

AMAZING ADVENTURES OF SCHOOLBOYS ON A PACIFIC ISLAND!

THE Nelson Lee 2d *Library*



✧
A Gripping Story
of a strange
mystery con-
nected with an
unknown island
of the
Pacific.

✧ This Week's Great Story:
**THE MYSTERY OF
DORRIMORE ISLAND!**

Introducing:—
LORD DORRI-
MORE, UMLOSI,
NELSON LEE,
NIPPER, and the
WELL-KNOWN
JUNIORS OF
ST. FRANK'S.

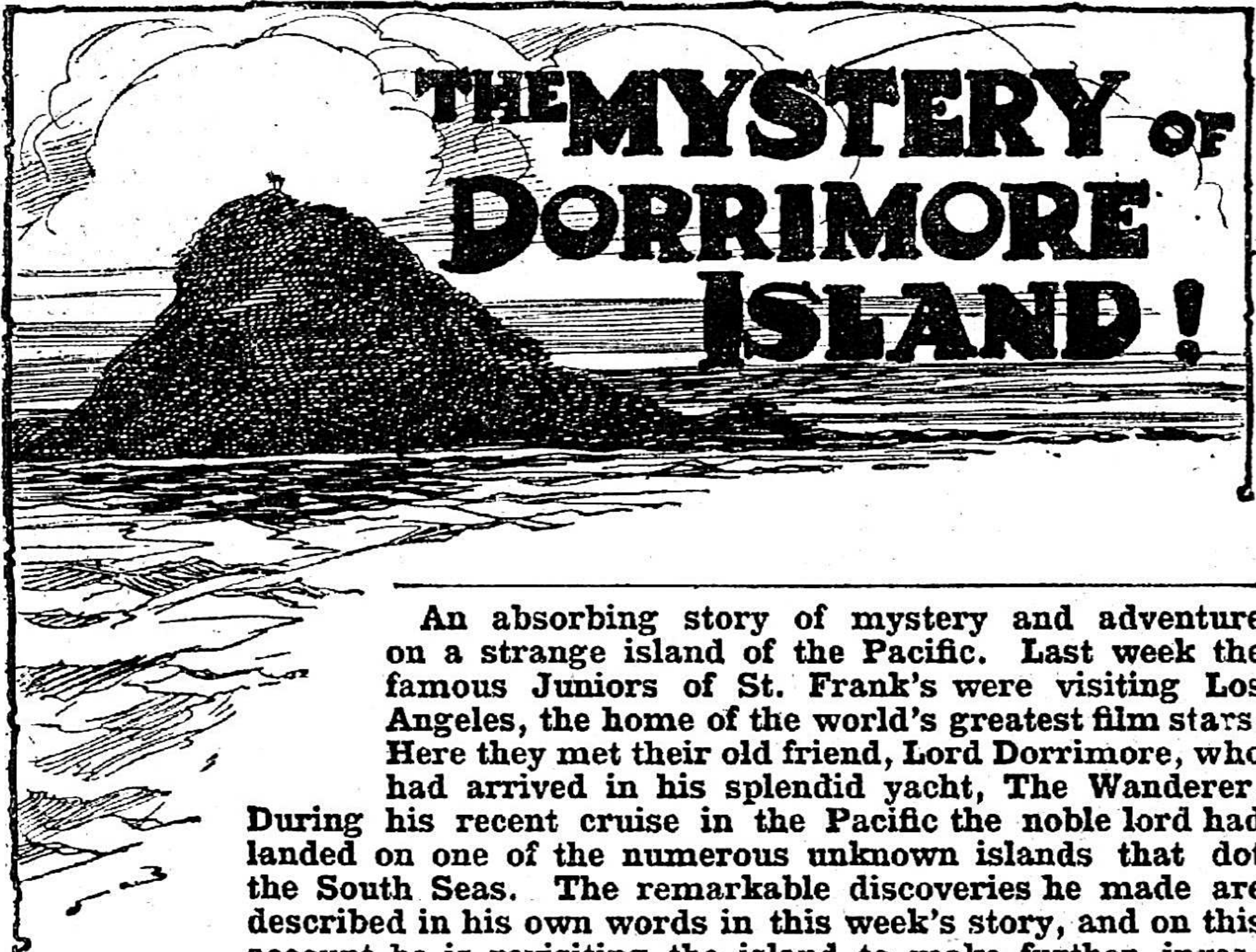
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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

August 25, 1923.



He caught sight of a villainous face, a face he was not likely to forget for many a long day. It took a great deal to make Willy Handforth's heart jump with sudden fear. But it jumped now.



THE MYSTERY OF DORRIMORE ISLAND!

An absorbing story of mystery and adventure on a strange island of the Pacific. Last week the famous Juniors of St. Frank's were visiting Los Angeles, the home of the world's greatest film stars. Here they met their old friend, Lord Dorrimore, who had arrived in his splendid yacht, *The Wanderer*.

During his recent cruise in the Pacific the noble lord had landed on one of the numerous unknown islands that dot the South Seas. The remarkable discoveries he made are described in his own words in this week's story, and on this account he is revisiting the island to make further investigations. Nelson Lee and the Juniors are invited to join him on his latest quest. The boys, of course, are overjoyed at the prospect, little thinking what exciting adventures await them.

THE EDITOR.

The Narrative Related Throughout by Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER GOES A-WANDERING!

AZURE skies, the placid, crystal Pacific—and the *Wanderer*. Dorrie's beautiful steam-yacht was cutting her way through the sparkling waters to the accompaniment of the hissing foam, as she went on her course south-west from the Californian coast.

It was morning—and hot.

So hot that the majority of the passengers were lounging about under the big awning on the promenade deck. They were lolling back in comfortable deck chairs, partaking of iced lime juice at fairly frequent intervals.

And the passengers mainly consisted of the St. Frank's Remove.

We were all there—the entire Form, even including such undesirables as Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell, Teddy Long, etc. But these young gentlemen had certainly been

behaving themselves fairly well since the commencement of our world trip.

Handforth's young brother was with the party, too. In the beginning he had come with us more or less accidentally, but he was now accepted heartily as one of the party—although he was really a paltry fag, a Third Former.

We had been out from Los Angeles harbour for three days, and the weather had been glorious all the while. Having seen the United States, from coast to coast, and having spent a considerable time in the vicinity of Film-city, we were rather glad to be at sea.

For there was something wonderfully fine in being Lord Dorrimore's guests.

There was every comfort that a fellow could desire on the *Wanderer*, for she was equipped as only a millionaire can equip his private yacht. And Dorrie had always

made a special thing of fixing up accommodation for schoolboys.

It was the sporting peer's greatest delight to take parties of St. Frank's fellows on long trips. He had done so frequently, and we had gone through many thrilling adventures together, always with the good old Wanderer.

Strictly speaking, our summer holidays were now getting towards their end, but there was plenty of time yet—several weeks—in which to crowd in some more excitement and adventure.

The general idea, I think, was to travel across Oceanica, visit one or two of the South Sea Islands, and then make for home by way of the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.

It was a wonderful project.

We had crossed the Atlantic from England, had crossed America, and if the Wanderer's cruise became a reality, we should have encircled the entire globe. And for the St. Frank's Remove to make a trip round the world was indeed a somewhat wonderful achievement.

But, without Dorrimore's yacht, and without his millions, such a thing could never have been. We had to thank him for a great deal.

There was something just a little mysterious about this trip.

I knew, for example, that Dorrie had something up his sleeve. Even Nelson Lee didn't know what this was. It wasn't merely a pleasure cruise—there was some other project behind it.

Lord Dorrimore spent most of his time in searching for unusual adventures—and then embarking upon them. Sometimes these adventures would turn out to be a fizzle, and then Dorrie would growl at everybody, and declare that life was hardly worth living.

But on other occasions the most thrilling episodes would result—dangers and hair-raising experiences. Danger to Dorrie was the spice of life. Any cruise without a definite objective, without an adventurous tang to it, was hardly worth embarking upon.

And he remained as close as an oyster regarding his present trip.

We simply left him to himself—feeling quite convinced that he would open out sooner or later. Since pumping had absolutely no effect, this was the only thing that could be done.

In his own time, Dorrie would speak.

At the present moment, we were lounging about in the deck chairs, as I have already mentioned. The weather continued fine, and the sun seemed to increase somewhat in its intensity. Iced lime juice, in large quantities, was about the only relief we knew.

Umlosi, Lord Dorrimore's faithful servant and friend, was with us. The huge black Chief of a little-known African tribe, having toured through all parts of the world with

"his father"—as he insisted upon calling Dorrie—was quite content to leave everything to his lordship.

He was always a bit scared of the sea.

So long as it remained calm and placid, he rather enjoyed it. But as soon as a storm arose, and Umlosi's interior man began to complain, then Umlosi's exterior man complained also.

He was reclining gracefully in a chair, with his head hung back, fast asleep. There was no question whatever about his being asleep. The noise he made about it was sufficient advertisement of the fact.

Archie Glenthorne was rather astonished.

"I mean to say, I sincerely trust the dear chappie is well!" remarked Archie, adjusting his monocle, and gazing concernedly at Umlosi. "But, dash it all! I should say dash it all twice! All that thunderous noise, don't you know! Sounds like a bally whale, as it were, about to spout!"

Reginald Pitt grinned.

"It's the first time I knew whales made a noise like a foghorn," he observed. "I think we'd better do something about it."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "The disturbance, so to speak, is somewhat poisonous, I mean to say, the whole bally ship is quivering!"

Whether this quiver was caused by the engines, or Umlosi's snore, was not quite clear. But this snore was certainly of such power that it would take the first prize in any competition. Even Edward Oswald Handforth, the undoubted champion of the Remove, would have been a very poor second!

"What's the trouble over here?" I asked, strolling along the deck. "All you chaps seem very much interested in Umlosi."

"Beg pardon?" said Pitt, holding a hand to his ear.

This, of course, was an exaggeration. But Reggie meant humorously to imply that Umlosi's snores drowned ordinary conversation.

"I'll cure that in one minute!" I said, with a chuckle. "There's one certain remedy for Umlosi's little outbursts. I've tried it before, and so I know. Just watch your uncle, my children!"

It so happened that I had brought along a full glass of lime juice. It was intended for myself, but it was well worth sacrificing. With the others watching with great interest, I held the glass over Umlosi's mouth, and gently tipped it. Umlosi's mouth was about as large as a pudding basin, when it was fully opened—as it was now. I couldn't have missed, even if I had my eyes closed.

Swish!

The lime juice entered its appointed home. There was a curious gurgling, gurgling sound, very similar to the noise made by water passing down a sink pipe, or when the bath is being emptied.

Then Umlosi awoke.

"Sizzz-ploosh!" ejaculated Umlosi, in a watery voice.

He sat up, and a perfect shower of lime juice descended upon Archie Glenythorne, like the discharge of a hose-pipe. Archie staggered back with a yell, and commenced making swimming movements.

"Help!" he gasped. "I mean to say, kindly throw out the old life-belt! I'm dashed well sinking for the third time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie indignantly. "There's nothing I like better than large supplies of lime juice—but a fellow doesn't care for it to be thrown at him in chunks! I mean to say, I'm drowning in the stuff!"

Archie was gently pushed aside, and Umlosi slowly sat up.

"Wau!" he ejaculated. "Methinks the great waters have arisen! 'Tis ill!"

"Not a bit of it, old man," I exclaimed. "'Tis well! We thought you were ill a minute ago, judging by the noise you were making. Your snores were about as penetrating as a train going through a tunnel!"

Umlosi looked at me reproachfully.

"Thy words are wondrous strange, my young master," he said. "But I know thee of old. Thou hast been playing one of thy jokes, is it not so?"

"It is so!" I said gravely.

"'Tis a pity, indeed," said Umlosi, shaking his woolly head. "For thou did interrupt a dream of the most wondrous kind. Surely a man has such dreams only rarely! And 'tis indeed a pity that I should not be allowed to finish it."

I grinned.

"Awfully sorry, Umlosi, but something really had to be done," I said. "That dream of yours must have been about sixty horse-power, if the snore was any method of judging."

Umlosi nodded.

"There was much fighting," he said, in a dreamy voice. "Men of vast brutality were surrounding us. Wau! 'Twas a great and glorious battle! And thou, Manzie—thou wert fighting well."

"Good!"

"And thou—and thou!" went on Umlosi, indicating the other juniors. "Yes, 'twas a grim affair, indeed. And even now can I see danger looming. N'Kose, my father, is leading us into vast perils and wondrous adventures."

"Good!" I said again. "I was hoping that we might have some excitement before long. Anything more, Umlosi? Do you know any more about this dream? Let's have all the gory details."

Umlosi passed a hand before his eyes.

"'Tis gone!" he said sadly. "I would that I knew more, my young master. But fear not—'twill be well ere long. Methinks the day approacheth rapidly. I have seen what I have seen, and my snake tells me much!"

"That snake of yours—in other words, your giddy instinct—is a pretty sure guide," I said. "Well, it's no good worrying. I

only hope that Dorrie will tell us a bit more information before long."

As it happened, the time was near.

For only that evening, after dinner was over, Lord Dorrimore decided to take us all into his confidence. It was quite cool down in the saloon, for fans were whizzing, and sending draughts of ice-cooled air through the big, beautifully-equipped apartment.

And as we sat round, taking our ease after the meal, Dorrie looked at us all, and nodded.

"Well, I think I might as well get busy on my yarn," he said languidly. "Of course, some of you fellows might find it a bit dull—an' if so, you have my full permission to skip."

"No, Dorrie, we want to hear it!"

"Rather, sir!"

"We've been waiting for it for days, sir."

Lord Dorrimore nodded again.

"Well, it's going to be pretty long—so you're in for a fair sittin'," he warned us. "There's no sense in doing a thing by halves, so I shall give you the yarn from first to last. Afterwards we can hold a debate, and decide what's to be done."

"All right, Dorrie—go ahead," smiled Nelson Lee. "I'm quite certain of one thing—and that is that your story will be at least entertaining. Any adventure that you consider worth while telling is bound to be well packed with thrills."

But Dorrie shook his head.

"That's just where you make a mistake, old man," he said. "There weren't many thrills in this experience—but, judgin' by what did happen, I haven't the slightest doubt that there'll be large supplies of thrills in the near future."

And, having whetted our appetites for his story in this manner, our host began. Instead of telling the story myself, I think it would be far better to let Lord Dorrimore do it in his own way.

So, for the purpose of this record, I took down his narrative verbatim in shorthand—and so I can give it word for word as he told it to us.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF LONE ISLAND!

Told by Lord Dorrimore.



IT happened four or five weeks ago, while the old Wanderer was making her way to Los Angeles.

My scheme was to get to California in time to collect the bunch of St. Frank's fellows, and so that I could take them on a good cruise. We had fine weather, and everything was in favour of a first-class trip.

I can't tell the exact latitude and longitude—I'm no navigator, anyway—but we were getting well within three or four days

of Los Angeles when we happened to come within sight of a little island.

Of course, you'll understand that we weren't keeping to any ordinary shipping routes. And we were now steaming through a part of the Pacific that is, I believe, deserted from one year's end to another.

No self-respecting ship goes there unless it's blown out of its course, or meets with some other funny thing that it oughtn't to. I don't like keeping to the regular routes—trust me to go on the unbeaten track.

Well, as I said, we came within sight of this island.

The bally thing is charted on the map all right—just a kind of pinpoint, and it isn't even dignified by a name. But I've heard that among the skippers who use these waters it's called No Man's Island.

As soon as I came within sight of the spot, I named it Dorrimore Island. Confound it all! I might as well have something named after me, even if it's only a beastly little pinpoint in the Pacific.

Well, there it was, and I was pretty interested. We were steaming within a couple of miles of the thing, and it suddenly occurred to me that it wouldn't be a bad idea to go ashore. My chief reason was that I wanted to stretch my legs. We'd been at sea for weeks, and I saw no reason why I shouldn't indulge in this little whim.

"What about it?" I said, to Mr. Barry.

"What about what, sir?" asked that ass, in his usual inane way.

I don't want to make any uncomplimentary remarks about our excellent second officer, but now and again he appears to show a startling lack of intelligence.

"We'll go ashore, what?" I suggested.

"Just as you like, sir," said Barry. "There doesn't seem to be much prospect in the trip, as far as I can see—but it's up to you."

"Confound it all, man, think of the exercise!" I declared. "Look at that hill! Climbin' that will be pretty interestin', I should think—an' I'm just longin' to stretch my legs as they deserve to be stretched."

No doubt Mr. Barry had certain private views concerning my sanity, but he was wise enough not to express them. I observed a peculiar little glint in his eyes, but he removed this as soon as he saw me looking at him.

"Certainly, sir," he said. "It will be awfully interesting."

The confounded fibber! The truth was, he didn't want to offend me, and although he thought the whole thing was absolutely dotty, he was good enough to accompany me. I thought about taking old Umlosi, but the lazy blighter was so deucedly sound asleep that I didn't trouble to wake him.

I had a word with the skipper, and he gave me that same inquiring look. He couldn't quite understand why I should want to go ashore on a miserable little deserted island that was just about as

barren as the shaved head of a Central African cannibal.

The skipper took his instructions fairly well, considering, and ordered the yacht to be anchored, and a boat was put over-side. I mean, if I own the bally yacht, it's a pity if I can't do what I like with it!

And, somehow or other, I had an instinctive sort of feeling that there was something queer about this island. Nobody would know it to look at the thing. If Umlosi had had the same feeling, he would have trotted out the explanation that his snake was getting busy.

But as I don't happen to have a snake, I set it down to instinct. And that, after all, is about the same thing.

By the way, I haven't mentioned what the island was like, have I? If I leave a thing out like that, don't forget to dig me in the ribs. I'm a shocking fellow when I'm telling a yarn—I forget half the details. The whole thing's a bally bore, to tell the truth, but now that I've started I've got to finish.

The island, eh? Yes, of course. Well there it was, like a cone. When I say a cone, I don't exactly mean a cone. That's rather involved, but we'll straighten it out. Try to imagine an ordinary soft felt hat lying on the ground—a felt hat with the crown of it all pushed in at various angles.

Well, this island was just about the same.

Only, of course, it was floating in the sea. The brim of the hat was the beach, all the way round, and the crown a strange, uneven hill which arose in the centre. This hill was pretty high—like a kind of knob sticking upwards. And as far as I could judge from the present position, the island was about a couple of miles long, by a mile broad.

And, stuck right on the top of this central hill there were two palm trees. The poor beasts looked frightfully lonely up there, for there was no other vegetation of any kind to be seen.

Just those two palms, lording it over the entire place. I imagine they were pretty conceited, having the whole island to themselves in that way. Big fellows, too—with great, waving crowns.

Barry and I went ashore in one of the small boats, and there proved to be quite a decent natural harbour—a priceless little cove, tucked away round in a bay. I reckon any ship would be safe there in the biggest storm.

We went at the job thoroughly.

"What we've got to do, Barry, is to climb to the top," I said. "It's about half-a-mile I should think, but the exercise will be wonderful. An' I want to have a look at the view."

"Just as you like, sir," said Barry, in a tired voice.

"Of course, if you don't want to come

you can stay behind," I said obligingly. "I wouldn't dream of puttin' you to the inconvenience, old man. Sit down here and twiddle your thumbs until I come back."

"Not at all, sir," said Barry. "I'm as keen as you are to stretch my legs. I'll guarantee the officers would like it, too."

I grinned.

"They didn't seem very eager," I remarked. "However, it'll soon be over and done with, so that's that. Come along. Don't jaw so much."

And off we went. Of course, you're beginning to think that I'm mad, I suppose? What on earth is there of interest in this silly story? Just landing on a desolate island, and climbing to the top?

But wait a minute!

Don't be so darned impatient, and you'll hear something. Well, there we were—Barry and I. I think I've said that before but I might as well say it again, so as to thoroughly impress you with the fact.

