

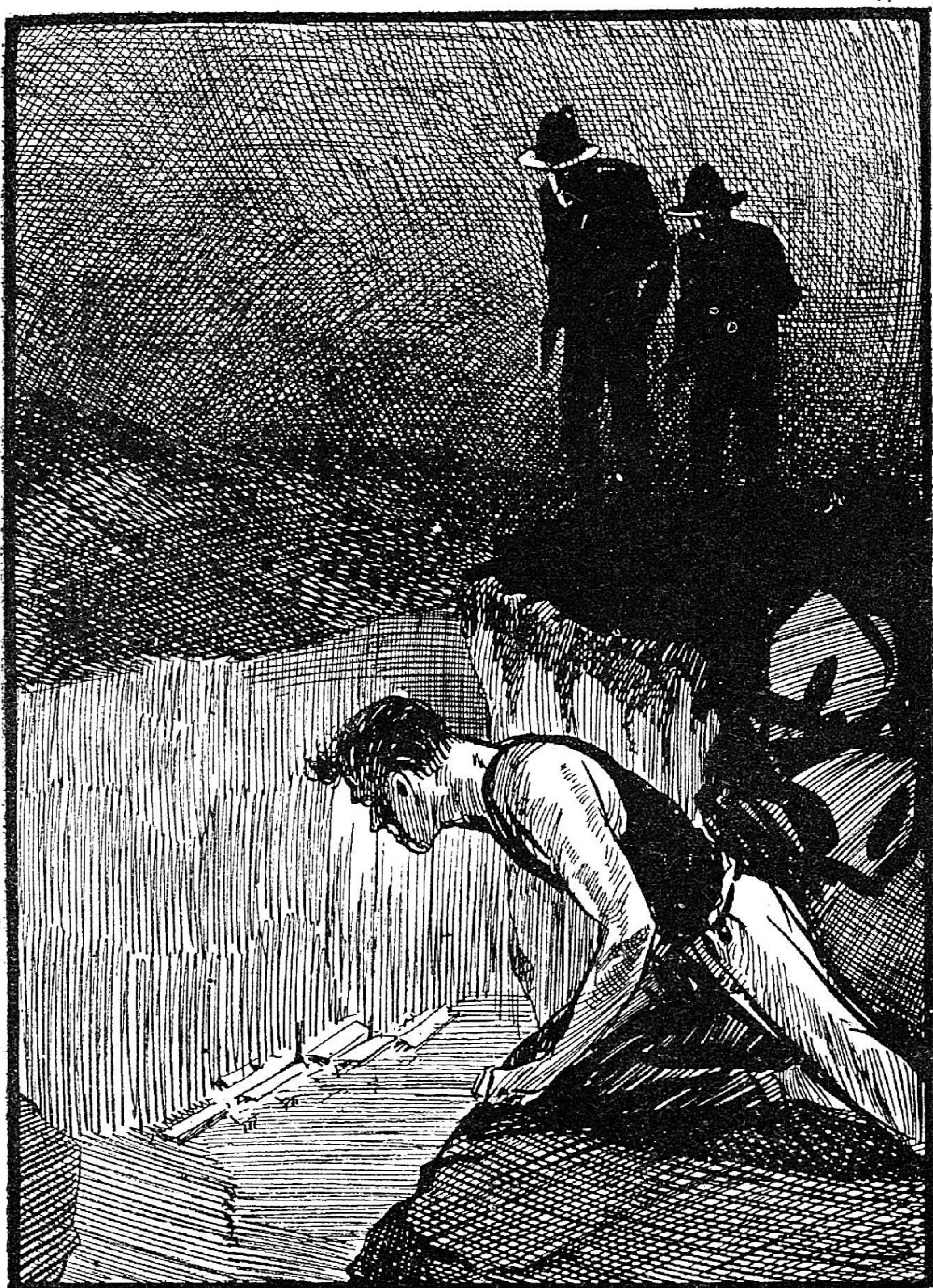
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The Nelson Lee 2^d Library



THE AMBUSH.

From This Week's Capital Story:—
**The Slaves of
Dorrimore Island!**



But his nerves were steady as he gazed down. His heart was thumping rapidly, and far below he could see lights. One or two of them were moving about. It was clear that men were down there, carrying lanterns or torches. And Handforth tried to get a true picture of the pit.

The Slaves of Dorrimore Island!



A rousing story of the famous Juniors of St. Frank's, who are the guests of their old friend, Lord Dorrimore, on board *The Wanderer*. The sporting peer had been cruising around the South Seas in his yacht, looking for adventure, when he stumbled upon an island bearing evidence of mysterious inhabitants, who appear to be engaged on some secret enterprise. Determined to investigate, Lord Dorrie sails for Los Angeles, where he picks up Nelson Lee and the Holiday Party, and they all proceed to this strange island. Captain Hurricane, the unprincipled skipper of the *Henry R. Cane*, hears about Dorrie's project, and tries to scuttle *The Wanderer*. Captain Hurricane is a desperate man who gives no quarter nor expects any. He is a terror to the high seas, and it is clear that he is interested in some shady business connected with the island.

THE EDITOR.

*The Narrative Related
Throughout by Nipper.*

CHAPTER I.

HANDFORTH MAKES UP HIS MIND.

RALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD lounged languidly in a deck chair, under the awning on the promenade deck of the steam yacht, *Wanderer*. With him were Gulliver and Bell, his two particular chums of Study A.

And Fullwood and Co. were enjoying a smoke.

"Pretty good idea, borrowin' these cigs from Dorrie's box," remarked Fullwood, as he blew forth a fragrant puff. "We're quiet

here, too—no danger of bein' disturbed in this corner."

"I think we ought to have waited until the party set off," said Bell. "Might be a bit awkward if Mr. Lee spotted us."

"Rot!" said Fullwood. "They're all too busy to care about us."

It was night and Lord Dorrimore's well-appointed yacht was lying at anchor in a protected little bay, just off the coast of Dorrimore Island. His lordship himself had given the island this name.

It was really a tiny, barren islet in the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean, several

days' sail from the Californian coast. Overhead, the stars were shining, but there was no moon.

And the land was enshrouded in gloom.

There were very few signs of activity on board the Wanderer. There were no indications that a perilous task was about to be embarked upon by an intrepid party, led by Nelson Lee.

And yet, this was the case. It really seemed that there could be no purpose in going ashore. The yacht had dropped her anchor just as dusk had been falling, and the juniors had seen a peculiarly-shaped island, barren of all vegetation except for two tall palm trees at the summit of the big hill.

This hill, in fact, was the island.

It was something like the top of a mountain stuck out of the water. True, there was a short, sandy beach all the way round, but the island was in no sense similar to others in the South Seas.

There was no luxuriant growth of grass, wild flowers, and so forth. That big central hill of the island was just a rocky eminence—with rough, jagged sides, and a most depressing appearance.

Roughly speaking, the island was about three miles long by two miles wide—really an insignificant little pinpoint of land in all that vast expanse of ocean. It lay well out of the course of all shipping, and was scarcely ever visited. There was no water supply there that was known, and no ship had any reason for paying a call.

And yet the Wanderer was on the spot for a very definite purpose.

Fullwood and Co. were inclined to be somewhat sour in their criticism. It was hardly to be expected that they would be otherwise, for they were rather famous for their unpleasantness.

"A bally shame, I call it!" said Bell.

"What is?"

"Why, bringin' us out on this trip," replied Bell. "Goodness knows what might happen. It's quite on the cards that there may be a fight, an' then what would happen to us?"

"You needn't be scared," said Fullwood, with a slight sneer. "We're safe enough—an' personally, I don't altogether believe that yarn of Dorrimore's, either. I think he must have been takin' too much brandy!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Gulliver. "What about those men who tried to sink the yacht? They were real enough, anyway! I believe it's all true, an' things don't look any too bright to me. Still, we're havin' a pretty good time, an' I must say that the Wanderer is a fine old tub."

In the meantime, a few other St. Frank's fellows were chatting on the other side of the deck. The whole Remove was on board. Not a single fellow had been left behind from this summer holiday trip. And even Willy Handforth, of the Third, had graced the party with his presence.

In a way, this was lucky.

For Willy had been the direct cause of

saving everybody on the Wanderer from swift and violent death. Willy claimed no real credit for this, because it had been more or less accidental on his part. But there was no getting away from the fact that his presence on board was the main factor.

It was Edward Oswald Handforth who calmly claimed the credit.

"You chaps can say what you like—but facts are facts," said Handforth firmly. "You'll never catch me bragging about anything. I'm one of those modest chaps—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, of course—expect you to cackle!" said Handforth tartly. "Nobody looks for anything from a donkey but braying!"

"And sometimes a kick!" said Reggie Pitt significantly.

"Well, we won't argue!" growled Handforth.

"Good! Then if you stop, there'll be complete silence!" said De Valerie.

Handforth ignored the insult.

"Let's look into facts," he said. "We might as well find out exactly where we are. A good detective always gets his data, and lays it out in front of him like a map. To begin with, we left Los Angeles three or four days ago—and two members of the crew, named Harding and Baxter, were missing."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "He's going over the whole giddy works!"

"I am!" said Handforth determinedly. "Nothing like knowing where we stand. Well, we started out on this trip, and nobody knew what we were going to do, or where we were bound for. Then Lord Dorrimore startled us by telling a ripping yarn about slaves and villains!"

Pitt nodded.

"I'll help you!" he said. "We'll put it in a nutshell. Dorrie came to this island weeks ago. He discovered that the centre of it is hollow. Up there in the middle of that big hill there's a huge pit, five hundred feet deep, with sheer sides—"

"Look here—" began Handforth.

"Sheer sides," continued Pitt. "Down in this well, which happens to be two miles long by one mile wide, Dorrie saw men at work. They were chained together in gangs of twenty. And they were being treated like slaves—driven by guards, who were armed with whips and rifles. So Dorrie made up his mind to come back, fully equipped, and to make fuller investigations. That's the whole thing."

Handforth was highly indignant.

"You—you rotter!" he snorted. "I'm telling this yarn!"

"It's told!" said Reggie. "If I had allowed you to finish, you would have been going on for an hour! Here we are, at the island, and Mr. Lee and Dorrie and a good many others are going ashore within a few minutes to make some preliminary investigations."

"And we're left out of it," snorted Handforth, his voice fairly quivering with indig-

nation. "We've been brought along—and yet we can't take any part in the affair!"

"Well, it might be dangerous——"

"Who cares for danger?" said Handforth tartly. "All the better! And I can tell you, my sons, that it won't be so easy to leave me out of this! I've got a few ideas of my own!"

"Look here, Handy," I broke in quietly. "Don't you——"

"Look here, Nipper!" said Handforth, mimicking me. "You mind your own giddy business! I know what you're going to say! I mustn't disobey your gov'nor's orders—I mustn't dare to leave the ship! Piffle! If I do anything, it'll be my own giddy responsibility. See?"

"Oh, all right—I'm not your keeper, anyway," I said. "And if you're too pigheaded to take advice, you can go and eat coke! And chew it well, because it's good for the digestion!"

Handforth gave a mocking laugh.

"I suppose that's meant to be a joke?" he sneered. "Har-har! Just listen to me screaming with merriment! Ass!"

He turned away from me, and knitted his brows.

"Lemme see, where was I?" he asked.

"Oh, I know! I was just going over the facts about our giddy visit here. Well, we were all pretty well struck by the story of this island. To look at it, you wouldn't think that there was anything queer about it. You wouldn't believe that the inside of the hill is all hollow. But there's something grim going on there—and that's certain enough, because these crooks tried to keep us from coming here."

"The rotters!" said Armstrong hotly. "The inhuman beasts! Trying to sink the Wanderer, with everybody on board! Why, it's too awful for words! They're nothing more than a lot of demons!"

Handforth nodded with entire approval.

"Yes, and we ain't even allowed to take a smack at 'em!" he said wrathfully. "That's what makes me wild, you know! And remember what happened on the way here! Those two stowaways were found down in the bilge, setting a bomb! And if it hadn't been for me, they'd have blown us all to smithereens!"

"Rats! It was Willy who found them!"

"Yes, and why did he find them?" retorted Handforth. "Because he was bunking from me, and dodged down there for safety. It was jolly lucky that Mr. Barry came on the spot when he did. That second officer chap is a good 'un! Anyway, those murderous rotters were captured."

"Yes, and they didn't escape, as they had planned," said Church. "It was a pretty clever wheeze to have a fast motor launch come up in the dark at a fixed hour, so that the men could jump overboard. And it was a lot cleverer when Mr. Lee and Dorrie jumped over instead of the real crooks!"

"Rather!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "They collared the launch, made everybody a prisoner, and shoved the two crooks on

board, as well. And now the launch is on its way back to Los Angeles, in charge of Mr. Colgate. Before long that bunch of criminals will be in jail!"

"But what about the rest—including Captain Hurricane?"

"Ah!" said Handforth dramatically. "What about 'em? That's just it! Mr. Lee believes that an awful beast named Captain Hurricane is responsible for the whole giddy bag of tricks. And it won't be long before the full truth is known. There's a giddy mystery about this island—and we're here to find it out."

"Sorry—your mistake," said De Valerie.

"What?"

"We're here to look on!" said De Valerie. "It's Mr. Lee who'll do all the finding out. We're just spectators. We've got to stay on board. Later on, perhaps, we shall have a chance to go ashore."

Handforth was about to make some suitable reply to this when Nelson Lee himself came briskly along the deck. He was accompanied by Lord Dorrimore.

In the rear was Umlosi, the giant African chief—the huge black who had accompanied Dorrie on many a world adventure. And Umlosi was in all his warrior's get up. He was ready for the fray. Stripped of practically all clothing, he carried his great spear—which was the only weapon he would deign to use. Revolvers and other firearms he regarded with entire disdain.

"Now, boys, just a final word of warning," said Nelson Lee, speaking to the crowd in general. "We're now going off, and things will be rather quiet on board for a time. But there will be plenty of armed men here, in case of any surprise attack."

"Good!" said Handforth eagerly. "Do you think there's any chance of a fight on the yacht, sir?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Handforth, but I should say that the chances are very slim indeed," replied Lee drily. "I have not the slightest suspicion that anything will disturb the tranquil calm of the night on this spot. But it is always well to be prepared."

"Then—then we've just got to twiddle our thumbs, sir?" growled Handy.

"If that pastime amuses you, by all means indulge in it," replied Nelson Lee. "But there are plenty of other ways of passing the time away. I cannot say when we shall be back, and you must not worry, boys, if bedtime arrives without any sign of us. Just go to your berths as usual, and sleep soundly."

"Yes, sir."

"And I must impress upon you the importance of your remaining on board," went on Lee. "There must be no adventures—no escapades. Until we have found out the actual truth regarding this island, all you boys are forbidden to go ashore. The yacht's officers and men have been instructed to keep you away from any of the boats, if you should attempt to rush one of them."

"It's all right, sir—we'll obey orders."

"Thank you, boys," said Nelson Lee.

Handforth had not been one of those to say anything. And soon afterwards, when Nelson Lee and the others had moved along the deck, Handforth drew Church and McClure aside.

They had a feeling that they were being taken to the condemned cell. They knew what was coming. There was a gleam in Handforth's eye that meant a great deal to his chums.

"Look here, Handy, you mustn't do it!" said Church, with alarm.

"Mustn't do what?"

"I don't know—but I'm pretty certain you're thinking of some mad, idiotic scheme," said Church. "You heard what Mr. Lee said, didn't you? You mustn't leave the ship—"

"Dry up!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "Wait till I've told you the idea. Why, you'll simply go dotty over it. If you've got any brains at all, you'll be full of enthusiasm."

"Let's hear it!" said McClure grimly.

Handforth leaned closer, and his voice descended to a hoarse whisper.

"We're going ashore!" he breathed tensely.

"But—but—"

"Mr. Lee thinks that he's going to leave us all behind—but he's made a bloomer!" hissed Edward Oswald. "By George! Does he think he can mess me about like that? Not likely! We're going!"

"I knew it!" said Church, in a hollow voice. "I could feel it in my giddy bones. I knew the awful ass was thinking of—Hi! Leggo my arm, you duffer! You're pinching!"

"And if you talk loud like that again, I'll biff you!" said Handforth, putting his face within an inch of Church's. "If you chaps dare to give me away, I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"You needn't stutter any more—we won't give you away," interrupted McClure. "We ain't that sort. You're a rotter to suggest it. You know we're always willing to back you up in anything sensible. And even if we're against you, we keep mum. We're not cads!"

Handforth nodded.

"Sorry—I didn't mean to say that," he growled. "Yes, I know you fellows are made of the right stuff. Look here, why don't you enter into this thing in the right spirit? My idea is to swim ashore, and land in the next bay."

"But what for?"

"What for?" repeated Handforth. "Why, we'll follow Mr. Lee and the others, and have a look into that pit. See the wheeze? If there's any fighting, we'll be safe enough, because nobody'll spot us in the darkness. And it's just likely that we might be able to lend a hand."

"It's more likely that we shall get into an awful row," said McClure. "If Mr. Lee spots us, we shall be flogged!"

"Oh, shall we?" said Handforth. "Don't

forget one thing—that Mr. Lee ain't a schoolmaster now! We're on our holidays, and he can't do any flogging! What's more, he can't give any orders, either! He asked the fellows to stay on board, and to be patient—he didn't order 'em! Well, most of the asses promised—but I didn't. See? It's up to me to do as I like!"

To Handforth, this argument seemed perfectly sound, and his chums protested with him in vain. The war-like leader of Study D had made up his mind. And there was an end of it.

And Handforth and Co. prepared for their escapade.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSH!



ASHORE, all was black and silent. From the deck of the Wanderer, one could see the strip of sandy beach, quite deserted and barren of all rocks.

These latter were strewn about higher up, but the beach itself was clear.

The Wanderer was anchored in a little bay, and it would be the obvious course of the landing party to go straight ahead, and climb the hill. There was a little headland, with a number of rocks jutting out. And these rocks were as dead and as silent as the rest of the island.

But appearances were deceptive.

At close range, it would have been seen that dim figures were lurking near the rocks—near them, crouching among them. And one man was just a little in advance of the others. The party numbered five altogether.

"No sign of anything yet," murmured the man in advance. "But they can't be long now. I guess they'll be showin' up pretty quick."

"Well, anyway, I figger that we've got the bunch set!" said another voice. "Gee! I'm sure keen to use this gun, Skinner."

