not even noticed.

But Handforth had heard a lot of the chief's talk, and he knew exactly what had happened. Here was proof that Irene had been kidnapped, and that she was being held as a hostage. And now Handforth's opportunity had come!

Whilst everybody crowded round these red-skinned visitors, Handforth edged away. His eyes were gleaming, and he was quivering

from head to foot. Until now he had had no chance of getting out of the camp. He had been watched, not only by Nelson Lee and the other men, but by the boys, too.

Now the boys had no eyes for him. They were pressing round the men, listening to all that was being said. Handforth succeeded in slipping behind some rocks, and after that he fell on his hands and knees and crawled round a big clump of bushes, keeping in cover all the way.

The one thought which obsessed him was that he was to blame for this disaster. Because of his lapse, Irene had been kidnapped. Well, it was up to him to rescue her. Single-handed, he would have to do it!

Probably no other fellow but Handforth would have considered such a hare-brained idea. He did not even know how he was to set about the task. But Irene was somewhere on that butte, and it was towards the butte that Handforth made his way.

He did not go directly, but by a cunning, roundabout route. He went up the gully, and then reached the level of the desert some distance further on, where there were some jagged rocks sticking up grotesquely. Having reached the cover of these, he worked his way round, and there were some more masses of rock which would provide him with shelter almost all the way. Only occasionally was it necessary for him to show himself as he sprang from cover to cover.

Nobody noticed him—nobody paid any heed. In the camp, all eyes were fastened upon the Indians. And so it was that Edward Oswald Handforth succeeded in getting away.

Once he had reached the base of the big butte, he found himself in a perfect wilderness of rocks and miniature gullies and gorges. From a distance, the ground had seemed fairly smooth all round the butte; but, at close quarters, Handforth found that the place was a perfect maze of irregularities. He was rather glad of this, for he was afforded plenty of cover.

There was something rather startling in his determination; it was an obsession. He must find Irene, and bring her safely back! Nothing else in the world mattered! She was in the hands of these Indians, and he was to blame. It was up to him to rescue her!

With no room in his mind for any other thoughts, Handforth climbed the rocks, getting higher and higher. He had a vague notion that there was a cave entrance some distance up the butte. If he got in, he might be able to work his way towards Irene's prison.

He did not seem to realise that he was taking a grave risk on a chance that was extraordinarily slim. This butte was of an enormous size. And if, indeed, it was honeycombed with passages and caverns, it might take a hundred men a hundred hours to explore it thoroughly.

What chance was there, then, for Handforth, single-handed?

One thing was in his favour. The Indians were evidently not expecting any such visitor as this. If a watch was being kept, it was not a particularly strict one. Probably the explanation was simple. The Indians on the butte were watching the camp, so that they could see how matters fared with their messengers. Handforth's lone search was an unexpected development, and nobody was looking for it.

He came to places where it was necessary for him to take risks. There would be great gaps in the rocks, places where a single slip meant disaster. At times he would be clinging to the face of the rock, clutching precariously with his fingers, and seeking a foothold in the little crevices with his feet. But he did not hesitate. He had started this climb, and he was going to finish it.

AT last he came upon a narrow ledge, and at the back of this there was a low, black opening. It was a cave entrance of some kind—the end of a tunnel perhaps. At all events, it was a likely-looking spot, and Handforth edged his way towards it, gratified by the fact that there had been no alarm.

He had heard all that the Apache chief had first said, and he knew that Irene Manners was somewhere in this butte—a prisoner. Well, if she was here, he would find her.

In a dim sort of way, Handforth imagined that once he got into a tunnel he would be able to penetrate into the interior of the butte, and there he would find the fair prisoner. It was not until he was in that tunnel that he began to appreciate the difficulties of his self-imposed task.

He found himself in utter darkness, and, curiously enough, the air was warm and moist. It had a curious chemical-like odour about it. Evidently there was a hot spring of some kind within this vast mass of volcanic rock.

Handforth had not proceeded far before he paused. His satisfaction was tempered by a dawning understanding of the difficulties of his job. He had no matches on him—no candles; no light of any kind whatever. He was compelled to feel his way forward foot by foot, his hands, outstretched before him, running along the rock walls of the passage.

He had an impression that this passage was a natural one, although it seemed that the walls in some places had been hewn by human hands. It was another relic of the ancient cliff-dwellers.

He paused, wondering if he should go out and attempt to find another tunnel. But what would be the use? He would be in just the same position, whichever tunnel he penetrated. He would be in the dark, and one entry was just as good as another.

However, after another ten minutes had elapsed, Handforth had lost much of his optimism. He was anxious and worried and uncertain. He realised, at last, that this task of his might prove too difficult.

While he paused, leaning against the rock wall, he again noticed how damp the air was—and how warm. He fancied that he could hear the sound of running water coming from far, far off. It seemed only like a dim echo, but he was certain that the sound came from the interior of the butte.

Disheartened and weary, he felt his way onward again. He believed that he turned a corner—or, at least, a curve. Then he abruptly halted, his heart giving a great leap.

Was it his imagination, or was there a light ahead?

Not exactly a light, but a dim, pale kind of glow? It was so intangible that Handforth half believed that his eyes were playing tricks with him. He had been so long in the dark——

"No, by George!" he muttered tensely. "There is a light! I don't know where the dickens it's coming from, in this rock, but it's there!"

He pressed on, rather recklessly now. Once or twice he stumbled over the inequalities in the flooring, and before long he knew that he had made no mistake. Soon he came out into a kind of cavern—one side sloping steeply, with great stalactites of rock hanging down. The other side was lost in shadows. And the whole place was bathed in a soft, whitish radiance.

It wasn't until some moments had elapsed that Handforth realised that daylight was the cause of this. Through a long crevice—a mere slit—some shafts of sunlight were

" We hold white girl as hostage," said the Indian. " If you leave here by noon she shall be returned to you unharmed. Refuse, and she shall die ! " Nelson Lee and his companions listened in horror. Refusal to obey the Indians' ultimatum would mean the death of Irene Manners !

penetrating down, perhaps from the very top of the butte.

He stood there, looking round—and then, suddenly, he heard Irene's voice!

CHAPTER 9.

The Rescue!

HANDFORTH could not understand the words; he only knew that Irene was speaking. Her voice seemed to be far away—at a vast distance. Yet, in spite of this impression, Handforth had an idea that it was false; that Irene was not really very far distant from him. She was somewhere in this great butte, and her voice was coming up through one of the honeycomed crevices.

His first impulse was to yell—to let her know that he was near at hand, ready to rescue her. Then commonsense quickly came to his assistance. It would be madness to shout now, before he was even aware of Irene's exact whereabouts. Such a shout might, indeed, bring the Indians upon him, and leave him no hope of saving the girl.

"She's here, anyway!" breathed Handforth exultantly. "By George! I said that I'd rescue her—and I jolly well will! I shall never be able to hold up my head again if I don't!"

He moved across the cavern, looking out for any kind of exit. At first he could see none, and his hopes began to fade. Then, as he moved forward, his left foot seemed to hover in space for a second, and it was only by a tremendous effort that he flung himself backwards. Had he not done so, he would have gone pitching headlong down.

He dropped on his hands and knees, and now he saw that there was a yawning gap in the rock flooring—a mere slit, not more than eighteen inches across, and extending from one side of the cavern to the other almost.

It was as black as night, and, mysteriously and whisperingly, came the sound of running water. Waves of heat were rising, too—damp, moist heat.

Handforth crouched there, full of doubts. It was incredible that any living beings could be down in that steamy pit. Where did it lead? What was down there to create this warm moisture?

Then he heard Irene's voice again—followed by the guttural sounds of a man's voice. He wondered if he was dreaming. How could this be possible? And how would he be able to get down?