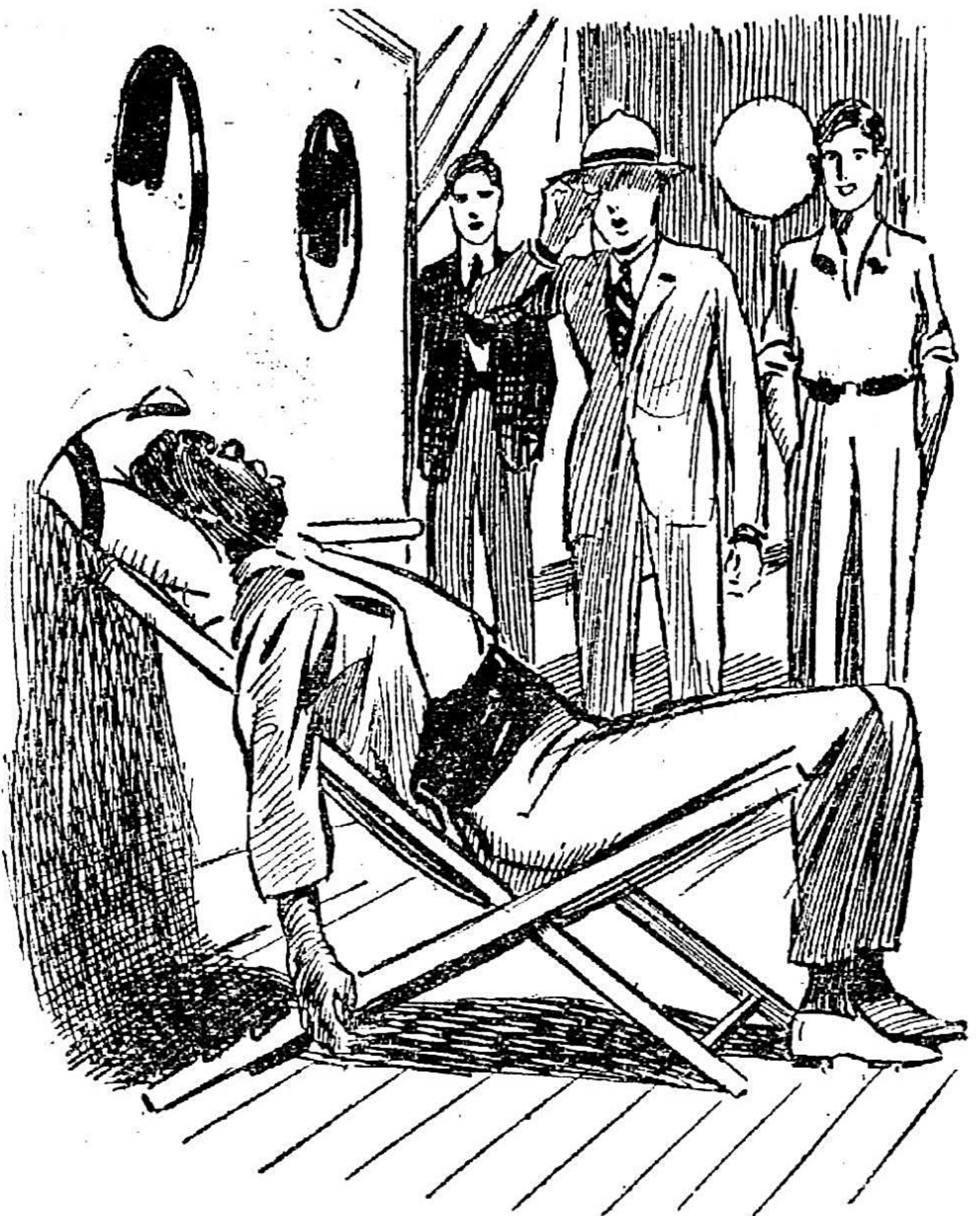
We started on that ridiculous climb. I don't mind admitting that it was a bit of a silly business. After all, when you come down to brass tacks, where was the sense in going ashore at all? I'm hanged if I know why I did it—except that instinct got on the job.

I imagine that we got half-way up the hill before anything happened. The ground was peculiar—not ground at all, as a matter of fact, but rock—rough, brownish rock, without a blade of grass to be seen. And I can tell you pretty keenly that the sun was considerably warm.

"All right, old man—don't start grumblin'," I said, as Barrie opened his mouth. "We're goin' to the top—so don't you start any of your famous objections."

Barry grinned.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I was going to remark that the trip was well worth while," he said. "I'm quite enjoying it. It's a real pleasure to be on solid ground again."



"I mean to say, I sincerely trust that the dear chappie is well!" remarked Archie, adjusting his monocle, and gazing concernedly at Umlosi. "But—dash it all! All that thunderous noise! Sounds like a bally whale, as it were, about to spout!"

"And you call yourself a sailor!" I sneered.

He didn't make any reply to that remark of mine, and we went on for another spasm—until, in fact, we were within about a hundred yards of the summit. We could see the palm trees towering above us. Then Barry suddenly came to a halt, and looked at me in rather a queer way.

"Can you feel anything, sir?" he asked, his voice a bit strange.

"Feel anythin'?" I repeated.

"A kind of catchiness of the throat, sir," said Barry. "It may be my imagination, but—"

He paused, and gave a kind of gulp, breathing at the same time. And I stood there swaying in a most extraordinary manner. Remarkable thing, but even as I

looked at the chap, he seemed to divide himself into three.

Everything went queer—the whole island rocked about. And my throat felt as though it were burning. And then, of course, I understood. It didn't take me long to get the hang of it.

"Gas!" I said thickly.

"I—I don't understand, sir!" panted Barry.

"Neither do I, you ass—but there must be some kind of a natural gas oozing up out of these rocks!" I choked. "By glory! This is gettin' too steep for me! Unless we're careful we shall peg out."

And, by gad, I was right.

Barry, poor chap, sort of collapsed on the spot. I don't like saying much about myself, but it's a fact that I grabbed the idiot, and shook him like the dickens. But he wasn't capable of doing a darn thing.

I slung him over my shoulder, and staggered away.

This sounds pretty easy, but it wasn't. I was helped by the fact that we were on a hillside, and so I had only to lean down in order to get him across my back. Somehow, it felt as though my legs had turned into a peculiarly weak variety of jelly.

The infernal things wobbled alarmingly and I was in a horrible daze. Every breath I took was like breathing in a few flames. Well, anyhow, we don't want to make too much of this business.

I'll cut it short, and get to the end of the first reading, as it were. Somehow or other, we managed to make the beach. Even now, I don't know how in the name of all that's mysterious we did it.

But we did. And that's that. We felt a bit better down there—the choking sensation wasn't so great, and the effects were wearing off a bit. Anyhow, Barry was thoughtful enough to recover a bit.

And after we were on board, plenty of iced water, and a stiff dose of brandy each, worked wonders.

Within three hours, in fact, we were almost normal. All we had was a glorious sore throat each, watery eyes, and cracked voices. And we felt considerably lucky to have escaped at all.

Of course, you want to know what the trouble was?

Well, if that's so, you'll have to continue to wait. I'm hanged if I can tell you. All I know was that some particularly choice brand of noxious gas hit us squarely amidships, so to speak. And I honestly believe that if we'd remained on the island, we should have said a somewhat regretful good-bye to the good old earth.

Of course, I decided to kiss my hand to Dorrimore Island, and to make tracks for a more healthy spot. That's the worst of these uninhabited rocks. They're dotted about in various parts of the ocean, and you don't know what you're in for until you get there.

I wasn't at all surprised that this island was deserted.

But there was one thing that did puzzle me just a wee bit. The palm trees. If there was an endless supply of rotten gas wafting about, how was it that those palms looked so green and fresh? And why didn't they wither up, and cease to exist altogether?

I spoke to Barry about this, but he wasn't interested. What he wanted to see more than anything else was a clear horizon, with that island off the map.

We were still anchored near by, because I'd thoughtlessly forgotten to give the skipper any further instructions. It was dusk now—with night coming down at its usually rapid speed.

I was on deck, taking a last look at the palm trees through a pair of pretty decent binoculars. By now we were actually steaming away. It was just about dark, and these two trees stood out like sentinels against the last rays of daylight.

Without the glasses, the darkness was almost impenetrable. But, looking through those binoculars, I could see the twin palms with surprising clearness. And then, as I looked, I'm hanged if I didn't get a surprise.

Something moved between the trees.

I almost dropped the glasses at first, but by a supreme effort I managed to stick on to them. I couldn't be quite sure as to what that figure was—but it looked very much like a human shape!

CHAPTER III.

INVESTIGATIONS!

(Lord Dorrimore continues.)



HUMAN shapes!

Well, that was a rummy thing, wasn't it?

You've got to admit that it was a bit more than we expected, anyway. And now you're beginning to understand that this island wasn't such a washout, after all. Before I could finally decide whether the figure was human or animal, it was unkind enough to vanish.

But don't think that I was seeing things.

Don't imagine for a moment that the brandy was having an unfortunate effect.

Nothing of the kind. I was absolutely certain that something had moved—something, I repeat, but I couldn't explain what.

I went to the skipper.

"Stop the bally yacht!" I said, or words to that effect.

"Again, sir?" said Captain McDodd wonderingly.

"Absolutely!" I said. "I've seen something. That dashed island isn't so empty as we thought. In fact, there's something fishy about it. I don't mean it's a good place for anglin', but it's fishy, all the same."

The skipper looked at me with that look that means that he was doubting my correct mental balance. But he was too sporting to make any objection. And the Wanderer was shoved back into the bay.

"Now, look here, Barry," I said, diving down into that gentleman's cabin, and grabbin' him by the coat lapel. "You'll come with me."

"But what for, sir?" asked Barry.

"We're goin' back to the island," I declared. "Don't think that I have any designs upon your life. Not at all. But a little while ago I saw a human figure between those two palm trees."

"Impossible, sir!" said Barry incredulously.

"Well, I won't say a human figure," I amended. "It might have been an animal. But I'm hanged if I know of any animals that size in these waters. Between you an' me an' the compass, I believe the chap was a black."

"But, hang it all, sir, it's out of the question!" protested Barry. "How could any human being live in that ghastly atmosphere? It's nothing but poison—rank, absolute poison!"

I nodded soothingly.

"I admit you're talkin' with about a hundred per cent. of sense," I replied. "But you didn't see this figure, an' I did. That makes all the difference. An' I've got to believe the evidence of my own eyes."

"You're quite sure, sir, that——"

"Of course I'm certain," I interrupted. "To be quite exact, I've got an idea that there's some squiffy business here. You understand?"

"Not quite, sir."

"Well, of course, you wouldn't," I said. "But there you are—that's the position. I couldn't dream of goin' away from this island for all I can see. I'm goin' to make some investigations, an' I'm goin' to do it at once."

Barry shook his head.

"In the darkness, sir?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And what about that gas?"

"Well, I'll admit the gas is somethin' of a drawback," I said. "But it so happens that we can deal with that rather effectively. Unless my memory fails me completely, we've got a few spare gas masks down in the stores—two, at least. I don't know how they've got there—but I have an idea that we took them to that port on the African coast when we went after elephants. There was some talk of swamps or other, and I had the masks as a precautionary measure."

I daresay that was all wrong, but Barry didn't mind.

But what does it matter? We had the masks, and it didn't worry me why they were on board. Barry brightened up considerably as soon as he heard this piece of news, and he agreed with me.

"In that case, sir, there'll be no danger," he said.

"Not a bit," I replied. "Now, this is the scheme. What we've got to do is to sneak ashore like thieves in the night. We'll climb that hill, an' at the first sign of any gas, we'll put the masks on. Then we'll carry on. How does that go?"

"A good idea, sir."

"Right—then we'll begin the entertainment," I said briskly.

I did think of taking another officer instead of Barry—but as we had gone the first trip together, it was rather fitting that we should be together still. I remarked, in passing, that Umlosi refused to have anything to do with the business.

I was quite keen upon taking him, and at first he was as willing as a bird. But as soon as he saw those gas masks, he quit the job. In other words, there was nothing doing. He was quite willing to come as he stood, but nothing under the sun would induce him to put one of those masks on. He kindly referred to them as devil-devil contrivances.

So Barry and I started off.

We got ashore, and with the gas masks tucked under our arms, we started up towards the centre of the island. The air was quite fresh and pure—and there was a great advantage in the fact that a cool breeze had sprung up.

The climb was nothing near so arduous as it had been earlier. And, although we were on the lookout for the first whiff of gas, we didn't get any—at least, not until we were almost at the top.

And then we both felt the same effect together.

"I think it's coming on, sir," whispered Barry. "Maybe it's my imagination, but there's that same feeling——"

"You're right," I interrupted. "Shove the old protector on."

"Yes, sir."

In two minutes we were safe from any brand of gas that might be let loose. And, feeling surprisingly secure, we continued the climb. I might as well mention that we had armed ourselves with hefty revolvers before starting out.

We reached the summit, and got right beneath the two palm trees—or, at least, between them. They were set about twenty yards apart, and were as alike as two peas.

We paused at this spot to take a breath.

Conversation, you will understand, was somewhat difficult. It takes a pretty clever chap to talk with any fluency through one of those beastly gas masks. So we had to content ourselves with signs.

This was a difficult method of making ourselves understood.

I indicated the sweep down to the beach with a wave of the hand, and Barry's head-gear wagged itself. The Wanderer was lying down there, quite calm and patient.

It was rather difficult to see her, owing to the almost complete darkness.

After a while we turned, duly refreshed, and looked in the opposite direction. There was nothing to see, of course.

We were at the top of the central hill, and ahead of us lay a dark expanse of nothingness. At least, that's what it appeared to be. If we had not been handicapped by the masks we might have seen better.

But it was rather like walking in a pea-soup fog.

Barry was slightly in advance of me—I suppose the painstaking fellow wanted to make a bit of a hit. Anyhow, there he was, just a few steps ahead, picking his way

To be exact, he nearly stepped off the edge of a precipice!

It was only by a twisting movement that would have done credit to a contortionist that he saved himself. And even then he might have gone if I hadn't been near enough to seize him. I saw him going, and I made a grab. I yanked him back, and he gasped, and was all of a tremble.

"Steady!" I said softly.

Of course, he didn't hear me, but that made no difference. I know what it's like to nearly take a sudden drop. And there was no telling how far this drop was. It might have been just a few feet, and nothing to worry over. On the other hand, there was a distinct chance that the distance

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over the rocky ground like a cat on hot bricks.

Then, suddenly, something happened.

That's how the novelists put it, isn't it? I've read something after that style now and again. As I remarked, something happened. It was nearly a tragedy, but not quite.

In other words, Barry started disappearing.

He gave a kind of yelp that sounded even through his gas-mask. I don't wonder at it, for as he took a step forward, he suddenly found that there was nothing of a solid nature to tread on.

was in the neighbourhood of a couple of hundred feet.

And a fall like that isn't always healthy.

Anyhow, we paused. I was getting thoroughly fed up with the gas mask by this time. I was perspiring, and the air within the mask didn't seem any too nice. I decided to chance it. I took the infernal thing off.

Mind you, I held my breath. Then, when the mask was free from my face, I took a soft, cautious breath. I grinned. The air was as fresh and pure as ozone. We had been scared asses to wear the masks at all.

I took a deep breath, made quite sure,

then dug Barry in the ribs. He saw at once what I was doing, and took his mask off also.

"Why, the air's quite pure, sir," he said, with relief.

"Number one quality," I agreed. "Now what was the idea, old son? Didn't you just try to step into a hole, or somethin'? This needs a little lookin' into, I fancy."

So we proceeded to look into it—the hole, I mean. Well, it wasn't exactly a hole, unless you call a great gash in the ground a hole—a gash extending for over a mile in one direction, and half a mile in the other.

The top of the hill, in fact, was a swindle.

It wasn't a top at all. From the sea that hill looked as solid as a mountain. But it was really nothing of the kind. I'll tell you all about it soon. I'm getting a bit ahead of myself.

We couldn't see much at first, for we didn't happen to possess the eyesight of cats. The darkness was intense, and we only knew that a huge gap of some sort lay in front of us.

It wasn't so much that we saw the gap—but we felt it. We knew it was there, as surely as if it had been broad daylight. Somehow, a fellow does feel these things.

We knew that we were on the edge of some cliff. Indeed, looking down, we could not be in any doubt regarding this point. Just at first we didn't know what to make of what we saw. It was so strange and uncanny.

"Look, sir!" whispered Barry, clutching my arm. "Lights!"

"By gad! You're right!" I breathed.

I was fascinated. There were lights—right down in the very bowels of the earth, it seemed, although it probably was not so. I meant to make sure, so I threw myself on my face, and wormed forward.

And almost at once I found my head hanging over space. And, staring down, I made out an awful drop in the gloom. And far below us there were little, twinkling lights. They seemed to be right down—down.

It was as though we were staring down a mine shaft, only the shaft was half a mile in size.

"Look at that, sir!" muttered Barry suddenly.

But I needed no telling. One of those lights had commenced to move—a most peculiar circumstance. It seemed as though there were fireflies down at the bottom of the hollow—for if those lights were carried by human beings, they must have been very miniature people indeed.

Because we were assuming this hole in the ground was about a hundred feet deep. Being in the darkness, we couldn't imagine anything different. Unfortunately, I hadn't brought the binoculars with me.

But our eyes were getting more and more accustomed to the darkness.

"Look here, Barry, it's my opinion this valley is deeper than we first thought," I

murmured. "In fact, it's an awful depth! An' they're real people down below—I swear I saw the figure of a man cross in front of one of those lights."

"That's what I thought, sir—but it seems so impossible," murmured Barry. "What do you think they are—blacks?"

"My dear chap, do be sensible!" I exclaimed. "What do you expect them to be—Chinese, or somethin'? Of course they're blacks. Either they've come on this island for some religious stunt—they're always gettin' up to games of that kind, these blacks—or else it's their natural home."

"What, right down here—in this peculiar valley?"

"I imagine so," I replied. "But it's no good makin' guesses, old man. There's only one thing to be done—we've got to wait until mornin'. I mean to look down here with my own eyes in the daylight."

"But then we shall probably be seen, sir."

This obvious thought hadn't occurred to me, and I considered for a few moments. After all, we didn't want to advertise the fact that we were on the island. And if a horde of blacks surrounded us, we shouldn't stand much of a chance. The point wanted thinking out.

Glancing up, I happened to see some big rocks standing out against the sky.

They were set just near the edge of that precipice, and I cautiously made my way across to them and began investigations.

In a few minutes I was chuckling with delight.

"Look here, Barry," I whispered. "See those rocks? Judgin' by their shape, I reckon we can easily find cover. Look, there's plenty of room to squeeze in here—it's almost like a cave. We can spend the night among these rocks, an' in the daylight we shan't be seen at all."

"Quite so, sir," said Barry. "But how about getting back to the ship?"

"Gettin' back to the ship?" I repeated. "H'm! Well, of course, we can wait until to-morrow night."

"Remain in hiding all day?"

"Yes."

"I think we shall be pretty thirsty, sir," said Barry thoughtfully. "Besides, there's the question of food, too—and the skipper might get anxious, and send a search-party."

I patted him on the back.

"Good lad!" I said approvingly. "I always thought you were a bit of an ass, Barry, but I take that back. You've got brains. You've thought of all the little details. Well, there's only one thing to be done. You stay here, and I'll go back to the ship—"

"No, sir; I'll do that," said Barry firmly.

"But, my dear idiot—"

"It's my job, sir," insisted Barry.

"Oh, well, if you want to be such an ass, have your own way," I said. "Arguin' always did bore me. Slip back to the ship, an' take care that you don't get

gassed on the way. Tell the skipper that everything's O.K., and he can expect us back when he sees us. He's not to worry if we're away for twenty-four hours. After that he can send a party to look for our remains."

"Yes, sir."

"An' while you're there, you might as well lug back a parcel of sandwiches an' some lime juice. We don't need much to keep body an' soul together," I said. "As long as we've got a snack, we shall manage. Oh, an' wait a minute. Bring my binoculars with you."

"Yes, sir," said Barry.

"That's all—scoot!" I said briefly and to the point.

He scooted. I thought he'd fallen into another hole, or something, for it seemed ages before he came back. However, after about a couple of hours I heard a slight movement near-by. I had been keeping my eyes and ears pretty wide open, but hitherto I had seen nothing and heard nothing.

A shape loomed up near me.

Of course, you're beginning to think it was the shape of some enemy or other, aren't you? Sorry to disappoint you, but it wasn't. It was Barry. And he had come back loaded.

"Good man!" I said warmly. "Let me congratulate you on the way you crept along. You came up like a bally Red Indian. For a minute I thought you were one of the blacks!"

"No sign of gas now, sir," murmured Barry. "I didn't have to use the mask at all. I told the skipper to wait, and he said he couldn't understand."

"Probably thought I was off my head, eh?"

"Well, he did make some remark about there's no telling what you'll do next, sir," admitted Barry. "He's going to wait in the bay until this time to-morrow night—and if there's no sign of us then, he'll come and look for us."

"Good! That's one comfort, anyway," I grinned.

Barry had very thoughtfully brought along about six bottles of lime juice, all ready to drink, and a parcel of sandwiches which would last us for a week, judging by the size of it.

So we settled ourselves down to wait for the dawn.

While Barry had been gone I had spent some time in making a closer examination of the rocks. They appeared to be a kind of pile, and by working our way beneath a cross piece—through a space of about fifteen inches—we found ourselves in a very compact little cave.

There was plenty of room for the two of us there, and we were perfectly hidden. A horde of savages could come by within a yard, and never know that we were there. And we saw no reason why we shouldn't have a nap.

There were several hours before daylight,

and we turned in. In other words, we placed our backs against the rocks, and had a snooze. As a rule, I can wake up just when I like, and I timed myself to awaken just at dawn.

But something went wrong with the works.

Probably the stuffy air in that cave. Anyhow, it was broad daylight when I did open my eyes. Barry was very thoughtfully using my left shoulder as a pillow, and he was making musical noises with his mouth.