Skinner nodded.

"Yep, we'll clean up," he replied briefly.

Who were these men, and why were they here?

The matter needs only a very brief explanation. To be perfectly frank, these men were the prisoners who were supposed to be going towards Los Angeles in the motor launch, with Mr. Colgate in charge.

But the rascals were here—actually on the island.

For, unknown to Nelson Lee and Dorrie, a disaster had taken place. Skinner's crowd had turned the tables on their captors. They had, in short, recaptured the launch, and had sneaked up to the island under the cover of darkness. And now they were intent upon grim, deadly work.

Mr. Colgate and his four men were

prisoners on the launch—handcuffed, bound, gagged, and absolutely helpless. One member of the criminal party had been left in charge. The other six were intent upon—murder.

As Skinner looked round, the sixth member of the band crept into view from behind some rocks. He had been away scouting, and he was now looking eager.

"The boat's just gettin' away from the yacht, I figger!" he murmured. "Least-ways, it's being prepared. Gee! We don't need to wait much longer. This is sure where we start in to real work."

Skinner grunted.

"Sure—and we've got to make no mistakes!" he said. "We've got all the advantage, and we'll use it."

The plan was a diabolical one.

Hidden by those rocks, the enemy would be at fairly close range when Nelson Lee and his companions would pass. At a given signal, Skinner's crowd would open fire.

And the result would be appalling.

For Nelson Lee and his companions would be shot down without a single chance of retaliation. They would fall into the ambush completely, for they had no suspicions whatever that men were so near at hand.

All the odds were in favour of Skinner and his gang.

And while this situation remained thus, Handforth and Co. were getting busy. They had no intention of waiting until the shore party left. Handforth's idea was to get away first.

He wanted to have time to swim to the next bay, and then creep round along the shore. In this way, the juniors would be able to hide behind the rocks when Lee and the others passed. Then Handforth and Co. would follow. It was quite a simple scheme, and easily capable of fulfilment. There was only the slight danger of being spotted as they left the yacht.

The three juniors had casually gone below to their own cabin. Here they stripped, and donned bathing costumes. The night was quite warm, and there would not be the slightest danger of them catching cold. Indeed, a bathing costume was the most comfortable form of attire.

"All ready?" murmured Handforth, at length.

"Yes."

"All right—we'll go!" breathed Handforth. "Don't forget, we've got to slip to the stern, and then scramble down a rope that's hanging overboard. We'll be able to drop into the water without a sound. And if you chaps are seen as we go along the deck, I'll slaughter you!"

But Edward Oswald need not have worried. For his chums were now becoming fired with the same enthusiasm as himself. They had forgotten all about their desire to pull their leader up. He had at last succeeded in convincing them that the idea was a good one.



"Good gracious!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "Handforth! What on earth are you doing in the water, my boy? Church and McClure, too! I shall require a full explanation for this!"

And Church and McClure, like most other boys, were always ready for an adventure. They were keen upon the whole thing.

By great good luck, they reached the stern without being seen. This was chiefly because the boat deck was in almost complete darkness. The promenade deck, being illuminated, and being thronged with fellows, assisted the trio. For nobody suspected them of being on the deserted boat deck. They edged their way along to the stern, and duly arrived.

"Eureka!" breathed Handforth dramatically. "We're here! Go on—you chaps, go down first!"

"No need to use that tone!" breathed Church.

"I've been dished before!" said Handforth darkly. "If I go first, you're quite capable of slipping away, and leaving me to do the job alone. I'm going to see you chaps in the water before I leave the deck."

This was rather unkind, for both Church and McClure were loyal to their leader, and were prepared to accompany him through thick and thin. For, after all, Handforth was one of the best fellows breathing. He was reckless to a degree, but when it came to a matter of courage, he was indomitable.

Church and McClure scrambled down the rope.

It was a big one, and they had no difficulty in slithering down until they reached the water. They slipped in noiselessly, and swam silently about until Handforth joined them.

"Good!" breathed Handforth. "Follow me."

"Hold on!" muttered Church. "I've just thought of something."

"What?"

"Sharks!" said Church.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Sharks!"

He was startled. He had an uncomfortable feeling that something was about to grab hold of one of his legs. He gazed across the surface of the water, half expecting to see a dorsal fin cutting the surface.

"Oh, don't be such asses!" murmured McClure. "There's no fear of sharks. Didn't you hear Dorrie saying that there aren't any in these waters? I don't know why, but swimming's as safe as eggs here. That's what Dorrie said, anyhow—and he ought to know."

Feeling much relieved, the juniors began their swim.

They did not make direct for the shore, but cut off towards that nearby point at the end of the little bay. As soon as they had rounded this it would be quite safe to get ashore, for they would be out of vision.

They arrived opposite the point, and then struck in for the shore. Finally, they landed on the sandy beach, and crept like shadows towards the rocks.

Handforth was feeling very triumphant. They were ashore now, and they would easily be able to follow the party as it made its way up towards the summit of the big hill.

But, first of all, it was necessary to creep round the point.

There were some rocks near that spot, and Handforth reckoned that he and his chums would be able to crouch there, and wait until Lee's party passed. He turned to his chums, and motioned that complete silence was to reign. But he rather spoilt this by speaking at this moment.

"Shush!" he breathed. "Not a giddy word! You chaps have got to follow me in single file. Keep your distance, about

five yards apart. We can't take any risks of being spotted."

Church and McClure nodded, and the procession started along the beach.

They crept along very quietly, hidden by the darkness. Handforth, in advance, was the first to reach the point, where the rocks jutted out a little way. He paused here, and peeped round a boulder. For he had half an idea that Nelson Lee's party would already be on their way ashore.

And then Handforth got a bit of a shock.

For, clearly, he saw figures just in front of him—figures of men crouching among the rocks, and only two or three yards distant! He was so surprised that he nearly let out a yell.

It was only by a supreme effort that he kept himself in check. His heart began to thump. This was the very last thing he had expected. But the men were there—crouching in tense attitudes. And then Handforth noticed, with another jump, that they were all armed with revolvers and guns.

"My goodness!" he breathed. "An ambush!"

Blunderer though he was, Handforth could see in one glance that this was a deadly ambush. These men were waiting for the boat to come ashore. And as Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the rest stepped up the beach, they were to be shot down like skittles. It was a horrifying thought.

Quickly, Handforth glanced towards the yacht.

She looked very peaceful, lying there in the bay. The boat was still lying against the accommodation ladder, empty. The party had not yet left the yacht! There was time to take a warning!

For a flash, Handforth had half an idea of waiting there, in the hope of overhearing something. But better judgment told him that such a course would be unwise. For valuable time might be lost. Besides, Church and McClure were coming up behind, and they might give the whole game away.

Handforth turned, and crept back as silently as a shadow.

It was fortunate, indeed, that he had nothing to tread on but soft sand. For Edward Oswald was not a very careful fellow, even when danger lurked. He came upon Church and McClure, almost at once.

"Go back!" he hissed.

There was something in his voice that was quite different from usual—a note of real alarm. For Handforth to be alarmed was so strange that Church and McClure felt their pulses rapidly increase.

They turned back on the instant, and after they had gone a few yards, Handforth pulled them up. He drew them towards him, and placed his face in close proximity to theirs.

"There's an ambush round the corner!" he whispered tensely.

"What!"

"An—an ambush!"

"About ten men!" exclaimed Handforth, really believing that he was right. "They are all waiting there, with revolvers! I saw them as clear as daylight! They mean to shoot Mr. Lee and the rest down as they come ashore."

"Good heavens!"

"What—what can we do?"

"Do?" said Handforth. "We'll swim back, and take the warning."

"But—but we were forbidden to leave the ship—"

"Do you think that matters now?" snapped Handforth. "We're going to save their lives—so it'll be a queer thing if Mr. Lee scolds us for coming ashore. Why, it's absolutely providential!"

In this remark, Handforth was right.

The three juniors descended to the water, and slipped into the sea. The breaking of the waves had effectually drowned any noise they may have made. And Skinner and his men were in total ignorance of the fact that their terrible plot had been discovered.

Handforth and Co. did not go back the way they had come. There was no need for that now. They struck out straight for the accommodation ladder. And arrived in the very nick of time.

For Nelson Lee and Dorrie were in the act of descending just as Handforth hauled himself out of the water. Instinctively, Nelson Lee drew his revolver as he saw a dark figure rising out of the sea.

"Wait a minute, sir!" gasped Handforth. "It's me!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Nelson Lee. "Handforth! What on earth are you doing in the water, my boy? Church and McClure, too! I shall require a full explanation for this!"

Lee's voice had become stern, and he returned to the deck, with Handforth and Co., glistening and dripping, beside him. Lord Dorrimore, Mr. Barry, Umlosi, and several members of the yacht's crew, stood round. And a number of juniors crowded up, keen to look on.

"The awful ass!" said Pitt. "So he tried to get ashore, after all!"

"He'll get it in the neck, now!"

Handforth clutched at Nelson Lee's arm.

"We—we're only just in time, sir!" he panted.

"What do you mean, Handforth?" asked Lee. "Perhaps you had better explain at once what is wrong, my boy?"

There was something in Handforth's bearing—in his tone—that was very different from usual. And Nelson Lee could tell that something was wrong. He spoke in a much quieter voice.

"There's an ambush just on the shore!"

panted Handy. "A group of men are lying among the rocks—all of them with revolvers ready! They meant to shoot you down, and kill you all!"

CHAPTER III.

PLAYING SAFE!



LORD DORRIMORE whistled.

"An ambush, eh?" he repeated. "Gad! That's interestin'!"

"Handforth, I want to hear more details of this," said Nelson Lee grimly. "If you are right in what you say, we have to thank you for our lives. Let me hear your full story at once."

Handforth poured it out, assisted by Church and McClure.

"You see, sir, we thought we might as well be in the fun," concluded Handy. "My idea was to follow you, so that we could have a look at that pit. I hope you won't be cross, sir—"

"Under the circumstances, Handforth, I could not very well be cross," interrupted Nelson Lee. "As a general rule, I am not always ready to accept your statements as being actually true. I am not intimating that you are in the habit of lying—but you are somewhat apt to obtain false impressions."

"But it's true, sir—really!" insisted Handforth, in alarm. "You mustn't go ashore—those murderers are waiting to shoot—"

"Yes, yes—I believe you," interrupted Lee. "I can generally tell when you are in deadly earnest, my boy. But we will make doubly sure—and, furthermore, we will allow those gentry to fully appreciate the fact that we are prepared."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"You will see very soon," replied Lee. "For the present, you had better go below, and dry yourselves. I need hardly say, my dear boys, that we are all extremely grateful to you for this very timely warning—"

"Oh, come off it, sir," growled Handforth. "It's nothing, sir."

But every member of that shore party knew to what extent they had to thank Handforth & Co. They had been doomed to almost certain death. And these juniors, disobeying all instructions, had saved them. It seemed, after all, that there was much to be said for Handforth's dare-devil recklessness—much to praise in his determination to join in the fun.

It may be thought that Nelson Lee was lacking in caution, to plan the shore trip without making sure that the coast was clear. But the detective had known nothing of the launch's approach.

And, according to Lord Dorrimore's story, there were only four or five men on the island, and these were required down in the pit, to look after the slaves. Lee.

therefore, had had no cause to suspect an ambush.

All the juniors were interested to know what the next move would be.

They were rather surprised. For Nelson Lee had decided upon a definite course. He did not disbelieve Handforth, but, at the same time, he was determined to make absolutely certain.

It was highly essential that Handforth's story should be verified.

There were a few preparations on board the *Wanderer*, and then, at a given signal, half a dozen huge rocket-like things shot skywards. When they reached a fair height, they suddenly burst into dazzling fire. The whole bay, the beach, the hill, and the *Wanderer* were bathed in brilliance.

"Star shells!" exclaimed Bob Christine, with a gasp.

"My goodness, yes!"

They were, indeed, star shells. Another six followed the first volley. All the line of the shore could be seen as in broad daylight. And consternation reigned in the ambush.

Skinner and his men had been quite concealed by the friendly darkness; but that was destroyed now. It was as though the men had been suddenly uncovered. They were all revealed, crouching there.

They started up, one after another. They ran about, trying to find some concealment. But there was none. That brilliant light placed the whole scene in clear observation.

And Nelson Lee, peering keenly through binoculars, started.

"This is extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "Dorrie, do you recognise any of those men?"

Dorrie was using his own glasses.

"They look a pretty villainous lot, anyway," he observed. "No, I can't say that I— Why, surely that's Skinner—the man who was in charge of the launch?"

"You are right."

"But that crowd is on its way to Los Angeles, with Colgate in charge of the party," exclaimed Dorrie.

"That is what we assumed; but it is quite evident that some disaster must have occurred to the launch," said Lee grimly. "This makes a very great difference, old man. Those seven criminals must have turned the tables on Colgate, and they are all here. That means that we have many more enemies to contend with."

"Oh, well, it's pretty evident that large supplies of trouble are comin' along," said Dorrie. "Perhaps we ought to have brought one or two warships with us, to say nothin' of an expeditionary force!"

Nelson Lee looked very grave.

"I think it most likely that we shall be able to deal with the situation ourselves," he said. "Of course, we are what is commonly termed 'butting in.' It is really none of our business—but I quite

agree with you that the matter demands strict investigation."

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "Hallo! They're scootin' now. Bunkin' along the beach for all they're worth. Wouldn't be a bad idea to get the twelve-pounder into action, an' tickle 'em up with a few shells."

Lee smiled.

"We are not actually at war," he replied. "If such were the case, we should have no difficulty at all—for we should be able to shell the island, and soon bring these rascals into a state of submission."

"It's a bally good thing that Handforth disobeyed orders," remarked Dorrie. "He was right, you see. No question about that ambush, old man. By glory! We should have been properly in the soup!"

"Handforth's discovery makes all the difference to our plans," said Nelson Lee. "As things stand at present, I suggest deferring our visit until the morning. It will be much better to land in full daylight."

"You really think so?"

"I do," replied Nelson Lee. "We know that these men are prowling about, and it would be foolhardy to land now. After all, there is no hurry that I know of—to-morrow will do just as well as to-night. And all secrecy is at an end now, anyhow."

"I'm dreadfully dense—I don't quite follow."

"My dear man, these men know that we are here—they are equally certain that we intend to land and examine the whole place. Therefore, why should we take the risk of going in the darkness? Far better to go with a strong armed force in full daylight, and we shall probably be able to wing through at the very first attempt."

Lord Dorrimore could see that Nelson Lee's reasoning was perfectly sound. And so the night expedition was abandoned. It was decided that a strict watch would be kept from the yacht throughout the night until morning.

Indeed, Dorrie gave instructions for a searchlight to be rigged up.

This was soon done, and the beam of light was swept on to the shore. Throughout the hours of darkness it was to continue this work—sweeping the whole shore from end to end without pause.

Thus it would be quite impossible for any enemy party to creep up to the yacht by surprise. It was a very necessary precaution, for these men had proved that they were capable of any violence.

Personally, I was rather pleased.

"I'm jolly glad the gov'nor's not going," I said to a group of fellows. "I didn't quite like the idea of that party setting off in the darkness. Too risky. I was in a state of nerves all the time. Of course, I wouldn't have cared if I had been going myself—that makes a difference."

"Something like an expert motor-car driver taking a trip with a pal," said Pitt. "He's as nervous as anything; but when

he gets at the wheel himself he never notices it."

Handforth was still unconquered.

"We've done one jolly good thing to-night, and there's no reason why we shouldn't do another," he said, taking his chums aside, and talking to them seriously. "Now that the party isn't going ashore, there's a big chance for us."

"What do you mean?" asked McClure.

"We'll swim ashore again——"

"You—you ass!"

"We'll swim ashore again, and do some quiet investigations alone," continued Handforth coolly. "See the wheeze? We'll be safe enough, because we can be on the watch all the time——"

"And what about the searchlight?" asked Church.

"The which?" repeated Handforth. "My hat! I'd forgotten about the searchlight! Still, I reckon we could manage to miss it. The beam doesn't keep in one place all the time, and we could seize our chance to slip ashore just at the point of the rocks when the beam is in the other direction."

Church shook his head.

"You're dotty!" he said firmly. "For goodness' sake don't spoil everything by doing anything mad like that, Handy."

"But I'm not going to be dished out of some excitement!" said Handforth obstinately. "I don't mind telling you, I'm fed up. I thought there was going to be a battle—and Mr. Lee's given up the whole scheme! Nothing's going to happen until to-morrow. We've all got to go to bed like good little boys!"

Handforth spoke in a tone of great disgust.

"I know it's a bit disappointing, but why can't you leave Mr. Lee to do things his own way?" demanded McClure. "Anyway, you won't get me to go on any blessed night investigations!"

"Same here!" said Church firmly.

Handforth looked at them, and glared.

"You—you rotters!" he said witheringly.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, we're not—and you know it!" said Church quietly. "Sometimes you can goad us into doing a thing by saying that. But it won't work this time, Handy. Not likely!"

"We're not going—and that's final!" declared McClure. "And, what's more, if you persist in this crazy scheme, we'll tell Mr. Lee!"

"I was just going to say the same thing," said Church.

Handforth swallowed hard.

"You—you traitors!" he hissed. "You sneaks! You—you——"

"Go it!" said Church gruffly. "Call us what you like; we don't care! We're doing it for your own sake, anyway. You're a mean beast, Handy!"

"What?" gasped Handforth, aghast.

"You're a mean beast!"

"Why, you—you——"

"You know jolly well we're not sneaks—or traitors, either!" said Church hotly. "It's rottenly mean of you to say things like that! We shall tell Mr. Lee only because we're thinking of you—because we don't want to attend your giddy funeral!"

Handforth suddenly softened.

"Asses!" he growled. "Oh, all right! I didn't mean to call you traitors. And I suppose there's some sense in what you say. Let's all go to bed. Perhaps there'll be some decent excitement to-morrow."

Both Church and McClure breathed a silent sigh of relief. They exchanged significant glances—although they did not allow Handforth to see this. By reason of persistent effort, they had succeeded in driving a little common sense into their leader's obstinate head. And this object had been accomplished without even a blow being exchanged.

It was quite a record for Church and McClure.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY MEANS BUSINESS.



THE Wanderer lay silent and at peace.