He tried to pierce the blackness, but it was no good. He even thought about lowering himself into that narrow crevice and then dropping, trusting to Providence that he would land safely.

But he wisely dismissed this hare-brained scheme. For all he knew, the crevice might be twenty or thirty feet deep, and that would mean grave injury, if not death, when he struck the rock at the bottom.

So he worked his way up the slit, until he was close against one of the cavern

walls. And now he was immediately rewarded. The dim light in this place enabled him to see some roughly-hewn steps, cut in the rock. They led downwards steeply.

Handforth took a deep breath and began the descent.

He was glad that he was wearing rubber-soled shoes. He made no noise, and he was certain of a firm grip, too. In one or two places, it was as much as he could do to squeeze through. The stairway was extraordinarily narrow—not more than twelve inches or so in parts. He was compelled to go sideways more than once, forcing his way through only with an effort.

AFTER he had gone down some little way, the rock opened wider and the going was easier. There was an abrupt turn, and some of the steps were so worn away that Handforth nearly went stumbling down into the mysterious blackness. Only by clutching at the rock—and tearing his fingers at the same time—did he succeed in saving himself. This warned him that hurrying would do him no good. Far better to take it easily and quietly.

Just as he had come to this conclusion he saw a flickering, lurid light at the end of a tunnel. The effect was most curious. He was in darkness again now, for he had left that cavern high above. He had penetrated far down into the interior of the great butte.

Now the stairway seemed to have come to an end. He was looking down a steep, slanting tunnel. There was an irregular opening at the end, and it was outlined in a lurid, yellowish glare. It seemed, at first sight, to be a sort of furnace.

But Handforth quickly came to understand that this was merely another trick of his eyesight. After being in the dark so long, the mere light of a candle would have looked like a huge glare. He knew that there was no furnace at the bottom of that tunnel—but merely some artificial lights burning; candles, perhaps—or lamps. And now the sound of running water had grown less, curiously enough.

He commenced the descent easily, confident that his rubber-soled shoes would hold him. But he misjudged the steepness of that shaft; and suddenly, without warning, his shoes slithered, and he was unable to obtain his grip again.

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

He went sliding and skidding down, gathering momentum alarmingly.

In vain he tried to check himself, but the rock here was smooth. There were no projections—which, perhaps, was just as well, or Handforth might have torn his hands terribly.

By the time he got to the bottom he was travelling at a tremendous rate, and he shot out, slithered across a rock floor, and came to a halt in a squatting position, dazed and bewildered and confused.

"Ted!" screamed a familiar voice.

If a bomb had exploded beneath Handforth, he could not have moved more quickly. He leapt to his feet and twirled round. He had no eyes for his surroundings; he took no note of the fact that he was in another cavern, this time much smaller. Two or three crude lamps were burning on a ledge, sending forth a flickering, ruddy glare. The atmosphere was filled with choking fumes—damp, hot, sulphurous. There was an Indian standing there, his eyes starting out of his head, his whole attitude one of dumbfounded amazement.

But Handforth was looking only at Irene Manners. She was sitting on a ledge of rock near by, staring at him with joyous eyes. She was not even bound or gagged, as Handforth had imagined she would be.

"Renie!" he gasped. "Oh, good egg! I'd no idea that—— Hallo! What the—— Oh, would you?"

The Indian had suddenly leapt forward, his right arm upraised. There was a gleam of steel, and Handforth squared his jaw and clenched his fists. He needed no telling that the Indian was attacking him with a long, wicked-looking knife!

There was something electrical in Edward Oswald's movements. He dodged like a panther, his left fist came round and struck jarringly against the Redskin's jaw.

Crash!

It was a terrific hit, and the Indian, uttering merely one gurgling grunt, went clean over backwards, to thud to the floor with a crash. He rolled over and remained still, the knife clattering to the far side of the cavern.

"Oh, Ted!" panted Irene, running to him.

"That's all right, old girl," said Handforth breathlessly. "The treacherous blighter! Trying to run that giddy knife into me! I'll bet he won't move for a bit!"

"WALDO, THE WONDER BOY!"

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"You gave him an awful punch, Ted!" said Irene, staring at the still form.

"I meant to," said Handforth grimly. "You need to give these Indians awful punches if you're going to make sure of the job. They haven't hurt you, have they?" he added anxiously. "It's my fault that you were captured."

"Your fault?" repeated Irene, in wonder. "Oh, Ted, you gave me a dreadful shock just now!"

"A shock! Weren't you glad——"

"But you came so unexpectedly—and so strangely," said Irene. "Without warning, you came shooting out of that black hole like—like coal down a chute. I've never been more surprised in all my life—and never more glad!"

"Well, let's get out of this place," said Handforth practically. "Do you know how they brought you in?"

"I—I don't know anything," replied the girl. "When I went to sleep I was with Doris and Winnie and the others. When I woke up, I was in here."

"They stole you away during the night," said Handforth gruffly. "It was my fault, Renie, and I'll never forgive myself unless I get you out of here safely."

"How could it have been your fault, Ted?" she asked.

"Because I was on sentry duty just there—and I went to sleep," replied Handforth. "I nearly went mad when I heard that you'd been collared. These Indians have grabbed you as a hostage. They're powwowing with Mr. Lee now."

"I thought it was something like that," said Irene softly.

"The Indians are saying that if we don't all go away they'll kill you," continued Handforth. "By George! We'll show 'em! I made up my mind to climb the butte, to get in and to rescue you, and I'm doing it, too! Once we've got you back we can snap our fingers at these beastly Redskins. Come on! We've got to find a way out——"

"Wait!" interrupted Irene excitedly. "I've just remembered something. There were three other Indians in here not long ago——"

"They'll be the beggars who came to the camp, I expect," said Handforth.

"And they went out through that gap in the rock," continued the girl, pointing. "I expect it must lead out somewhere."

"Of course!" said Handforth eagerly. "Why, this is as easy as shelling peas! We'll soon be out now!"

They had only got half way across the cavern before they checked. A clatter of sound had come to their ears, and two or three more Redskins came tumbling through that gap in the rock. No doubt they had heard Handforth's voice, and they had come to make investigations.

"More of 'em!" roared Handforth. "All right—come on! I'm ready for you!"

"Ted!" gasped Irene.

She was fascinated with horror. She expected to see Handforth fall, shot or stabbed or felled in some other way.

Instead, she saw Handforth thoroughly enjoying himself.

There were three Indians, and they all appeared to be unarmed. If they had any knives, they had no time to use them. Handforth was in their midst in a flash, and his blood was up.

"Come on—all of you!" he roared. "I don't care how many! I'll show you whether you can play these sort of games with us! Take that, blow you!"

Crash!

"And see what this one tastes like!" bellowed Handforth.

Biff!

"And this one, too!" panted Edward Oswald.

Crash!

If he had been like a whirlwind before, he was now like a tornado. His fists shot out like sledgehammers, and the Indians, taken completely by surprise, hardly had a chance. Even if they had not been taken by surprise, they would have been at a disadvantage. For they were unaccustomed to this kind of fighting.

Handforth's first righthander caught one of the Indians on the point of the chin, and the unfortunate man must have nearly bitten his tongue in half, to judge by the wild, screeching howl that he uttered before he went down. Handforth's left fist caught another Indian behind the ear, and this man reeled over sideways, struck his head against the rock wall, and sagged down, "out."

The third Indian fared no better. Handforth twirled on him like a tiger, his fists thudded, and the fellow was beaten.

"Any more?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Come on, you rotters! I'm ready!"

But there were no more. Handforth had apparently disposed of them all. And just then his gaze fell upon some lengths of rope near one of the rock walls. He pounced upon them.