The sun was streaming in through the cracks of our wonderful edifice. I judged that dawn must have occurred an hour earlier. I seized Barry by the shoulder and gave him a shove—much less than he deserved.

"Wake up, you idiot!" I said severely. "What's the idea of usin' me as a couch? Rouse yourself!"

Barry was soon wide awake, and then we proceeded to crawl out through the front doorway. It was, indeed, the only exit. And I was the first to go. Barry came hard on my heels.

I didn't venture out too far at first.

Gazing cautiously round, with only my head protruding out of the hole, I saw a most unpleasant vista of rocks. There was just a corner of the palm trees showing within my line of vision. But there was not the slightest sign of any human being.

I became bold, and edged further out of my shell. And as I turned my attention to the right, on which I knew the precipice to be, I gave a kind of gulp. For, to tell the truth, I was staggered by what I saw.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIT!

(Lord Dorrimore continues.)



GREAT Scotland Yard!" I said blankly.

Now, I think it's a pretty well-known fact that it takes something of an extra-special nature to startle me. I've seen so many queer things in my time, in all parts of the world, that I'm not the kind of chap to become amazed over a trifle.

But this wasn't a trifle—oh, no!

I'll just try to describe what I saw. I crawled a bit further out, so that Barry could see, too. And he was nearly struck dumb.

As we had known during the hours of darkness, we were practically on the edge of a precipice. But we didn't know that we had been so close. For it was there, within three feet—a sheer, smooth edge.

Bending slightly over, we gazed out.

And it made my heart give a bit of a leap. I looked down for a distance of between four hundred and five hundred feet—a clean, straight drop! That precipice was as smooth as the wall of a house.

It was of rock, without a single niche and

without a single crevice. The rock was so smooth that it looked as if it had been sandpapered and polished. And Barry gave a queer little sound.

"Gives you a rummy feelin', eh?" I asked.

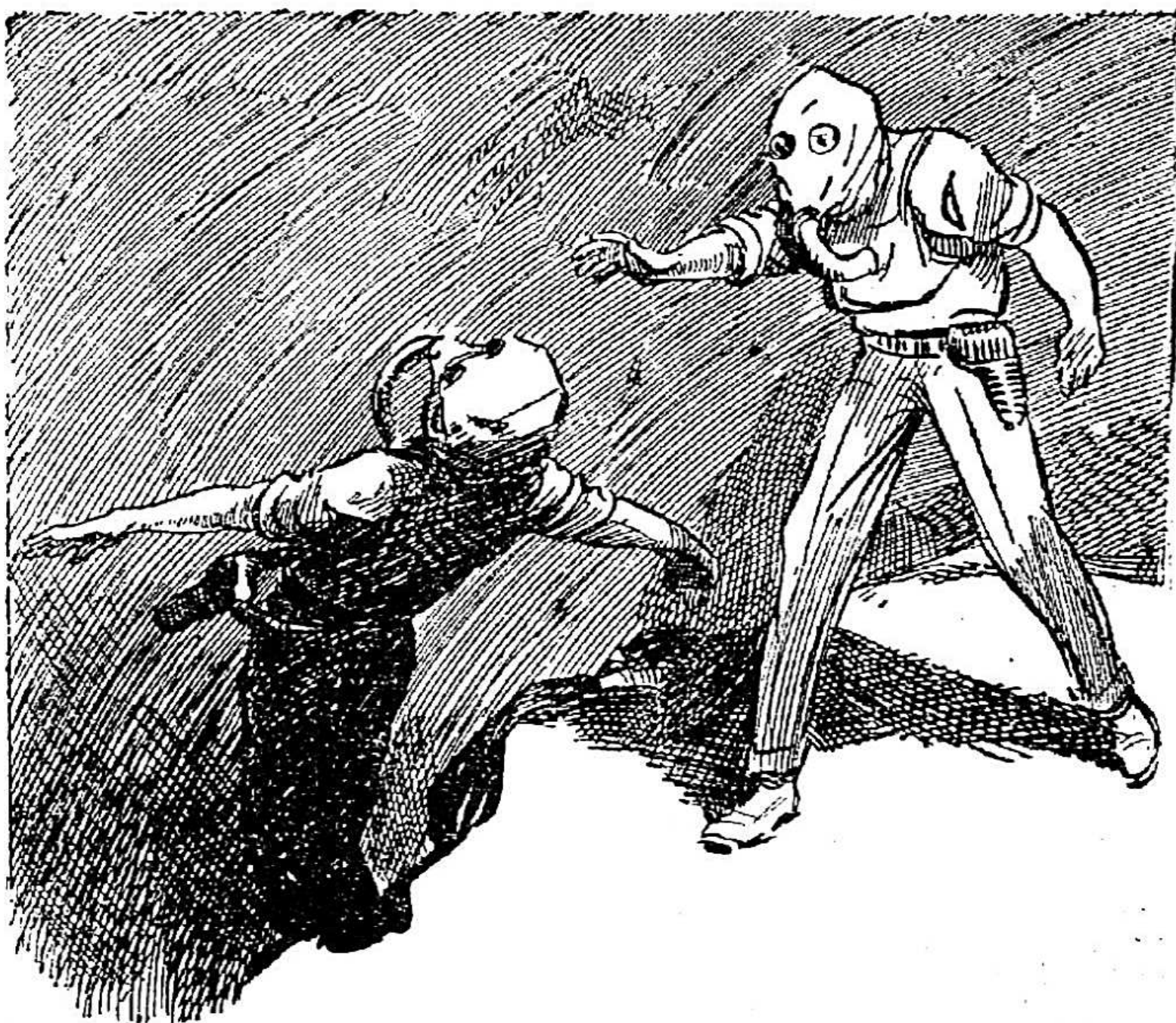
"By Heaven, it does, sir!" muttered Barry, who had gone white. "I was just thinking of that step I took last night, sir!"

"Phew! Yes, you were nearly over!" I said, with a whistle.

"I don't suppose I shall ever have a narrower escape," said my companion. "Why, I can't understand how I'm alive—but I think I can, after all. It was your doing, sir—you pulled me back."

"Fiddlesticks!" I growled.

"I had one foot right over!" went on Barry, with a shudder. "If I had hurtled down to the bottom



"To be exact, he nearly stepped off the edge of a precipice. It was only by a twisting movement that he saved himself. And even then he might have gone if I hadn't been near enough to seize him."

"You didn't, so why think about it?" I interrupted. "An' look down there! By gad! This is gettin' supremely interestin'. I don't think I've ever seen anythin' quite so remarkable as this before."

"No; it's—it's amazing, sir!"

Barry spoke in an awed voice—as well he might. Staring out over a wider expanse, we could see that we were looking down into a deep pit. It was very different from what we had expected.

The place was, in every sense of the word, a pit. It was about five hundred feet deep, and the sides of it were absolutely sheer the whole way round. If you can imagine any ordinary well about two miles long by a mile wide, then you've got an idea of this spot.

So far as we could see, there was no way down into the place. Not a stairway, nor any break in the rocks where a descent could have been made. And I'm quite sure that the bottom of the pit was below sea-level.

That was the extraordinary part of it.

Moreover, there was green down there—vegetation! A strip of ground two miles long by a mile wide—a pretty big piece. And practically through the centre of it ran a stream, with grass on the banks, and small, stunted trees. And there was one spot which looked amazingly like a patch of potatoes—for all the world similiar to an allotment.

"What—what can it mean, sir?" muttered Barry dazedly.

"Don't ask me; I don't know," I replied. "Wait a minute—I'm takin' a good look! An' that'll occupy some time."

From our point of vantage we could see everything—the whole pit, from one end to the other. There were buildings down there—wooden buildings. You don't believe me? Well, that's my misfortune; but I'm telling you the plain, straightforward truth.

At the very most, I had expected to see a kind of native village down in a hollow. But this pit, with its wooden buildings, staggered me. They were huts—just roughly constructed shacks.

And, more astonishing still, there were two or three tents! Yes, I'm not relying upon my imagination—real, civilised tents.

It seemed to me, looking down into that amazing gully, that no human beings could exist there. The heat ought to have been too awful to bear. But perhaps it was just the opposite to what I expected—possibly the place was cool, being protected from the glaring rays of the sun for a large part of the day.

For example, now that it was only just after dawn, the sun did not shine into this pit at all. It struck the precipice-like sides on one side, but the actual rays did not go to the bottom. At noonday the sun would

shine directly into the pit, but it could not last for long.

"I can't understand how it's possible to live, sir," exclaimed Barry, evidently thinking in the same way as myself. "They can't have an atom of breeze down there—even if a gale was blowing they wouldn't feel it."

"It's—queer!" I said slowly.

I have felt interested many times in my life, but this attracted me more than anything I could ever remember. So far, we had not seen the slightest sign of any human being. But we were not destined to wait for long.

About five minutes later smoke began to appear from one of the huts. There was life down there, at all events. A man appeared—he was joined by another. And I rubbed my eyes.

They were white men!

They were attired in trousers and cotton shirts, and without hats. Looking down from this height, it was very similar to staring into a street from the top of a skyscraper.

The men were like midgets. Even if they happened to glance up, they could not see us, for we only had our heads just over the edge of the cliff. We were lying flat on our faces, staring downwards.

"White men, sir," said Barry.

"Yes! an' pretty specimens at that," I said. "Through these binoculars they stand out clearly."

I was cautiously using the glasses, and I could see that the two men were apparently ruffians. Each wore a cartridge belt, including a holster, with a big revolver stuck into it.

For the life of us we couldn't possibly imagine who these men were, why they were there, and what possible reason they could have for being armed. But, again, we didn't have to wait long for enlightenment.

Other men appeared—four of them, armed with rifles. These men stood talking to the first two for a time, and then they went to some of the wooden shacks—carefully unlocking the doors.

To my astonishment, I could see through the glasses, that all the shacks had iron bars fitted over the windows. They were, indeed, like prisons. And from each shack came gangs of men.

I say gangs, and I mean gangs. They were chained together like convicts. Or, better still, like the unfortunate niggers in the old days of plantation slavery in the south.

"Gad!" I breathed. "Either we're dreamin', Barry, or else this is the most amazin' thing that ever happened on earth!"

Barry made no reply—he was too dazed.

There were two gangs—each one numbering about twenty men, and all the men being chained together by their feet. The men carried picks, shovels, and other implements.

Each gang was guarded by two of the warders. And these latter were armed with rifles. For any of them to escape was a sheer impossibility. The unfortunate wretches had not the slightest chance in the world.

Just think of their position!

Chained together, with armed men in charge of them, and incarcerated down in a pit with sheer sides nearly five hundred feet high! I rather wondered that they were chained together at all.

But then I came to the conclusion that there was one good reason for this.

There were about forty men, and only four guards. Armed though these latter were, it was quite on the cards for them to be overpowered if the prisoners took it into their heads to make a sudden rush.

Some might be killed in such an operation, but the majority would survive. But, by being chained up, the prisoners were helpless. Under no circumstances could they turn upon their captors.

And these prisoners were not black, either!

At least, not all of them. I could make out one or two dark skins, but the majority were white. At such a distance, it was not possible to judge very well, even with the binoculars. But I'm pretty sure that most of these forty prisoners were American and Mexican, or something like that. There were no South Sea Islanders at all, for the blacks were of the American negro type.

"Well, Barry, this beats me!" I said frankly. "But it's pretty sure that there's some demoniacal work goin' on here."

"There is, sir!" said Barry, taking a deep breath.

"An' what's the idea of it all?" I went on. "Slaves—in these modern times! Why, good gad! It's unheard of! It's appalling to think of! These poor brutes are in a livin' death!"

"In the pit itself, sir!" said Barry literally.

Before long the gangs were set to work. They were using their picks and shovels. I couldn't possibly understand what they were doing, and don't know even now. But I can guess that they were mining—probably for diamonds, or something like that. But, of course, I'm just guessing.

Our hearts ached as we looked down.

We had the whole day before us, and during that day we saw enough to fill us both with violent indignation. Those unfortunate prisoners were treated as badly as the negro slaves of the last century.

The slightest slackness in work, and they would be heavily struck with a rifle, or slashed with a whip. The whip, indeed, was being constantly brought into use to make the unfortunates work harder.

Towards midday one man collapsed—he seemed to go into a kind of faint. One of the guards kicked him brutally. The poor

man tried to rise, but failed. Again he was kicked.

But he was done for—and there he was left to lie, still chained to the others. I wanted to jump down in my fury, and knock every one of those guards to smithereens. That poor wretch was not released until two hours afterwards. Then he was unchained from the rest, and dragged into one of the huts.

Night came at last.

By this time, as you can guess, both Barry and I were feeling pretty sober. What we had seen during the day had given us such a lot to think about that we had very little time for conversation. And I was scheming all the time—wondering how I could do something to ferret out the truth of this mystery.

Even now I don't know why Barry and I were nearly gassed on our first visit. Perhaps we shall find out some day. But when darkness descended that night, we made our way down the hill, and reached the yacht without any untoward incident.

I have more than an idea that the yacht was watched all the time. But I'm sure that we were not seen. Those friendly rocks had hidden us, and we had been enabled to make our observations in private. Those men on the island hadn't the faintest idea that the Wanderer sailed away with the full knowledge of what was going on.

I had half an idea of taking a big party ashore.

But after due consideration, I decided not to. For one thing, we had practically no arms on board, and only those two gas masks. Besides, we needed ropes, and pulleys, and all manner of other equipment to get down to the pit.

And so I came to a decision.

I would make straight for Los Angeles, get all sorts of stores on board, including masks and rifles and ropes, and then sail back. And I fully made up my mind to take you fellows with me.

That's why I brought you along, and we're due to arrive at this island some time to-morrow—in the evening, I expect. I can tell you straight from the shoulder that I mean to find out the absolute truth. And, what's more, we'll rescue those poor devils from their torture, and bring their persecutors to justice. It's impossible to believe that such a thing can be honest and above board.

Exactly what we shall find when we do arrive, I can't say. But there you are—that's the yarn. I didn't mean to make it quite so long, but I've squashed it into as short a space as I possibly could.

To-morrow we shall arrive—and then things will happen!

CHAPTER V.

WHAT WILLY DISCOVERED!

(Nipper Resumes.)



LORD DORRIMORE came to a stop, and took a sip of water.

There was a kind of hush in the saloon of the Wanderer. Nobody spoke. We could hear the gentle throbbing of the engines, far below.

Dorrie had commenced his yarn in a light strain, but towards the end he had grown more serious—he had almost cut out the use of his usual slang, and his voice had taken on a sterner, icier tone.

Nelson Lee was the first to speak.

"Dorrie, if any other man had told me this yarn, I shouldn't have believed him," he said quietly. "It is altogether too fantastic—too wildly improbable. But I know you, old man. Whatever your faults, misrepresentation or exaggeration is not one of them."

"Thanks," said Dorrie. "Well, what do you think of the affair?"

"But—but it seems so startling, sir!" I broke in, before the gov'nor could reply. "A pit like that—five hundred feet deep! With slaves working in gangs! And all chained together!"

"By George!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "Just wait till I get there! I'll jolly well biff those brutes on the nose!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Taking everything into consideration, boys, I don't think it would be advisable for any of you to land on this island," he said dubiously. "There is work for men here—not for boys."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the juniors.

"In fact, Dorrie, it was wrong of you to bring these juniors at all!" continued Nelson Lee. "If I had known the exact nature of this trip I should never have given my consent."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"I knew that!" he said calmly. "That's why I insisted upon sayin' nothin' until we were well out to sea. But don't you worry, old man. I'll see that the boys don't come to any harm. Trust me for that. It'll do 'em good to have a little excitement."

"Excitement—yes," agreed Lee. "But there is more than a chance that there will be real, stark peril here."

"I've got hundreds of gas masks on board, rifles, ropes, and all manner of other contrivances," said Dorrie. "Of course, I'll leave you to deal with affairs, now, Lee. You're the commander-in-chief, don't forget. And I'll take orders from you, an' do as I'm told, like a good little boy."

Soon afterwards some of the juniors went on deck, by themselves.

And nothing else could be talked of but Dorrie's story.

"Personally, I reckon it's a lot of bun-kum!" said Gulliver, with a sniff. "Dorrie

must have dreamed it, or something like that—"

Biff!

"Yow—yaroooh!" howled Gulliver wildly.

"That's for casting an insult at Lord Dorrimore!" said Handforth, as he rubbed his knuckles. "You cad! Are you trying to make out that Dorrie's a liar?"

"Pretty free with your fists, ain't you?" snapped Gulliver. "I've got a right to my opinion, I suppose? Who ever heard such a yarn? Slaves—down in a pit! It's all rot!"

"Steady on, Handy; don't start fighting!" exclaimed Pitt, as Handforth pushed his sleeves back. "After all, Gulliver's justified—"

"What!" shouted Handforth. "Do you agree with him?"

"No, I don't," said Pitt. "But, at the same time, the story's almost incredible, and there's plenty of excuse for anybody being dubious. Personally, I believe every word of it, but you can't expect all of us to be the same."

Handforth grunted.

"If any of these rotters say bad things about their host, I'll jolly well treat them as they deserve!" he said. "And when we get to that island, I'll go ashore and smash up those cads!"

"The men in charge of the slave gangs?" asked Willy.

"Yes."

"Oh, draw it mild, Ted!" said Handforth minor. "You're a bit of a fire-eater, I know, but you can't fight against men who are armed with rifles! Be reasonable!"

Handforth glared at his younger brother.

"Are you suggesting that I'm unreasonable?" he roared.

"Yes."

"Why, you—you—"

"The fact is, I'm worried about you," went on Willy, with concern. "Unless you're looked after, you'll go and get yourself into a mess—as usual! I think we shall have to appoint a guard, to see that you don't get loose! There's no telling what mad things you'll be up to."

Handforth slowly turned back his sleeve.

"You've been asking for a good hiding ever since we came on this ship!" he said grimly. "I've delayed giving it to you, but now the time has come. I'm going to biff you!"

"Bully!" said Willy.

Handforth turned red. If there was one thing he hated more than another, it was being referred to as a bully.

"Why can't you hit one of your own size?" went on Willy. "All you can talk about is biffing me! I know jolly well that these other chaps won't allow you to bully me! They've got a better sense of justice—"

"By George!" breathed Handforth thickly. "It's not a question of bullying at all! When a cheeky kid deserves a hiding, he gets it! And you're going to get yours now!"

"Oh, am I?" sneered Willy, with heavy sarcasm. "Come on, you chaps! Protect me! You ain't going to allow any bullying, I suppose?"

The crowd of Remove fellows eyed Willy coldly.

"You deserve a hiding," said De Valerie.

"What?" gasped Willy, in alarm.

"After all, it's not right of you to talk to your major like that," said Pitt. "I'll cheerfully stand by, and see Handforth biff you. Go it, old man—spank him!"

Willy felt very much the same as a man feels when financial troubles envelop him. The main thing he had relied upon for support was withdrawn. His props were gone, so to speak. The Remove had failed him!

"Now!" said Handforth, in a voice that meant business.

Willy decided that discretion was the better part of valour. There was only one thing to be done—and he did it. It wasn't pleasant, and it wasn't dignified. But it certainly had the advantage of being safe.

Master Willy bolted.

He fled like a rabbit, whizzing along the deck, dodging several juniors in rapid succession.

"Hold him!" howled Handforth.

But there was about as much chance of holding Willy as holding a freshly landed eel. He squirmed round a corner, and vanished like a Jack-in-the-box down one of the companionways. Handforth rushed after him like a bull.

And Willy didn't stop, either. He knew that he had goaded his elder brother into a really dangerous condition. Once caught, he would suffer to the fullest extent for his temerity.

And so Willy went right down—from deck to deck, until he finally lost himself in some of the lower passages. He was now among the stores, where everything was quiet and still.

But he could faintly hear Handforth blundering down in pursuit.

He went down even further. Fleeing along a passage, he was rather astonished to see a kind of trapdoor open in the middle of the floor. It was propped up, as though somebody had recently gone right down into the very bilge itself.

And, more surprising still, a faint kind of light was coming upwards.

Instinctively, Willy went very slowly, and crept up to the trapdoor. It seemed to him that all was not right. He bent down and

(Continued on page 15)

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No. 38.

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August 25, 1923



THE SILVER DWARF



In this amazingly clever detective story, NELSON LEE is matched against the brains and subtle skill of Professor Mark Rymer, an exceedingly dangerous type of intellectual criminal—inhuman, crafty, resourceful and daring

FOR NEW READERS.

If the rascally cousin of the late Lord Easington, Professor Mark Rymer, can destroy certain documents hidden inside the silver effigy, known as the Silver Dwarf, he will inherit his cousin's title and wealth. There is a son living by a secret marriage of the late peer, evidence of which is contained in the documents aforementioned. So far, the Silver Dwarf has eluded the clutching fingers of the unscrupulous professor. Nelson Lee, who is determined to frustrate Rymer's evil designs, is also in quest of the effigy.