It was soon after dawn, and the sun was just beginning to peep over the rim of the ocean. It was a clear, brilliant morning, with every promise of a blazing hot day. A gentle breeze was coming along from the south-west. But the glass was steady, and fine weather was due to prevail.

All the juniors were sound asleep, for it was still very early.

But signs of activity presently made themselves manifest. Umlosi appeared, and he thoughtfully leaned against the rail, tenderly testing the edge of his spearhead. It was as sharp as any razor—a truly deadly weapon.

"Wau!" muttered Umlosi. "Methinks much fighting will be with us ere long. 'Tis well! Many moons have risen, and many moons have sunk, since I felt the thrill of a battle betwixt real men!"

"What's that you're muttering about, old son?" inquired Dorrie, strolling on the deck. "Havin' a few words in private with the old spear?"

Umlosi looked round.

"'Tis thou, N'Kose?" he said gravely.

"Ay, even so, O chief," said Dorrie. "'Tis I!"

"Thou art up betimes, my father."

"Yes, an' a bally nuisance, too!" growled Dorrie. "I do hate bein' lugged out of bed in the early mornin'! When it comes to sittin' up all night, I don't care a rap. But it's a dashed bore to tumble out in the grey dawn. This early-risin' stunt is overrated."

"Thou art surely jesting, N'Kose, since thou hast always arisen at earthly and

unearthly hours," said Umlosi. "'Tis well that we leave in good time for this wondrous expedition. Methinks much fighting will result."

"Always the same old cry," said Dorrie. "You're for ever thinkin' about fightin', you old fire-eater! I'm sorry, old man, but I'm very much afraid that there'll be no fightin' at all—at least, not your brand."

"Thou art surely attempting to fool me, my father."

"Not a bit of it," said Dorrie. "As far as I can see, these gentlemen are experts in the use of rifles and revolvers. We're not battlin' against a crowd of savages, where you can use your spear to good purpose."

"The thought has even crossed my mind," said Umlosi sadly. "'Tis ill, N'Kose. Surely the opportunity will arise for me to reveal my prowess with the trusty spear. 'Tis to be feared that my muscles are tight, and need practice."

Nelson Lee joined them just then, and announced that the party would be ready within five minutes. They were setting off quite early, before any of the juniors were awake.

Lee thought it was better so. He was very anxious to examine that deep pit that Dorrie had described so closely, and with so much detail. Lee wanted to verify, with his own eyes, the story that his lordship had told.

The party was quite a large one.

It consisted of Lee, Dorrimore, Mr. Barry, Umlosi, and ten members of the yacht's crew, the majority of them being burly stokers from the engine-room staff. They were a keen, determined lot, ready for any fighting, and fully armed.

The men on the island would have a somewhat formidable task to defeat such a force as this. And there would be no further opportunity of an ambush. For, in full daylight, there was no possible place where the enemy could hide.

The party had also equipped themselves with gas-masks—apparatus of the very latest type—comfortable and effective. The most poisonous gas would have no ill results if these masks were worn.

Within fifteen minutes the party had left for the shore.

There was no sign whatever of the enemy. The island seemed to be completely deserted. The rocks stood out bare and stark in the morning sunshine. And, far above, on the hilltop, stood those two palm-trees, like sentinels watching over their charge.

A very strict watch was kept all the time. Nelson Lee did not lead his men in any direction where there might be possible snipers lurking. He chose the most direct way up to the summit of the hill. On both sides the rocky slopes were comparatively smooth.

There were no boulders behind which snipers could lurk.

But as the party ascended higher and

higher, they kept on the alert. Still there was no sign. For all that could be seen, this island was as barren and deserted as it really appeared to be.

Three parts of the journey had been completed. Lee, in advance, was growing near to the summit. And then he paused. His keen eyes detected a kind of haze upon the hillside. It was almost as though a filmy cloud was rolling down, clinging close to the ground.

Nelson Lee turned.

"Get ready!" he said sharply. "There may be gas."

"I've been expectin' it," said Lord Dorrimore. "We struck the gas much lower down than this when we came up here before. Hallo! I believe I caught a whiff just then. Better hurry up, you fellows."

Indeed, there was every necessity to hustle.

For a big cloud of awful, deadly gas enveloped the party during the next few seconds. It was something like a faint haze. But, although nearly invisible, it was horrible.

All the men got their gas-masks on, and then they were safe.

But several had taken a breath or two. And now they were reeling about, almost insensible from the effects of that one gulp. Nelson Lee himself had felt a trace of it, but he had acted in time.

Conversation, of course, was now impossible.

They proceeded up the slope grimly, and with the conviction that this gas was not natural. It did not ooze from the ground itself, but it had been deliberately set loose by the enemy.

It was poison gas.

It was the same kind of gas that had been used on the Western Front during the Great War. Lord Dorrimore himself recognised it as such, for he had done quite a lot of fighting on the various fronts.

But where the gas came from was a mystery.

And while the party was climbing the hill in this way, a rather remarkable discovery was made on board the yacht. And it was Church and McClure who made this discovery. They awoke—at least, Church awoke.

He turned over in his bed, and then blinked. McClure was in the cabin all right—but Handforth's bed was empty. It was all muddled up, and had obviously been slept in. Church sat up.

"You awake, Clurey?" he yawned. "What's the time?"

McClure turned over in bed, and followed the example of his chum. The morning sunlight was streaming in through the window—for this cabin was one which looked out on to the promenade deck.

"Where's Handy?" said McClure. "The mean rotter! Fancy getting up and leaving us to sleep! He might have given us a dig—"

"I say, it's only just half-past six!" interrupted Church. "Why, it's not time to get up yet. I say," he added, with a startled look, "I hope Handy hasn't done anything rash!"

They stared at one another. It was a most unusual thing for Handforth to get up without battering his chums into wakefulness, too. For him to sneak out on the quiet was almost unheard of. But, without any question, he had done it this morning.

"Oh, I suppose he's only up on deck somewhere," said McClure uneasily.

Nevertheless, they quickly dressed themselves and passed outside. They found that some of the other juniors were up—including myself, Tommy Watson, Pitt, and some more.

We had learned that the party had set off on its trip ashore, and we were rather keen to watch the progress up the hillside. From the deck of the Wanderer we could see practically everything.

And then we heard from Church and McClure that Handforth was missing.

And he really was missing. There was no sign of him on board whatever. The yacht was searched high and low. Stewards were pressed into service during this search, but all the efforts were in vain. We made the startling discovery that Edward Oswald Handforth was not on board the Wanderer at all!

"The hopeless ass!" I said, in exasperation. "That's just like him! Of course, he must have sneaked ashore before dawn. I suppose you chaps don't know anything about it?" I added, turning to Church and McClure.

They were both looking rather scared.

"No," said Church. "He was saying something last night——"

"Saying something?"

"Well, he wanted to make us agree to go ashore," replied Church. "He said there were all sorts of investigations to be made, and all that kind of rot. We persuaded him not to be such an ass. And he promised that he would chuck up the whole thing—and he came to bed with us."

I nodded.

"Just like Handy!" I said. "Of course, he didn't give it up at all. As soon as you chaps were asleep he must have slipped out of bed and gone ashore. Goodness only knows what's happened to him now."

Church and McClure were quite pale.

"We—we ought to tell somebody!" exclaimed McClure frantically. "Can't one of the men go after the party and tell Mr. Lee about it? It'll be terrible if something bad has happened to Handy."

"Oh, he'll be all right," declared Pitt. "I don't know why it is, but Handforth always manages to escape everything. He goes into the most awful dangers, and comes out without a scratch."

We didn't really know what to do. We couldn't send anybody in chase of the shore



"Yes; and Handy's bound like a trussed chicken!" I declared. "You can see him clearly through these glasses. He's held by two men, and there's no telling what the consequences will be."

party—besides, it wouldn't have been any good, in any case. For what could they do? As far as I could see, the only thing was to wait. Perhaps Handy would turn up himself.

We all went on deck and stood watching. Even without the aid of glasses we could see the progress of the invaders. Nelson Lee was leading, and the whole party was climbing the hillside slowly and in good order.

"Hallo, they're pausing!" said De Valerie. "Something seems to be wrong!"

"My hat, yes!"

"I expect they've seen one of the enemy, or something."

"No—it's gas!" I pointed out. "Look! They're putting on their masks. I hope to goodness they don't all faint, or something. That gas is awful stuff. Lots of chaps die, even if they only get one whiff!"

"That's right—be cheerful!" said Reggie Pitt.

Through my binoculars I could easily see the gov'nor and Dorrie fixing on their gas masks. They were apparently quite all right, for they were perfectly steady, and were acting just as usual. One or two of the sailors were reeling slightly, but they soon recovered from this after their masks were on.

And the whole party proceeded on its way.

But only for a few yards farther. For, quite unexpectedly some figures appeared above the skyline at the very top of the hill. There were three of them, and shouts went up from the juniors.

"The enemy!"

"My only hat! There's going to be some fighting!"

"It looks like it!"

Those three figures, however, made no attempt whatever to give battle. They stood there—one smaller figure between two burly ones. And Nelson Lee and his party had come to a halt—about a hundred and fifty yards away, with their weapons held in readiness for instant use.

"Gimme the glasses—quick!" I panted.

Somehow I had a suspicion. I had just lent my binoculars to Fatty Little, who was still trying to adjust them to his own focus. I grabbed them, in spite of his protests, and quickly set them.

Then I levelled the glasses at the top of the hill.

"Good heavens!" I muttered, with a kind of gulp.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Pitt quickly.

"Take these—and look!" I said, in a queer voice. "It seems that things are going to be pretty bad now. There's Handforth up there—"

"Handforth!" yelled the crowd.

"Yes; and he's bound up like a trussed chicken!" I declared. "You can see him clearly through these glasses. He's held by two men, and there's no telling what the consequences will be!"

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed Reggie, peering through the glasses.

Edward Oswald Handforth was in the hands of the enemy!

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HANDFORTH!



IT will be just as well, I think, to give a little account of Handforth's own interesting adventures. For, before he appeared on the hilltop between his two guards,

quite a number of exciting events took place.

Handforth had done exactly as we believed.

As soon as Church and McClure went to sleep Handforth sneaked out. He waited until his chums were quite sound in slumber. He wasn't taking any chances in that way.

He also wanted to make quite sure that most of the others on board were in bed and out of the way. It was well after midnight when Handforth silently and stealthily crept out of the cabin window—and thus direct on to the deck.

He did not want to take the chance of going along the ordinary corridor. By doing this he might easily run into a member of the night watch—and that would be rather unfortunate, for he would be reported to Lord Dorrimore, or to Nelson Lee.

So Handforth took no chances.

He nipped to the side of the boat and slid over on the seaward side—opposite to where the searchlight was playing. He hoped that he would be able to make the trip ashore without anyone being the wiser.

"What I'll do is to just have a look round and then come back—in an hour," he told himself. "But I must see what there is in that giddy pit. Why shouldn't I be the first to have a look? It'll be something to talk about afterwards."

Handforth was always out for glory. He didn't always get it. In the majority of his adventures he generally made some bloomer or other which led him by the shortest possible route into trouble. He was a kind of marvel at finding trouble. But this was hardly surprising, considering how loudly he asked for it.

Before going to bed he had managed to fix a rope to the lower rail just opposite his own cabin window. So his journey on the deck was only one of a few feet. And he was overboard before anybody had the slightest chance to catch sight of him.

He was still wearing his bathing-costume, but he was taking along an old pair of canvas shoes, and a pair of flannel trousers. He meant to don these as soon as he got ashore.

A glance at the rocky ground had assured him that walking up the hill would not be a very pleasant task in his bare feet. Handforth's thoughtfulness in this way was a sure indication of his whole-hearted determination. He didn't usually consider such details.

By dint of much patience and careful swimming, he dodged the beam of the searchlight with great skill. When it swept over the bay in his direction he would remain quite still, with only just his head above the water. And then, as soon as the beam would shift away, he would swim with all his might. And at last he got ashore.

Then, without troubling to don the shoes, he ran along the sands until he was almost on the other side of the island. He must have travelled a good mile. And now he was in complete darkness, and the big hill loomed up in front of him, grim and sinister.

Handforth was in a warm glow, and he sat down on a rock to put his shoes on, and to don his flannel trousers. He had carried these in a bundle, tied round his waist. Of course, they were soaked, but this made no difference to Handforth. He didn't mind a slight inconvenience of that kind.

The main reason he had brought the trousers was that if there was any kneeling to be done while climbing, he would be afforded some little protection. He set about his task at once, climbing upwards steadily.

The Wanderer was right round the bend of the island and out of view. But Hand-

forth could still see the faint reflection of the searchlight, as it played about on the opposite side of the hill.

Once or twice he began to think that he had been a bit rash in coming alone, but he put all these thoughts aside. Who would suspect him of being there? He was safe enough!

And if he ran into any of the enemy he would jolly well show them a thing or two! That was the way Handforth looked at the matter. He didn't quite realise that his capture might mean real disaster.

He only looked at the matter from his own view point.

If he was caught, he would be the one to suffer.

Therefore, it was his own affair. That was the way Handforth looked at it. It didn't strike him that his capture might tie the hands of Nelson Lee completely. The leader of Study D, moreover, had told himself in the most emphatic manner that he wasn't going to be captured at all.

He would return to the yacht, get into bed, and nobody would know anything about it until the morning. He kept assuring himself that he had done the right thing as he climbed up higher and higher.

And at length he reached the top.

He remembered Dorrie's story. Although the top of the hill looked quite level and ordinary in the darkness, it was really nothing of the kind. A false step might send him hurtling down a sheer precipice to certain death.

And so Handforth went very cautiously.

It was still dark, but not absolutely pitchy. His eyes, being accustomed to the gloom, could dimly make out rocks here and there. The ground ahead appeared to be as black as ink—almost as though a big stretch of water lay there. Indeed, at one time he had the illusion that there was a lake in front of him.

But it wasn't a lake.

It was the opening of that gigantic pit. And Handforth suddenly reached the edge of it. He was going on his hands and knees here, and almost without any previous warning he found himself staring downwards.

He was right on the edge—and there, in front of him, yawned the dizzy chasm, just as Lord Dorrimore had accurately described it. Handforth was an excellent climber, and height made no difference to his equilibrium. He never became dizzy when looking down from a cliff top.

It was dark now, of course, and he could not see distinctly.

But his nerves were steady as he gazed down. His heart was thumping rapidly, and far below he could see lights. One or two of them were moving about. It was clear that men were down there—carrying lanterns or torches. And Handforth tried to get a true picture of the pit.

"Oh, it's no good!" he growled to himself. "Can't see anything in this giddy

darkness. I've a good mind to wait here until daylight!"

But he abandoned this project almost as soon as he had thought of it. For, after all, it would be the height of foolhardiness. His only course would be to get back as soon as possible.

But he had seen down into this chasm—and that was the main thing.

He turned his head sharply, for it seemed to him that a slight noise had sounded in his rear. His heart gave a little jump. Of course, it was only his imagination, but he was rather cross with himself for giving way to nerves. He didn't usually suffer in that way.

And then he gasped.

Looking up against the skyline, within a few feet of him, were two black figures. He could see them distinctly. Men, standing up—looking at him! They were standing there silent, like two ghosts.

Handforth twirled round and jumped to his feet.

"Better take it easy!" exclaimed a curt voice. "Up with your hands—slick! We've got you covered, and if you don't—"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth blankly.

"Gee! It's only one o' them kids!" said another voice. "Say, young 'un, step right here. Best not fight, because if you happen to take one step backwards, you'll never take any more steps! I guess it's only five hundred feet to the bottom!"

Handforth was aware of a queer, shivery sensation. In the darkness he had not realised the awful depth of that precipice. And he had forgotten how near it was to him. Even as he stood there, one foot was within twelve inches of the edge. A step backwards would have meant horrible death.

He moved forward hastily—right into the arms of the two men.

There was no other course for it. He couldn't escape, for it would be just as risky to bolt sideways. Almost before he knew it, he was fighting desperately, but without the slightest chance of winning.

He was made a prisoner.

"Say, kid, what's the big idea?" asked one of the men, who proved to be Skinner. "We caught sight of you ten minutes ago. Feel kinder fresh, don't you, coming out here alone?"

"You—you rotters!" said Handforth thickly. "If you don't let me go I'll—I'll—"

"Nix!" interrupted Mr. Skinner. "You'll do nothing, kid! And you can say good-bye to your pals for ever—I guess you won't see them again. All right, Jose—bring him along!"

Handforth was forced to walk between the two men. There was still a faint hope within him that he might be able to make a dash for liberty. He wasn't bound, and if the men happened to get careless, Hand-

forth might be able to make a sudden rush down the hillside.

Once he had a good start he would easily be able to outstrip these men. But his hope was in vain. After travelling a short distance, the little party came to a kind of depression in the rocks. They descended for a few feet, and Handforth saw a great wooden beam stretching out over the edge of the chasm. There were, indeed, two beams, side by side.

And hanging there was a rudely constructed car—a kind of cage affair, capable of holding four or five people. And it instantly occurred to the prisoner that this was the means by which the men were able to get down to the bottom of the pit.

The cage was evidently worked by a system of pulleys and thick ropes.

"In there—and don't kick any," said Skinner curtly. "Say, I think we'd best tie the kid's hands—we don't want any trouble. Well, we've got one of the young guys—an' he's gonna be valuable, too."

Skinner was already gloating over his prisoner.

For he realised, of course, that Handforth would be of immense use. He could be used in all sorts of ways to further Mr. Skinner's own ends.

Much to Handy's disgust, his hands were roughly tied. He was bundled into the peculiar cage, and both the men got in with him. All Handforth's hopes of making a dash for liberty were at an end.

Although he was intensely angry at having been captured, he was nevertheless secretly pleased at the idea of going down into that mysterious chasm. At all events, he would be the very first of the adventurers to undergo the experience! And that was a nice thought.

But Mr. Skinner's remark to the effect that he had said good-bye to his friends for ever was rather disconcerting.

Handforth didn't like that a bit. But, after all, it was just the kind of thing that a gloating scoundrel would say. The simple fact that Handforth was a prisoner did not intensely worry him. There were such things as escape—and, sooner or later, he would be able to seize his opportunity.

It was aggravating in the extreme that he would not be able to go back to the yacht, according to his original plan. He would be missed, no doubt, and there would be several kinds of a hullabaloo. Church and McClure would go half-dotty. And, quite possibly, Nelson Lee would be very angry indeed. But what was the good of worrying? Handforth was a fellow who easily resigned himself to the inevitable.