"Might as well bind these beggars up!" he said briskly. "I've only knocked 'em senseless, and they'll soon be coming to. We don't want them to cause any more trouble. Lend a hand, Renie!"

"Oh, Ted—it was wonderful of you!" said Irene, looking at him with wide-open, admiring eyes.

"Eh? What the dickens—— Oh, cheese it!" said Handforth uncomfortably. "You don't call that a scrap, do you?"

"I'll never grumble at you for fighting again, Ted," said the girl. "You're simply marvellous!"

"Let's bind these brutes up," said Handforth, trying to change the subject. "And if any more of them come along, we'll treat them in the same way. If these mouldy Indians think that they can mess me about, they've made a pretty large-sized bloomer!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Wall of Gold!

NELSON LEE rose to his feet, his face grim and set.

"Go back to your companions," he said, looking at the Apache chief. "We plan what we do. Come back in hour, and we tell you."

The Apache grunted.

"Talk no good!" he said contemptuously. "Talk too much already. White girl die unless you go."

The pow-wow was over. Nelson Lee had been doing his utmost to argue with these Indians; Lord Dorrimore and Dicky Siggers had tried their eloquence, too. But it made no difference. The chief was stubborn, and more insolent than ever.

It was pointed out to him that this part of the Chichon Mesa was well clear of the Blue Mountain Indian Reservation; but the chief passionately denied this. He swore that the butte belonged to the Indians. It was on the reservation—it was theirs.

All this, of course, was inaccurate.

Nelson Lee knew perfectly well, after inspecting the maps, that the boundary line of the reservation was at least ten or twelve miles away from this spot. These Indians had no right here—except, perhaps, the right that they believed they had earned by having been so long in possession. And, after all, possession was nine points of the law. Out in this country there was virtually no law at all. It was well beyond the normal limits of the administrative area. It was a wild desert region, without roads, without railways.

However, all the talk in the world would not alter the fact that Irene Manners was in the grip of the Apaches, and that she would be in deadly danger unless the chief's orders were obeyed.

"We go now," said the chief. "We not come back for further talk. Talk no good. You go back along trail. If you not gone by noon, then white girl die."

"You infernal pig——" began Lord Dorrimore.

"Wait!" said Nelson Lee, his voice suddenly changed. "These Indians want us to say something definite, and we will say it. We shall not leave this camp."

The chief's face was savage and sinister.

"No?" he snarled. "Then the white girl die! You think it bluff? Well, you see! We scalp the white girl——"

"Look!" yelled Church suddenly. "What's that up there—on the butte? There's a figure—no, two figures——"

"Handy!" roared McClure. "We wondered where he had got to, and now——"

"Renie's with him!" cried Doris Berkeley. "Look! It's Renie, girls!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Handy!"

Everybody was yelling and shouting. The excitement was tremendous. They had all seen what Nelson Lee had spotted at first. There were two figures up there on the face of the butte—and the air was so crystal clear that it was easily possible to recognise them as the figures of Handforth and Irene. They were both waving, and it was clear enough that they were both unharmed.

The Apache chief, his face working with fury, suddenly swung round upon Nelson Lee.

"You trick us!" he grated. "You die for this!"

From a fold of his clothing, he suddenly produced an old-pattern service revolver. He aimed it at Nelson Lee, and fired point-blank.

There was a sharp, shattering report, and Lee laughed. He had felt the hiss of the bullet as it had sped past his neck.

"A wretched aim, my friend," he said scornfully.

Before he could leap forward to disarm the Apache, Umlosi acted. The giant Kutana warrior charged forward, and with one blow he knocked the revolver flying. The next second he seized the Indian and swung him off his feet. With his other arm he grabbed the other two Indians, and in a moment they were all flung to the ground, one on the top of another, and held there. Umlosi's strength was enormous.

"Wau!" he rumbled. "Shall I thrust my spear through them all, Umtagati? One word of command——"

"No, Umlosi, you mustn't do that," replied Lee. "Bind them up, if you like—and you'd better help, Dorrie?"

"Think it's all right?" asked his lordship. "Don't forget they came here under the white flag——"

"And violated it themselves," interrupted Lee. "We are perfectly justified in making them prisoners now."

TWENTY minutes later Nelson Lee was shaking hands with Edward Oswald Handforth, who was looking thoroughly embarrassed and uncomfortable.

"Well done, Handforth!" said Lee heartily.

"Oh, cheese it, sir!" protested Handforth. "I haven't done anything——"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Bravo, old man!"

"Absolutely! Bravo, with sundry knobs!"

The whole camp was in a state of excitement and joy and animation. Handforth and Irene had managed to get down from the butte, and during this time there had been no indication of any other Indians. It was becoming apparent, indeed, that there had only been a mere handful on the butte. It was because of this that the chief had decided to kidnap Irene as a hostage. He knew perfectly well that if it came to a fight he and his fellow tribesmen would be overwhelmed. So, knowing that he could not defeat these whites by force, he had resorted to strategy.

These Indians, perhaps, were the guardians of the butte. No doubt they were relieved at intervals. Other members of the tribe would come and take their places—and so on.

But after what had recently happened—after the great fight with the Redskins in the canyon—it was doubtful if there would be any more trouble from this direction. The Indians had had their fill of fighting for a bit!

Handforth was so pleased with life in general that he felt like dancing all the time. Everybody else was staggered. Handforth had said that he would rescue Irene—and he had done so! But he had done more than this—he had turned the tables completely on the Indians.

Irene was surrounded by the other girls, who were excited and joyous. She had to tell them exactly what had happened, and

(*Concluded on page 42.*)

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. FRANK'S

Things Heard and Seen By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

I'M in serious trouble, it seems, with a Scottish reader—"Piper O' Dundee," whose address is obvious. Handforth's antics with the bagpipes in one of the School Train stories greatly offended this reader. I am wondering if other Scottish readers were similarly offended. If so, let me hasten to point out that they really mustn't take any notice of Handforth. He's always more or less of a clown, and, naturally, when he had the chance of getting hold of some bagpipes, he did his worst. I've half an idea that "Piper O' Dundee" is really Irish, because in the first part of his letter he says: "Of course, as you are English, you are naturally stupid, and cannot be blamed for getting such idiotic ideas." And then, later on in his letter, he says that I must be a genius to be able to write the St. Frank's stories. Ahem! But going back to the bagpipes, I must confess that I fail to appreciate that they are, as "Piper O' Dundee" remarks, "one of the finest musical instruments you could ever wish to hear." I'll grant that they sound very martial and inspiring when a regiment of Highlanders is on the move. The bagpipes are then played as they should be played, and one is enthralled. But this instrument, like the saxophone, becomes an instrument of sheer torture in incapable hands. And what hands could be more incapable than Handforth's? I'm dreading the day when he gets the idea into his head that he can play the saxophone!

* * *

I NOTICE that there has been some very big changes at the River House School of late. When I was there the other day. I was greatly struck by the many improvements. Dr. Hogge's establishment is getting quite big. There are three Houses now—Marshall's House, Wragg's House, and the School House. Brewster & Co., and all the decent juniors, who call themselves the "Commoners," are in Marshall's House. And the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne and his fellow "Honourables" are denizens of Wragg's House. Big developments since Dr. Molyneux Hogge first started! Why, when I first knew the River House School—when it was located in the old house near Bellton, now known as Moat Hollow—it was a very modest sort of show, with comparatively few pupils. But now it's a miniature edition of St. Frank's, with heaps of Fourth-Formers, prefects, and a little army of masters. I'm rather glad about this, because the River House School has now become a really worthy rival of St. Frank's.