After many exciting adventures, the detective and his rival discover that the Silver Dwarf has gone to Colombo. Both set off to Ceylon by the same boat. Lee gets left behind at Port Said. The professor reaches Colombo, and traces the effigy to a tea planter, who refuses to have any dealings with Rymer. The latter then plots to attack the planter and raid his bungalow.

(Now read on.)

THE DESERTED BUNGALOW.

THE five men stole towards the house, and halted at the foot of the steps which led up to the verandah. Rawana pointed to the window on the left of the entrance hall.

"Dat Massa Howard's bedroom," he said, still sticking to his pidgin English, of which he was inordinately proud. "Rama and Happeosamy, and Meenatchy and Kangarny will stay here and watch dat window. Me and Ramasamy will go round to de back and kill de servants."

"Kill dem!" said Kangarny, in tones of surprise. "But de Inglese said we make prisoners of dem, and carry dem into de stables."

"Ayo, Sarmy! De Inglese too white-livered!" said Rawana impatiently. "We going to have no foolishness 'bout carrying dem to de stables. We kill dem, den dey tell no tales! Me and Ramasamy kill de servants, den we creep into dat room and kill Massa Howard and him wife. If dey try to 'scape trough dat window, you dere to stop dem—savvy?"

Without waiting for his companion's

reply he beckoned to Ramasamy, and the two stole away. With a stealth that would not have disgraced Red Indians, they crept down the covered passage, and reached the verandah which led to the servants' bedrooms. These were two in number, and were situated at the far end of the block. Rawana halted outside the door of one, and signed to Ramasamy to take his stand outside the door of the other.

"You watch me, and do as me do," he whispered.

He waited until Ramasamy had reached the door of the second bedroom, then he whipped out his knife, and glanced at his confederate to see that he had done the same. For several seconds the two men crouched outside the bedroom doors, and then Rawana turned the handle and flung the door wide open.

A stalwart-looking native, with the customary loincloth round his waist, was lying on an iron bedstead in the farthest corner of the room. Roused by the sound of the opening door, he sat up with a low, hoarse cry of alarm.

Dark as it was, Rawana's eyes were keen enough to take in every detail. In two strides he cleared the space between the door and the bed, flung himself on the scarce-awakened servant, and buried his knife in his breast. A long-drawn, gurgling moan vibrated through the room, and all was over.

Flushed with triumph, Rawana turned, with the object of rejoining his confederate. In the doorway he was met by Ramasamy.

"Dere somefink wrong!" the latter whispered. "Me jump into de oder room, but find nobody dere! It am empty!"

"Empty!" echoed Rawana. "Me no understand. Massa Howard have two servants. Dere am one." He pointed to the lifeless figure on the bed. "Where am de oder?"

He stole into the second bedroom, and speedily convinced himself that Ramasamy had spoken the truth.

"Him not dere, for sure!" he whispered. "We go look for him."

They crossed the courtyard, and cautiously explored the bedrooms on the opposite side. They were all unoccupied. In swift succession they entered every room in the house, including Mr. Howard's bedroom; but still with the same result. Except for themselves and the murdered native, the house was deserted!

Rawana scratched his head in bewilderment. Then a sudden idea occurred to him. He rushed across to the stables, which were some little distance from the house. Mr. Howard, he knew, possessed three horses, one of which was exclusively used by his wife.

A glance showed Rawana that only one horse was in the stable, and that both Mr. and Mrs. Howard's saddles were absent from their accustomed pegs!

"Me understand now," he said, return-

ing to Ramasamy. "Massa Howard and him wife gone to pay one visit, and dey take one of de servants wid dem. I hear in Ulapane, one, two days ago, dat Massa Macpherson give one party to-night. Dey gone dere, I think! We better teil de Englese afore dey come back."

He communicated the news to the four men he had stationed in front of the house. Then the whole half-dozen wended their way to the garden gate, and reported their discoveries to Mark Rymer.

"Then the sooner I set about searching the house the better," said the professor. "Let two of your men mount guard at this gate, and two at the gate on the other side of the garden. You and Ramasamy had better post yourselves on the road below. As soon as I have found the silver image, I will pay you your money, and then you can loot the house. If Mr. and Mrs. Howard return before I have finished, you must make them prisoners, and keep them out of the way until my search is ended."

Rawana disposed his men in accordance with these directions, and a moment or two later Mark Rymer stood in Harvey Howard's bungalow.

WHAT THE PROFESSOR FOUND.

HAVING provided himself with a hatchet and a hand-lamp, the professor began his search for the Silver Dwarf by thoroughly exploring the entrance hall.

From the entrance hall he passed into the dining-room. From the dining-room he returned to the hall, and crossed into Mr. Howard's bedroom. From Mr. Howard's bedroom he stepped out on to the verandah, and made his way into the bedrooms at the back. Finally he peered into the bathroom and the kitchen, and even went so far as to pay a visit to the servants' bedrooms.

The result in each and every case was the same. The Silver Dwarf was not there.

So far he had sought for it on tables, shelves, and brackets, on the tops of chests of drawers, on mantelpieces, and so forth. He now set out on a second tour of exploration, in the course of which he opened and examined every drawer and cupboard and wardrobe in the house, smashing open those that were locked with his hatchet.

Not content with this, he turned out all Mrs. Howard's trunks and her husband's bags and portmanteaus. With the aid of a bunch of keys which he found in a writing-desk—which he had broken open with the hatchet—he opened Mr. Howard's private safe, and overhauled its contents. But his second tour of exploration was no more successful than the first. The Silver Dwarf was nowhere to be found. It was not in the house.

As this bitter truth forced itself into Mark Rymer's mind, a spasm of rage and despair convulsed his parchment-like face. For several minutes he paced to and fro in the

dining-room, raving like a madman, and consigning both Mrs. Howard and Nelson Lee to the deepest depths of perdition. Then all at once a brilliant idea occurred to him, and despair gave place to new-born hope.

"By Jove, I know what she's done with it!" he exclaimed. "When she received Lee's message, she took the Silver Dwarf to Colombo and deposited it in the bank. The bank, of course, would give her a receipt for it. If I can find the receipt, I can go to the bank with a forged letter from Mrs. Howard and claim the Silver Dwarf before Nelson Lee arrives!"

He hastened back to the safe, and hurriedly set to work to examine the various papers it contained. Failing to find any bank receipt in the safe, he turned his attention to the writing-desk. Here, again, he failed to find any bank receipt; but, just as he was turning away, his eyes fell on three cablegrams lying in one of the pigeon-holes, and fastened together with a thin rubber band. One of the cablegrams was folded in such a way that part of the message was visible, and the last words were "Nelson Lee."

"These are the cablegrams he sent to warn them of my coming," he muttered, as he drew the little packet out of the pigeon-hole. "I may as well see what he has told them."

He ripped off the rubber band, and tossed it aside. He unfolded the topmost slip of paper, and found that it was a cablegram which had been despatched from Marseilles on March 8th. Its contents were as follows:

"Mrs. Howard, Ulapane, via Colombo, Ceylon. Statuette given to you by your brother contains important documents. Leaving here to-day by s.s. Ormuz. Arrive Colombo 25th. Do not part with statuette, or allow anybody to examine it, or give anybody any information about it until I arrive. Would suggest you deposit statuette with bankers for safe keeping.—NELSON LEE."

"I knew it!" muttered the professor under his breath. "Without a doubt she has taken his advice, and the Silver Dwarf is now at the bank."

He unfolded the second cablegram, and even as he did so a savage oath burst from his lips. It was signed, like the first, by "Nelson Lee," and was dated "Port Said, March 15th." It was on the night of the 14th of March that Mark Rymer had pushed the detective over the edge of the wharf at Port Said; consequently, it was evident that Lee had escaped drowning.

This second cablegram ran as follows:

"Delayed by accident. Leave here to-morrow by s.s. Victor Hugo. Arrive Colombo 27th. English professor named Rymer will probably call on you about 25th or 26th, and

ask to see statuette. On no account allow him to see it, or to learn anything about it. Explain all when I see you.—NELSON LEE."

The professor glanced at a calendar which was hanging on the wall above the writing-desk. It displayed the date March 25th. It was now about half-past one on the morning of the 26th. And Nelson Lee would arrive in Ceylon on the 27th!

"Let him come!" muttered the professor. "I have twenty-four hours at least—probably thirty-six. If I can only find that cursed bank receipt, I have ample time to secure the Silver Dwarf before he arrives. In the meantime, there's this other cablegram. Where is it from, I wonder?"

Never doubting that it was another message from Nelson Lee, he unfolded the slip. No sooner had he glanced at it, however, than he staggered back.

For this is what he read:

"Handed in at Sydney, New South Wales. March 23rd.

"To Howard, Ulapane, Ceylon.—Arrived to-day. All well. Statuette found in my cabin after leaving Colombo. Tom returning to England in about a month. Will bring statuette, and leave it at Colombo. Letter follows.—ROBINSON."

For several minutes the professor stared at the cablegram in mingled bewilderment and dismay. Then the truth of the matter dawned upon him.

Mrs. Howard had evidently left the Silver Dwarf behind her when she had disembarked from the Ormuz at Colombo. A friend of hers, named Robinson, who was travelling in the same boat, had found the statuette in his cabin, and had taken it on with him to Australia. Upon arriving at Sydney, this friend had wired to Mrs. Howard, telling her that his brother was leaving Sydney in about a month's time, and would drop the Silver Dwarf at Colombo on his way to England.

Mark Rymer picked up the cablegram, and glanced at the date again.

"Mr. Robinson cabled on the 23rd of March—two days ago," he mused. "He says that his brother will start from Sydney with the Silver Dwarf in about a month's time. That means that his brother will leave about the 23rd of April. It is now the 26th of March. It is nineteen days' voyage from here to Sydney. If I can leave Colombo on the 27th by the same boat that brings Nelson Lee, I can be in Sydney by the 18th of April, which will give me five clear days to find Mr. Robinson and secure the Silver Dwarf before his brother starts for England. Good! That's what I'll do."

Suddenly an expression of annoyance crossed his face. As the reader may remember, he had borrowed five hundred pounds from Solomon Barnascone in Gibraltar. His expenses in Gibraltar and Morocco, including the heavy bribes he had

paid to Achmed and the Kaid of Kelelin, and his passage-money to Ceylon, had reduced this five hundred pounds to a trifle over sixty-five.

He had promised Rawana and his five accomplices a hundred rupees apiece for their help that night. If he kept his promise he would be left with under twenty-eight pounds.

"It can't be done!" he growled. "If I pay those beggars what I promised them, I shall be stranded in Colombo, without enough money to pay my passage to Sydney. But why should I pay them? Why shouldn't I quietly slip away?"

He stole to the door, and cautiously peered out into the inky darkness. All was quiet outside, but just for an instant he caught the gleam of a flickering lantern-light, less than half a mile away.

"Ten to one that's Mr. and Mrs. Howard coming back!" he gasped. "I haven't a moment to lose!"

He darted out of the house, and glided across to the stables. He saddled the one remaining horse, and was just in the act of leading him out of the stable, when the sound of firing fell on his ears.

The planter and his wife, accompanied by the coolie, had fallen in with the two men he had posted on the lower road. Rawana had fired at Mr. Howard, but had missed by a hairsbreadth. The planter had replied with a couple of shots, one of which had penetrated Ramasamy's brain. The coolie had rushed back to the "lines" to arouse the loyal tea-pickers. Rawana had taken to his heels, partly to warn Mark Rymer, and partly to obtain his promised pay.

The professor, of course, knew nothing of this. All he knew was that the Howards had evidently returned. Whether they were killed, or whether they succeeded in driving their assailants off, was a matter of no moment to him. In either case it was clearly to his advantage to get away at once.

He sprang into the saddle, and galloped off in the opposite direction to that from which the sound of firing had proceeded. Before his horse had covered twenty yards, however, the dusky figure of Rawana came flying after him, brandishing his revolver, and yelling:

"Ayo! Ayo! Massa Ingieese! Where you going? You no pay me my money yet!"

The professor's reply was a mocking laugh, which stung the native into sudden fury.

Without pulling up, he levelled his revolver, and emptied the remaining chambers at the half-seen figure of the horseman in front. But the darkness marred his aim, and the shots flew harmlessly over the professor's head. In one respect, however, his action was not barren of result. Startled by the fusillade, the horse contrived to get the bit between his teeth, and the next moment he was flying

through the night with the speed of an express train.

Superb horseman though he was, the professor had all his work cut out to retain his seat, and it was not until nearly half an hour had passed that he succeeded in getting the animal under control again.

By that time they had left Ulapane far behind, and had penetrated into the depths of that vast primeval forest which lies to the south of the mountain capital of Kandy. How far they were from the nearest habitation or the nearest town the professor could not even guess, whilst the darkness was so intense that he could not see his hand in front of his face.

"It would be madness to ride any farther to-night," he muttered to himself, as he reined in his trembling horse. "The probability is that I should only ride round and round in a circle, with the added chance of falling in with a panther. I must bivouac here to-night, and resume my journey in the morning."

He dismounted, and hobbled his horse with the reins; then collected several armfuls of brushwood, and kindled a blazing fire.

"After all, I haven't done so badly to-night," he mused. "I've found out where the Silver Dwarf is, and I've got away without my identity being discovered."

With which reflection he threw himself down in front of the fire, and was presently fast asleep.

THE TIC-POLONGA.

THE ruddy light of an eastern dawn was stealing down through the interlacing branches of the mighty trees around Mark Rymer's mossy couch. The professor was still sleeping, his head pillowed on his arm, and his face upturned to the sky. His fire had burnt itself out, and was represented by a smouldering heap of powdery ash. His horse was contentedly cropping the patua some fifteen or twenty yards away.

Suddenly the sound of a snapping twig was heard, and a startled sunbird rose out of a neighbouring bush and winged its way adown the forest. A moment later the bushes parted, and a dusky face, illumined by two gleaming eyes, peered through at the sleeping professor.

It was Rawana. All through the long, dark night he had followed the trail of Mark Rymer's horse, intent on having his revenge on the man who had played him false.

A diabolical grin spread over his face when he saw that the professor was sleeping. His hand stole into his waist-cloth, and the slanting beams of the rising sun flashed bright on the blade of a knife.

With his weapon in his upraised hand, Rawana stole from behind the bush, and crept towards his unsuspecting victim. Then suddenly, with a gasp of alarm, he halted, and stood spellbound, for at that

instant a large snake, whose velvety skin was decorated with dark oval spots, glided through the neighbouring undergrowth, and moved towards Mark Rymer.

It was the tic-polonga, the deadliest snake in Ceylon, one bite from whose fangs means certain and sudden death.

In fascinated stupefaction, Rawana saw the snake glide over to the sleeping professor. It wriggled over his chest, hissing softly to itself meanwhile, and darting out its tongue with a rapidity that was positively bewildering.

Rymer's doom would have been sealed. No one was better aware of all this than Mark Rymer himself. Yet never a sound escaped his tightly-drawn lips, never a muscle of his body contracted or relaxed, never a feature of his marble-like face quivered or twitched. Like a statue carved in stone, he lay motionless, rigid, breathless, whilst the venomous reptile wriggled to and fro across his chest, and peered into his face with its glittering, blood-red eyes.

An outsider would have viewed such

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"It all up wid him now!" gasped Rawana. And even as he uttered the words Mark Rymer awoke.

He opened his eyes, to find the tic-polonga's head within half a foot of his face, whilst behind the snake, less than a dozen yards away, stood the dusky-hued Rawana, his knife in his still uplifted hand.

One cry from the professor, one movement of his outstretched limbs, and all would have been over. The venomous head of the startled snake would have cleft the air with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, the poisonous fangs would have left their tiny puncture in his cheek, and Mark

stupendous self-control with feelings of unstinted admiration. Not so Rawana, however. To Rawana the professor's marvellous presence of mind was exasperating to the last degree. He wanted to see the tic-polonga bury its fangs in the Englishman's cheek, and he knew that if the professor continued to lie perfectly still the reptile would glide away without attacking him. He determined, therefore, to startle the snake with a sudden noise, in the hope that it would strike—as a snake generally does when it is started—at the object nearest to it, which would be Mark Rymer's face.

With this end in view Rawana suddenly

let out a short, sharp cry. Instead of striking at Mark Rymer, however, the tie-polonga swung round its head with an angry hiss, and glared in the direction from which the cry had proceeded.

This was Mark Rymer's chance. In the twinkling of an eye he shot out his hands, grasped the snake immediately behind the head, and leaped to his feet.

Furious at the failure of his plan, Rawana uttered a savage yell, and darted forward, knife in hand. Quick as thought, the professor flung up his arm and hurled the snake into the native's face. With a piercing shriek, Rawana dropped his knife and staggered back. The tie-polonga had wound itself around his throat and had bitten him on the temple. For a second or two he plucked at his throat in delirious frenzy; then he threw up his arms and sank lifeless at the professor's feet, whilst the tie-polonga, still hissing softly to itself, unwound its coils from its victim, and swiftly glided away.

"Safe!"

The word burst from Mark Rymer's lips with the shrillness of a woman's scream. Then his overstrained nerves gave way, and he sank to the ground trembling violently.

In ten minutes, however, he had quite regained his composure, and realised that he was ravenously hungry.

"Wonder if this blackguard carried any areca-nut about him?" he muttered.

He rolled Rawana over, and thrust his hands into the folds of his waist-cloth. The first thing he found was the revolver which he himself had given to the native the night before. He examined it, and found that the cylinder was full of empty cartridge-cases. He shook them out, and reloaded the weapon with half a dozen loose cartridges he was carrying in his pocket. Then he groped in the waist-cloth again and presently drew out a small metal box, in which were several betel-leaves, and three or four slices of areca-nut.

Nine-tenths of the natives in the East carry these commodities, which are used for chewing, and which gradually, in the course of time, dye the teeth a brilliant crimson.

Having mixed himself a quid by the simple process of wrapping a slice of the nut in one of the leaves, the professor thrust it into his cheek with a grunt of satisfaction. It would at any rate partially stave off the pangs of hunger.

"And now for Kandy," he muttered to himself, as he caught the horse and unhobbled him. "It can't be more than thirty miles at the outside, so that I ought to be there before sunset. Where's the sun? South-south-west, at a guess. And Kandy lies to the north. Good! Then all I've got to do is to turn my back on the sun, and strike a bee-line through the forest."

Suiting the action to the word, he sprang into the saddle, and rode away towards the north. For upwards of an hour all went well; then suddenly his horse pulled up with a shudder of terror, and began to tremble in every limb. A moment later a faint and almost imperceptible rustling was heard, and the next instant, to Mark Rymer's consternation, a huge black leopard bounded out of a neighbouring bush, sprang towards him with a low, fierce snarl, and alighted on the horse's neck.

The professor slipped out of the saddle and whipped out his revolver. By that time, however, the leopard had buried its fangs in the horse's neck, and before Mark Rymer could fire, the terrified steed broke into a furious gallop, and was quickly lost to sight.

Cursing his ill fortune, the professor resumed his journey on foot. After hours of toilsome wandering, he chanced on a bridle-path, which ultimately led him to a small village. Here he obtained a guide, and an hour before midnight found himself at last in Kandy, where, completely exhausted, he limped into the Queen's Hotel and engaged a bed.

HARVEY HOWARD'S PERIL.

AT a quarter to eleven the following morning Mark Rymer left the Queen's Hotel and sauntered across to the railway station.

"When's the next train to Colombo?" he asked.

"One just due, sir," replied the booking-clerk. "She's signalled now."

"Good! First-class single, please."

He received his ticket, and when, a few moments later, the train came in, he took his seat in the refreshment-car.

At eleven o'clock the guard's whistle sounded, and the train resumed its journey towards the coast.

There were several tea and coffee planters in the refreshment-car. Two of them were sitting at a table behind the professor, and presently he heard one of them mention the name of Harvey Howard. Instantly he pricked up his ears and listened eagerly.

"No, I haven't heard anything of it," said one of the planters. "When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning," was the reply. "Howard and his wife had been spending the evening at Macpherson's. They returned to Ulapane about half-past one, and just as they were nearing their bungalow they were fired at by a couple of natives. Neither of them was hit; but Howard shot one of the rascals through the head, and the other took to his heels, and got away."

"Have they found any clue to the scoundrel's identity?"

"Yes. The fellow whom Howard shot was a Tamil named Ramasamy. The other fellow—so Howard believes—was one of his foremen, whom he had dismissed a few days previously for drunkenness and theft."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the train arrived at Peradeniya, which was the junction between the main line from Kandy to Colombo, and the branch line from Ulapane. As the train pulled up, the professor happened to glance out of the window, and even as he did so his eyes fell on the trim-built figure of Harvey Howard, who was on the platform, evidently waiting for the train.

Almost before Mark Rymer had time to hide himself behind his newspaper—the young tea-planter stepped into the restaurant-car.

"Talk of angels—you know the rest!" said one of the planters, as Howard seated himself between them, behind the listening professor. "I was just telling Johnson about that affair at the bungalow yesterday morning. Any fresh developments?"