He did so now.

He was much interested as the cage descended. It was a jerky, ramshackle affair, and it went on its journey to the bottom of the cliff in a series of jumps and jolts. At any moment Handforth expected to be pitched out. He had half an idea that

the whole crazy contrivance would fall with a crash.

But it was safe enough, if he had only known it. Roughly made though it was, the cage was strong, and the ropes were well tested. And the pulleys were so arranged, with a system of balancing weights, that it was a matter of sheer impossibility for any disaster to occur.

And at last the bottom was reached.

Handforth was led swiftly away. Down here the air felt still and humid. It was quite different from the fresh atmosphere at the top of the hill, where the sea breezes blew from off the ocean.

Everything down in this pit was still—the air scarcely moved. There was a feeling of damp warmth, which was rather uncomfortable at first. He could hear mosquitos humming.

Handforth vainly tried to pierce the darkness with his gaze. Down in this strange place everything was inky. It was practically impossible to see a yard in front of one.

But Skinner and his companion evidently knew the way.

They were familiar with the ground, and walked straight forward along a kind of well-trodden footpath—which, Handforth was able to detect, ran beside the cliff face.

The junior was only taken a short distance.

There came a halt, and Handforth saw that they were in front of a small hut. It was a roughly constructed place of unplanned timber. The door was thrust open, and Handforth was pushed inside.

"Now, my lad, I figger you'll stay there until the morning," said Mr. Skinner. "No monkey tricks, or I'll soon be around."

"What's the idea of this?" demanded Handforth warmly. "What are you shoving me in this rotten place for?"

"All right—never mind," said Skinner.

"But I do mind—"

"I guess I can't help your troubles, son," interrupted the man. "Just stay right here, and do what you like. Maybe you'll sleep—I guess you'll find the spiders good company. There's sure a heap of bugs in there!"

Handforth gulped. And then the door was closed. He remembered that a bug, in the American language, stands for any kind of insect. In America, earwigs, beetles, spiders, etc., are commonly referred to under the general name of "bug."

Handforth heard the door close, and there was a snap as a padlock was locked. And he heard the voices of the two men.

"Yep, sure!" said Mr. Skinner, in reply to a remark from the other. "I guess that'll be the best thing. We'll put a man on guard outside the door right now. Of course, even if this young guy escaped, he wouldn't get anywhere. But we don't want to waste time in the morning."

(Continued on page 15)

READ OUR POWERFUL NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL!



CONTAINS THE VERY BEST DETECTIVE STORIES.

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

No. 39.

PRESENTED WITH "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." September 1, 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, after a fruitless search, learns that the silver effigy is on its way to Australia. Harvey Howard, a tea-planter, appears to know something about the Silver Dwarf, and is shadowed by the professor.

(Now read on.)

THE ATTEMPT ON HARVEY HOWARD'S LIFE!

A GLEAM of malignant fury leaped into Mark Rymer's eyes as he heard these words. The Victor Hugo was the steamer in which he himself intended to proceed to Sydney. Moreover, the thing which Harvey Howard was planning to prevent was the very thing Mark Rymer had counted upon. That is to say, he had calculated that Nelson Lee would go to Ulapane, and would thus be left alone in Ceylon whilst he—Mark Rymer—went on to Sydney in quest of the Silver Dwarf.

"Curse the young meddler!" he muttered beneath his breath, referring to Harvey Howard, of course. If he had only remained at Ulapane, I should have had at least three days in Sydney before Nelson Lee arrived. As it is, we shall both leave Colombo at the same time, and we shall arrive in Sydney together, unless—unless —"

His eyes contracted to the merest slits, and a look of desperate determination crossed his evil face.

"If I could only prevent him meeting Nelson Lee to-night!" he mused.

"You'll not be able to get back to Ulapane to-day, of course?" said one of the planters presently.

"Of course not," said Howard.

"Where are you going to put up for the night?"

"At the G.O.H.," said Howard.

That was all Mark Rymer waited to hear. The "G.O.H."—in other words, the Grand Oriental Hotel—was the very hotel at which he himself had arranged to spend the night.

"The Fates have delivered him into my hands!" he murmured. "He's sure to go to the hotel before he goes to meet Nelson Lee, and if I can only get to know the number of his room, the rest will be simply child's play."

He glanced back over his shoulder, and saw that Howard and his two companions were still engaged in earnest conversation. Taking advantage of this fact, he silently rose to his feet, and glided to the other end of the car, where he ensconced himself in the corner seat nearest to the door, and once more concealed himself behind the ample sheet of the "Ceylon Observer."

Punctually on the stroke of three o'clock the train arrived at Colombo. Almost before it came to a standstill the professor leaped out, hurried from the station, and sprang into a rickshaw. Ten minutes later he was standing in the spacious entrance-hall of the G.O.H.

In one corner of the hall was a kind of office, where those who arrived at the hotel engaged their rooms. Just outside the office door stood a towering pile of bags and boxes. Unnoticed by any of the native attendants, the professor concealed himself behind this pile of luggage, and a moment or two later he had the satisfaction of seeing Harvey Howard walk into the office.

"Can I have a bed here to-night?" asked the planter.

"Yes, sir," said the native clerk. "Single room?"

"If you please."

"What name, sir?"

"Mr. Harvey Howard."

The clerk made an entry in his register, and called to one of the attendants.

"Show this gentleman to No. 95," he said, handing the coolie a key with a label attached.

"This way, sar!" said the coolie, shouldering Howard's portmanteau.

"Thanks; but I'm not going up to my room just now," said Howard. "I have some business to transact in the town which will occupy me until half-past six or seven. Take my bag up to my room, and bring the key back to the office."

The coolie departed, and Howard turned to the clerk again.

"I should like to engage a bed-room for a friend of mine, if I may," he said. "He is arriving to-night by the Victor Hugo, and will leave for Sydney to-morrow."

"What is your friend's name?" asked the clerk.

"Mr. Nelson Lee," said Howard.

The clerk made another entry in the register.

"I have booked No. 96 for him," he said.

Howard turned away and left the hotel. The moment he was out of sight Mark Rymer glided into the office.

"My name is Rymer—Professor Rymer," he said to the clerk. "I left my baggage here a couple of days ago, and arranged to have a bed-room reserved for me. May I have my key?"

The clerk consulted the register, and handed the professor a key.

"Your room is No. 94, sir," he said. "Your luggage has already been taken there."

No. 94! There was a gleam of triumph in Mark Rymer's eyes. Surely he had not erred when he had said that the Fates had delivered Harvey Howard into his hands! The young tea-planter and himself had been given adjoining rooms.

He took the key, and hurried up the broad staircase. Upon entering his room, he discovered that the window overlooked an ornamental garden at the back of the hotel. Immediately beneath the window was the flat roof of a wooden verandah, and a single glance sufficed to show him that it would be the easiest thing in the world to step out of his own window, to walk along the verandah roof, and to reach the window of the room next door.

He opened one of his bags, and changed his travel-stained clothes; then he put on his hat and left the hotel.

He was absent for about an hour, and when he returned he had a four-ounce bottle of chloroform in his pocket. Having gained his bed-room, he locked the door on the inside and opened the window. The garden below was deserted. He stepped out on to the verandah roof, and stole to the window of the room next door. He forced back the catch with the blade of his pocket-knife, and opened the window. A moment later he was standing in Harvey Howard's bed-room.

He closed the window, but did not fasten it. He drew down the dark-green blind, so as to make the room as dark as possible. He loosened the stopper of the chloroform bottle, and folded a handkerchief into a pad of convenient size. Then he crouched behind the door, and waited.

At a quarter to eight Harvey Howard returned to the hotel with an armful of packages. His business had taken him longer than he had expected, whilst the Victor Hugo, on the other hand, had arrived somewhat earlier than usual. She had already anchored in the bay, and the steam tender, with the first batch of passengers, was already on its way to the landing-stage, which was almost exactly opposite the hotel.

"I've cut it rather fine, I'm afraid," he muttered to himself, as he took down his key from the office-board and bounded up

the staircase. "I shall only just have time to toss these parcels into my room, and run down to the landing-stage."

He reached the door of No. 95, unlocked it, and stepped into the dimly lighted room; but no sooner had he crossed the threshold than the door was suddenly banged to behind him, whilst at the same instant a dark form leaped upon him from the rear, and hurled him face downwards on the bed.

Ere he could shout for help, two knees were planted in the small of his back, one hand encircled his windpipe in a vicelike grip, and another hand, holding a chloro-

He removed the key from the outside of the door, and locked it on the inside. Then he drenched the handkerchief with a fresh supply of chloroform, and returned to the bed to complete his dastardly work.

NELSON LEE TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Mark Rymer pushed Nelson Lee over the edge of the wharf at Port Said, he was unaware that a small ship's boat, manned by a couple of English sailors, was passing at that very moment immediately underneath the spot



He stepped out on to the verandah roof, and stole to the window of the room next door. He forced back the catch with the blade of his pocket-knife and opened the window.

formed pad, was firmly applied to his mouth and nostrils.

In vain he kicked and struggled; in vain he tried to turn his head and get a glimpse of his assailant's face. Slowly but surely the noxious fumes accomplished their work, till at last, after a final abortive effort to shake his assailant off, the young tea-planter ceased to struggle and lapsed into unconsciousness.

"So far, so good!" hissed the professor, as he sprang from the bed. "I'll lock the door, to guard against interruption, and then I'll give him another whiff that will waft him into eternity."

where his cowardly deed was enacted. This fact was both fortunate and unfortunate for Nelson Lee. It was unfortunate by reason of the fact that the detective struck his head against the side of the boat, and was thereby rendered insensible. It was fortunate, because the men in the boat immediately fished him out of the dock and conveyed him to the hospital.

It was morning ere he recovered from his stupor, and by that time, of course, the Ormuz had passed through the Canal, and was on her way to Colombo. Later in the day, however, the Victor Hugo, a French-Australian liner, called at Port Said to coal,

and when she resumed her voyage the detective was one of her passengers.

The Victor Hugo, as already mentioned, arrived at Colombo about half-past seven on the evening of March 27th. Nelson Lee was one of the first to land, and, leaving his baggage at the Custom-house, he walked across to the Grand Oriental Hotel.

"Can I get to Ulapane to-night?" he asked, addressing the clerk in the office.

"No, sir," was the reply. "There's no train for Ulapane until seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Then I shall have to stay here to-night, I suppose," said the detective, in a resigned voice. "Can I have a bed?"

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. "What name?"

"Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Then your bed is already engaged, sir," said the clerk. "Mr. Harvey Howard engaged it for you this afternoon."

"Mr. Harvey Howard!" repeated the detective. "Is he in Colombo?"

"Yes, sir. He intended to meet you at the landing-stage, but the early arrival of the boat appears to have upset his plans."

"Then where is he now?"

"He went up to his room a few minutes ago, sir."

"What is the number of his room?"

"No. 95, sir; the next room to yours, which is No. 96."

The detective took the proffered key and went upstairs. He halted at the door of No. 95, and rapped upon it with his knuckles.

"It's Nelson Lee. May I come in?" he asked.

To his infinite surprise, the only reply was a startled oath, whilst at the same instant his quick sense of smell detected the odour of chloroform.

He tried the handle, and found that the door was locked. Then, throwing all further ceremony to the winds, he applied his shoulder to the door, and burst it open.

He sprang into the room. The window was screened by a dark-green blind, and the room was in all but total darkness. For a second he saw nothing save the dim, furniture. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, he perceived the figure of a man lying on the bed and breathing stertorously.

After pressing the electric button, Nelson Lee made his way to the bedside, and found that the unconscious man was Harvey Howard. To his great relief, he discovered that the young tea-planter was still alive, though unconscious, and evidently in extremis.

"Do you think he will recover?" asked the proprietor of the hotel, who had come into the room, together with several guests, for the news had been spread by the coolie who had answered the bell.

"I hope so," said Nelson Lee. "But it will be touch-and-go with him. If he hasn't had a fatal dose of chloroform, he

had had something very near it. About two more whiffs, and it would have been all over with him."

He unfastened Howard's collar and set to work to practise artificial respiration. For a time it seemed as though his efforts were going to be rewarded with speedy success; but by-and-by the planter's breathing began to grow more feeble, his face took on an ashen, deathlike hue, and ever and anon his heart appeared to cease to beat.

"It's all up!" muttered one of the guests, shaking his head. "He's sinking fast!"

By way of reply the detective whipped out his notebook, tore out one of the pages, and scribbled a couple of words in pencil. He handed the slip of paper, together with a coin, to one of the coolies.

"Run with this to the nearest chemist's!" he said. "Bring back what I have ordered as quickly as ever you can!"

The coolie took the note and sped away. He was absent perhaps five minutes, and when he returned he handed the detective a cardboard box in which were a number of small glass capsules, each of which was enclosed in a tiny cotton bag, bearing the inscription "Amyl Nitrite."

Having folded his handkerchief into a pad of convenient size, the detective placed one of the capsules in the centre, clapped the handkerchief over Howard's mouth and nostrils, and crushed the capsule into fragments by squeezing it between his finger and his thumb.

The effect was magical. The colour began to ebb back into the young tea-planter's cheeks, his breathing grew stronger and more regular; and a few seconds later he opened his eyes and gazed round the room with a vacant stare.

Despite the solemnity of the occasion, the little group around the bed burst into a ringing cheer—a cheer which was heard in Room No. 94, and which told the listening Mark Rymer that once again had his cunning schemes been brought to naught by his resourceful rival.

NEWS OF THE SILVER DWARF.

TWO hours passed. It was half-past ten. Nelson Lee was sitting on the edge of Harvey Howard's bed. The young tea-planter was practically himself again.

"I didn't intend coming up to see you to-night," said Nelson Lee. "After what you have passed through, I thought it would be wiser for you to refrain from talking just at present. However, since you have sent for me, I have come, though I still think you would be well advised to postpone our interview until to-morrow morning."

"Why should I?" said Howard. "Thanks to you, I'm as right as a trivet now. Besides, I'm simply dying of curiosity to learn your opinion as to the identity of the scoundrel who attacked me."

"As to that," said Nelson Lee, "I firmly

OUR DETECTIVE STORY SECTION

believe that the man who attacked you was Professor Mark Rymer!"

"Mark Rymer again!" gasped Howard.

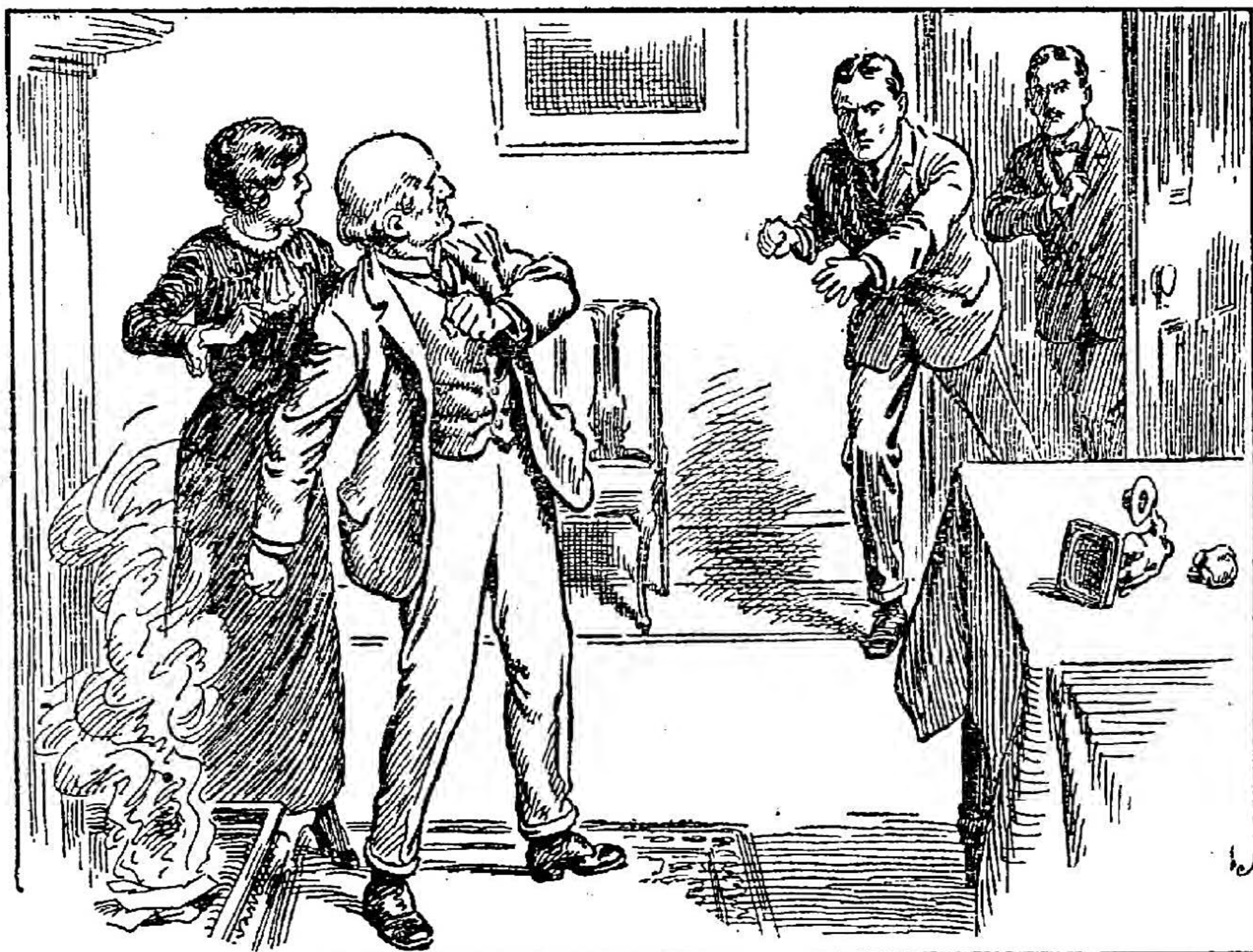
"Again?" said the detective quickly. "Has he attacked you once before?"

"Well, no; I ought not to say that he has actually attacked me," said Howard.

"At the same time, I have a very shrewd suspicion that he incited a number of natives to attack my house. However, I'll tell you all about that later. In the meantime, what makes you think my assailant was Mark Rymer?"