* * *

THIS week's photo is of Charles Hedge, of Manor Park. He has asked me to give him descriptions of William Napoleon Browne, Horace Stevens, and others. I dare say many other readers would welcome these descriptions, but as they will all appear in the "Who's Who at St. Frank's"—that's another name for the Portrait Gallery—in due course, I don't feel justified in including them in these columns. These same remarks apply to queries about studies and the colours of fellows' hair, and things like that. A number of readers have asked me for such particulars. If they watch the "Who's Who" and the "Questionnaire," week by week, they'll get their answers.

* * *

NOW that the new term is about to start at St. Frank's, with the football season upon us, it is only natural that the subject of footer should be in the air. I was having a chat with Dr. Morrison Nicholls recently about the possibilities of Rugby at the old school. He was full of enthusiasm about it, and I understand that he's going to have a serious talk with the various Housemasters on this matter. Perhaps this will please Mr. Julius Herman, of Tarkastad, South Africa, who has asked why Rugby is not played at St. Frank's. He is not the only one, either, for hundreds of readers have brought up the same point. Rugger is a great game, and

I've no doubt that the St. Frank's fellows will play it well if they take it up. But, judging by a few words I have had with two or three of the Housemasters, there's no certainty of it. In fact, I have half an idea that the Head's suggestion will be turned down. Dr. Nicholls is a most go-ahead man, always out for something fresh. But while Nelson Lee is equally go-ahead, such masters as Mr. Goole and Mr. Stockdale are rather old-fashioned in their ideas. And Mr. Stokes, of the West House, who might have a sort of casting vote in this matter, is a keen Soccer enthusiast. If Rugger does come to St. Frank's this season, I believe it will be only as an experiment, and it will probably be confined to the seniors. I am curious to know what the juniors will have to say about it!

* * *

I DON'T think the St. Frank's fellows will do any more touring for a bit. The new term starts next week, and they'll soon settle down at St. Frank's. I fancy they've had quite enough travelling to last them a decent while. Having toured the world, and then the Old Country, with a trip to Arizona as well, they ought to be jolly glad to settle down for a spell. Nipper, I know, is very pleased about it, for he can devote his energies to sport. He's very keen on football this term—Soccer—and he wants to make it a record one for the Junior Eleven.

* * *

TALKING about football reminds me of the Hon. Tom Silward Harborough—better known as "Tich." I'm afraid we shan't see much of him in the future. As he is a regular player for the Blue Crusaders, he is naturally barred from playing for St. Frank's, and so he won't figure in any of the school games. Just at present he is with Fatty Fowkes and Dave Moran and the other Blues at the stronghold, in Bannington. It is really a magnificent place, and the clubhouse has accommodation for all the players. I fancy that Tich will decide to remain there, for I think his father has arranged for him to have a tutor on the spot. So if Tich appears at St. Frank's in the future, he'll merely come as a visitor.

* * *

OF course, it's different with Lionel Corcoran. He's not tied in the same way as Tich—it's not necessary for him to travel to all parts of the country with the team, as Tich has to do, and so it is quite easy for him to remain at a big public school like St. Frank's. Corky is the owner of the Blue Crusaders, as everybody knows, but he doesn't take an active part in the management now. He leaves everything to Mr. Ulysses Piecombe. Corky, in fact, is firmly established in the Fourth as skipper, having usurped Buster Boots' place. He hasn't played much football—which, when you come to think of it, is rather queer—but this term he is training like the dickens, and I believe the Fourth will find him to be a fairly useful man. As skipper of the Form, it's very necessary that he should be a first-class player.

* * *

I HAVE been criticised by Lily Wright, of Belfast, for including Boomerang Bangs on that recent School Train trip. Miss Wright figures it out that Bangs, being a new chap—and moreover from Australia, where he has been earning his own living—would not have passed the necessary exam., which took place before the trip, in order to weed out the ineligibles. Well, it so happens that Bangs is a remarkably keen scholar, and, although he earned his own living in Australia before coming to St. Frank's, he never neglected his studies. I'll admit I was rather surprised myself that he qualified so easily. But Bangs is one of those who is keen on sport and good at lessons, too.

* * *

OUR READERS' PORTRAIT GALLERY

Charles Hedge

AN old friend of mine, H. J. McMahon, of Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, begins one of his letters to me like this: "Dear Mr. Brooks. You haven't heard from me for a very long time, have you? Somehow, I think you don't take any interest in my letters. You never seem to comment on them, so I knocked them off for a while. Still, here I am again, and I hope I can interest you with my letters. Can I?" I'd like to assure this reader that I am interested in his letters—very much so. If I haven't commented on them it is because I haven't had the space, or because the subjects he brought up were not of general interest. I hope he will continue to correspond regularly with me in the future.

* * *

HERE'S somebody wanting to know who the head prefect of St. Frank's is. As my correspondent—Bob Sones, of Willesden Green—is a new reader, I can forgive him. But I thought that everybody knew that Edgar Fenton, of the Ancient House, is the head prefect of the school. Fenton is really one of the best. Perhaps he is inclined to be a bit serious; but, then, he takes life seriously—particularly sports. He is a very sound man, and St. Frank's is lucky to have him as captain.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Here's the Opening Instalment of a Wonderful New Adventure Serial!

The ISLAND CASTAWAYS!

by ARTHUR S. HARDY

CHAPTER 1.

The Conference!

IT was pitch dark when Tom Perry opened the door of his deck cabin and stepped out into the open. Overhead the black canopy was studded with a myriad stars, and below the Pacific slept, not a ripple disturbing the serenity of the surface on which the yacht had crept to anchor at the close of yesterday.

Leaning upon the deck rail, Tom tried to make out the line of the palm-fringed coral shore that lay a mile or two away to leeward, but even his keen eyes failed him.

There was the sound of a soft footfall close at hand, and turning, Tom saw Dr. Fraser, whose duty it was to look after the health of the holiday-makers aboard, smiling at him.

"You're awake early, Tom," remarked the doctor.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. "I want to see the sunrise."

"It certainly is a marvellous sight," replied the doctor, raising his head to study the myriads of winking stars, "and it's a pity there are not more aboard to share your enthusiasm."

The boy turned away from the rail.

"I'm going to drag Eva out. Time she was awake," he said; then added as an afterthought: "How's the pilot, sir?"

"He is causing us a lot of uneasiness, Tom," replied the doctor gravely. "The heat and these southern seas seem to have affected his mind. The chief is going to hold a round table conference about him this morning. I gave him a sleeping draught last night, but he can't go on forever on drugs."

"Wasn't he mixed up with a tragedy in these parts some years ago, sir?"

"Yes, my boy, but I do not quite know the circumstances."

"Do you think Mr. Hanway would mind if I were to join the conference? You see, I feel frightfully sorry for Daniel Kemish."

"Come by all means. I am sure nobody will mind."

"Very well, I will."

The boy leapt to the gangway and sped below. Amid the luxury of the heavily-carpeted passage he came to a white enamelled door upon which he knocked loudly. A girlish laugh answered him.

"Is that you, Tom?" came in clear-cut tones from the cabin.

"Yes. I say, are you ready yet?"

"I am. Just coming, in fact."

The door opened to reveal pretty Eva Hanway.

Impulsively Tom dashed forward, dragged her from the cabin and whirled her up the gangway stairs, making light of her protests and her struggles.

He drew her to the rail.

"I wanted you to see the day come, Eva," he told her, "and don't forget I want to

know what you'd like to do on your birthday. It's to-morrow, you know."

Before she could answer their cheeks were fanned by a gentle breeze, and the sea below them rippled, harbingers of the coming day.

Then the curtain seemed to lift, the night darkness changing for a brief moment or two to a drab half-tone before the sunshine burst over sea and land in a glory that held the boy and the girl spellbound.