"Rather!" said Howard. "As soon as my coolies heard what had happened they formed themselves into a search-party, and they finally came across Rawana's body in the heart of the forest."

"Dead?"

"Yes, bitten by a tie-polonga. The stolen horse was found, or, at least, the remains of it, were found, a few miles farther on. The poor brute had evidently been attacked by a leopard, or a panther."

"There's no doubt, I suppose, that the whole affair was got up by Rawana in a spirit of revenge for his dismissal?"

"Well, I'm not sure about that," said Howard, lowering his voice. "The fact of the matter is that my wife and I have become involved in a kind of duel that is taking place between Nelson Lee, the great detective, and a fellow of the name of Rymer. And we're both inclined to think that the attack on the bungalow was part and parcel of Rymer's operations."

"Egad! This is interesting, if you like!" said Johnson. "Is it a secret, old man, or may we hope to hear particulars?"

"No, it isn't exactly a secret," said Howard, lowering his voice to such a pitch that the professor had all his work cut out to hear what he was saying. "All the same, you'll quite understand that what I'm going to tell you is not intended for public consumption."

"Certainly—certainly!" said the two planters in one breath.

"Well, the facts of the case are these," continued Howard. "My wife, as you know, has recently returned from a visit to England. She sailed from London in the Himalaya, and she was met at Marseilles by her brother—Dr. Olsen—who gave her a small silver statuette, which had been presented to him by one of his Moorish friends. With all due respect to my wife, I'm bound to confess that she's rather a careless little woman, and when she got back to Ulapane she discovered that she had left the statuette on board the Himalaya!"

"A few days after her return we were astounded to receive a cablegram from Nelson Lee, informing us that the statuette contained important documents, and asking

us not to part with it until he arrived. He said that he was coming to Ceylon in the Ormuz, and would arrive at Colombo on the 25th of this month; but a week later we received another cablegram, stating that he had been delayed by an accident at Port Said, and would not arrive until to-day, the 27th.

"In his second message Mr. Lee informed us that we should probably receive a visit from a man named Rymer, and he warned us that on no account were we to let the fellow see the statuette, or give him any information about it.

"About a week after the receipt of Mr. Lee's second message we received a cablegram from Sydney, informing us that the statuette was safe, and telling us where it was. A day or two later Mr. Rymer—I beg his pardon, Professor Rymer—arrived at my house. He was evidently very keen on getting hold of the statuette before Nelson Lee arrived. Needless to say, I declined to give him any information. I did not even tell him that the statuette was not in our possession, and he went away in a towering rage.

"That very night my bungalow was attacked by the natives; my writing-desk was broken open, my safe was opened and overhauled, and every drawer and cupboard in the house was thoroughly ransacked; yet nothing was stolen. Doesn't that strike you as suspicious? Doesn't it look as though this fellow Rymer was at the bottom of the whole affair, and that he had raided the house, with the help of the natives, in the hope of finding the statuette?"

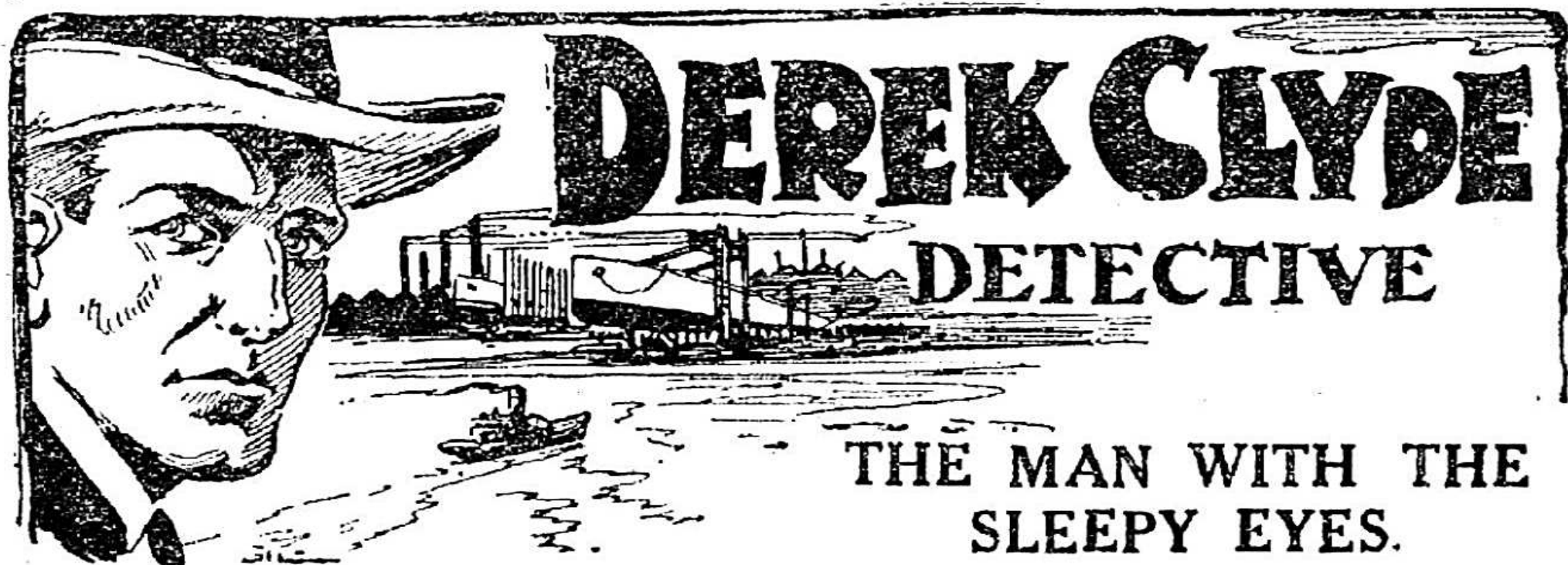
His companions agreed with this, and for the next three-quarters of an hour they discussed the theory in all its bearings. Then one of them asked Howard if he was going to Colombo.

"Yes," he replied; "I'm going to meet Nelson Lee. He's coming by the Victor Hugo, which is due to arrive at eight o'clock to-night. The steamer will remain at Colombo for twenty-four hours, and will leave for Australia at eight o'clock to-morrow night.

"Nelson Lee, of course, doesn't know that the statuette is not in our possession. He thinks, no doubt, that it is at my house at Ulapane. If nobody met him on his arrival he would leave Colombo for Ulapane by the first train in the morning—there's no train to-night, you know—and would arrive at my house to-morrow afternoon. As it is, I shall meet him to-night; I shall tell him where the statuette is, and he will then be able to proceed to Australia by the Victor Hugo to-morrow night."

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DEREK CLYDE

DETECTIVE

THE MAN WITH THE SLEEPY EYES.

THE PROFESSIONAL INSTINCT.

IT was not quite the height of the season, but Rothesay was busy, and Clyde was fortunate in obtaining a room in the Hotel Bellville, an imposing building overlooking the bay, where he registered as Blair McAlpin, of Inverness. For Mr. Derek Clyde was disguised as a country gentleman with a deep interest in sheep and fat cattle. He had come to Rothesay for a much needed holiday and rest, and it was to avoid the attention of his numerous friends—and not a few of his enemies—that he had adopted an impenetrable disguise.

In the dining-room he recognised among the visitors Lady Falkland, wife of a notorious war profiteer, arrayed in a vulgar display of jewels.

"What a fool the woman is!" Clyde reflected. "She's simply asking for trouble. And I hope she gets it!" he added almost vindictively.

"Oh, yes," Lady Falkland was saying, loudly enough to be heard across the room, "I always take my jewels with me. What's the use of them if you can't show them off? Pretty?" in answer to the remark of a demure little woman, a widow, Mrs. Waterson. "Fifteen thousand pounds!" she went on in an impressive whisper, which everybody heard. "But that's nothing. Some people think they're something, but I could buy and sell them with what I've brought with me!" And she glanced to see the other woman's look of envy.

But Mrs. Waterson merely nodded her head complacently. She was obviously one of those quiet, refined ladies, and Clyde had the impression that she was disgusted with Lady Falkland's swagger.

Clyde looked round the room to see what effect Lady Falkland's words had had on the other guests. In an instant he was all alert; the professional instinct asserted itself.

At a table to his right Rupert Gascoyne, a visitor from London, a man about forty, with sharp, clean-shaven face, and hawk-like nose; Charles Jermyn, a Birmingham

man, short, stout, with round, red face, and bull neck; and Andrew Bothwell, a visitor from Glasgow, very stout, with pointed beard and moustache, and heavy eyebrows, were seated.

Like Clyde, the three men were holidaying, and, from what he could gather, had never met in their lives before.

They were apparently engaged in an animated discussion, when Lady Falkland's shrill voice fell on their ears. Then Clyde observed a curious thing. Gascoyne's eyes met those of Jermyn, and an intangible communication seemed to pass between the two men. Bothwell, if he heard Lady Falkland's remark, was evidently too busy eating to look up.

Furtively Clyde watched the two men during the remainder of the meal. Were they signalling to each other? Did Bothwell observe anything? Clyde could not make up his mind, but the one swift glance from one to the other had aroused his suspicions.

After dinner the gentlemen went to the lounge. Purposely Clyde joined the three men, and allow himself to be drawn into a discussion with Gascoyne and Jermyn, while Bothwell, who apparently had wine as well as dined, nodded his approval of the arguments of both sides in the intervals between dozing.

A RUDE AWAKENING.

ON the whole they were a jolly company, and Clyde's suspicions gradually evaporated. In the genial atmosphere Lady Falkland and her jewels were forgotten.

But he was to get a rude awakening in the morning. Finding a number of valuable papers which Jock Nicol had inadvertently included in his luggage, he put them into an attache case, and went down to leave it with the manager.

He had only been speaking a few minutes, when Lady Falkland, in a dressing-gown, her hair dishevelled, a look, blended of rage, consternation, and bewilderment on her face, burst into the room.

"Mr. Rankin! Mr. Rankin! My diamond and ruby necklace! It's gone! It's gone!" she cried incoherently. "I have been robbed—drugged and robbed during the night! Send for the police! I'll have the whole hotel searched from attic to basement! The guests—you must——"

Her voice was roused to a screech. Mr. Rankin, at first absolutely petrified by the shock of her announcement, now regained control of himself, and touched her on the arm, while Derek Clyde looked on grimly, resisting the impulse to take a hand in the game.

"Hush!" he said. "You are quite sure you have been robbed? You haven't mislaid it?"

"Sure!" screamed the lady. "Haven't I told you I was drugged? Can't you do something instead of standing gaping at me?"

"I'll 'phone up Inspector Corrie," said Rankin. "Tell me how it happened. Have you lost anything else?"

In a rambling way, with many lamentations and objurgations interjected, Lady Falkland explained that, fortunately, her maid had taken the rest of her jewellery to her own room.

In the morning Lady Falkland had awakened with a headache, and there was a curious odour in the room. On summoning Marie, they discovered that the necklace and two or three valuable rings were gone. She had heard nothing during the night. She had implicit faith in her maid. She concluded with another demand that all the guests be paraded and searched.

"My husband," she stormed, "is a particular—a most particular—friend of the Prime Minister. I'll ask him if I am to be robbed with impunity. I came here——"

"But, my lady," interjected the distraught manager, "the local police——"

"The local police!" sniffed the indignant lady. "What can they do? Wire at once for Derek Clyde—at once! Do you hear?"

The manager murmured a soothing assurance, and Clyde took advantage of getting away after saying a few words of sympathy to Lady Falkland, who looked after him with suspicious eyes.

PUZZLING IT OUT.

"WELL, this is a nice pickle," Clyde reflected. "Seems to me I can't keep out of mysteries, no matter how I try. And I came here for a rest! Jove, how that woman can storm and rave! Looked as if she wanted to search my pockets, too. I can't say I am particularly sorry for her. She was asking for it. Yes, I think I'll leave this to Corrie, and see what sort of a job he makes of it."

But resolves are easier made than kept. During the forenoon, Clyde could not help revolving the whole circumstances of the theft of the necklace, and by a series of

eliminations he had narrowed down the possible thieves to two—Gascoyne and Jermyn. He had not forgotten the singularly communicative glances they had exchanged the evening before.

But which was the thief? And where was the necklace? Neither of the men had made the slightest attempt to leave the hotel. That was what puzzled Clyde as he sat on a bench on the lawn and watched the movements of Corrie and his men.

His thoughts were interrupted by the rustling sound of a skirt. He looked up, and saw Mrs. Waterson, more beautiful than ever, coming towards him, a dainty parasol held up to protect her head from the sun's rays.

"May I sit down, Mr. McAlpin?" she asked with a coquettish smile. "It's simply too warm for anything."

Clyde made room for her. The great detective was a man, and he felt a little bit flattered.

"This is an awful business about Lady Falkland's necklace, isn't it?" she began, her eyes turning towards Clyde's face.

They were clear, grey eyes, limpid and with all the innocence of a child's. Clyde avoided them, and, looking upwards, stared at the parasol. For a moment a puzzled look appeared on his face, but the next moment it had passed away as Mrs. Waterson chattered on.

A NEW DEVELOPMENT.

"OF course, everybody knows about it," she was saying, "and the police are in the hotel. It's very awkward for every one of us, for we're all under suspicion, you know. Probably they'll search our luggage. Will they, Mr. McAlpin? Dear me, I hope they won't search mine. I'll die of shame if they expose my rags!"—And she laughed lightly.

"Oh, I don't suppose they'll do that unless they have strong suspicion," Clyde assured her.

"Am I a suspicious character?" she laughed.

"Anything but."

"That's good of you," she said, and came a little closer. "Do you know," she went on a little more earnestly, laying her hand on his arm, "I don't believe it's stolen at all. Lady Falkland hasn't got the memory of a hen, and she's constantly forgetting where she puts things. Ask her maid. I won't be surprised if they get it when they search her room."

Bothwell sat on the other side of Mrs. Waterson, and again the subject of the necklace came up. But Clyde had had enough of it. There were one or two theories he wanted to think out and test. Besides, he had just seen Gascoyne and Jermyn proceed down the avenue, evidently going to the town. Murmuring an excuse about requiring tobacco, he followed them.

In a circumspect way and without being

observed he shadowed them for the next hour or so, but without result. By that time he was aware of a new and unexpected, and rather disconcerting, development. He himself was being shadowed.

There was nothing for it but to return to the hotel, where, in the smoking-room he sat puffing in silence, pondering the problem.

Towards night Gascoyne, Jermyn, and two other men were playing bridge in the smoke-room, and evidently deeply engrossed in their game.

"Don't look as if they'll move for some time," Clyde thought. "I'll risk it."

He went up to his bedroom, and taking from his bag an electric torch, slipped it into his pocket. Opening the window, he climbed out on to a narrow ledge, and went along until he came to the window of Gascoyne's room.

Softly raising the window he entered quietly, and making sure first that the door was locked, he began his search.

He ransacked a kit bag, examined the drawers of a dressing-table, and rummaged in the pockets of the clothes that hung in the wardrobe. He felt all over the carpet, looked under the mattress of the bed, shook the pillows, thrust his hand up the chimney, felt boots and shoes, but without success. No diamonds or rubies rewarded his quest.

A visit to Jermyn's room was equally fruitless. This time, finding the door open, he stole out on to the corridor. The sound of voices fell on his ears. In his hurry he slipped into a room, which he thought was his, but a loud snore convinced him of his mistake.

But he dare not go out! What was he to do? He flashed his electric torch on the bed, and then suppressed the gasp of astonishment that rose to his lips. The next instant a curious smile momentarily lighted up his face.

He waited for a few minutes longer until all was silent in the corridor. Then, softly turning the handle, he opened the door, and as silently closed it.

For a few moments he paused breathlessly in the corridor. Then, as he was about to turn towards his own room, something like an avalanche seemed to sweep down on him, and he was borne to the floor, two pairs of strong arms round him.

"Got you!" exclaimed a panting voice, and he found himself roughly dragged to his feet, two hands holding each wrist.

When Clyde looked up it was to meet the eyes of Inspector Corrie. For the moment he forgot the character he was playing, and attempted to free himself.

"Let go, you fool!" he cried angrily. "You don't understand!"

"Oh, don't we?" scoffed the Inspector. "Of course not. When we see a man come creeping out of someone else's room we don't know what it means? It was just a friendly visit, I suppose?"

"I can explain this," said Clyde.

"I daresay you can," retorted Corrie. "Only we're not having it. Cough up that necklace. That's all the explanation you'll do here; you can do the rest to the jury."

By this time the noise of the scuffle had attracted attention. The manager and a number of the guests came running upstairs.

"What's this?" asked Mr. Rankin.

"We've caught the thief," said the inspector exultantly. "Now we're going to search him. Where's his room? You come with us, Mr. Rankin. We want an independent witness."

"You're making a mistake," protested Clyde. "You'll be sorry for this."

"Not so sorry as you'll be when we're done with you," retorted Corrie grimly. "Come along," and he followed Clyde into his own room, while the hotel manager brought up the rear.

"Search him!" ordered Corrie.

The officers at once began to turn Clyde's pockets outside in. They didn't go very far until they made a discovery which absolutely flabbergasted Clyde, and brought a grin of triumph to the face of the inspector.

From a patch breast pocket of the golfing jacket—a pocket which one seldom uses—the officers brought out various glittering objects, which on examination proved to be the gold settings of the jewels in the diamond and ruby necklace.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Corrie.

Clyde realised he was in an awkward predicament, but he was still very loth to disclose his identity. In a sudden flash, with the discovery of the gold settings, the whole affair stood out clear and distinct in his mind. By this act the real criminals had given themselves away. But he knew that it would be impossible to convince Corrie.

"I know nothing of this."

AN INTERRUPTION.

"Oh, don't go on," said Corrie contemptuously. "We had our eye on you all day. In the first place your name's not Blair McAlpin—we'll soon be able to give you your proper one, probably better known to the police—in the second place you didn't come from Inverness, but from Glasgow. Stow it. The game's up. You may as well own up and be done with it."

It certainly did look black against him, but a curious doggedness seized Clyde. His brains, not his name, must save him.

He remained silent while the officers turned the room upside down in search of the missing jewels. Their efforts were fruitless. The inspector got angry.

"You're only making things worse for yourself," he said to Clyde. "Better cough them up, and—what?"—as the manager touched his arm. "Left an attaché case with you this morning? We'll go down and see what's in it, then."

They proceeded downstairs to the manager's office. The attache case was produced. Clyde handed over the key. He knew the papers, valuable as they were to him, would prove meaningless to the inspector.

Corrie opened it with a smile, but a moment later his face fell.

"Not here," he growled. "Well, there's nothing for it but to take you with us. We'll find the stuff yet. Come along."

But this was what Clyde did not want to do. If he allowed himself to be taken to

"Excuse me," she apologised. "I—I didn't know you were engaged, Mr. Rankin. Will you please give me my parasol? I left it with you, you remember? I am going away to-morrow, and I want to pack."

The manager was in the act of handing over the parasol to her, when Derek Clyde quickly intervened and grasped it. The next instant he had closed the door, and stood with his back to it.

"What—what—"

"Wait a minute, inspector," said Clyde



He flashed his electric torch on the bed, and then suppressed the gasp of astonishment that rose to his lips.

the police station, the chances were that the real thieves would escape.

"Look here, inspector," he said, speaking impressively, "you're making a serious blunder. I am not the thief. If you take me you will allow the real culprits to get away, and your chance of recovering the jewels will be gone."

"Oh, chuck that," said the inspector wrathfully. "You've had your say. Come along!" and he tapped Clyde sharply on the arm.

Then a very fortunate thing occurred. There was a knock at the door, and the next moment Mrs. Waterson appeared. She looked at the stern faces of the men, and a curious gleam shot into her eyes.

grimly, and there was a note in his voice now that compelled obedience.

The next instant there was a strange scene. Mrs. Waterson, her face like that of a fury, distorted with rage, anger, and fear, threw herself wildly at him.

"Give me that! Give me that!" she screamed. "It's mine!"

"Keep her off!" commanded Clyde, and the officer accompanying Corrie put his arms round her and dragged her back, kicking and struggling.

While the others watched him curiously, Clyde opened the parasol, and held it up. His next movement was to unscrew the shaft close to where the ribs met. He

handed it to Inspector Corrie. The shaft was a hollow tube.

"Turn it over!" ordered Clyde.

Involuntarily Corrie did so. There came streaming out the sparkling gems which had formed Lady Falkland's necklace!

"Well, I'm blowed!" was the inspector's comment, as he stared from Clyde to the now haggard and crouching woman in the corner.

NEMESIS.

YOU over-reached yourself," said Clyde, addressing her. "I wondered why you sidled up so close to me to-day, and I noticed your parasol was a trick one. But I don't think I would have given it another thought if you hadn't slipped the settings into my pocket. That enabled me to spot the thief to a certainty. But we're not done yet, inspector."