"I have been making inquiries," said Nelson Lee, and I find that he is staying

produce a single scrap of evidence in support of my accusation. He tried to murder me at Penleven Cove, and again when we were crossing the Channel. He murdered his cousin, Lord Easington, though I am bound to admit that the poor man was dying at the time; and he murdered a jeweller's assistant in Paris. He made another attempt on my life at Port Said, and he tried to murder you to-night. Yet every one of these crimes has been planned and executed with such subtle cunning that he is able to snap his fingers in my face and challenge me to produce one solitary scrap of evidence against him!"



At that moment Nelson Lee and Tom Robinson darted into the room.

"Too late, my friend—too late! too late!" exclaimed the professor. "Too late to save the papers, but just in time to see the blaze!" (See next week's instalment.)

here. He arrived this afternoon, and was given the room next to yours."

"Your assailant, whoever he may have been, undoubtedly escaped from this room by the window. Outside the window is the flat roof of a verandah, so that it would be the easiest matter in the world for Mark Rymer to crawl along the roof from his own room to yours, and back again the same way.

"Have you taxed him with the crime?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"What would be the use?" he asked.

"He would only deny it, and defy me to

"It was the same in the case of the attack on my house," said Howard.

"Tell me about the attack on your house," said Nelson Lee; "or, better still, begin at the very beginning and tell me everything that has happened since the Silver Dwarf came into your possession."

"The Silver Dwarf?" repeated Howard. "Is that what you call the silver statuette which was given to my wife by her brother, Dr. Olsen?"

"Yes. You deposited in the bank, I hope, when you received my cablegram from Marseilles?"

Howard smiled, and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I didn't deposit it with the bank, for the very simple reason that I have never yet set eyes on it."

"Never yet set eyes on it!" repeated the detective, in a dazed voice.

"Never set eyes on it!" said Howard.

"But Dr. Olsen gave it to your wife at Marseilles?"

"True! But when my wife reached home, and began to unpack her baggage, she discovered that she had left the Silver Dwarf on board the Himalaya, which by that time had resumed its voyage to Australia!"

The detective groaned—positively groaned aloud!

"Then the Silver Dwarf is now in Australia?" he asked.

Howard nodded his head.

"Briefly, the facts are these," he said.

"Dr. Olsen, as you truly say, met my wife at Marseilles, and made her a present of the Silver Dwarf. He accompanied her as far as Naples, and then returned to Morocco.

"Amongst the passengers on board the Himalaya was a certain Mrs. Robinson, whose husband holds some sort of public appointment in Sydney. Mrs. Robinson had been to England to see her son, who was an undergraduate at Cambridge, and who had recently passed through a serious illness. In accordance with the doctor's advice, she was taking her son back to Australia with her, in the hope that the long sea voyage would re-establish his shattered health.

"Neither my wife nor Mrs. Robinson had ever met each other until they met on board the Himalaya. Notwithstanding this, they quickly became fast friends, and by the time the steamer reached the Bay of Biscay they were as thick as two thieves, as the saying is. Under these circumstances, you will readily understand that one of the first persons to whom my wife showed the Silver Dwarf was Mrs. Robinson.

"On March 4th the Himalaya arrived at Colombo. I met my wife at the landing-stage, and, at her suggestion, we invited Mrs. Robinson and her son to come ashore and dine with us at this very hotel. The following morning my wife and I went up to Ulapane, whilst Mrs. Robinson and her son continued their voyage.

"Three days later, on March 8th, we received your cablegram from Marseilles. A week later we received your second wire, announcing that you had been delayed at Port Said, and warning us that Professor Rymer would probably honour us with a visit. Finally, four days ago, we received a cablegram from Mrs. Robinson, informing us that she had just arrived at Sydney, that the statuette had been found in her cabin, that her son Tom was returning to England in about a month, and that he would bring the statuette back with him as far as Colombo. Here is the cablegram—read it for yourself."

He handed the flimsy to Nelson Lee, and

whilst the detective was reading it, he told him of Mark Rymer's visit to Ulapane, of his refusal to give the professor any information, and of the subsequent attack on the bungalow.

"My own impression is," he said, "that Rymer thought the statuette was in the house, and that he bribed the natives to loot the house in the hope of finding it."

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "Did he see this cablegram, do you think?"

"He must have done," said Howard. "It was in my writing-desk, along with the two cablegrams we received from you. And, as the writing-desk was broken open, I can only suppose that he has read all three. On the other hand, if he has read the message, and knows that the Silver Dwarf is not in my possession, why did he try to murder me to-night?"

"That's easily answered," said Nelson Lee. "He has read my cablegram from Port Said, and he knew that I was due to arrive here by the Victor Hugo to-night. He knew that if I had to make the journey to Ulapane I should not be able to get back to Colombo in time to catch the steamer before she resumed her voyage. He guessed that you had come to meet me, in order to prevent me going up to Ulapane, and he argued to himself that if he murdered you before I arrived I should have to go to Ulapane, in order to discover what had become of the Silver Dwarf; whilst he—Mark Rymer—would be able to leave by the Victor Hugo to-morrow, and thus reach Sydney in advance of me."

"But supposing his plot had succeeded," said Howard—"supposing you had been left behind, and he had gone on to Sydney, what could he have done? He doesn't know where Mrs. Robinson lives."

"He knows she lives in Sydney," said the detective grimly. "That's quite sufficient information for Professor Mark Rymer. If he could have had two clear days in Sydney before I arrived, neither the bigness of the city nor the commonness of the name would have prevented him finding her. As it is, we shall arrive together."

"But surely he won't go on by the Victor Hugo now?" cried Howard. "He will never dare to show his face on the same boat as you?"

"Dare?" said Nelson Lee. "There's nothing Mark Rymer dare not do. Of course he will travel in the Victor Hugo. Why shouldn't he? I can't prove anything against him."

"He'll have his journey for his pains," said Howard.

"I hope so, I'm sure," said Nelson Lee. "But it all depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you can give me Mrs. Robinson's address. If you can't, then Mark Rymer and I will have to start hunting for her, and it's no great odds that he won't be the first to find her."

"But I can give you Mrs. Robinson's

address," said Howard. "She gave it to my wife before they left the Himalaya. She doesn't live in Sydney itself, but in one of the outlying suburbs. The exact address is: 'Ivanhoe House, Waverley, Sydney.'"

The detective entered the address in his notebook.

"You are sure Mark Rymer doesn't know this address?" he asked anxiously.

"I am perfectly certain he doesn't," said Howard. "Mrs. Robinson wrote it down on a slip of paper, which my wife put in her purse, and her purse was in her pocket on the night when the bungalow was raided."

"Then," said Nelson Lee, as he replaced the notebook in his pocket, "I think we may say that Professor Mark Rymer is checkmated, and that the Silver Dwarf is as good as in my possession!"

MARK RYMER'S BIG BLUFF.

ON the following morning two cablegrams were despatched from Colombo. The first read thus:

"Robinson, Ivanhoe House, Waverley, Sydney.—Statuette found in your cabin contains important documents. Do not send it back, or part with it, or give anyone information about it, until I arrive. Am leaving here to-day; due in Sydney April 16th. This message sent with Howard's approval."

"NELSON LEE."

The second cablegram said:

"Sinclair's Detective Agency, Pitt Street, Sydney.—First-class passenger named Robinson arrived Sydney per ss. Himalaya March 23rd. Trace if possible and wire present address to undersigned at post-office, Adelaide. Am sailing to-day. Arrive Adelaide April 14th, and Sydney by first available train. Spare no expense. Payment when I arrive. Reference, Bank of Australasia."

"MARK RYMER,

"Professor of Chemistry, Westminster University."

Twelve hours after the despatch of these cablegrams the Victor Hugo put to sea again, and amongst her passengers were Nelson Lee and Mark Rymer.

At two o'clock in the afternoon on April 14th the steamer came to an anchor in Larg's Bay, the port of call for Adelaide. A large proportion of her passengers disembarked, and proceeded to Adelaide by rail. And amongst them, again, were Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee. The professor disembarked in order to call for the answer to his cablegram. The detective disembarked because it was shorter by nearly three days to go from Adelaide to Sydney by train than to go by the boat.

It was half-past three when the train steamed into Adelaide. At a quarter to four the professor stood in the post-office. Two minutes later he was reading the following telegram:

"Rymer, Post Office, Adelaide.—Address

required, Ivanhoe House, Waverley, Sydney. Awaiting your further instructions."

"SINCLAIR."

Leaving the post-office, he invested in a railway-guide and a plan of the city of Sydney, both of which he carefully consulted. He then returned to the post-office, and sent off the following wire:

"Leaving here 4.30. Arrive Sydney 11 a.m. Saturday. Arrange for one of your men to meet me at station, and to have speedy car waiting outside. Shall alight from train with white handkerchief in hand as means of identification. Shall want to drive Waverley fast as possible. Every second of value."

"RYMER."

After a railway journey of over seventeen hours, Nelson Lee and Mark Rymer arrived at Melbourne.

At a quarter-past five in the afternoon they left for Sydney—Nelson Lee in the sleeping-car, Mark Rymer in a first-class carriage as near the engine as possible. At eleven o'clock next morning the train pulled up in Sydney Station. Before it actually came to a standstill Mark Rymer sprang out, with a white silk handkerchief in his hand, and in the twinkling of an eye a red-haired, bullet-headed man was at his side.

"Professor Rymer?" said the red-haired man.

"Yes," said the professor hurriedly. "Quick! Let us get outside!"

They reached the outside of the station, where the red-haired man pointed to a smart-looking car.

"There's your car, sir," he said. "Have you any further instructions?"

"No—yes!" said the professor, as he sprang into the car. "Secure my luggage—three bags, all labelled with my name—and take them to your office. I'll call for them, and settle with Mr. Sinclair."

He turned to the chauffeur.

"Ivanhoe House, Waverley," he said. "Drive like the very deuce!"

Ten minutes later the car pulled up in front of a handsome villa, standing on the summit of the cliffs which enclose that picturesque inlet of the sea which is known as Bondi Bay. One minute later the professor was ringing the front-door bell.

His summons was answered by a trim maid-servant.

"Is Mr. Robinson at home?" asked the professor.

"No, sir," replied the maid. "But Mrs. Robinson is."

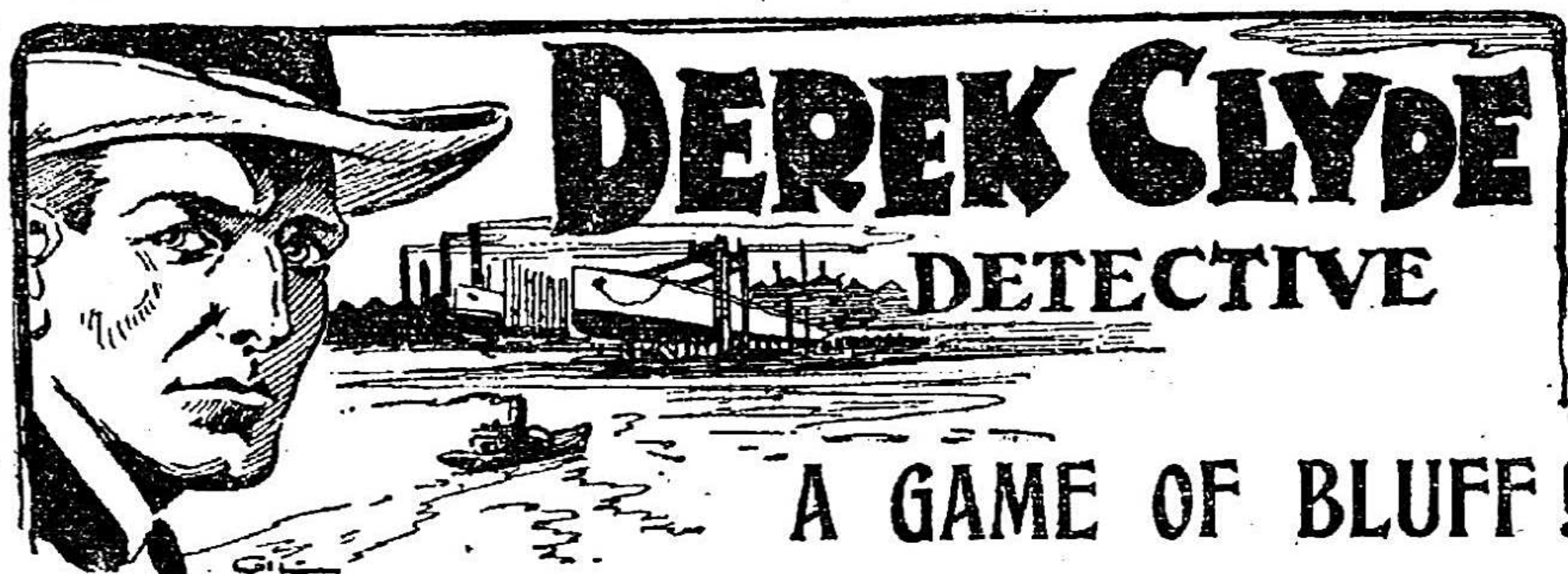
"Good! I will see Mrs. Robinson," said the professor, as he stepped across the threshold.

The maid ushered him into a cosily furnished drawing-room.

"What name, sir?" she asked.

"Mr. Nelson Lee," said the professor boldly.

(Concluding Instalment Next Week)

GRAND NEW COMPLETE TALES OF THE FAMOUS SCOTS DETECTIVE!

MR. JASPER LINN-REDLAW, stout, clean-shaven and leering, looked as if he wanted very much to dig Derek Clyde in the ribs and share a joke with him when they met in the porch of the multi-millionaire's Northumberland mansion.

"You're not a bit of use now," he grinned, and his small eyes twinkled through the masses of fat hanging to his cheeks. "Of course you would guess when you got my message that I was nervous about the Linn-Redlaw ruby collection, and craved the presence of an expert crime-detector like you. But I've learned a thing or two since I sent out that S.O.S."

"Indeed?" said Clyde, with a surreptitious nudge to Murdoch as a warning to keep his ears open. "What did you learn?"

Linn-Redlaw, war-made millionaire, drew closer to his guests, winked with immense sagacity, and told them, sotto voce:

"I've had 'em all copied—every article. It was the new parlour-maid put me up to it. She's a pretty little thing, and I called her in one day to try on my wife's pendant."

"Go on, sir," she said, when I told her the ladies were going to be all decorated with the famous rubies at this reception and dance. 'That's a risky thing to do. Get 'em all copied in glass and gilt, and nobody won't know any difference. Then you can lock up the real ones in your safe till the affair is over.' Now wasn't that cute of her?"

"Very cute," said Clyde, with unnecessary emphasis. "Now, when the ball takes place to-night, the Redlaw rubies will be securely locked away in your safe, and the frocks and necks and coiffures of your wife and three daughters will be adorned with copies. Brilliant idea!"

"Isn't it? And the reception won't suffer. Who will know the difference in the electric light? D'you know, Clyde, there's a swell crowd coming from far and near—so many that I have had to arrange extra accommodation for all the cars there will be. I'm having a few parked in the old paddock

there," and he pointed to an unfenced field adjoining the road and the house.

Clyde studied the paddock and the surrounding scenery. Bordering one of the main roads through England, and standing on a commanding eminence, the home of Jasper Linn-Redlaw was a stately dwelling, surrounded by sparse woods and the only grass parks in a somewhat wild bit of countryside.

Apparently the only attraction the plutocrat had found in that wilderness of gorse and heather had been the altitude of the site and the possibility of erecting there a "stately pleasure-dome" with some of the appearance of an ancient stronghold.

"I'll go and give a few orders about the parking," he said. "Here are a few keys. Have a look round the house, and tell the servants I have given you carte blanche. Best have a squint at the safe, and then you can get my wife to let you see her rubies. She's got them in her boudoir—the imitations at least." And he winked ponderously.

"Does she know?" asked Clyde.

"Does she?" repeated the millionaire with scorn. "Be sure you don't breathe a word about the real gems in the safe."

MURDOCH'S ANXIETY.

LINN-REDLAW went off, leaving Clyde and Murdoch looking at each other, an amused grin on each face.

The old man, anxious about the safety of his almost priceless gems, had sent for Clyde, and Murdoch, having a few days off duty, decided to take a 'busman's holiday and accompany his friend.

"Go and hunt up a servant with a little time on his hands," said Clyde, while he tried a few keys on what was apparently the door of the owner's "den."

Clyde identified key after key with remarkable facility and contrived to enter almost every room in the place. Not only that, but, accompanied by a so-called butler—whom he kept dismissing every few minutes on trivial errands—he opened the safe in Linn-Redlaw's office and saw the genuine

rubies about which the master of the house was so nervous.

He also employed the eldest daughter of the house to introduce him to the imitations, laid out for the ball in the evening—and so beautifully courteous was he that Miss Vi Linn-Redlaw also executed a few useless errands without being requested.

In short, Derek Clyde did very much as he wished about the house, and handled both the real rubies and the imitation. Then he expressed a desire to have a sly peep at the servants' quarters, and in the basement he found Murdoch having an absorbing chat with the pretty parlour-maid. And she was pretty!

So much so that Murdoch talked rather loosely when Clyde dragged him away.

"Some cars at the door," he said. "That'll be the first of the guests arriving. Time we had our boiled shirts on."

When these two met again it was in the great ballroom of Redlaw House, and Mr. Linn-Redlaw was at great pains to impress them with the luxury and costliness of the apartment.

Fortunately the guests began to arrive at that moment, and the host had to flee and join his lady in welcoming them. Before long the vast ballroom was filled to overflowing with a beautifully-attired, rustling, murmuring, laughing concourse, half of whom did not know the other half from Adam. An expensive orchestra played weird and wonderful dance music—and Clyde and Murdoch looked around them helplessly.

"Wish I had those precious stones in my tail pocket," whispered Murdoch, backing away from the perfumed, moving mass of frail gowns and snowy linen. "Any old crook could get into that bunch and we'd never know."

"Oh, the rubies are all right," laughed Clyde. "Don't you see Mr. Linn-Redlaw and Vi Ditto and Daphne and Carrie of that ilk sporting the gorgeous ornaments that have made the name Linn-Redlaw famous among the crooks of the land? See Ma's necklace and brooches; likewise the necklaces of the daughters of the house; and the rings and pendants and gewgaws and, and——"

A STERN CHASE.