"Tom," she whispered, "dad and most of the guests are getting tired of cruising among these unknown islands, but I think I would like to spend all my life here. It is paradise. Just look at the golden sand and the waving palms; and that turquoise lagoon that shows among the trees. I shall have to be a very dutiful daughter to-morrow, but I don't want to spend all my birthday on board. Let's go ashore to-morrow after lunch—just you and I."

"As long as the chief won't mind," Tom agreed.

"He won't mind, for he'll know I'll be safe with you."

"All right. If the sea isn't rough we'll skip ashore on the Rosita, and come back in time for dinner."

The girl clapped her hands in delight; and then looked dismayed as a warning gong echoed through the ship.

"I must finish tidying myself," the girl cried. "I should hate to sit down to breakfast with my hair all anyhow."

She vanished, waving her hand to Tom, and the boy strolled along the deck to join Dr. Fraser, who had been watching them with some amusement.

"Join me in a game of deck quoits, Tom," invited the doctor, "and let's see if we can't work up an appetite for breakfast."

The Esmeralda was an eight hundred and fifty ton sea-going yacht, which had been built especially for Mr. Thornton Hanway, American millionaire and business magnate. There was no more luxurious ship afloat, and Captain Stanton, her commander, possessed a magnificent service record.

She carried mate, engineer, pilot, doctor, chef, two cooks, two men and two women stewards, a dozen guests and their maids and other human impediments besides her crew. The voyage from its inception had proved a complete success, and this, its last stage, which provided a cruise among the uninhabited coral islands far south of the Marquesas, was to Tom Perry and Eva Hanway at least, the most entrancing of all.

Yesterday, when her father had talked about turning back and heading slowly for home, the pretty girl of fifteen had protested vehemently.

"No, pop," she cried. "I want to spend my birthday here. And Daniel Kemish says that there are real pearl oysters with huge real pearls in them waiting to be picked up in the pools and lagoons of the coral islands."

Her father had laughingly squeezed her cheeks between his hands.

"Maybe there are, and maybe it is only another one of Dan's tall stories," he told her. "But you shall have your birthday wherever you want it, my dear."

That was yesterday, when the Esmeralda had steamed on a placid sea to her present anchorage.

Now, at breakfast, the guests were unusually quiet, and even Thornton Hanway seemed to have lost his usual high spirits. He scarcely touched his food, and seemed glad when the meal was finished.

"George," he said to Tom's father, as they left the saloon, "I want you to join me and Captain Stanton in my cabin."

Gently the Esmeralda lay at anchor on the placid waters of the Southern Pacific. A mile or two away was the palm-fringed shore of an island—a beautiful island; so entrancing that Tom Perry, as he watched it from the yacht with his chum, Eva Hanway, wished he could explore it. He little realised that his wish was to be gratified — with amazing, dramatic results!

"Worrying about that pilot?" asked Perry, a Britisher who had made a fortune in America, and was a life-long friend of Hanway's.

"Why, yes. I wish we could drop him somewhere. I just hate having him on board. But it's my own fool fault for having brought him. Stanton objected, but I would have my own way, and now there's not a port or a ship within hundreds of miles where I could drop him."

They strolled along to Hanway's day cabin, a magnificent apartment that was fitted and panelled like a library, and there Captain Stanton joined them. A moment later Tom Perry slipped in at the door.

"Hallo, my lad," cried Hanway breezily, bending two stern eyes on the boy that were softened now by a keen approval. "Who told you you could come here?"

"Dr. Fraser said I might, sir," answered Tom, and then the doctor entered, to plead guilty.

The millionaire nodded.

"All right. The boy's one of us," he said, "and it doesn't matter. He won't go about telling tales. Now to get down to business. Are we all here? Good! Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen!"

They all took a seat round the table, and then Hanway cleared his throat.

"You know why we have assembled here," he said. "We've got to decide what we're going to do about Daniel Kemish."

CHAPTER 2.

The Captain's Story!

THERE was a long pause before Dr. Fraser broke the silence.

"It seems to me, sir, since there is no port at hand where we can leave him, that I had better continue to keep a close eye on the man. But I don't mind telling you that he is restless and given to roaming when he ought to be asleep in his bunk. And yesterday, when I questioned him as to the course he had chosen, he answered incoherently. It seemed like a touch of madness."

"Does he drink?" asked the millionaire sharply.

"No. I have seen to that. But his mind is wandering. Yesterday he kept on muttering about a ship, a whaler named the Sea-Elf, and a man named Sellwood. The sun was shining brilliantly, and yet he would have it that we were tossing about in a raging storm. He gripped my arm, Hanway, and kept on shouting in my ear, 'Man overboard! Man overboard!' He was quite mad—for the moment, at any rate."

"There's not only that, but two nights ago when I went to my cabin to fetch my cigar-case after dinner, I found him there turning over my papers, and when I asked him what he wanted, he raved, saying that he was captain of the Sea-Elf, and that if I didn't leave the cabin he'd clap me in irons," said George Perry. "It took me all my time to pacify him."

"And he's the man," cried the millionaire, "I would insist upon bringing with me on this cruise in spite of the captain's protests. I've always prided myself upon being a judge of character, but I reckon, after this, I shall have to revise my own estimate. I brought him, and here he is, and I'd like Stanton to tell us what we can do with him."

Captain Stanton leant eagerly forward in his chair.

"I've known Dan Kemish all my life, sir," he said, "and in the ordinary way I would sooner have him aboard than any other pilot I know. But I wouldn't have brought him south of the Marquesas, and I'll tell you why. More than twelve years ago Dan Kemish lost his sailing partner overboard in these parts, and it seemed to affect his brain. At any rate, he sold the cargo of sperm oil and bone, and everything else he brought home after a three years' voyage, paid off his crew, sold his ship, and retired. When I advertised for a pilot who knew these lone islands of the coral seas, he answered the advert and, as you know, sir, I turned him down."

"And after I'd seen the man, I chose him," added the millionaire. "I was impressed by his knowledge of the island seas, his earnestness, his brilliant record and his eagerness to join us; and, of course, I was wrong. But tell us the story, Stanton."

"It's a simple enough tale," said the captain. "Daniel Kemish and David Sellwood were life-long friends. When they were boys they went to sea together, and later in life, when each had made a bit of money, they pooled their capital and bought a 500 ton whaler named the Sea-Elf.

"Then they sailed the tropic seas in search of sperm whale. They must have been passing the islands that surround us now, and I learned afterwards that they were caught in the worst storm any man aboard had ever encountered, when David Sellwood was lost overboard.

"Daniel Kemish never recovered from the shock, and when he returned to New York, after an absence of over three years, he had changed from a bright, good-natured and talkative seaman into a silent and embittered man. By the terms of their agreement the Sea-Elf and her cargo became his. She brought home a fortune in oil and bone.

"I heard a long time afterwards that there had been quarrelling between Daniel and David owing to Dan neglecting to carry out his proper share of duties. Daniel never forgave himself, I was told, for leaving David to take double watches during that storm, and blamed himself for his friend's loss." Captain Stanton smiled grimly. "Now you know, sir, why I didn't want to bring Daniel down here. I had an idea it would be like this."

"How does Stanton's story colour your view of the case, doctor?" asked the millionaire, turning to Dr. Fraser.

"It helps. I think," replied the doctor. "I could tell the man had something on his mind. That, and the great heat of the last few days, afford a satisfactory explanation; he is suffering from a touch of sunstroke. You can safely leave him in my hands, Mr. Hanway. But I think it would be wise to land him the moment we touch a port. We can make sure that he is left in capable hands, and it will be better for his own sake and for ours."