It was wonderful how Clyde had taken command of the situation. "Send for Mr. Bothwell, please. Insist upon him coming here," and the note in his voice left no doubt of his meaning.

A few minutes later Mr. Bothwell, in a dressing gown, entered the room. He started as his eyes fell on the pale and haggard woman.

"Well, what's this?" he asked jauntily.

The woman attempted to signal to him, but Clyde, stepping swiftly forward, deftly tore the false beard and moustache off the man's face.

"Do you know him now?" he asked.

Inspector Corrie drew a deep breath.

"Flash Fred, by all that wonderful!" he gasped. "If this isn't the blessed limit!"

"Yes, and that's his partner—Sparkler Kate. I wondered where I had seen her before, but it only dawned on me after my visit to Flash Fred's room, and saw him sleeping minus his beard and moustache."

The inspector was more amazed than ever.

He turned to Clyde; there was an eager, questioning look in his eyes.

"And who are you, may I ask?" There was a note of deep respect in his voice, like that of one who speaks in the presence of his master.

"Get your prisoners under lock and key, and then come back for a chat," said Clyde with a smile.

Half an hour later Corrie came back, and was sent up to Clyde's room.

"You want to know who I am," he said with a laugh, after filling the inspector's glass. "Here goes." He pulled off the false moustache and eyebrows, and wiped the grease paint off his face.

"Derek Clyde!"

"Exactly. And at your service."

"And to think I nearly ran you in!"

"That's all right," laughed Clyde. "All's well that ends well. You see I'm here incog. I want a holiday badly, and it's a nuisance to have every bally fool gaping at one. Now, Corrie, don't give me away. I'll be here a week or so yet, but I don't want any more exciting scenes."

"How did you spot these two?" asked the inspector.

"Sheer accident," replied Clyde. "You might have done it yourself. I really suspected two others. As a matter of fact I dodged into Flash Fred's room by mistake for my own. He was snoring. That's how I knew I was in the wrong room. I flashed the torch. One peep at his face was enough. Then when you found the gold settings in my jacket pocket, that put me wise to the whole game, and—Sparkler Kate. I knew Flash Fred's methods—how he relied on drugs. The whole thing was absolutely clear."

"Very clever," commented the inspector. "All right, Clyde, I won't give you away, and you may be sure," he went on with a laugh, "we won't arrest you again."

"That's all I ask," said Clyde. "I'm afraid these two are not the only crooks in the town at present."

"Well, they won't visit Rothesay again for a long time," said Corrie, with a grin.

He was right. Flash Fred and Sparkler Kate were tried at Glasgow a month later. The evidence against them was overwhelming, and they were sentenced to seven and five years respectively.

And through it all Clyde preserved his incognito.

THE END.

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(Continued from page 14)

gazed into the open cavity. At first he could see little.

In his present position, there was very little chance of making any discoveries, for the bilge-space was low and narrow and smelly. Down there it was necessary for a man to bend in order to walk. Willy would not be inconvenienced much. And he suddenly made up his mind.

Handforth might come blundering along at any moment, and there would be a certain security down in the bilge—for Willy would have the protection of the engineers who were at work down there.

For the light clearly proved that somebody was there—and who else but one or more members of the engine-room staff, probably making some adjustment or other to the propeller shaft, or some such thing?

For Willy to make up his mind was for Willy to act.

He was a youngster who never hesitated. He was like his famous brother in this respect. And in a flash he had lowered himself silently down, and was groping his way along a kind of metal platform, running towards the stern of the yacht.

Then, abruptly, he paused.

He caught a glimpse of a villainous face—a face he was not likely to forget for many a long day. It took a great deal to make Willy Handforth's heart jump with sudden fear. But it jumped now.

He stood there, staring. The face was just at the rear of a bulkhead, bending over something. A guttering candle was held in the hand of another man. And the pair were intent upon something. They had no knowledge whatever of the junior's presence. The quivering vibration caused by the shaft had been enough to drown any sounds that Willy might have made.

Willy was uncertain. He still believed the men to be a pair of engineers, but that face was so utterly brutal and horrid. Willy had a sensation of insecurity—just the opposite to what he had expected.

"Blessed if I like it," he told himself.

He didn't remember having seen these men, for by now he had glimpsed the face of the other man, and it was almost as villainous as his companion's. Yet Willy believed that he had seen every member of the crew. It was strange that these two should have escaped him—especially as they were such disreputable-looking specimens.

They didn't look English. They weren't English. Willy put them down as half-breeds of some sort—probably with Mexican blood in their veins. And the circumstance startled him.

Cautiously, he crept nearer.

Willy was a very nippy youngster. He slid noiselessly forward, until he was quite close. But the bulkhead afforded him complete protection. Even if the men looked up now, they wouldn't see him.

The junior listened.

The men were talking, and by shoving his ear round the steelwork, Willy could just manage to hear what they were saying.

"All right now?" asked one man.

"Sure—all set!"

"Better be careful, Jose," muttered the first man. "Heck! We don't want that cussed thing to go off before time—"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the other. "It's timed to explode at midnight exactly—I guess it can't go off earlier, even if it wanted to. It's made like the time-lock of a strong-room. This ain't no ten-cent outfit!"

"Well, as long as it don't take us with it, I don't care," said the first voice. "Sure those wires are O.K.? Better go easy when you step out—they're sure loose around your doggone feet, Jose! Gee! I'll be glad when I'm off'n this all-fired ship at ten o'clock!"

"Pah! You ain't got nerve!" sneered Jose contemptuously. "This thing ain't worrying me any. The launch comes along at ten o'clock, and we'll be as safe as Mike. Well, let's go. All set."

Willy made a swift decision.

During the last second his brain had been working with lightning speed, and he had realised that if he was left in this bilge, he might easily remain until the disaster took place.

All the knocking that he could do would have no effect—for at that distance down nobody would hear his frantic hammering.

There was only one thing to be done—get out before these men!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT IN THE BILGE.



WILLY crept like a monkey towards the trapdoor.

His mind was still in a whirl, although he was doing his utmost to steady it. He kept thinking of what he had heard—the terrible, significant words. Had he made a mistake?

Or was his supposition true?

He was certain, now, that these men were not members of the crew. They never had been. They were outsiders—stowaways, probably. And, according to what they had said, they had fixed something that was timed to explode at midnight. And the men themselves were to escape from the Wanderer by means of some launch or other.

Young as he was, Willy knew that this was sinister.

His one thought was to get out and give the warning.

These men had to be captured. And Willy edged his way to the trapdoor, his heart beating like a sledge-hammer. He was really certain that he would be able to get out.

It seemed to him that hours had passed—but, really, merely a few minutes had elapsed since he had first dived down into

the bilge. And although Handforth was still looking for him, he never even thought of his elder brother.

He actually reached the trap, and then he heard a low cry in his rear—instantly followed by a quick, significant scuffle.

"Great Scott!" gasped Willy.

He had been seen! He flashed a glance behind him, and saw that one of the men was swiftly bearing upon him, a look of intense alarm and fury upon his evil face. Willy nearly lost his nerve—but not quite.

He was made of stern stuff, and he made a wild grab at the edge of the trapdoor opening. If he had succeeded in grasping it, he would have got away. But his fingers caught hard on the ironwork, breaking two of his nails. The pain was great, and he fell back.

And before he could make a second jump—before he could clutch at the opening again—he was seized about the waist by a strong, vicious arm. The next second the youngster was fighting madly.

He had no chance whatever.

The man who had got hold of him was of enormous strength. He wrapped his bear-like grip round Willy's middle, and with his other hand he closed the junior's mouth.

"Quick!" he snarled. "Hold the young guy's legs!"

The other man came up, and Willy was held even more tightly. String was used—a scarf, and two handkerchiefs. And he was helpless—he had not even been able to make any outcry.

"The young rat!" snarled Jose. "One o' them boys! How did he get down here? I guess he must have heard us talkin'."

"This might spoil everything!" snapped the other. "Still, the only thing we can do is to tie him up, and leave him down here. He needs to be made more secure than he is now—"

"No!" interrupted the other. "We can't waste time."

"But he might get loose—"

"Let him!" said Jose. "He'll never get out, and the trapdoor locks with a catch on the other side. The best thing we can do is to quit—and make it snappy!"

"You're sure right!"

They flung Willy down, leaving him on the hard, greasy metal. The candle was extinguished, and the two men made for the trapdoor.

In the meantime, Edward Oswald Handforth was still on the hunt.

It is really extraordinary how a small, unimportant trifle will frequently lead to results of the most paramount importance. And who would have imagined that this simple chase by the two Handforth brothers would lead to such results?

Fate is a queer kind of chap, at the best.

Handforth was searching diligently. He had no intention whatever of giving up. He wasn't the kind of fellow for that. He had made up his mind to find Willy, and he

was going to find him, even if he had to search the whole ship through. He was going through it systematically. And, at last, he came to the last possible hope.

And this was down in the passage where the trapdoor lay in the floor. Handforth came upon it, and looked along the passage. And as he caught sight of the trapdoor, he gave a grunt.

His search was ended.

"Oh, so that's where you've bunked to!" he murmured grimly. "All right, my lad! I'm jolly well going to tan you! Call me a bully, would you? By George! I'll make you smart!"

Handforth advanced towards the trapdoor stealthily.

He didn't want to give his minor any warning that he was approaching. So he went on tiptoe, and at length reached the trapdoor itself. And even as he did so, a most evil face came into view.

"The kid 'll be all right down there," said the face. "He won't get free from those ropes— Hang!"

The man broke off with a curse of alarm and surprise. For he had just caught sight of Handforth. And the latter was staring at him rather wildly. Edward Oswald was a duffer in many things, but when it came to a real emergency, he never failed to rise to the occasion.

And those words had been significant.

Who could these men have meant but Willy? And Willy was roped up! And these men certainly did not belong to the crew. Handforth gave one of his most celebrated roars.

"Hi!" he bellowed. "Help!"

"Grab the young guy!" hissed Jose.

"Help! Rescue, St. Frank's!" yelled Handforth, at the top of his voice. "This way! Hi! Help! Pirates! Fire! Murder!"

In his excitement, Handforth didn't exactly know what he was shouting, and it certainly didn't matter. The main thing was to make a noise—and he made it. Pitt afterwards declared that the whole yacht shook.

Certainly, those shouts were heard by many.

In the meantime, a little delay took place.

And Handforth found his hands full. The two men sprang at him like tigers. But Edward Oswald was not such an easy one to deal with as Willy had been. Handforth didn't wait for the pair to attack—moreover, he was not seized from the rear similar to his younger brother.

He simply sailed in.

Bill! Crash! Slosh!

A thudding right was swiftly followed by a lightning left. Then the right came round again. Jose wondered how many mines the Wanderer had struck. He simply charged over backwards, dazed.

His companion hurled himself at Handforth with the fury of a maniac. For these men realised that their very safety depended

upon silencing this boy with the appalling voice.

And to silence Edward Oswald seemed a heavy task.

"Help! Fire! Remove to the rescue!" howled Handforth.

"Help! Fire! Remove to the rescue!" The other man was now utterly desperate. It meant discovery—capture! And the fellow whipped out a wicked-looking knife from his hip pocket.

Handforth started back at the sight of it.

"You—you giddy murderer!" he gasped. "If you try to use that thing, I'll knock you into the middle of next week!"

The man leapt forward, murder in his eyes. And Handforth knew it. He was wise enough to attempt no resistance. He simply bunked—and it took a great deal to make Handforth bolt.

Jose was just rising at the same moment.

Handforth didn't know this, and he pitched headlong over the man, and they both crashed to the floor. The fellow with the knife blundered into them, and they were mixed up in a wild heap.

And at that moment Mr. Barry, the second officer, arrived to see what all the noise was about. He was accompanied by two sailors. They ran forward as they caught sight of that heap.

"Good heavens!" shouted Mr. Barry. "What's all this?"

"Help!" bawled Handforth. "This chap's trying to knife me!"

It was over in about twenty seconds.

Mr. Barry and the two sailors needed no second appeal. They simply fell upon the half-breeds, and after a quick tussle, the latter were secured. They did put up a fight, but it wasn't much of an affair.

And, with Handforth assisting, there were really two to one. The prisoners were not equal to such odds. Almost before they knew it, they were roped together, with their hands behind their backs.

Mr. Barry looked at them, breathing hard after his exertions.

"And who the blazes are you?" he asked. "How did you get on board? Better answer pretty lively, my men!"

Jose whined.

"I guess we only came on board as stowaways, sir," he said. "We thought we'd do the trip without being found—"

"Liar!" roared Handforth.

"Steady, young man—" began Mr. Barry.

"They've done something to Willy!" shouted Handforth hotly.

"Willy?"

"My young brother!"

"But I don't follow!" said the officer. "How could these men have done anything to your young brother? I think you must be mistaken, Handforth. Willy wouldn't be down here—"

"I tell you he is!" interrupted Handy. "I was chasing him, you know. The young

ass escaped from me. And I heard one of these rotters saying something about the kid, and that he wouldn't be able to escape from his ropes!"

"Good glory!" said Mr. Barry, starting.

He had just caught sight of the trapdoor, and he dived towards it without asking more questions. Pulling an electric torch from his pocket, he flashed it on. And almost the first thing he saw was Willy's prostrate form. The junior was wriggling convulsively, trying to free himself.

Mr. Barry's face hardened.

"There's more in this than we know about!" he exclaimed. "All right, kiddy—I'll set you free. Martin!" he added, calling up through the trapdoor.

"Sir!"

"Take those brutes straight to the captain's cabin, and tell the skipper that I'll be there in a minute!" said Mr. Barry. "This looks like devilish work of some kind."

The two sailors, without any more ado, hauled their cringing prisoners up above. The men couldn't possibly fight, tied together as they were. And, before long, they were hustled straight into Captain McDodd's cabin.

As it happened, the skipper was having a quiet cigar with Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-more. They were all rather startled by the interruption. The two prisoners who were hustled in were about the most scoundrelly-looking characters imaginable. Lord Dorri-more eyed them with interest.

"By gad!" he remarked. "Who, may I ask, are the handsome visitors?"

"Found them below, sir!" reported Martin, saluting.

"Stowaways, by thunder!" roared the skipper, leaping to his feet.

"Yes, sir," said Martin. "Mr. Barry's just coming up, sir. Told me to bring these on straight to you, sir."

The skipper glared ferociously at the prisoners.

"You scum!" he said furiously. "What do you mean by coming on board my ship? I've a darn good mind to pitch you overboard—and I would, by gosh, if it wasn't for the fact that you'd pollute the sea!"

"Hear, hear!" said Dorrie. "That's the style, captain! Nothing like talkin' to 'em in the right way. Stowaways, by gad! About the first time we've had any of those gentlemen on board!"

Below, Handforth minor had just been hauled up into the passage. Mr. Barry had not untied him, or ungagged him—much to Willie's indignation. But Mr. Barry had a purpose.

"Untie those ropes, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Edward Oswald.

"No, we'll take him up just as he is," said the second officer. "I'd like the skipper to see him—just to show what those brutes have done!"

"By George, yes!" said Handy. "That's a good idea!"

But Willy didn't think so. He was dying to relate what he had seen and heard down in the bilge. And it absolutely galled him to hear that he would be taken to the captain's cabin first.

However, he couldn't help himself—it had to be.

It was only a short delay, after all. Within a very few minutes Willy found himself in Captain McDodd's cabin. The two prisoners were there, with the skipper questioning them closely. Mr. Barry entered, carrying Willy bodily, and Handforth crowding in behind. I was just in the rear, with a few other fellows, who had just got wind of the affair.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the captain, aghast.

"I thought I'd bring the lad to you just as we found him, sir," said Mr. Barry, saluting. "These men are responsible. They tied the boy up in this way, and left him down in the bilge!"

"Oh, they did, did they?" said the skipper. "The infernal scum!"

Lord Dorrimore was on his feet by this time, and so was Nelson Lee. It was quite evident to them that there was something pretty sinister in all this.

Willy was quickly released, and he poured out his story in a stream.

"Quick, sir!" he gasped. "These men have put an infernal machine down below!"

"What!"

"It's timed to go off at midnight!" said Willy breathlessly. "And the rotters are planning to leave the ship at ten o'clock, so they'll be safe. There's a launch coming, or something, to help them!"

The captain looked at Dorrie, and Dorrie looked at Nelson Lee.

"Steady, lad, steady!" said Dorrie softly. "I think you must have been imaginin' a few things——"

"I haven't, sir!" gasped Willy. "It's true! They've put an infernal machine down in the bilge! A bomb, sir! I saw it! I heard them talking together! It's awful, sir!"

Nelson Lee took Willy by the shoulder.

"Calm yourself, my boy, and tell us this story as quietly as you can," he said softly. "If the bomb is not timed to go off between now and twelve o'clock, there is no need to get into a panic. Now then, let's have it!"

There was something soothing in Nelson Lee's tone, and Willy was calmed.

And then, as quietly as he could, he told exactly what he had heard. He explained how he had been fleeing from Edward Oswald, and how he had entered the bilge in the belief that engineers were at work there.

He then explained all that he had overheard, and all that he had seen. And after

that Handforth took up the story, and went into a few interesting details concerning his scrap in the passage.

Nelson Lee nodded slowly.

"Yes, it seems that there is something pretty big here," he said. "Mr. Barry, will you accompany me down to the bilge? We will go straight down and verify this story. I'll be back as soon as possible, captain."

Captain McDodd was looking almost dangerous.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "If these men have made any attempt to sink my ship, I'll never rest until they are in prison! The filthy scum!"

The very thought of anything happening to the beloved Wanderer was enough to make Captain McDodd see red. He glowered at the prisoners, who were now thoroughly scared. It was quite impossible for them to deny anything, since the boys had overheard so much. Besides, there was the infernal machine itself to provide the final proof.

Nelson Lee and Mr. Barry hurried below.

In the meantime, hardly anybody on board, excepting just that few, knew what had been taking place. Many of the juniors were below, enjoying a quiet game of whist, or reading, and the Wanderer was steaming sedately along, utterly unconscious of the fate that had been planned for her.

The second officer led the way down into the bilge, with Nelson Lee close behind him. Very cautiously they explored the whole place by means of electric torches. And in a very short time they located the bomb.

It had not been concealed in any way.

There it stood, in one of the most vital parts of the ship. And Nelson Lee approached it very gingerly, and handled it with extreme care. The thing itself was about as large as an attache-case. It was almost square, and enclosed in a heavy metal box. There were switches, a dial, and attached to it by means of wires were two electric batteries.

"Better go easy, sir," said Mr. Barry cautiously.

"I am acquainted with this type of bomb," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Indeed, I think I can name the very individual who invented it. It is a particularly violent and effective weapon."

"Capable of doing much damage, sir?"

Nelson Lee did not answer for a moment. He had taken a small pair of pliers from his pocket, and he was busily disconnecting the wires. When, at last, he had succeeded, Mr. Barry was feeling more comfortable.

"Is it safe now?" he asked.

"Quite safe," replied Lee. "There is not the slightest danger of explosion, for the electric current is absent. Even if the thing were dropped with considerable violence, I don't think it would explode. At the same time, we are not taking any chances—I shall handle it with extreme care. And within five

minutes from now it will be overboard—heavily weighted, and sunk.”

“I’ll be glad to see it go!” said the second officer.

Lee looked at Mr. Barry steadily.

“You were asking, a moment ago, if this bomb is capable of doing much damage?” he said. “Well, Mr. Barry, I can assure you of one thing. But for the fact that those boys stumbled upon this dastardly plot, there would have been utterly no hope for any soul on board.”