"**Y**ES, I know all about them," growled Murdoch. "But wouldn't you rather be upstairs in the old man's den, sitting on the safe?"

"With a gun in each hand?" smiled Clyde. "Well, if you like we'll go and have a look at the safe that contains the real Mackay."

They found the door of Linn-Redlaw's domestic "office" on the first floor standing unlocked. Murdoch pushed it open and they dashed in—to find the safe open and empty. Then Murdoch used bad language and sprang back to the door.

"There he goes!" he announced in a shrill whisper. "Running for one of those cars, I'll bet. Come on!"

Clyde smiled at the apparent sudden change in their positions; but the knowledge that a thief was in the house and only a few yards away roused all the sleuth in him and he bounded after his companion.

He seemed to have dropped his attitude of banter like a cloak, and he made no reply to the breathless theorising of Murdoch as they ran over the soft lawns and down slippery terraces of grass in pursuit of a flying figure in the waning daylight.

"He's going to nab a car," gasped Murdoch. "Must have come and got to work on the safe with the first of the guests. Old fool Redlaw to put all his eggs in one basket and let his womenfolk gad about in imitations!"

Clyde made an exclamation that was inaudible to Murdoch as the latter leaped the door of a little ten horse-power two-seater. Clyde was hesitating when the grating of the controls sounded on the night air and the little car moved; the next instant he, too, leaped the low door.

Released from the detaining brakes, the little car slipped down from the paddock and wheeled with perilous abruptness over the filled-in ditch; then in went the low gear, and the race began.

The ten h.p. was made for speed, with her peaked bonnet and graceful streamline body, and in response to the clever handling of Murdoch she went off with a roar like a Gatling gun from the exhaust.

Clyde bumped a good twelve inches in the air and shouted something which Murdoch took to be a protest, and replied to with a laugh.

The driver of the car in front looked over his shoulder as they came into a straight stretch of highway that was visible for miles over a sort of moorland plateau; then he crouched to his work.

It was a big car, with the look of a racing Napier, that set the pace, and the driver handled it admirably. Twice it hit loose stones and showed daylight between the wheels and the ground.

Such leaps would have shaken the wheel from the hands of anyone unaccustomed to the race-track, but still the leviathan was held true as a die.

"Some driver!" yelled Murdoch above the scream of the wind in their ears.

The two cars ate up the straight like conjurers swallowing paper ribbon, and plunged into a wild tract of country with neither field nor fence—an area where the road dipped precipitately at intervals and as suddenly swept upwards in abrupt steeps on the side of hills, swooped round and down long curves, and wavered in breathless hair-pin bends.

But neither of the drivers was deterred. The big sixty h.p. roared up the heights with a relentless speed, its rear wheels racing every time it leaped a boulder, slithered round sharp corners, with a sudden mitigation of its roar and a tearing of tyres,

and waltzed round the bigger bends on two wheels.

The little one in hot pursuit behaved like a skittish pony in the masterful hands of Murdoch, leaping the big stones and flipping the small ones in the air as it made an almost ridiculous mimic of the leader's antics.

DISASTER.

A GAIN they came on a long stretch of level road, and the ten h.p. roared futilely at the sixty.

"What's the betting?" the breathless Clyde contrived to get in at last.

"We're winning!" shouted Murdoch.

Presently the road began to dip again, and Clyde and Murdoch could see at least half a mile ahead to where it curved round in a blunt hairpin and returned at a lower level parallel with its earlier course.

Then both the occupants of the pursuing car saw the runaway meet with disaster. The driver negotiated the steep bend skilfully—or as skilfully as was possible with the two back tyres in ribbons—and judged the amount of skid available to a hair's-breadth.

But, just where the skid should have ended, the big car hit a stone embedded by the side of the road, rebounded like an indiarubber ball and struck the opposite bank.

Seeing what was going to happen, Murdoch pulled up the smaller car with marvellous speed before it reached the curve. They were almost at a standstill, on opposite legs of the hairpin, so to speak, when the leading car made an attempt to rise on the two nearest wheels and flung its driver somersaulting over a few yards of gorse bushes, on the side of the road nearest to Clyde and Murdoch, before it dithered to a stop.

"Poor devil!" said Murdoch, as he jumped out and staggered in an attempt to recover the sense of being stationary. "Let's cut across. No use going away round that bend. He won't run now."

Then he and Clyde scrambled through the bushes and proceeded to cut across the rough country that sloped steeply between the two sides of the bend.

Near the lower half of the curve they came on the driver of the bigger car, rather fortunately cushioned on bushes and long grass, face upwards, arms outspread, breathing rapidly. Beyond, the sixty h.p. was visible, tilted against the roadside.

"Crooked?" asked Murdoch.

Then he gasped and ejaculated under his breath, as the victim of the race sat up and bestowed a brilliant smile on him.

"The parlour-maid!" he said humbly.

"Yes, the parlour-maid," replied the fallen driver, stretching shapely limbs to ease them in their tight-fitting leather suit. "These things are a lot better than skirts, don't you think?"

"You were alone in that car?" asked Murdoch.

"All alone," she replied with a ravishingly pathetic accent.

"And you're not hurt?"

"Twisted my ankle—that's all. I'd soon put it right, but—" Again that sweet smile expressed the impossibility of doing some things with men about.

"Don't you think we brought off that wheeze well!" prattled the girl while the two men looked at each other.

"We?" said Murdoch, who rather prided himself upon being chosen for spokesman—unconscious of the fact that Clyde was trying hard to frown him into discreet silence.

"Yes. My—er—brother and I." This with a pretty blush. "I've taken you a good twenty-odd miles out of the way, and if you've driven the car like I did you won't have juice to take you back in time to stop him getting away with the rubies." And she laughed merrily, her teeth gleaming in the red afterglow that by now suffused the scene.

Murdoch gave Clyde a look of sheer bewilderment; but the latter was gazing over the girl's head at the car a few yards away, and he was still frowning. Murdoch had just enough wit left to see that Clyde was seriously considering the possibility of their being told lies, and contemplating a raid on the car.

But, before he could make the suggestion himself, the parlourmaid-chauffeur attempted prettily to smooth the ringlets that peeped from beneath a leather helmet. Then she sighed and turned a pair of wide, appealing grey eyes on Murdoch.

"I'm an awful sight," she said, "to appear in a respectable police office. Would you be so good as to fetch me that handbag that's lying on the front seat of the car? My combs and"—a coquettish look at Clyde—"well, manicure set and things are all there. Sorry to trouble you."

THE RUBY PENDANT.

MURDOCH obeyed the request—and Clyde, still silent, looked black as thunder.

But as it happened, he rather misjudged Murdoch at that moment.

The girl turned on Clyde a pair of wide, innocent eyes and laughed airily.

"You do look mad, Mr. Clyde," she said. "Oh, yes, I know the pair of you all right—"

An imperious wave of Clyde's hand stopped her.

"Harry," he said, "is no doubt Harry Hepburn, who notified the C.I.D. that he would make one more raid and settle down to a happy married life with the proceeds?"

The girl nodded with all the humility Clyde's manner demanded.

"And go straight in future," she whispered without a trace of banter. "He promised."

"So you took a hand and helped him in the last and biggest thing he ever tried." Clyde stared hard down at her.

"He's a lucky devil—in more ways than one. Can you walk?"

"Yes." The voice was lower than ever, and there was a quaver in it.

"Good. You're only about half a mile from a village. Be sure you keep Harry straight. What's that on your neck?"

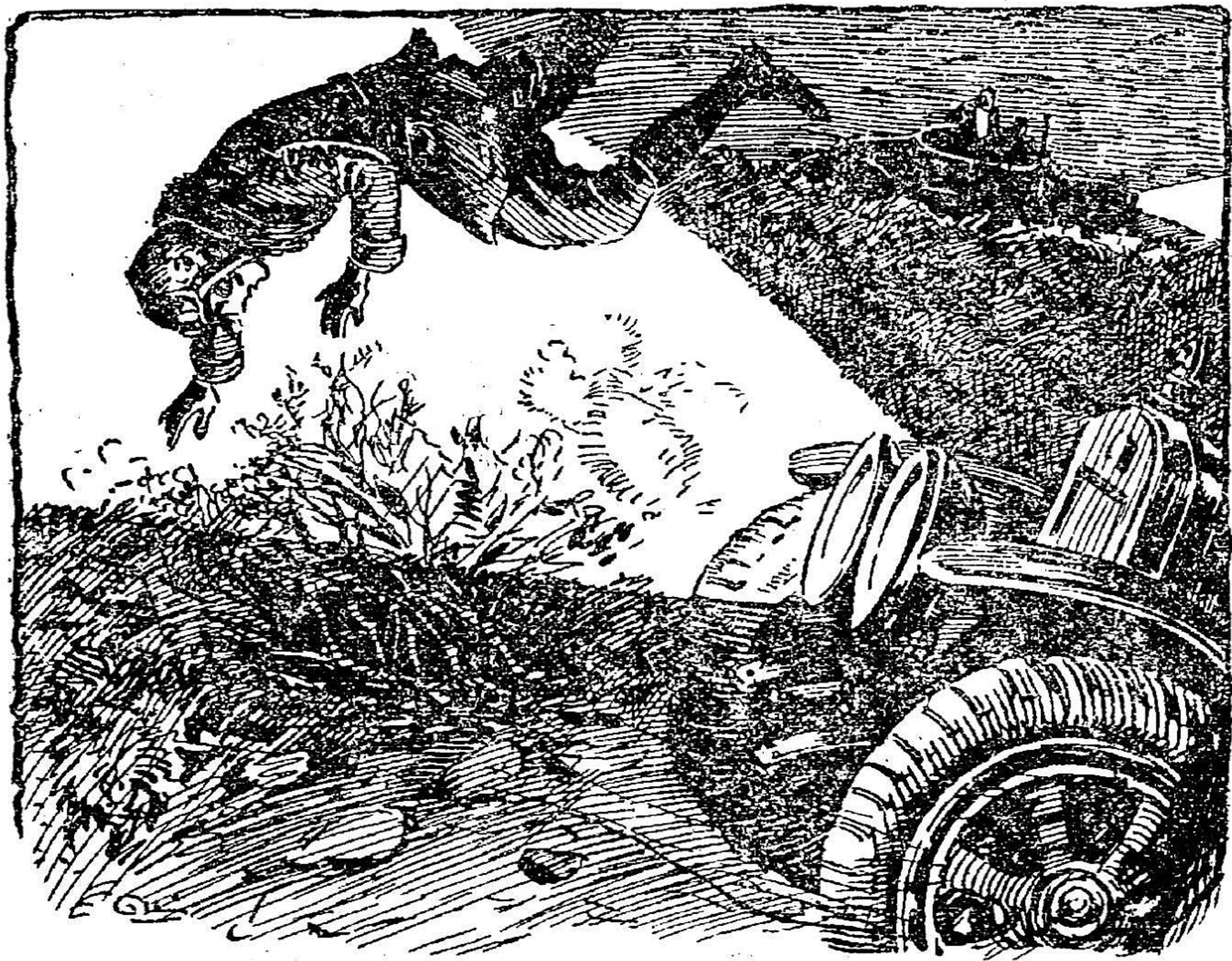
With trembling hands the girl pulled from under the leather collar at her neck a beautiful pendant of rubies on a gold chain. "The master gave it me," she told Clyde.

"If it's imitation," she fired up in his smiling face. "I suppose so. Anyhow, that notion let Harry get away with—"

"With what was in the safe? Precisely. Take my advice and stick to that pendant. That, at least, is genuine."

At that moment Murdoch approached with the handbag, but it was rather strange that Clyde, after his significant words, should hold up a hand to silence the girl.

Murdoch would have liked to give the girl a lift, her own car—or rather the car she had commandeered—being out of action; but Clyde led him away. They were in the little



They were almost at a standstill, on opposite legs of the hairpin, so to speak, when the leading car made an attempt to rise on the two nearest wheels and flung its driver somersaulting over a few yards of gorse bushes, on the side of the road nearest to Clyde and Murdoch.

with an accent of perfect truth. "Just after you had been round the house this morning. He said the ladies had as much as they could carry of the rubies and I was welcome to this lot."

"I expect he did," thought Clyde. "The old fool!"

Aloud he queried keenly. "After I had seen round the house?" Then he bent down and examined the jewels. "Of course," he said, "Linn-Redlaw took your advice on the subject of cheating possible thieves. So you have only got yourself to blame if—"

car before Clyde volunteered the information.

"There's a village round the corner, and she can walk all right. Can we get back?"

"Just about it."

They were in sight of Redlaw House before the petrol gave out; then they walked. Murdoch was looking very well pleased with himself.

They reached the mansion in a few minutes and were told that the owner had gone to get the police.

"We'll wait," said Clyde.
They were seated in the supper-room, awaiting a belated meal, when he explained.

THE ONE HITCH.

"**W**HERE are you going with your pockets crammed, Murdoch?"

"I don't know what you made of the night's work," he chuckled. "But I rather think I recovered the Linn-Redlaw rubies. You scowled, of course, when I ran to do that girl's bidding. But did you imagine that I didn't see through her assumed innocence?"

"I thought you were pretty hard hit," Clyde confessed.

"Not at all. I saw through her game. She got away with the loot all right. She had it in that bag, but she couldn't crawl to the car. So she killed two birds with one stone—got me to fetch the bag, and at the same time put suspicion out of the question by letting me carry the things we were after. See here!" He untied two leather bags with a deft pull of strings.

Then he went weak at the knees, and Clyde smiled to see a collection of pebbles and bits of glass from a chandelier tumble on the table.

"Just as I thought," said Clyde. "You walked into that trap nicely. She rather guessed you would see through her innocence, so she played the double bluff on you."

"But—but," stammered the totally abashed Murdoch. "The swag? Where? Did she tell the truth?"

"I'm sorry to tell tales about such a sweet little thing, but she was lying. She got away with the—er—the loot. I tumbled to the game when she dropped those delicate hints about her injuries. As a matter of fact, I believe she was sitting on the stuff her crook sweetheart pinched from the safe

—with the aid of a good eye and ear and a knowledge of the combination."

"Good Lord! Inside that leather suit—that male rig-out. But why did you let her go, then?"

"Because I knew a little more than she did."

At that moment Linn-Redlaw burst into the room. Clyde calmed him with a gesture.

"Keep cool," he snapped in the agitated countenance. "I know they opened the safe and got away with the contents—but I had been there first. The thief, Mr. Linn-Redlaw, escaped, thanks to his sweetheart. But the booty which he got from the safe was the collection of imitations. I know, for I made the substitution myself."

Linn-Redlaw shouted a joyful "What!" and Murdoch, gradually beginning to understand, merely gasped.

"You should be more careful when choosing parlour-maids," smiled Clyde.

The owner of the house cursed from pure happiness, clapping Clyde on the back till he was begged to desist. He had gone to collect the genuine gems from the women-folk who had been innocently wearing them when Murdoch ventured to speak.

"But why on earth did you come with me?" he asked.

"Did you give me any chance, you confounded speed-fiend? Now I think we'll enjoy supper, if it is the small hours. There was only one hitch in my plan, and I hardly regret it. When the master gave those jewels to his women to wear, he was so tickled at the idea of their being false that he slipped a splendid pendant to that parlour-maid. I noticed she was wearing it."

"Good!" said Murdoch, with gratification. "Let's hope she recognises it is the real thing and makes a few hundred off it."

"Amen. I rather think she will. It'll be very handy to a young couple setting up house."

THE END.

STARTING NEXT WEEK! THE MISSING HEIR!

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(Sequel to "THE SILVER DWARF!")

DON'T MISS THE OPENING INSTALMENT!

(Continued from page 14)

They walked away, and Handforth looked round.

Of course, he couldn't see anything. The interior of this hut was as black as pitch. There was no window of any kind. And Handforth, being merely attired in a bathing costume and a pair of flannel trousers, had absolutely nothing on him. He didn't possess a match, or a pocket-knife, or anything that might come in useful.

He was, in fact, in a most unenviable position.

"Rats!" he growled. "This is a fine how-do-you-do! The rotters! Shoving me in a giddy hole like this! I haven't seen anything—and I don't see how I can get out, either!"

After a little groping, he found that the hut was very small—not more than six feet square. It was perfectly empty, save for himself. The door was strong, and it creaked considerably. When he pressed against it, the boards protested. And a voice came from outside.

"Stop that, in there!" it said. "You can't get out!"

So it was true—there was a man on guard!

Handforth gave up all hope then. He didn't feel like sitting down, because there was no floor to the place—just the damp ground. And once or twice he felt insects crawl upon his bare ankles.

He shook them off, and decided to pace up and down for the remainder of the night. Sleep was not to be thought of. He couldn't possibly lie down in this ghastly place and slumber.

He didn't.

Exactly how he kept awake, he never quite remembered. But there seemed to be a period of time that he lost count of. He must have dozed as he walked up and down in that confined space.

But he knew that daylight had come.

It shone through the chinks in his prison. It grew stronger and stronger. And with it he awoke again to full activity. He was now able to see the interior of his hut.

It was quite bare and dirty. And he was wondering how long he would be kept in there, and assuring himself that he would make the rotters pay, when he heard the door being unlocked.

It opened, and Mr. Skinner appeared.

"You—you beastly bounder!" said Handforth, his voice quivering with wrath. "What's the idea of keeping me in a filthy hole like this?"

"You're lucky!" retorted Skinner. "When I first saw you, I was figgerin' on pitchin' you over the edge of the cliff. Say, you don't know when you're havin' a good time!"

"Is this what you call having a good time?" snorted Handforth fiercely.

"Come along—no lip!" growled the man. Handforth was pulled out. His wrists

were tied once more—for he had been allowed that freedom in the hut—and he was led out into the open. He looked about him with great interest.

"My only hat!" he muttered involuntarily.

The sight he saw was extraordinary.

Stretching out before him lay a vista of coarse grass, a few shrubs, and many huts. And, just over a mile distant, the opposite side of the pit arose—sheer, smooth-faced cliffs rising to a height of five hundred feet.

It was like being in an enormously deep canyon—but a canyon that had both its ends blocked up. It was a curious fact that a stream ran through this pit—a stream of pure, crystal water.

Obviously, it had its source in some underground spring, and vanished underground at some other point.

Handforth was not allowed to waste any time in looking about him. He was hustled along until he arrived at that cage again. But during this short little trip he saw that gangs of men were at work.