"Very well. I think that settles it, then, doctor. Persuade Kemish to keep below decks if you can. We'll stay here over my girl's birthday, and sail for home the day after to-morrow."

"That was a sad story about poor Daniel, sir," said Tom Perry, as he sidled up to Thornton Hanway just before leaving the cabin. "I feel frightfully sorry for him."

A big, capable hand dropped on the boy's shoulder.

"So do I, my lad," said the millionaire. "Dan, poor devil, did a man a wrong years ago. I expect, and he's got a conscience. Still, I'd rather he didn't indulge in his fits of remorse aboard my boat."

When Tom slipped out into the sunshine he could see the wide sweep of the palm-clad beach of the coral island shimmering in a heat haze, and looking aft, he saw Daniel Kemish, with arms folded, staring gloomily at the distant shore. Obeying an impulse, Tom went up to him.

"You've been round these islands before.

Dan," he said. "Have you ever seen this one before?"

Kemish, a man past middle age, grizzled, weatherbeaten, and somewhat strikingly bent, turned upon the boy, and, laughing strangely, pointed away to sea.

"That's where Dave Sellwood tumbled overboard," he cried harshly. "Over there. You never saw such a storm. It nearly tore the Sea Elf's masts right out of her. I came on deck just as a big sea bore Dave away. I threw a hen-coop after him, but it was washed back again. I never saw Dave any more. The sharks ate him!"

Hanway sat talking in their deck chairs beneath the stars, a stealthy figure came up from the men's quarters and crept furtively along until it reached the deck cabins.

The tropical night was close and brooding: there was, as Mrs. Hanway—Eva's mother—had put it, a feeling of calamity in the air. The windows were open to their fullest extent, and, inside the cabins, fans were whirling. The silken curtains fluttered in the artificial breeze.

The boy caught sight of the man when he was peering into one of the cabins, spying on the occupant.

Savagely the man pulled himself away from the boy, and then swung the iron bar he held at Tom's head!

Tom shivered as he looked into Daniel Kemish's burning eyes, for he saw madness there.

"Don't you think you had better go below, Dan?" he suggested.

The pilot, who knew every inch of these shark-infested coral seas, brushed a hand wearily across his forehead.

"Perhaps I'd better, Master Tom," he murmured—"perhaps I had better!" And he walked unsteadily to the gangway for'ard and disappeared.

Nothing more was seen of Daniel Kemish during the rest of that day. Most of the guests aboard paid a visit to the island, returning just before dinner.

But that night, after most of the guests had retired and while Tom Perry and Eva Hanway sat talking in their deck chairs beneath the stars, a stealthy figure came up from the men's quarters and crept furtively along until it reached the deck cabins.

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Tom and Eva had been talking about tomorrow, planning what they intended to do. The boy now stopped abruptly.

"I say, Eve, look!" he cried. "Isn't that Kemish, and isn't he looking into your mother's cabin?"

The girl turned with a startled cry.

"Yes, Tom," she cried.

The boy leapt from his chair, and, running up to Kemish, spun him round with a vigorous twirl.

"What are you doing? You've no right on this deck, Dan!" he cried.

The pilot reeled unsteadily. Tom smelt brandy. Kemish must have stolen it from somewhere. There was defiance and hatred in the man's eyes. Tom did not see that he

was carrying a heavy piece of iron in his right hand, hiding it against his leg.

"You leave me alone," Kemish answered. "I can do what I like on my own ship!"

"You're aboard the Esmeralda, Dan," answered Tom. "It belongs to Mr. Thornton Hanway, and if you go on like this you'll be put in irons. Come, behave like a man, Dan, and go down below like a good fellow."

He would have led Kemish back along the deck, but the man savagely pulled himself away and swung the iron bar he held at Tom's head. Swift as thought, Tom ducked, and the bar crashed against the holystoned deck.

The man was fighting mad, Tom saw, and as Eva came screaming towards them, the boy stood his ground firmly, measured his man, and sent him crashing on to the flat of his back with a perfectly timed right hand punch.

For a moment Kemish lay still, dazed by the force of his fall. Then, groping after the iron bar he had dropped, he staggered up and rushed at Tom again. Whilst Eva screamed and cabin doors opened, Tom closed with the madman.

The boy knew that if he was to win he must get the better of the man quickly, for Daniel Kemish was twice as strong as he. With a deft stroke he tripped him and sent him crashing against the rail, and held him down.

Beams of light slanted across the deck. Men came running up. Tom was pulled off the fallen man, and Dr. Fraser and Captain Stanton seized Kemish and dragged him to his feet.

"What's all this about, Tom?" asked Hanway.

Tom explained breathlessly, and then the millionaire beckoned to two of the crew.

"This is becoming serious, captain," said he to Stanton. "The boy has come within an ace of being killed. It's not much use asking this man why he went spying about the deck, because he's mad. I think it will be best, if the doctor is agreeable, to take Kemish below and clap him in irons."

CHAPTER 3.

Disaster!

IT seemed to Tom a fitting thing that a heavy mist, or sea fog, should shut out the beauty of the daybreak when he went on deck the next morning.

The Kemish affair had cast a gloom upon all aboard the yacht. Even Eva, whose high spirits were hard to quell, had scarcely a smile to grace her birthday. One glance around at the all pervading fog, and she begged Tom to let her go below.

But half an hour later a sea breeze drove the fog away, and the beaming sun studded the island setting with what appeared to be a spangle of glittering jewels.

Soon the pilot's strange behaviour was forgotten, and everybody became merry once more. Presents befitting the daughter of a millionaire were showered on Eva, and by lunch time even the girl's father was in a mood to make allowance for, if not to forgive, Daniel Kemish. Dan's latest outburst had been caused by a sailor giving him a strong tot of brandy, hoping to do him good. Dr. Fraser had reported that Kemish was now quiet again.

Just before the birthday lunch, Eva approached her father.

"Daddy," she begged, "I want you to grant me a big favour because it is my birthday."

"Say what you want, and I'll grant it," her father replied, beaming at her, "for there's nothing I'd deny you."

"First," she told him, "I want Tom to take me to the island on the outboard boat; and secondly, I want you to take those irons off poor Dan and set him free."

"You can go with Tom, because he's quite capable of looking after you, lass," said her father. "But I'm doubtful about Dan. He's not to be trusted. He might have killed Tom last night. But that boy's smart. I'll see what Dr. Fraser says."

Dr. Fraser himself was doubtful, but the girl was so insistent he reluctantly gave in, and at lunch-time Daniel Kemish was freed from his irons and allowed to join the other members of the crew.

As results proved, it was a fatal mistake, but for the moment Kemish was forgotten amid the dancing and the singing and games that accompanied the birthday festivities.

The outboard motor-boat, Rosita, was lowered away on to a millpond sea soon after lunch, the guests lining the deck rail to watch the departure of the boy and girl.

Tom had placed in the boat a tin of biscuits and two thermos flasks, one filled with tea the other with lemonade, and amid the shrilling of sirens and the cheers of the crowd, Tom set the motor racing and headed for the shore.

One moment the island seemed miles away and the glistening white sides of the magnificent yacht close at hand; the next the palm beach rushed to meet them, and the Esmeralda had shrunk to the size of a pea-shell at her moorings.

Frantically the laughing girl waved her handkerchief as Tom steered the Rosita through the narrow opening into the still waters of the blue lagoon. And a minute later he had drawn the boat up high on to the beach, and was racing with the girl along the sand.

They threw themselves down beside the lagoon and talked animatedly. They strolled beneath the palms. They plunged into the woods and found the source of a stream that ran trickling to the lagoon.

Never had Tom known such a perfect day; and the girl, enjoying every moment of it, sighed to think that to-morrow they would be starting on the homeward voyage.