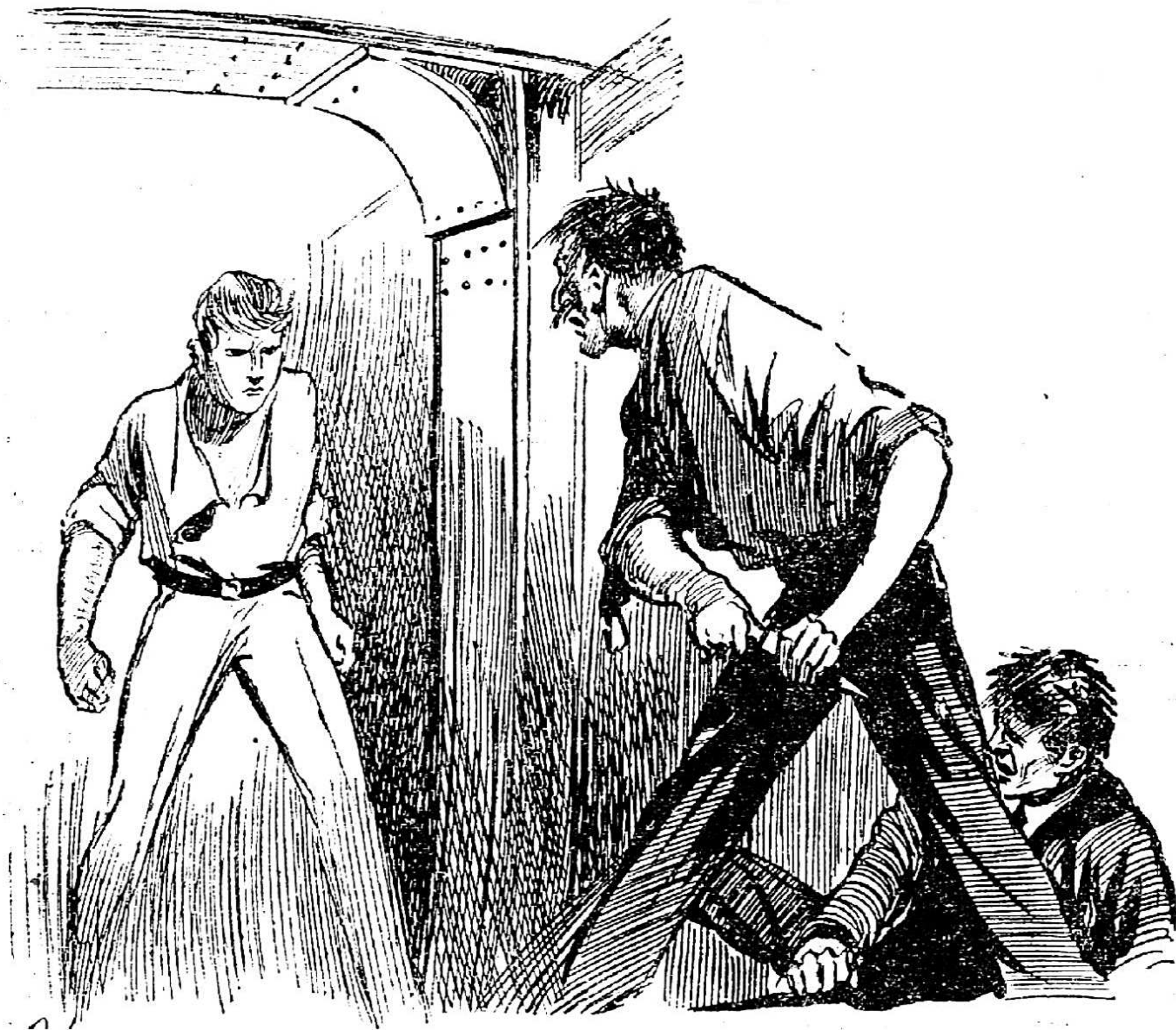
CHAPTER VII.

WE HEAR OF CAPTAIN HURRICANE!



“WELL, that’s that!” said Lord Dorrimore lightly.

The deadly infernal machine had just been lowered overboard, and was now sinking swiftly on its way to the enormously deep bed of the Pacific Ocean. All possible danger was over. Until that deadly piece of mechanism had been



The other man was now utterly desperate. It meant discovery—capture! And the fellow whipped out a wicked-looking knife from his hip pocket.

“Good heavens!”

“This machine is of the most violent character,” continued Lee. “I think I am perfectly right in saying it would blow the bottom of the Wanderer completely out—not merely a gash—but a complete and utter disaster. The vessel would have sunk within a few seconds, long before any boat could have been lowered. There is no question that we should all have perished.”

Mr. Barry was too startled to make any comment.

sent overside nobody felt exactly comfortable.

Lord Dorrimore spoke lightly, but he was really very stern. He had every intention of making those two men suffer to the fullest extent of the law. They were guilty of attempted murder of the most awful kind. For they had tried to kill, in cold blood, a whole ship’s company, including the entire Remove.

“I don’t fancy these men are actually responsible,” said Nelson Lee, as he and Dorrie

made their way to the captain's cabin. "I cannot see any reason why two such rascals should wish to sink the Wanderer. Moreover, we know that they have been employed by somebody else."

"How do we know that?"

"It appears that a launch is coming alongside at ten o'clock."

"By gad, yes," said Dorrie. "We shall have to make certain of that, though. I think it would be pretty enlightening to question those two men."

"I intend to do so," said Lee.

They soon entered the skipper's cabin, where the two rascals were still standing, guarded by Mr. Barry. The captain was walking up and down, a somewhat fierce expression on his face. Handforth minor was there, too, in addition to Edward Oswald.

The prisoners were disposed to talk.

"The best thing you can do, my lad, is to explain exactly who paid you for this work, and everything else you know," said Nelson Lee quietly. "The bomb is overboard now, and so your plot has failed."

"It wasn't our scheme, anyway," growled one of the men.

"Who instructed you?"

"Captain Hurricane."

"Who?"

"Captain Cane—skipper of the Henry R. Cane," said Jose, in a sullen voice. "I guess he's known on the Pacific coast as Cap'n Hurricane. He gave us all the dope, and five hundred dollars each for the job—with a promise of another five hundred each if it was successful."

"That's two thousand dollars," remarked Dorrie. "It appears that Captain Hurricane has quite a lot of money. An' why should he be so interested in our welfare? Havin' never met the gentleman, I can hardly see why he should be so intent upon sendin' us all to the bottom."

Nelson Lee continued his questioning.

"So you are in the pay of Captain Hurricane?" he asked. "And how did you intend to escape from this yacht before the explosion took place?"

"There's a motor-launch following us," said one of the men.

"A motor-launch is following, eh?" exclaimed Lee. "I do not think we have seen any sign of it. But that doesn't mean to say that it isn't within a comparatively near distance. Well, go on."

The men explained that it was quite simple.

The motor launch was to come fairly close—within two hundred yards—and would be in this position at exactly ten o'clock. Jose and his companion would be ready, and they had planned to jump overboard.

They would be seen by the motor-boat, which would pick them up, and then make away—to hover fairly close until the explosion was seen to happen. It was a fairly complete scheme.

"I'm not so sure about this, though," re-

marked Dorrie. "How were these men sure that they could escape, anyhow?"

"Of course, they had to risk being seen before actually taking the leap overboard," said Lee. "But, after all, there was not much danger there. At night they would have had ample opportunity to slip to the rail."

"But the look-out man would have seen the launch."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Lee. "There would, of course, have been a great deal of comment. We should have wondered who the two men were who had jumped, and what business they had had on board. But it is very doubtful if we should have suspected such a diabolical scheme. And even if we had searched the vessel, I question if the bomb would have been discovered in time."

"Yes, that's right enough," growled the skipper. "I don't suppose we should have searched the bilge, anyway. But who is this murderous Captain Hurricane? And what does he want to harm us for?"

"Perhaps a little further questioning will repay us for the trouble," said Nelson Lee.

At first it seemed that nothing would result. And then one of the prisoners happened to mention that Captain Cane had been greatly interested in two members of the Wanderer's crew.

"Perhaps they mean Harding and Baxter, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Barry.

"Are they the names of the two men?" demanded Lee.

"Yeah!" growled Jose. "Them two guys are on board Captain Hurricane's schooner now. I guess they were shanghaied. Maybe the old man questioned them about something—we don't know. We were just paid to do this job."

There was more interest now. Baxter and Harding were two members of the Wanderer's crew who had mysteriously disappeared while the yacht had been lying in Los Angeles harbour. They had apparently vanished into thin air, and no trace of their whereabouts had been discovered.

"By glory!" exclaimed Dorrie suddenly. "I wonder if this Captain Hurricane's connected with that island?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I can see, Dorrie, that you are as shrewd as ever," he said. "The same idea has occurred to me. Indeed, it almost follows. If I can read the thing aright, I should say that this Captain Hurricane got into conversation with Baxter and Harding quite casually. They happened to mention something about the island—possibly telling him that you intended sailing back to it—"

"But they didn't know that," said Dorrie.

"But they know you—and they could easily guess what your intentions were," said Lee. "If, indeed, Captain Hurricane is in any way connected with the island, then this mysterious affair becomes clear—we have the solution."

"Well, I'm hanged if I can quite see it," said Dorrie.

"Man alive, it's obvious," went on Nelson Lee keenly. "From your very own story, we can plainly understand that the man in charge of that island would give a great deal to avoid investigation. For the sake of argument, we will take it that this Captain Cane is the prime mover. He learns that you are preparing to go to this island—he knows for an absolute fact that you have been there once. It is only a matter of plain reasoning that you would return. For you to show up there would be disastrous. His only course, therefore, would be to frustrate your plans. And by sinking the *Wanderer* he can do it very thoroughly."

"But the man must be a fiend!" exclaimed his lordship. "No human being would sink a ship with all hands in that callous manner."

"Such things have been done before now," replied Lee quietly. "And when a man is desperate he will go to any length. For all we know, this affair may be worth many thousands of pounds—perhaps millions. In addition, investigations would mean imprisonment for Captain Hurricane—and possibly hanging. So he had every reason to take drastic steps."

"Old man, I believe you're right," said Dorrie. "In fact, there's no other possible explanation."

Very few other facts were discovered, although the men were questioned again and again. They were speaking freely because they hoped that this frankness on their part would lighten their sentences later on. If they could prove that they were merely tools they might get off fairly easily.

They could only say that the two men, Baxter and Harding, were prisoners on board Captain Hurricane's schooner, which had left Los Angeles harbour before the *Wanderer*. The prisoners did not know the schooner's destination.

Both the men were taken below and placed in irons.

And then a consultation was held in Captain McDodd's cabin. None of the juniors were present—not even myself. The party consisted of Dorrie, the skipper, and Nelson Lee and Mr. Barry. The first officer, Mr. Colgate, was on duty on the bridge, and could not be spared.

"Well, we've got to decide upon our course of action," said Nelson Lee.

"I don't see there's much to be done, except carry on," said Dorrie. "We're not goin' to turn back just because of those two prisoners. An' this bally Captain Hurricane needn't imagine he's scared us off."

"There is something else that we can do," said Nelson Lee.

"And what's that?"

"Well, you remember that the launch will be in fairly close proximity at ten o'clock," continued the detective. "The time is now only just nine—so we have plenty of time at our disposal to make arrangements."

"What arrangements?"

"It seems to me that we ought to make a big attempt to capture that launch," said Lee grimly. "The men on board, of course, have no idea that their friends have been exposed. They will, in short, be expecting two men to jump overboard."

"An' two men won't," smiled Dorrie. "That'll be rather rich."

"Two men will!" declared Nelson Lee smoothly.

"What!"

"And those two men, Dorrie, will be yourself and me."

"Gad!" ejaculated his lordship, jumping up. "You mean—"

"Exactly," said Lee. "Those on the launch will see us jump, and they will assume that we are their men. They will have no suspicions. We shall be able to get on board before they even know that we are the wrong pair."

Dorrie was enthusiastic.

"It's a brain wave!" he exclaimed. "Why, we'll have that launch captured before the brutes can look round! An' it's just possible that we shall land Captain Hurricane himself!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That," he replied, "was what I was thinking."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARRIVAL AT DORRIMORE ISLAND.



TEN o'clock.

It was just the hour, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were ready for their coming ordeal. They were leaning against the rail, in the bows. The sea

was quite dark on all sides, and the *Wanderer* was steaming along, with all lights blazing, in her usual fashion.

Both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were fully equipped.

They had stripped, except for the lightest of light attire, and each wore a belt with a revolver fastened to it. These weapons were of a special manufacture, and were quite waterproof. Immersion in the sea would not affect their mechanism in any way.

The pair had not disguised themselves, but they had bronzed their faces to a considerable extent—so that it would not be too easily distinguishable by reason of their fairer skin compared with the prisoners.

These were the only preparations that had been made by Lee and Dorrie. Everything was ready, but there was no sign of any launch. The sea, in every direction, appeared to be deserted.

"Well, old man, it looks as though we're goin' to be left in the cart, eh?" said Dorrie. "I've got an idea that those men were tellin' a faked story."

But Lee shook his head.

"I hardly think so," he replied. "Of course, it is possible that Captain Hurricane meant to leave them to their fate, but very unlikely. For as the hour of twelve

approached, they would certainly reveal their presence, and give a warning of their danger."

"Yes, you're right," agreed Dorrie. "But why doesn't the launch appear?"

"Unless I am mistaken, it has appeared."

As Nelson Lee spoke, he pointed.

Sharp as Dorrie's eyes were, he saw nothing during the first few seconds. But then, after a bit, he detected a faint, blackish blob on the surface of the water, thirty or forty fathoms distant from the yacht's side.

"By gad!" he murmured. "Yes, there's somethin' there."

Even the look-out man would have had difficulty in spotting the craft unless he had been deliberately looking for it—and in these waters there was not much chance of seeing a motor launch riding without lights.

And this is what this particular launch was doing.

She edged nearer and nearer. The men, evidently, had told the truth when they had been in the skipper's cabin. And now, after a few minutes had passed, the launch was keeping alongside, only a comparatively short distance away. No doubt there were men on board, watching the *Wanderer* through binoculars.

"I think we'd better jump almost at once," said Lee. "She won't come any nearer. But as soon as we leap, they'll see us. Possibly they'll edge in, in order to pick us up—but we shall have to chance that."

"It'll be a bit of a joke if we're left behind," grinned Dorrie. "Well, we can swim, an' the skipper knows where to find us. As we go, he'll swing round, stop the engines, an' wait."

Everything had been fixed down to the last detail.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie jumped. And they dived into the water cleanly, rose, and struck out at once in the direction of the launch. Crouching in a secluded corner of the deck, I saw them go—for I knew all about the scheme, and I was anxious.

Indeed, I had pleaded with the gov'nor to let me accompany him. But he had turned a deaf ear to all my entreaties, and had insisted upon my remaining on board. He wouldn't let me take the risk. Besides, if I went, Handforth and one or two others would probably expect to go, too.

But I got a thrill as I saw Nelson Lee and Dorrie leap.

Would the affair pan out as they had hoped?

Or would they, themselves, become prisoners of Captain Hurricane's men? That was the thing that was worrying me. If this scheme of Nelson Lee's failed, it would be a disaster, indeed.

But it wasn't like the gov'nor to fail.

Both he and Dorrie clung together after they had risen to the surface. And the *Wanderer*, with her engines shut off, turned round in almost a half circle, so that she would still be on the scene.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie swam steadily and strongly to the launch.

The latter had now stopped her own engines, and was hovering near by. It was fortunate that the sea was perfectly calm, with a surface as smooth as a lake. There was nothing but the long, gradual Pacific swell.

"All right—this way!" came a voice over the waters.

The men on board the launch had not the faintest idea that the two swimmers were enemies—instead of friends. They naturally assumed that these swimmers were Jose and his companion.

And it was not at all surprising that the *Wanderer* had stopped her engines. The launch men had been expecting something of the kind. But it wouldn't matter. As soon as they had taken the pair on board, they would speed off.

Nearer and nearer came Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore—until, at length, they were caught by ready hands—hands that were outstretched in order to pull them on board.

The intense gloom made it impossible for the enemy to see the deception.

Lee could now see that the launch was a comparatively small one. He was rather surprised that such a craft should have risked the perils of the deep ocean. It seemed to him that a mother ship was near by—in all probability, the *Henry R. Cane*, captained by her owner.

Lee and Dorrie were hauled on board by two men.

"Good!" growled a voice. "I thought we'd do it without any trouble. I'm Skinner—you know me, Jose."

"Until this moment I have not had the doubtful pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Skinner!" rapped out Nelson Lee curtly. "And you will oblige me by putting your hands up. Quick, you rascal—up with them!"

The man who had called himself Skinner staggered back.

"What in—Heck—"

"You have one second before I fire!" snapped Nelson Lee.

The man raised his hands, gulping at the same time. He was a big, powerful, brutal fellow. His face was clean shaven, and there was an ugly scar across his left cheek.

"The game's up!" he shouted thickly.

Other men came round the little deck of the launch. Lord Dorrimore held them up at the point of his revolver.

It really seemed that Nelson Lee and Dorrie would have been able to deal with the launch entirely on their own. But they had not left anything to chance. For just then allies arrived.

Six members of the *Wanderer's* crew scrambled on board.

Although Mr. Skinner didn't know it, these six leapt into the sea from the port side of the *Wanderer* shortly before Nelson Lee and Dorrie had taken their dive. Thus, they had had a bit of a start.

And now they fairly swamped the little launch.

They were all over her, and if the crew had had any idea of making a fight for it, this idea was knocked on the head. Held under the menace of the two revolvers, they could do absolutely nothing.

They were seized, quickly placed in irons, and bunched together. There were three of them, and two other men were found below, in charge of the engines. They were hauled up without any trouble.

"Five of them, eh?" said Nelson Lee. "Well, I think, on the whole, we can say we have been successful."

"By the Lord Harry! You're right, old man!" declared Lord Dorrimore delightedly. "It was a first-class notion of yours to capture this launch. But we don't seem to have nabbed Captain Hurricane."

Skinner grunted.

"You won't find the skipper on board this craft!" he snarled, partially recovering from the shock. "Curse those Mexicaus! We trusted them, and this is what we get for it!"

"Your friends who were on board the Wanderer did their allotted part with complete satisfaction," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "It was only by a piece of ill luck that they were discovered. I should like to know who is in charge here."

"I am," said Skinner.

"And what do you know about this affair?"

"Nothing!"

"Come, come! That won't do!" said Lee. "I may as well tell you now that you will all be taken straight back to Los Angeles in this launch, and handed over to the police—charged with criminal conspiracy and attempted murder."

Skinner swore violently.

"Say, how do you get that way?" he snapped. "Who handed out that blamed dope? We don't know nothing about any conspiracy."

"Indeed? And yet you come here to pick up your two confederates?"

"We only had orders——"

"From whom?"

"Captain Hurricane," said Skinner. "He gave us orders to follow the Wanderer, and to pick up two men who would jump overboard at ten o'clock. We didn't know who they were, and what they were leaving for."

"You had no idea as to their identity?" asked Lee.

"Not a thing!"

"And yet you were good enough to address me as Jose as you hauled me on board," said Nelson Lee. "And Jose happens to be the name of one of the men we captured. I'm afraid, Mr. Skinner, that your word is not reliable. It would be quite idle to question you further."

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Again Skinner swore.

"Say, you blamed guy, where do you get that stuff?" he growled. "We don't know nothing! And you've no right to put us in irons like this! It's a darned outrage!"

Nelson Lee allowed him to continue. And new arrangements were quickly made. As the capture had been so successful, there was only one thing to be done. And Lord Dorrimore was entirely in agreement with Nelson Lee.

The launch was to be sent back at once—in charge of Mr. Colgate and four men. It was rather a pity that the Wanderer's crew should be thus depleted, but it was quite out of the question to let these scoundrels go free, even though their plot had been frustrated.

There was a short delay, and then the launch was brought alongside the Wanderer, and made fast. Jose and his companion were lowered, and placed among the other five prisoners.

There were now seven in all, and they were packed away below in the little cabin, and locked up—every man being in irons. And one of the Wanderer's sailors was placed on guard.

The three others of the substitute crew set about their tasks, and Mr. Colgate was to do the navigating.

The officer received his orders from Dorrie, and, although he was disappointed at having to return to port he didn't utter a word of complaint. After all, it was his duty to obey orders.

Within a very short time the launch was off—speeding on her way back to the coast. And her seven prisoners were about the most miserable set of men on the Pacific.

They were booked for long terms of imprisonment, at the very best. And, all in irons, they had little or no opportunity of escape. Although they were merely tools—the paid servants of Captain Hurricane—they knew very well that they would suffer the full penalty.

The Wanderer, freed from her unwelcome prisoners, proceeded on her course. There was no further danger, and the situation was vastly improved.

For Captain Hurricane, thinking that all his plans had gone well, was probably labouring under the delusion that he was perfectly safe. And, in reality, a great deal of his secrets were known, and all the trump cards in the game were held by Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore.

It was known that the unfortunate pair, Baxter and Harding, were prisoners on Captain Hurricane's schooner. There was just a chance that there would be an encounter with that vessel herself. If so, the two members of the Wanderer's crew would be rescued.

The next day all the Remove fellows were up bright and early, and they had nothing to discuss but the exciting events of the previous evening.

"Of course, we should have been blown

to bits by this time but for me," remarked Handforth carelessly. "I don't want to boast—goodness knows, I'm not a bragging bounder—"

"Oh, no!"

"Not at all!"

"I'm not!" roared Handforth. "And if you chaps haven't got the decency to thank me for saving your lives, you ought to be boiled! Everybody on board knows that it is my doing."

"Rats!" said Armstrong. "It was your younger brother who discovered the bomb."

"Of course it was!"

"Willy did the trick."

"My hat!" said Handforth indignantly. "Well, I like that! Didn't I yell for help? Didn't I bring Mr. Barry down? Wasn't it my doing that those blessed rotters were collared?"

"Well, we won't argue," put in Reggie Pitt smoothly. "Good old Handy! Of course it was your game from the very start. You threatened to biff Willy, and Willy bunked. If it hadn't been for you threatening, the bomb would never have been discovered."

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"Hold on!" grinned Bob Christine. "We can carry that a bit further, you know. Let's get right down to the root of it. Willy started cheeking Handy, didn't he? Therefore we've got to thank Willy!"