And, exactly as Lord Dorrimore had described, these poor wretches were chained together. They were like the slaves of Southern America before they obtained their freedom.

Handforth had an idea that most of these men were foreigners—they looked rough-looking specimens at the best, but there was no question about their pitiful condition. They were treated with the utmost brutality.

Edward Oswald was greatly astonished to find himself thrust into the cage once more. He had certainly not expected to be taken to the top of this pit. But that is what happened.

The cage was raised in the same jerky, laborious fashion. And at last the top was reached, and Handforth was pushed out upon the rocky ground, in that depression. It was a kind of hewn-out portion of the rock. Thus, the platform from which one stepped into the cage was on a lower level than the top of the hill. And from no part of the island could the contrivance be seen.

There was a short pause whilst Handforth's arms were roped tightly against his body.

"What's the idea of this?" he growled, glaring. "Ain't you satisfied with just tying my hands? Huh! You must be pretty scared of me!"

"The less lip, the better!" snapped Mr. Skinner.

"I'll talk as much as I like——"

Crash!

Skinner's hand thudded upon Handforth's mouth, and the junior gave a grunting exclamation. It felt as though his teeth were loosened, and the blood came. He looked at Skinner with utter contempt.

"You miserable cad!" he exclaimed. "By George! I'll give you one for that—you wait! Sooner or later, I'll pay you back!"

"You'd best learn that you can't talk free!" exclaimed Skinner. "Get me? You're a slave now—you belong to us, body and soul! And any insubordination will be dealt with. Guess we use the whip to all skunks who answer back!"

Handforth was roughly pulled forward. And then there was a wait. While Skinner went out of the hollow, two other men remained there with Handforth. And soon Skinner returned. There was a gleam in his eye.

"Come on!" he ejaculated. "Bring him up—no, only you, Jose. I figger that two of us will be enough."

Handforth was hustled forward by the rascally Jose—one of the scoundrels who had attempted to send the Wanderer to the bottom. In a moment, Handforth was between the two men, and he was being led to the top of the rise.

Abruptly, they appeared on the sky-line. And Handforth's heart leapt as he saw Nelson Lee only a short distance away, down the hillside. Lord Dorrimore was there, too—and Umlosi, and Mr. Barry, and a crowd of others. Far away, down in the bay, the Wanderer lay placidly at anchor.

"Say, stop just where you are!" shouted Skinner loudly.

Nelson Lee looked up, coming to a complete halt. His mouth closed with a kind of snap, and the hand which had grabbed for his revolver stopped. For Nelson Lee had just seen who the prisoner was.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "This is terrible."

He and Dorrie stared. They could hardly believe their own eyes. Handforth—a prisoner in the hands of these men! How on earth had it come about? How in the name of all that was queer, could Handforth have got himself into this shocking mess?

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Dorrie. "This, old man, has just about put the lid on it."

They all stood there, staring up at the three figures on the top of the hill. And Mr. Skinner laughed openly.

"You'd best not try any fancy shooting," he advised, with a sneer. "I figger that we've got the upper hand all right. You'd best quit—and quit right now! It'll be rather bad for this kid if you don't."

Nelson Lee was very grim.

"What do you mean to imply?" he asked.

"Say, your brains ain't workin', are they?" said Mr. Skinner jeeringly. "The first man who moves a step forward will cause the death of this kid! And if you don't all quit within two minutes we'll shoot him before your eyes!"

CHAPTER VI.

A LULL IN THE CAMPAIGN!



THE threat was an appalling one. It may have been bluff—but the chances were that Skinner really meant what he said. His revolver was pointing direct at Handforth. And the latter was fairly red with helpless fury.

"You brute!" he roared. "Do you think I care tuppence for your rotten threats? Blow you! Go and eat coke!"

He turned his head towards the halted party down the hill.

"Don't take any notice of him, sir!" he shouted. "It's all spoof—this cad daren't fire! Come right up, and biff the pair of them!"

"No, Handforth—I cannot risk your life like that," shouted Nelson Lee. "Listen to me, Skinner. What do you intend to do with that boy?"

"Hold him!" replied Skinner.

"Hold him until when?"

"I guess that all depends," said the man. "Anyway, he's a hostage. You'll get right back to that yacht, and get on board. Unless you hurry this kid will pass out!"

"And after that?"

"Unless you keep on board, the young 'un will die!" replied Skinner. "We'll watch all the time. The very instant a boat tries to get to the shore, we'll come here, in this very spot, and shoot the boy in full view."

"It sounds very grim—and for the moment you certainly hold the trump card," said Nelson Lee. "But remember one thing, Skinner. If that lad comes to any harm, you will suffer the full penalty of the law."

"Law nothin'!" jeered Skinner. "I guess ther' ain't any law around these parts. It's a case of the strongest being in command. And I guess we've got you beat!"

Nelson Lee did not descend to conversing with the man any longer. Discussion could do no good—and the only thing was to retreat. It was out of the question to rescue Handforth now.

A sudden rush might be successful—but, on the other hand, there was a terrible risk that Skinner would shoot Handforth dead. And that was altogether too terrible to contemplate.

The only thing was to get back to the yacht.

So Nelson Lee turned, and gave some orders to his men.

The whole party retreated down the hill. Both Dorrie and Umlosi were highly exasperated, but they could see the wisdom of Nelson Lee's decision. To advance was impossible.

"This is a fine kettle of fish, if you like!" growled Lord Dorrimore. "What can we do about that boy? By gad! This is a job

for your brains, Lee—mine ain't powerful enough for it."

"We will discuss the matter when we are back on the yacht," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"But they may kill that youngster——"

"Oh, no—he's perfectly safe," interrupted Lee. "He is far more valuable to them alive than dead. For his very presence in the enemy camp gives them the advantage. I am convinced that they will keep him, and treat him well. It is all to their own advantage to do so."

"Thou art surely right, O, thou of wise words!" rumbled Umlosi. "For 'tis a trick that even I have played in many battles. These jackals will not harm the young white master. Thy wisdom is great, Umtagati. 'Tis better for us to return, and arrange some other plan of campaign."

Handforth was held between his two captors until the shore party had actually reached the beach. Then the junior was roughly hustled back to that cage, placed in it, and lowered into the chasm.

This time he was not escorted by Skinner, but by Jose. And he was led into a different prison—a somewhat larger hut, and more presentable. It had a wooden floor, there was a kind of bunk in it, and a window. The outside of the window was strongly and heavily barred. The door was thick.

Handforth was left entirely alone, locked in. And this time his bonds had not been removed. He was now beginning to lose some of his supreme confidence. It seemed to him that there was very little hope.

And, on board the Wanderer, a conference was being held.

"Tell me what you know, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Church and McClure were there, having been called in. Lee had made a few inquiries, and it seemed to him that Handforth's chums knew more about the matter than anybody else.

"We know very little, sir," said Church miserably. "Poor old Handy is such a rash chap, you know. He doesn't stop to consider things—he just makes up his mind and goes off!"

"I am well aware of that, Church," said Nelson Lee. "I understand that Handforth attempted to draw you into his new escapade, too?"

"Yes, sir," said Church. "He suggested that we should go ashore, to do a bit of scouting. We told him it was a mad idea, and he seemed to agree. Then we all went to bed. McClure and I went to sleep at once."

"You did not hear Handforth leave the cabin?"

"No, sir."

"You knew nothing of his absence until this morning?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Well, boys, I think you can go now," said Lee. "Try not to worry about your chum. I think he will be quite safe, and

you may be sure that I shall do everything in my power to effect his rescue."

"Oh, I hope you do, sir!" exclaimed McClure, with a kind of gulp. "It would be simply awful if poor old Handy never came back! It would be too terrible for words! Can't you go and rescue him now, sir?"

Lee gravely shook his head.

"I am afraid the situation is rather more serious than you imagine," he replied. "You see, these men are murderous characters, and although they may be bluffing, for Handforth's sake we must take them at their word. It is thus impossible to even land. For the very act of doing so will place Handforth in a position of deadly peril."

Church and McClure were in a fearful state when they went out—and so, indeed, were all the other juniors. Handforth's awful position was a source of intense worry to nearly all the fellows in the Remove. Many juniors declared that Edward Oswald would never be seen alive again.

In Nelson Lee's cabin, the new plan of campaign was discussed.

"Our hands are tied, of course," said Lee. "That is the unfortunate part of the whole business. Handforth is to be severely censured for his foolhardiness in leaving the vessel—particularly after the strict orders not to do so. But it is idle to discuss that. The main fact is that the boy is a prisoner in the hands of the enemy."

"In other words, they've got us on toast," said Dorrie.

"For the moment—yes," agreed Nelson Lee. "There is, in fact, only one possible thing for us to do. We must wait until to-night, and then do our utmost to save the boy."

"Make a kind of raid into the enemy's lines?"

"Might not there be an ambush, sir?" put in Mr. Barry.

"I have no doubt that these men will do their very best to frustrate any attempt on our part to land a rescue-party," replied Nelson Lee. "I shall go out scouting as soon as darkness falls. And then, later, we will take the rescue-party ashore. We can do absolutely nothing in the way of aggressive measures until Handforth is brought safely back."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Well, that's about the only way to look at it," he said slowly. "You can see now, old man, that I was justified in comin' back to this bally island. These choice inhabitants are a pretty sweet lot—eh?"

"I shall not rest until I have ferreted out the truth," replied Lee, in a grim voice. "As I have said, the first thing is to rescue Handforth. And then—— But we must wait. The work ahead of us is heavy and perilous."

And ways and means were discussed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ISLAND.



MR. SKINNER lay back, smoking his cigar easily. "Well, kid, you may as well make yourself pleasant," he said. "I guess you're booked here for keeps, anyway. Grin and bear it, you know. It don't do you a heap of good to mope around."

Handforth sniffed.

"I'm not the sort of chap to mope!" he said disdainfully. "Of course, you believe that Mr. Lee won't be able to do anything. You think that you've got him on toast, I suppose?"

"I sure know it!" declared Mr. Skinner confidently.

"Other people have made the same mistake before now," exclaimed Handforth. "You may think that you've got the best of it, but you haven't. You've just spoofed yourself like that. There's going to be a dickens of a rumpus before long. You mark my words—you're going to get it in the neck!"

Mr. Skinner grinned.

"Say, I guess I kinder takin' a liking to you, kid!" he said. "That swell accent o' yours sure sounds good."

"Accent!" snapped Handforth. "What accent?"

"Gee! You don't even know you've got it!" said Mr. Skinner, with a chuckle. "All right, young 'un. It doesn't matter a heap. Just go on talkin', and I'll listen. I kinder like it."

Handforth was somewhat astonished by his chief captor's changed attitude. The man was doing his best to make himself pleasant. It was afternoon now, and Skinner had actually condescended to come into Handforth's prison, and was sitting down and enjoying a cigar.

Handforth himself was free, with the exception of his hands. These were still secured by means of a piece of rope. And he was sitting on the little bunk, glowering at his captor.

Mr. Skinner was lolling back in a chair.

At first, Handforth had been inclined to be morose. He didn't want to speak at all—he didn't see why he should descend to having any conversation with this brutal ruffian.

But Edward Oswald's mighty brain was beginning to get acute.

The extremity of his position had the effect of sharpening his wits. And it suddenly struck him that it might be a good idea to appear resigned. He would make the best of his position—he would give Skinner the impression that he was rather timid by nature.

And now, instead of uttering all sorts of threats that he couldn't carry out, Handforth sat there, content to talk as long as

Skinner would talk. He had an idea, also, that he might be able to learn something.

Handy had great ideas concerning his ability as a detective.

He was always out after information. He was very curious to know what these slave gangs were for, and he believed that he might be able to worm the truth out of his captor. By careful handling, Handforth might even obtain the full story.

"Of course, it's no good me saying that I sha'n't be here long—you wouldn't believe it," said Handforth. "But I've made up my mind to stick it. I'm pretty sure that Mr. Lee will come to the rescue."

Mr. Skinner smiled.

"Listen, kid!" he said indulgently. "Where do you get that stuff? Don't you remember the cliffs?"

"Of course I do."

"In most places they're about five hundred feet high," continued Mr. Skinner. "Say, what kind of a chance would these guys stand if they came down here? Do you figger they'd ever get out? Not on your life! Maybe this Lee guy will get busy."

"It's a certainty."

"Well, let him!" said Mr. Skinner. "It won't worry me any if he gets around. The sooner the better. Say, when he shows his face down here, there'll be more trouble than he reckons on. As for rescuing you—nothing doing! You'll be locked up all the time, and I guess he can't get at you. When he shows up here, it'll be the finish of him!"

Handforth gave a long sigh.

"It's rotten!" he muttered. "I'm helpless, and I've got to stick here like this! How long do you reckon you'll keep me?"

"Oh, around twenty years," said Mr. Skinner pleasantly.

"Eh?"

"You might last that time, but it's doubtful," continued the man. "I guess our slaves don't last many years. The work's kind of hard, and continual life down in this doggone place ain't exactly healthy. Guess I wouldn't stay around if I couldn't take some fresh air every day."

Handforth stared.

"Do you mean that you're going to keep me here until I die?" he asked, his voice trembling with something that sounded like fear. "Oh! You—you don't mean that! I've got to get back home—"

"Forget it!" said Mr. Skinner, with quiet enjoyment of Handforth's seeming terror. "Get me? You'll never see your home again, my lad. To-morrow you're going to be put into one of these chain gangs. I guess you've seen 'em through the window—eh?"

"Oh!"

Handforth gave a kind of groan, staring out of the window.

"Kind of given you a jag, ain't it?"

"You can't be speaking the truth!" muttered Handforth brokenly. "You're not going to put me in one of those gangs of slaves! Why, it's too awful to think about!"

"You'll look real pretty working with a pick," continued Mr. Skinner. "Gee! You're a pretty hefty young guy, and you ought to put in some snappy work. Maybe you'll be strong enough to shake off the fever."

"Fever?" repeated Handforth, startled.

"Sure! They all get it when they come first."

"But—but who are they?" asked Handforth. "And why are all these men kept down here, chained together?"

Mr. Skinner tossed the ash off his cigar.

"Want to be put wise?" he asked. "All right, sure! Seein' that you won't get out o' this place, I guess I might as well tell you

"But what are these slave gangs doing?"

"Mining."

"What?"

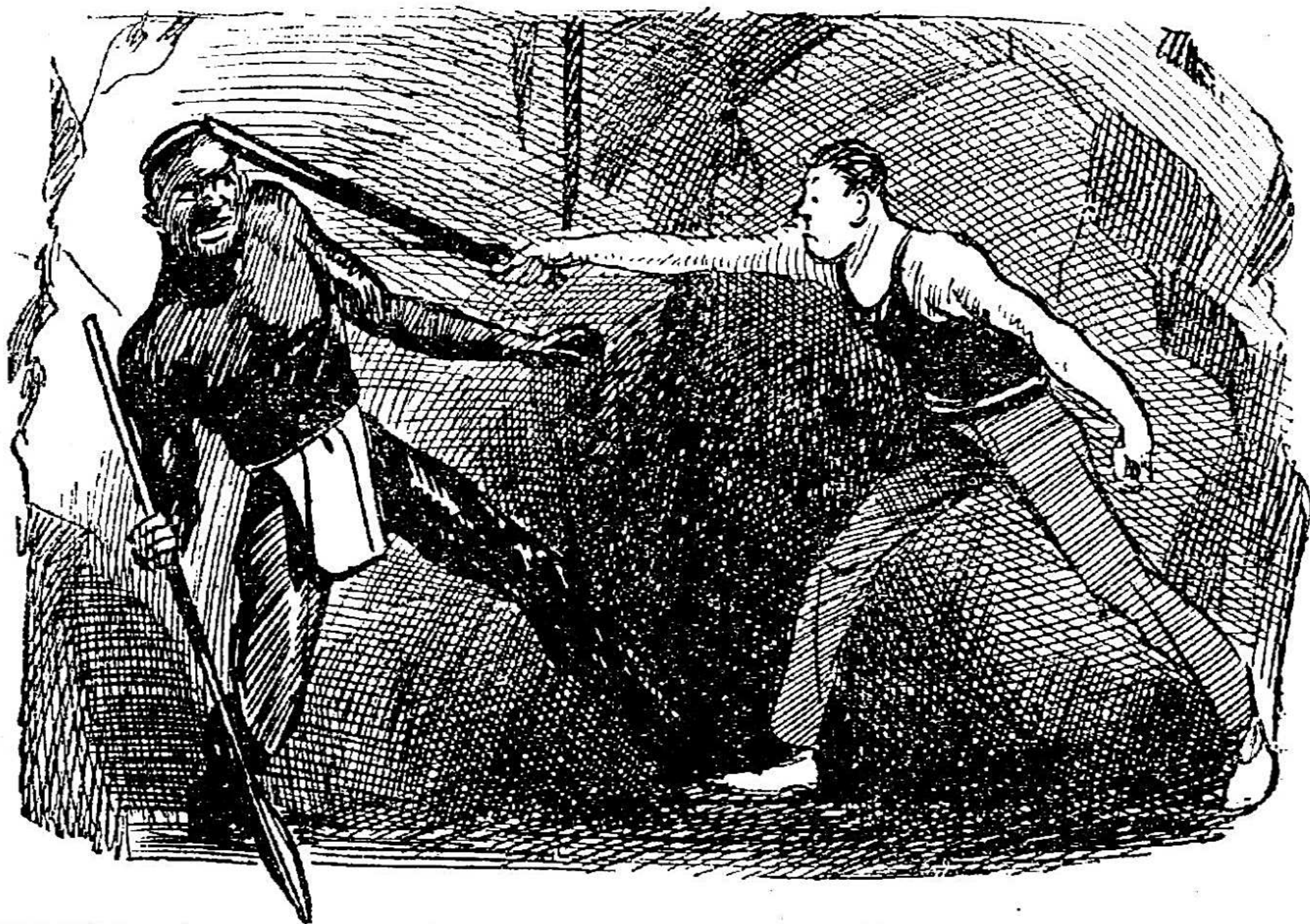
"Minin' for gold!" said Mr. Skinner.

"Gold!"

"You bet your life!"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "You can't fake me up with a yarn like that! There's no gold here!"

"I'll allow it sounds a bit steep," admitted Mr. Skinner. "But that's the truth, my lad. Why, most folks know about this island—they know that there's gold in these rocks. Say, this pit's been worked a score of times."