Throwing themselves down on the crest of a hill, they lay there talking of the

future and what they would both do when they were grown up. They were so completely happy as to lose all count of time, and when a warning gun fired on board the distant yacht startled them, Tom glanced at the face of his wrist watch in dismay.

"Eva," he said, "it's time we started back. But it wants nearly an hour yet to sundown. We have plenty of time, and the ship's lights will guide us to her. I can't understand why Stanton fired that minute gun. Wait a moment. I'll climb up and look before we start for the lagoon."

Laughingly the girl refused to wait. Instead she raced him to the top of a high mound, from which they were able to see, above the tangle of wood and undergrowth, to where the Esmeralda lay at anchor.

Then as he looked the boy knew why that gun had been fired.

To the west the sun was sinking low, and already in the east the stars were shining like diamonds. The yacht lay clear cut, white and beautiful, upon the still blue sea. But towards her, creeping like a great, billowing cloud, closing in upon her in mighty, awe-inspiring rolls, came a dense white fog which would soon swallow her.

Side by side Tom and the girl ran down the hill. Progress through the undergrowth was not so swift as Tom had anticipated, and when at last they reached the outboard boat they were tired and breathless from the exhausting run.

Tom did not hesitate the fraction of a second, but pushed the boat into the lagoon till she floated, and held her whilst Eva got in.

As he started the motor a second gun boomed from the yacht and, glancing seaward, Tom saw a light flash from her deck rail. Those on board the yacht were signalling anxiously, and with good reason. For even as he looked, the Esmeralda and all her shining lights, turned on to show the way, were swallowed in that approaching white cloud.

A moment later a siren shrilled. Tom headed for the mouth of the lagoon, passed it, nosing into the now swelling sea.

Eva crept to his side.

"Is it all right, Tom?" she asked, with just a quiver of anxiety in her tone.

Tom was not an optimist when he had to face the unknown, for he hated to deceive people.

"I think so," he cried. "It's not two miles to the Esmeralda. There is her siren to guide us, and when we are near enough her lights will shine through this filthy murk."

The siren screamed at regular intervals, and every moment it seemed to grow louder, as if they were drawing nearer. Tom had set the Rosita at top speed, and she was throbbing rhythmically.

Looking shoreward he saw the palm clad beach glow as if it were on fire, yet a moment later it was swallowed up in darkness. A few moments later, Tom and Eva were in the heart of the dense sea fog themselves.

Tom found himself heading he knew not whither, felt the frail boat rise and fall to the strengthening swell, heard the yacht's siren mocking him first on this side, then on that, now loud, then faint, baffling him until he set his teeth and wished that he had remained upon the shore.

But as they progressed the siren grew fainter and fainter, sounding every minute farther and farther away. Tom stopped the engine and let the boat drift with the current, which, as he well knew, raced round the far point of the island.

There came a time when the yacht's siren grew so faint they could hardly hear it. They had drifted miles and miles away from her, and were heading Tom knew not where. Then as suddenly as the fog had swallowed them they emerged from the enveloping cloud into a starlit world, with the gently heaving ocean all around them, and no sign of land anywhere.

And with the coming of the stars the wind came, too, freshening until it blew spindrift from the heaving rolls of the sea.

Tom's anxiety increased as the frail boat began to toss and turn. He was scarcely able to hold her on a true course.

By now Eva's face was white and drawn. So was his own, had he but known it. Next came rain that beat down them with tropical violence, whilst lightning flashed from the riven sky.

The boat was soon half-full of water. Waves began to beat over her. She was filling fast.

The wind began to scream around them. Twice the buffeting waves tore the tiller from Tom's hands, and it was only by a miracle he managed to right the tiny outboard boat.

There followed what seemed an eternity of time, during which Tom set the motor racing to try and keep the head of the boat into the ever-increasing violence of the waves. But at last the flood water stopped the engine and they were helpless.

"Don't lose heart, Eva," said Tom, as lightly as he could. "Leave it to me——"

Even as he spoke, the boat foundered under him. Tom caught hold of the girl; held her as the waves and the rain beat them down into the sea.

They went under, rose again, tossed and turned in a whirlpool of the shark infested Pacific. And then a wave that rose fifty feet or more above them tumbled over and bore them down once more. Down they went, down, down!

(How's that for a fine gripping first instalment, chums? This serial is going to be a real stunner, and you want to make sure you don't miss a single chapter. Read all about the exciting adventures that befall Tom Perry and his girl chum in next Wednesday's enthralling instalment!)

THE SCHOOLBOY GOLDSEEKERS!

(*Continued from page 33.*)

they listened with bated breath. And Handforth, of course, was obliged to relate his own adventures. He was keen enough to do this, for he had completely recovered his self-esteem now. His success had given him fresh confidence.

"There's something rummy about that butte," he said, after he had described how he had found Irene. "It's as hot as a furnace inside, and there's a kind of damp atmosphere, with sulphur fumes and a chemical-like niff in the air. I believe there's a volcano at work, or something—an extinct one."

"If it's extinct, it couldn't be at work, Handy," said Church.

"Well, it's nearly extinct, then," replied Handforth. "Don't quibble, you fathead! As for gold, I don't believe there is any! I didn't see any in the place, anyhow."

BUT he was soon to change his opinion. Hookey Webb was now full of eagerness to press on. So while Nelson Lee and Umlosi remained in charge of the camp—just in case there were other Indians knocking about—Dorrie and Hookey and Dicky Siggers went forward. And Handforth insisted upon going with them as guide.

So the little party went climbing up the butte, and presently they arrived at one of those low cave entrances. This time they had come equipped with lights. They penetrated a long tunnel, and after a while they came into a great chamber.

"This is it!" said Hookey Webb hoarsely. "We're right inside the butte now. This 'ere place is like the core of it—all hollow an' big. Go easy! Don't be in a 'urry over on the other side. There ain't no floor there. There's just a big space, goin' right down further inter the butte, with a big stream at the bottom—boilin' 'ot. There's no sign of it outside, because it runs underground."

They went forward cautiously, and only checked when they came to a point where the floor suddenly ceased. There was a black, gaping void in front of them.

"The lights!" said Hookey, his voice quivering and shaking. "Where's the lights, gents? Didn't you bring an electric torch with you? That's wot we want 'ere——"

"Steady, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "Here's the electric torch."

"Shine it over that there black space!" gasped Hookey. "Now! Now you'll see whether I'm barmy or not! There's gold 'ere, gents—more gold than you've ever seen in all your lives!"

Lord Dorrimore directed the powerful light from the electric torch across the void. The rays struck something on the far side—something gloomy and ghostly and white.

"I'm a rattlesnake if it ain't quartz!" ejaculated Dicky Siggers, in an awed voice. "A wall o' quartz!"

"But look at it!" shouted Hookey Webb. "Look at them points an' lines through it and down it!"

"By the Lord Harry, it's true!" said Dorrie with a gulp. "Gold! The genuine mother-lode! That thing over there, Siggers, is a matrix. Heaven only knows how far it goes back, but there must be tons of gold in that quartz!"

"There's a way down!" said Hookey shakily. "Some old rough steps cut in the rock. I reckon the Injuns worshipped this thing—an' mebbe they've worshipped it for centuries!"

"My hat!" said Handforth. "Let's go down and have a look at it closer! I never knew that you could get gold like this—running through the quartz in seams! It's—it's like they find coal!"

Having found a way down they got close in, and they were more fascinated than ever. The gold could be hacked out of the marble-like quartz with a penknife. It could be scraped off. When this thing was mined, it would be worth an enormous fortune!