"You—you dotty lunatic—"

"Of course we have," said Bob. "It's a perfectly sound argument—and strictly according to Handy's own system. Willy cheeked Handy, and you can't get away from the fact that it was Willy who started the whole giddy thing. So he's the hero of the hour. Handy's washed out of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we shall be at the island for to-night, anyhow," said Handforth, with a grunt. "And then we'll see a few things. I'm blessed if I'm going to be left out of all the fun again!"

"I don't think the gov'nor will let any of us land on the island," I remarked. "It strikes him as being a bit too risky. We've got rid of that crowd on the launch, but it's more than likely that there are a few other choice scoundrels on the island. And they appear to be a murderous set. If they were willing to sink the Wanderer with all hands, they won't jib at doing a little fancy shooting. So we can regard it as a dead certainty that we shall be kept on board."

"Oh, rats!" growled Handforth. "We'll see about that!"

For the rest of the day the juniors had plenty to talk about. They were discussing Lord Dorrimore's story, and the extraordinary state of affairs on Dorrimore Island.

Even now, quite a number of the fellows were not ready to believe Dorrie's account of the slave gangs. But, in face of all that

had taken place, there could be no question that he was perfectly right.

It was getting towards late afternoon when land was sighted.

It was Dorrimore Island.

There was no other land of any description in these waters. For this land was just one of those isolated spots, on the bosom of the Pacific Ocean. There are many such tiny islands dotted about, few and far between—quite separate, I mean, from the recognised groups.

Most of these islands are charted, and navigators know of their presence. They are generally given a wide berth, for they are quite uninhabited, and of no interest whatever to any ordinary shipmaster.

Dorrimore Island was exactly as his lordship had described it.

At a distance, it looked a mere speck in the ocean. At first, indeed, several of the fellows declared that the island was a ship—so tiny did it appear. But as we grew nearer and nearer, we could make out the outline.

And, at length, the Wanderer was quite close.

The island was small, being no more than three miles long, and two miles wide. It was principally composed of that big hill, the slopes of which rose straight up from the surrounding beach on all sides.

It was a bare, and barren sight.

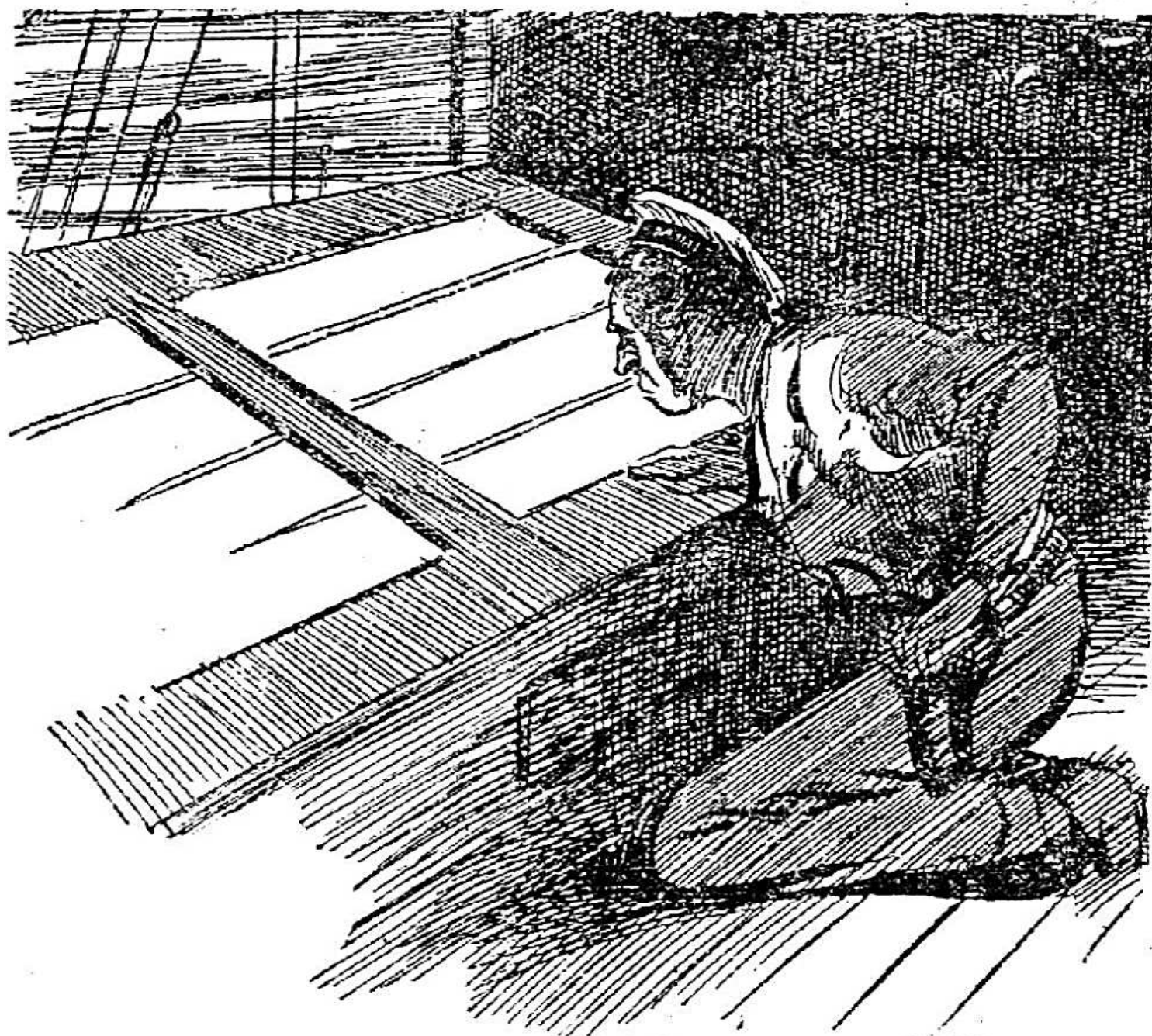
Except for those two palm trees, waving in isolated grandeur upon the summit of the hill, there was no other green spot—nothing but rock slopes, and the gleaming sand round the shores.

"Well, if Dorrie hadn't told us the yarn himself, I wouldn't have believed it," declared Somerton, as he stood against the rail. "Just look at it! Who could possibly imagine that there's a great pit there like Dorrie described?"

"It wants a bit of picturing, I'll admit," said Bob Christine. "Why, that hill looks absolutely solid, and the summit seems to be a kind of table land. I'm jolly curious to go and look for myself, anyway."

All the juniors, in fact, were anxious—but it did not seem that their curiosity would be satisfied.

For Nelson Lee soon gave strict orders that no boys were to land under any cir-



Crouching there, he placed his head to the open skylight, and the voices became audible.

"There'd better be about a dozen of us in the party, Lee," came the voice of Lord Dorrimore.

cumstances. Later on, perhaps, they would be permitted to do so—but not while there was any possibility of grave peril.

The Wanderer anchored in the little bay—quite a comfortable anchorage, and perfectly safe from any tropic storm that might arise. And the darkness descended with that swift suddenness which is characteristic of these waters.

On board there was a feeling of tension.

Not a soul had been seen on the island—but everybody had a sensation that eyes were watching—and there was a thrill of excitement in the air.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SURPRISE!



MR. COLGATE, in charge of the launch, was at the wheel.

It was morning now, and the stout little craft was travelling along at a fairly average speed. It was nearly time for the officer to be relieved by one of the other men, for he had been on duty all night.

Below the men were preparing food—at least, two of them were. The other two were attending to the engines. The two who were busy with the food had snatched a few hours' sleep, so that they would be ready for duty.

The seven prisoners were left to themselves.

They were all in irons, and quite helpless.

Not only were they handcuffed, but extra sets of manacles were placed round their ankles. This had been Mr Colgate's idea, so that the man who had been sent to watch them might be used for other duties.

Nelson Lee had strongly advised Mr. Colgate to keep a man on the watch constantly. But Mr. Colgate did not figure that this was necessary—particularly as he had now secured every prisoner by the ankles as well.

But Mr. Colgate made a terrible blunder.

He did not do so intentionally, or through any lack of thought. He had complete devotion to duty, and he would never have left the prisoners alone if he had had the slightest suspicion that harm would result.

But sheer disaster was at hand.

For Mr. Skinner, the leader of the gang, was a man of remarkable ability. He was as strong as an ox, but nobody would have believed him to be capable of getting free from handcuffs that were made of forged steel.

But people have wagered that the famous Mr. Houdini could not free himself from many handcuffs — some of them specially constructed. But Mr. Houdini had invariably succeeded in the apparently impossible task.

It so happened that Mr. Skinner was one of Mr. Houdini's imitators.

This man had not always been of the seafaring type. For some years he had appeared in various minor vaudeville houses in the United States, performing stunts with handcuffs, and locked boxes.

And when Mr. Skinner had known that he and his fellow prisoners were to be handcuffed, he had had a gleam of hope. If once the guard was removed, he might be able to do something.

And Mr. Colgate had acted in the exact manner to suit the enemy.

The very instant he was left alone, Skinner set to work on his manacles. It took him precisely five minutes to free himself from the handcuffs—and this, for an expert, was a fairly long time. But Mr. Skinner was somewhat out of practice.

However, the main thing had been accomplished.

The ankle irons were much easier. Skinner stood a free man seven minutes after he had begun his task. His companions had been eyeing him breathlessly—feverishly. They were glowing with a new hope.

"Don't say a word, you guys!" growled Skinner. "And if one o' those fellers comes in, I'll beat him up good! By gosh! We'll soon have things our own way! Just leave them to me!"

Skinner commenced work on Jose. The man was free in six minutes. And then the next one followed—and the one after

him. There were now four of the prisoners quite free from their bonds. The other three were to be served in the same manner.

And then, at that moment, the key turned in the lock.

Skinner seized a bottle, which had been standing on one of the shelves. He held it poised, ready. A man entered, carrying a great tray of food. With his hands so occupied, he had utterly no chance.

Crash!

The bottle descended upon his head with a sickening thud.

It was an awful blow, and the unfortunate sailor sank to the floor with a low groan. His head was badly gashed, and he was completely unconscious. The tray, with the food, went hurtling into the middle of the little cabin.

A moment afterwards one of the other sailors came along to see what the noise had been about. He was seized, and battered into insensibility within two minutes. And then the four ruffians, led by Skinner, rushed out.

They had three men to contend with now—Mr. Colgate and the other two.

A fearful fight resulted.

Mr. Skinner soon realised that he ought to have freed his other three colleagues first. But it was too late to do that now. The only thing was to fight. At one time it looked rather bad for the enemy.

For the first officer of the *Wanderer* was putting up a magnificent defence, and fighting with every ounce of his strength. He had a revolver, but was not allowed to use it. He had no chance.

The battle was settled by a heavy iron spanner.

One of Skinner's men hurled it with all his strength. It narrowly missed Skinner himself, and struck Mr. Colgate a glancing blow on the side of the head. He staggered, half dazed.

The next moment he was down, defeated.

The rest was easy. The other two men, although they fought gamely, were compelled to succumb. And the motor launch was in full and complete charge of her original crew from that moment.

Mr. Colgate and his four men were hurled below.

Skinner at first, decided to throw them all overboard. But he refrained from doing this, on second thoughts.

"I guess these guys will come in useful," he declared. "The skipper will want them for the new chain gang. Four hefty guys, too—they'll sure please the old man a heap."

So Mr. Colgate and the others were spared.

They were handcuffed in turn, and closely watched all the time. And the launch, turning about, sped towards Dorrimore Island. She was no longer going back towards Los Angeles.

The whole situation was changed.

And if Nelson Lee and Dorrie could have

known of this disaster, they would surely have planned things very differently. But it was impossible for them to know. They were in happy ignorance for the present.

The launch put on every ounce of speed possible.

For Skinner was making an attempt to arrive at the island at almost the same time as the Wanderer herself. And he would possibly succeed in his objective. For the little craft was a racer.

Mr. Skinner's calculations were not far wrong.

Soon after darkness had fallen the island came within sight. As a navigator, Skinner was by no means a duffer. He had found his destination accurately. And coming up out of the dark sea, the Wanderer could be seen there, with many lights gleaming from her decks and port-holes.

She looked comfortable—a spot of civilisation among all that desolate stretch of water and rocky land.

The launch did not approach the same side of the island, but swung round to the north. And there, on a straight stretch of beach, the vessel ran her nose into the sand. She had arrived without a soul on the Wanderer knowing of her presence.

It was really impossible for Lee to suspect that the launch could be on the spot. For Nelson Lee had every reason to believe that Mr. Colgate was still in charge.

Skinner left two men on board, and took the other four with him.

And they walked swiftly and silently round the sandy beach, until they came within comparatively easy distance of the Wanderer.

Here a halt was called, and Skinner left the four men there.

Nearly stripping, Skinner quietly entered the water, and struck out for the yacht. He knew that he was going on a risky errand, but he had decided to learn all he possibly could.

It was, indeed, necessary, if the scheme he had in mind was to be successful.

He reached the Wanderer's side, and found that the accommodation ladder was in position. This was better than he hoped for. Quietly, stealthily, he mounted. At last he was on the deck.

It was all dark there, and nobody was in sight.

But Mr. Skinner knew he would have to be remarkably slippy.

He had no difficulty in locating the saloon skylight. It was standing open, and voices were coming up from below. Creeping near, Skinner paused, to look round him.

Up for'ard, he caught sight of one or two figures moving about. But just near where he was, there was nobody. He knew that he would be able to get away with ease, if an emergency arose—so he didn't particularly mind

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Crouching there, he placed his head to the open skylight.

And the voices became audible.

"There'd better be about a dozen of us in the party, Lee," came the voice of Lord Dorrimore.

"Yes."

"It wouldn't be advisable to go with less," continued his lordship. "An' when do you propose to make the start?"

"In just about an hour."

"Not before?"

"No—we want to make full preparations," said Nelson Lee. "We shall have to use the gas masks, and we shall all be fully armed. This trip will be more or less in the nature of a scouting visit."

"You don't intend to make any attempt to get down into the pit?"

"No—not to-night."

Skinner heard a footstep along the deck. He dared not wait a second longer. He had been marvellously fortunate to hear what he had heard. The very information he had required was now his.

The party would be going ashore in an hour!

Silently, Skinner slipped to the rail, and he descended the accommodation ladder like a shadow. In another moment he was in the sea, noiselessly swimming to the shore.

He hauled himself out, and made his way back along the beach.

His one fear had been that the party had already gone, and were even now on their way to the summit of the hill. But no. He had almost an hour to make his preparations—and they were likely to be grim.

He found his companions waiting for him.

"Well?" asked one of them. "Anything doing?"

"There sure is!" replied Skinner. "But listen! Lee, Dorrimore, and the whole gang, are coming right ashore. I guess they'll be making in this direction in about an hour's time. Have you guys got your guns ready?"

"Yes, you bet we have."

"Well," said Mr. Skinner grimly—"you'll sure need to use them."

"What's the dope?"

"We're going to get right along the beach, behind them rocks," replied Mr. Skinner. "Say, when that gang gets on the beach there'll be blazes to pay! At the word from me, we'll all open fire."

And the ambush was prepared.

In the meantime, there was great activity on board the yacht. The juniors stood in groups, looking on eagerly, and with great interest. They all knew that a shore party was being got ready.

Handforth was particularly keen.

"It's all very well for us to be kept on board, but I don't believe in it," growled Edward Oswald. "If there's any fighting to be done, I want to be there."

"Absolutely not!" said Archie, shaking his head.

"What?"

"I mean to say, this bally business is somewhat frightfully poisonous," said Archie.

"Are you talking about the gas?"

"Not at all," Archie hastened to explain. "That, of course, is poisonous as well. But I mean to say, a man's-size job, what? It's all very well for priceless chappies like Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore—but these foul blighters on shore appear to be toughs of the worst description. Hardly the thing, what? Not quite the style for us, as it were."

We watched the preparations eagerly.

Gas masks were brought on deck—all ready for the use of the party that was getting ready to go ashore. A boat was already lowered, and waiting alongside. And, in due course, Nelson Lee announced that he was ready. Special men had been picked for this task, including Mr. Barry, who had had former experience of climbing the hill.

He and Lord Dorrimore were to be the guides.

And on the shore, watching closely from behind the rocks, Skinner and his men were in readiness—like a skulking band of wolves, ready to pounce upon an unwary traveller.

The situation, in all truth, was rather terrible.

Those on board the Wanderer had no suspicion that this ambush had been prepared. And when they went ashore they would walk blindly into it—to meet an almost certain death.

But I must reserve the full description of all this until the next episode. For this present record is now ended. We had completed our journey to the island. We were on the spot, and the episodes of the future looked like being even more thrilling and perilous than the one we had just experienced.

Dorrimore Island was to prove a place of many startling thrills!

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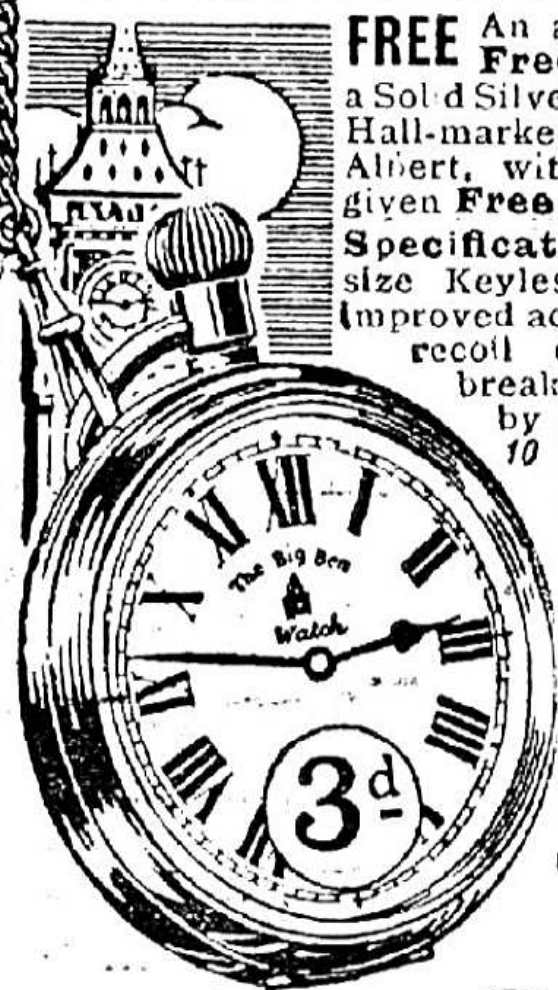
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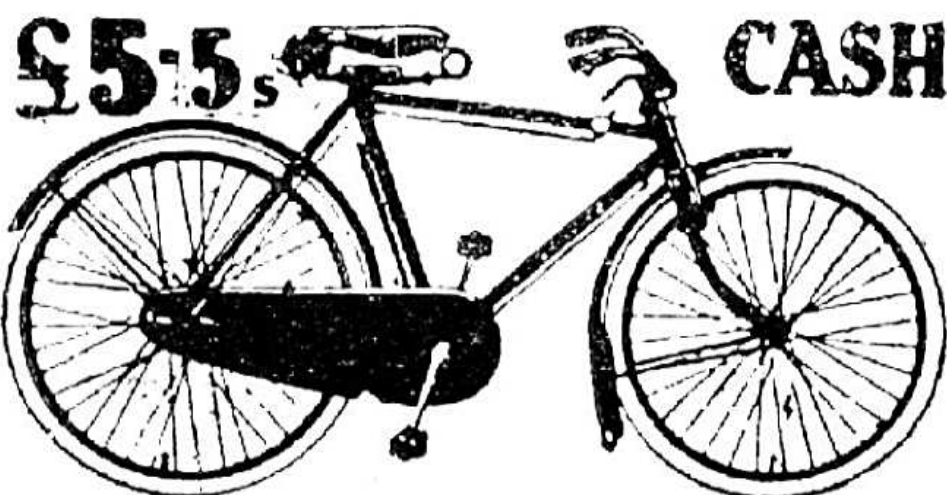
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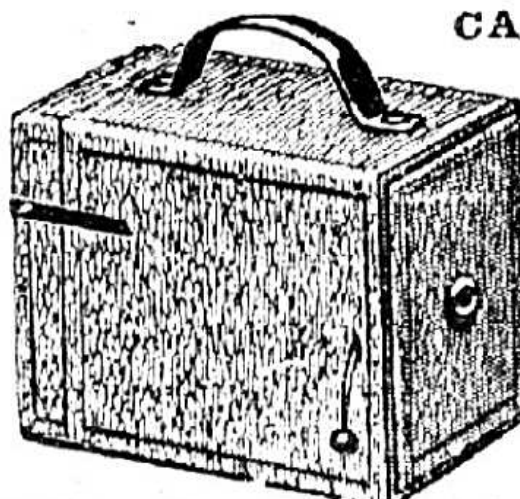
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