LATER, the rest of the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were allowed to come in and view this marvel. It was the end of the quest—and all the excitement was over. For the Indians were kept prisoners, and Nelson Lee intended to march them back to Circle City. There he would hand them over to the authorities. And there, too, he would give a full account of that other encounter with the Redskins, and in due course a full inquiry would be held, and the whole matter would be officially dealt with.

As for Hookey Webb, he was almost certainly a millionaire now. The old man was content at last—but only after Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Dicky Siggers had consented to accept equal shares in the great discovery.

Dorrie had enough money already, but, as he pointed out, he could easily give his share away to charity after he had got it.

And so the Arizona gold quest ended, and with the finding of the treasure, so the interest of the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls waned. They were glad enough when the homeward trip was commenced. They had had enough of the desert to last them quite a long time—and now their thoughts were turned towards England and home—to say nothing of the new term at school!

THE END.

(*That's the end of that fine series, chums. There's another one starting next week—with the Boys of St. Frank's back at their famous school and meeting with all sorts of thrilling adventures. Watch out for the grand opening story, which is entitled: "Waldo, the Wonder Boy!"*)

The St. FRANK'S LEAGUE CORNER!

The Chief Officer Chats with his Chums.

Here's his address if you want to write to him: The Chief Officer, The Nelson Lee Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

News From Malaya!

THE widespread popularity of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY is clearly evident in the many letters I receive week by week from "all four corners of the globe." This week, to support that statement, I am pleased to announce that a reader wishes to start a St. Frank's League club in far-away Malaya.

Mr. Koji Mohamed—that is the name of the reader in question—must be one of the most enthusiastic and energetic members in the League. Already he has done valiant work for the good of the Old Paper in Malaya. Now he hopes to add to his laurels by forming this club, the headquarters of which will be in Singapore. Members desiring to join should write to him at the following address: The Treasury, Singapore, Straits Settlements.

THIS WEEK'S WINNING LETTER

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER,—*I am very pleased to know that my two chums and myself have been enrolled as members of the St. Frank's League.*

I think the League is a very good idea, for it helps to make friends all over the world; it brings together people who live thousands of miles apart and who would otherwise have never known of each other's existence.

My chums and myself are very enthusiastic, and we intend to start a correspondence club in Preston. I shall be obliged if you will put a notice to this effect in the Old Paper, for we want to get plenty of members and make the club a complete success. Your sincere League-ite,

(*Signed*) KENNETH NORRIS (*S.F.L. No.* 9,748).

(*For this letter Kenneth Norris, of Penwortham, Nr. Preston, has been awarded a useful penknife.*)

How to Make Money!

A SURE sign that another football season has started is the number of letters I have received from club secretaries asking that old familiar, yet vexing, question: "How can we make money to increase the club funds?"

Here is a subject which is bound to interest many of my chums, so I do not think I can do better than to devote the rest of my chat to this topic.

There are many ways of solving this problem of making money for your club.

Providing you already have some capital, a good scheme is to run a dance. Of course, a big profit is not guaranteed—there's always a risk in any venture of this kind—but, providing you go about it in the right way, you should at least cover expenses and have a bit in hand; at the same time, you're making your club known in the district!

If any of you are thinking of running a dance, I would advise you to secure a hall where dances are held regularly. In this way you are ensured of attracting a number of people who, although nothing to do with the club, make a habit of attending this hall just for the dancing itself. These, together with the club members and their relatives and friends, should assure you of getting a decent gathering.

Don't forget to advertise the affair, either. Having posters printed is an extra expense,

(*Continued on next page.*)

All members of St. Frank's League are invited to send to the Chief Officer letters of interest concerning the League. The most interesting will be published week by week, and the senders will receive pocket wallets or penknives. If you don't belong to the League, look out for the entry form which will appear next week—and then join immediately.

The St, Frank's League Corner!

(*Continued from previous page.*)

admitted, but I think it is worth while in the long run. There's a great deal of truth in that slogan: It pays to advertise.

Make sure you engage a reliable dance band, too. This is an important point if you are contemplating running more dances during the season. If you get a mediocre band playing at your first affair people won't want to come to the next dance!

Dancing appeals mostly to the younger folk. How about a whist drive for the elders. Here again you want to "book" a hall where drives regularly take place in order to get the support of the "regulars." If you're thinking of running more drives later on, it is a wise policy to offer attractive prizes at this, your first affair. People will want to come again if they see that your club offers worth-while prizes.

Both these ventures need capital. If your club hasn't got any, get some by having scent cards printed and then selling them to friends at a penny each; there's a nice little bit of profit to be made out of these for only a small outlay. Again, you can organise a raffle. Or, particularly if your club is attached to a church, how about running a bazaar?

Another excellent scheme is to get a few local gentlemen interested in your club with a view to making them president and vice-presidents. In the latter event, they are sure to give a donation to the club.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Kenneth Norris, "Chellow-Dene," Pope Lane, Penwortham, **Preston,** wants to form a correspondence club. He will be pleased to hear from anybody who is interested. He himself would like to correspond with readers in the St. Annes' district.

A. Mitchell, 30, West Grove Road, St. Leonard's, **Exeter,** has "N.L.L.," new series, for sale.

Miss Margery Beckett, 23, Quil Road, **Bootle,** wants girl correspondents.

C. Lovell, 71, Park Side, **Woodford Green,** Essex, wants "N.L.L.," Nos. 83—88, new series.

P. D. Jansen, International Correspondence Club, 76, Vogelkersstraat, The Hague, **Holland,** wishes to correspond in English or Dutch, with readers anywhere, particularly in Spain, Africa, and Asia.

W. A. Taylor, 65, Studland Road, Hanwell, **London, W.7,** wants copies of the "N.L.L." containing the "Schoolboy Test Matches," or "St. Frank's In China" series.

Walter Ashby, 45, Priory Street, Stockingford, **Nuneaton,** Warwickshire, wants correspondents anywhere.

Raymond Wiltshire, 40, Dagmar Road, **Dorchester,** Dorset, wants correspondents in his district.

Howard Mansfield, 90, Church Street, Canterbury, Sydney, N.S.W., **Australia,** wants correspondents in England. Aged 13.

Geoffrey Garlick, 6, Tyne Street, Burwood, E.13, Melbourne, Victoria, **Australia,** wants correspondents. He is interested in cricket, stamps, coins and match brands.

D. Tanner, 78, Napier Road, East Ham, **London, E.6,** wants correspondents interested in Nature study, cycling and post card views.

John Hayes, 20, Devon Street, **St. Helens,** Lancs., wants to hear from stamp collectors.

James R. F. Race, 74, Strada Reale, Zabbar, **Malta,** wants to hear from stamp collectors—ages 14-16.

Miss Nancy G. Lewis, 14, Wilmot Street, Malvern East, Melbourne, Victoria, **Australia,** wants girl correspondents in South American, Pacific Islands, France, Spain, Portugal, etc.

D. Lynch, 71, Easton, **Portland,** Dorset, offers "N.L.L.," new series, 30—168.

Wilfred Kirkbride, 42, Orme Street, Beswick, **Manchester,** wants correspondents who are interested in gardening and other hobbies; ages 15—16.

Ralph Clarry, 14a, Gonguine Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada,** will pay £1, or anything reasonable, for "N.L.L.," Nos. 1—84, 89, and Nos. 118—130, new series.

A. T. Wright, 32, Upper High Street, **Winchester,** Hants., offers "N.L.L.," new series, Nos. 44—159.

C. Hillard, 6, St. Norbert's Road, Brockley, **London, S.E.4,** wants to hear from cycling correspondents.

Miss Marie Yvonne Flanagan, 48, Gordon Street, Paddington, Sydney, N.S.W., **Australia,** wants girl correspondents anywhere; interested in the Girl Guides, sports, etc.

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