At the same moment the man finished his descent and touched the ground. Handforth raised his stick, and brought it down with stunning force upon the head of the enemy!

a heap. Perhaps you know who's the big boss of this outfit?"

"Yes—Captain Hurricane!"

"Right!" said Mr. Skinner. "Captain Hurricane is sure the chief. This here place was found by him, and he's making a big wad out of it. By the time he's through I guess he'll have a bank roll as big as Ford's."

Mr. Skinner laughed at the idea.

"Gee! It's sure a good proposition, but Captain Hurricane don't figger to make a pile that size," he went on. "You can bet we get our share, or we wouldn't be around this doggone place. And it pays us to stick around, too. Best job I ever struck."

"I don't understand," said Handforth, puzzled.

"Why, two or three companies have got busy with mining plant, gangs of men, and all the fixings," said Mr. Skinner. "Even lone prospectors have come round here. But I guess it ain't worth while. You see, the gold's kinder scarce, and it requires a whole heap o' getting. The cost of producing is more than the gold's worth."

"Then what's the good of trying to get it?" asked Handforth.

"Sure thing—what's the good?" smiled Mr. Skinner. "I guess that's what these darned mining companies said. Say, by the time they'd paid their shipping bills, and by

the time they'd met their payrolls—why, it didn't need a whole heap of calculating to figger they were on a losing proposition. You see, son, the cost of labour and everything else was about fifty per cent. more than the gold's worth. In just plain language, the whole thing was a dud proposition."

"And the same with all the other people?"

"Sure!" said Mr. Skinner. "The lone hands couldn't get enough gold up by themselves to earn twenty dollars a week. Do you get the idea? What the blazes was the good of living in a bunk place like this when they couldn't earn more than a durned bellboy?"

Handforth was still puzzled.

"But if these mining firms couldn't make money, and if the other people couldn't, what's the good of Captain Hurricane wasting his time on it?" he asked. "He must be mad! I've heard of gold mines that aren't worth working—"

"Yet bet you have," said Mr. Skinner. "There's a heap of 'em. Well, this is one, but it happens to be kind of isolated. And Captain Hurricane is able to do pretty well as he likes. You're getting the idea of the slaves, maybe?"

Handforth started.

"You mean that he keeps these slaves to do the work, and doesn't pay them any wages?" he asked.

"Say, you're sure full of pep!" said Mr. Skinner. "That's the idea, sonny. Everybody who works around here is a slave. We've got forty men on the job right now. They're working twelve hours a day—and I guess there's no slacking allowed. I guess these men do the work of a hundred men employed in the ordinary way. And they don't get a cent."

"My goodness!" said Handforth.

"Figgerin' it that way, the thing's a sure cinch," said the man. "I guess it's all profit. No wages—just food. And mighty poor food at that, believe me. These guys never get any luxuries. And now the skipper is figgering on growing a heap of food on the spot. With no wages to pay, and with men working twelve hours a day, I guess there's a big return. Instead of this mine being no good, it's sure paying big money."

Handforth had been listening with rather staring eyes.

He was quite certain that Mr. Skinner was speaking the truth. Indeed, there was no earthly reason why he should do otherwise. Besides, the slave gangs themselves certified the story.

And now, of course, Handforth could understand.

This gold mine, which had been abandoned by many companies, had been taken over by Captain Hurricane—who employed slave labour! He had a gang of brutal ruffians to assist him, who no doubt made a large amount of money for themselves, too.

It was one of the most extraordinary things Handforth had ever heard of.

But it was so feasible. Granting that a man would employ slaves, a mine of that kind would indeed be valuable. Because it was the wages that rendered such a place useless. When the cost of production is greater than the return, the concern is obviously of no use.

But when the production can be obtained without any material expense, then it becomes a different thing. Captain Hurricane, the ruffianly skipper of the *Henry R. Cane*, had hit upon this daring scheme.

And it was an easy one for him.

He knew every port on the Pacific coast of the United States. He had taken his schooner into these ports, month after month, and year after year. And his ship had such an evil reputation that his only way of obtaining a crew was to shanghai the men—to get them on board while drunk, or under the influence of drugs.

And Captain Hurricane had visited this island. He had seen the pit—he had known that gold existed. The gold was there, but it was a great labour, and a great cost to get it out from the rock.

And then Captain Hurricane had put two and two together.

He had realised the utter isolation of this island. And it had occurred to him that if he could shanghai men to form his own crew, he might be able to kidnap others, and bring them to this desert isle.

He had started his scheme a year earlier.

And since then it had been growing. Every trip that Captain Hurricane took to the Pacific coast, he got hold of two or three men. He kidnapped them so cunningly and so cleverly that they vanished without trace. They were brought to this island, and condemned to the worst kind of slavery that the human mind could imagine.

Other men had been obtained, and once they arrived here they had lost all hope. And now, among these slaves, that horrible chasm was known as the Pit of the Doomed.

All who entered there never escaped.

There was only one release—death.

Handforth was inwardly horrified as he listened to the brutal Mr. Skinner talking of these things. Skinner almost appeared to take a pride in the harsh manner in which he treated the slaves.

It seemed that many of these unfortunates had died from time to time. They were constantly being replaced by fresh arrivals. For nowadays Captain Hurricane spent all his time in journeying from the island to the American coast, and back again.

On the outward trip he would bring men—fresh slaves. On the homeward trip he would take the gold returns from the mine, and dispose of the gold in various ways of his own.

And Captain Hurricane was mounting up a big fortune in this way. The more slaves he could get, the quicker he obtained the money. Mr. Skinner, Jose, and the other men in Hurricane's pay, were all in the secret—they were, in a way, partners. For

they each received a certain proportion of the wealth—money, as it were, that was stained by the sweat and blood of the pitiful slaves.

Captain Hurricane was safe. He was never afraid of his men blabbing. For if ever they did happen to do so, their story would be set down as the ravings of a madman. The island was so far distant that no investigations could ever be made. And, in the unlikely event of any such things happening, Captain Hurricane always had the poison gas. And there was the knowledge that if exposure came, every man would suffer the penalty with their chief.

This poison gas, Handforth learned, was not natural. There were big metal tubes of it kept concealed among the rocks. The gas was much heavier than the air itself, and as soon as it was released, it rolled down the hillsides, clinging to the ground.

It was on hand for a very definite purpose.

If a whaling ship or any other vessel happened to drop anchor, and anybody came ashore, the gas was released. The unwelcome visitors would instantly assume that the island was naturally poisonous, and would escape as precipitately as possible.

In fact, Captain Hurricane had taken every precaution that he could conceive of.

And now—the Wanderer had arrived.

And those on board of her were so determined to ferret out the truth that it really looked as though some earnest trouble might result. Mr. Skinner was rather concerned about it, but he declared that he would wait until the arrival of Captain Hurricane.

This grim gentleman was expected very shortly.

And Mr. Skinner, having entertained Handforth by all these revelations, took himself off to attend to a few duties. The man had been quite frank because he knew that Handforth was booked in that pit for life. Once any person entered there, he never escaped.

Besides, what difference did it make? Handforth would learn all about it on the morrow from his fellow prisoners. Mr. Skinner had merely told the boy something that he was bound to know almost at once.

And Handforth was very thoughtful.

After Skinner had gone, he sat in his prison, pondering over all that he had heard. He had deliberately kept up an attitude of half fear, half awe. He had begun to realise that it paid him better.

But Handforth had not forgotten that blow in the mouth that Skinner had given him. At the earliest possible moment he would repay that—with interest.

The dusk came, and then darkness.

It descended swiftly into that black chasm. And it was the darkness of the Pit itself. Everything was utterly inky. Handforth was left alone in his prison, hungry, miserable, and well-nigh hopeless.

He wondered what was happening to those on board the Wanderer. He wondered if any efforts were being made to rescue him. And, what was more to the point, he was very anxious to know if he would obtain any food.

For Handforth had had nothing all day—and was starving hungry.

He received a pleasant surprise later on in the evening, when he had given up all hope of obtaining food that night.

He heard a sound at his door. It was being unlocked. And then it opened to admit Mr. Skinner. The latter brought a rough kind of tray, containing some hard biscuits, and a hunk of cheese. There was also a tin mug of water, and a candle. Mr. Skinner set this tray down on the bench.

"I guess you sure thought you were going to be hungry to-night," he said, as he noticed Handforth's eager glance. "I guess them biscuits ain't what you're used to—but they'll go down good. You won't get any other tack in this layout, son. Get busy on the eats."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth eagerly. "But—but my wrists——"

He glanced down at his bound wrists, and Skinner chuckled.

"Sure!" he said. "You ain't dangerous, anyhow."

He leaned over to release Handforth's wrists, and Edward Oswald delivered a swinging, slashing lefthander that caught the staggered Mr. Skinner a terrific crash on the point of the jaw.

The man reeled back, nearly lifted off his feet, and thudded against the side of the hut, his head meeting the woodwork with a frightful thud.

"Take that, you cur!" panted Handforth tensely. "By George! I promised you one, didn't I?"

Even as he was speaking, Handforth leapt upon his enemy. He pounded Mr. Skinner's face with every ounce of his strength—desperately, feverishly.

Handforth's knuckles were stinging and aching terribly. It was rather a wonder that he didn't break several bones. Indeed, his knuckles were bruised more severely than they had ever been bruised before.

And Mr. Skinner was done.

That one blow alone had been nearly enough to knock him senseless. The following blows completed the good work. And Skinner lay there, moaning slightly, incapable of any action—even incapable of shouting.

Handforth acted like lightning.

At any moment an interruption might come, and his chances of escape would vanish. He bound Mr. Skinner's legs with rope, and gagged him with his own shirt, which Handforth ruthlessly ripped from the man's body. Then he tied his hands behind his back.

Handforth rose to his feet, breathing hard.

"Great!" he muttered. "I'm going to get away yet!"

He snuffed out the candle and made for the door. Outside he turned the key in the lock, and put the key in his pocket. Then he padded silently away. At first he went blindly, without knowing or caring which direction he took.

The only fact he did know was that he was out in the open air. There appeared to be no guards about, and only one or two lights showed further along the pit. Handforth went in the opposite direction, where all was black.

Now that his eyes were growing more accustomed to the darkness, he could see that he was quite close to the overpowering cliff. It towered above him like the continuous wall of some gigantic skyscraper.

How was it possible for him to get to the top?

He couldn't use the cage—he dare not even go near it, even if he knew how to find the thing. But one thought was paramount. He had to get as far from that present hut of his as possible.

And he crept along the side of the cliff, so that he would not lose his bearing. As he went along, he gloated over the way in which he had fooled Mr. Skinner. It had taken him over two hours to get his wrists free from those ropes.

And then, at the crucial moment, he had acted. He had long pictured to himself the terrific blow he would deliver when he had the first opportunity. But Handforth had never believed he would be able to escape. That hope had only come to him when he had found that he had knocked Skinner out, and that nobody else was present.

As Handforth was stealing along, he paused—startled. For his face had struck against a quivering rope! It hung there, down the face of the cliff. Handforth stared at it, his heart beating madly. The rope was moving! Glancing up, he dimly discerned a figure descending.

Handforth's first impulse was to flee. He turned and stumbled over something, nearly tripping over. And there, at his feet, lay a big wooden stick—a heavy thing.

He picked it up, glowing.

At the same moment the man finished his descent, and touched the ground. Handforth raised his stick, and brought it down with stunning force upon the head of the enemy!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARRIVAL OF CAPTAIN HURRICANE!



"W AU! Thou dog of a jackal!" grunted the enemy, in a rumbling tone.

Handforth gave a gasp of joy and surprise.

"Umlosi!" he exclaimed, bending over the fallen man.

"'Tis thou, my young master!" said Umlosi, with a joy that was equal to Handforth's. "'Tis well, thou of much recklessness! But methinks thou art found. O, thou art madly impetuous!"

"Great pip! Sorry!" panted Handforth. "I—I thought——"

"Even as thou sayest, my young master!" rumbled Umlosi. "'Tis nought! A mere bump which will cause but slight pain."

"But I nearly brained you!" said Handforth, startled.

As a matter of fact, he had given the unfortunate Umlosi a terrific whack—a whack that would have knocked any white man absolutely silly. But Umlosi had a head as hard as a chunk of rock. He felt that blow, certainly, but made light of the stinging agony.

"Were—were you coming down to find me?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"Even so," said Umlosi. "Umtagati, thy master, awaits above, on the edge of the great precipice. 'Tis indeed wondrous that we should meet in this way. Thou art fortunate—even as I am unfortunate!" he added, rubbing his head again.

"This is amazing!" said Handforth, fairly bubbling over with enthusiastic delight. "I've just smashed Skinner to a pulp, and tied him up."

"Thou art a warrior, without question!" said Umlosi. "Indeed, thou art truly a fighter after mine own heart. Thou and I, my young master, will surely agree well! But I am of heavy heart, since I had hoped that I, too, might indulge in fattle. Methinks 'twould be unwise to dally."

"Yes, I suppose it would, strictly speaking," said Handforth. "If Mr. Lee's up at the top of this rope, the best thing we can do is to make haste. The sooner I'm out of this place, the better."

"Wise words, O my son," agreed Umlosi. "For until thou art back with the rest of thy companions, our hands are surely tied. Even as the great Umtagati sayest, we cannot give battle with thou in the hands of the dogs of enemies!"

Umlosi was more pleased than he could express. It seemed that he had come down as the first of the invading party. Up above, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Barry and a few others were waiting.

Nelson Lee was to have descended almost at once—providing that Umlosi jerked the rope once. But if he gave three jerks, in quick succession, the signal meant that he was to be hauled up again.

Swiftly Umlosi made a second loop in the rope—there had already been one, in which Umlosi had rested a foot. He now provided another for Handforth, about six feet away.

"Thou wilt go before me, my young master," said Umlosi.

"Not likely!" said Handforth. "We'll both go together. We're not going to chance losing you! What's the good of rescuing me, if you fall into the enemy's

hands? The position would be just as bad! Now that we've got the opportunity, we'll both escape."

"Thy words are the words of wisdom," said Umlosi. "And methinks the rope is of sufficient strength. There are strong muscles above, and willing hearts. Wau! We will go together, even as thou sayest."

And Umlosi gave three quick jerks of the rope. This meant to those above that there was urgent need for swift action. The rope had to be pulled up with all speed.

It commenced going at once.

Handforth was pulled clear of the ground, and then Umlosi's weight came upon the rope. It grew tauter, and the upward swing was not so rapid.

Those above were hauling with all their strength.

The rescuers had brought a system of pullage with them, and had rigged up this contrivance at the top of the cliff. There was no fear of the rope chafing, and there was no direct thrust upon it. It was only a matter of time before the pair reached the top.

"Do thou keep a tight hold, my son," rumbled Umlosi from below. "See that thy foot is well placed, and grip fast with thy hands. Ere long the distance will be of great height, and a slip will be even as death!"

"All right—don't worry!" said Handforth. "My foot's wedged in, and I'm sticking to the rope like glue. You can trust me not to slip. I'm not anxious to go back into that pit! Once is enough for me!"

They rose higher and higher—slowly, but steadily.

And while this operation was going on, other events were occurring on the island—events which Nelson Lee and his party were in total ignorance of. Scouts had been placed at various points—but the schooner, Henry R. Cane, crept up to the island like a ghost-ship.

Without a light showing, and under the hand of Captain Hurricane, the vessel approached and dropped anchor on the northern shore. Here, she was exactly on the opposite side to the Wanderer.

Her approach had been looked for by Jose, in charge of the motor launch—for she was expected about this time. And while she was still long distant from the island, Jose had taken the warning.

And now the schooner had arrived—silently, unseen.

Captain Hurricane was grim.

A big, grizzled man, with great shoulders like those of a gorilla. His face was coarse, thick-lipped, and blotchy. He looked one of the most villainous characters that the Seven Seas could boast of. And, indeed, his reputation along the whole Pacific coast was an evil one.

He heard all the news with scarcely a comment. It was a blow to him. He had fully calculated that when he arrived every

danger would be over. He had taken it for granted that the Wanderer would be at the bottom of the sea, with every soul on board.

But the actuality was very different.

For he learned that the Wanderer was here, and that her master and crew were making determined efforts to probe out the secrets of the chasm. The one satisfactory piece of news was that a schoolboy had been made prisoner, and was being held as a hostage.

But Captain Hurricane was not overjoyed.

The position was still bad. For the Wanderer could sail away at any moment—she could carry news back to San Francisco or Los Angeles. And what was to prevent Lord Dorrimore invoking the aid of the British Navy, or the American Navy? If a warship arrived on the scene it would be disastrous indeed.

"Good gosh!" said Captain Hurricane.

"I guess it's time I arrived!"

He had taken care to bring his schooner in on the opposite side of the island to the Wanderer. He wished his arrival to be absolutely unknown, for here there was a chance of springing a big surprise.

The night helped him.

It was inky black, for clouds overcast the sky, although there was no wind. It was almost impossible to see a yard in front of one. There was a kind of intense, velvety blackness about the night.

Captain Hurricane landed a big party. He had fully fifteen men with him, all armed with revolvers. And they proceeded at once towards the top of the big hill. The skipper's first object was to consult Skinner.

But the hill was only half mounted, when a man came out of the gloom.

He was a scout, and he had important news.

"Lee and his men are at the edge of the precipice now, sir!" announced the scout, in breathless tones. "They've lowered a rope, and two or three of them are going down. They mean to rescue the boy."

"Oh, do they!" snarled Captain Hurricane. "I guess we'll fix that crowd right now! Things couldn't be better! We'll pounce upon them by surprise, and nab the lot!"

The scout was quite ready to lead the way.

Unconscious of the approach of the enemy, Nelson Lee and his men were hauling away at the ropes, pulling Handforth and Umlosi up the sheer face of the giant cliff.

"I think somethin' must have gone wrong, old man," said Dorrie, with concern. "Umlosi was only down there for a few minutes. He couldn't even have moved away from the rope. An' yet he's comin' up again."

"I am hopeful," said Nelson Lee.

"Of what?"

"The weight on the end of the rope is much heavier," declared Lee. "It is almost too much to expect that Handforth is with

Umlosi—but who else could account for the extra weight?"

"Perhaps Umlosi was overpowered, and two members of the enemy are comin' up," suggested Dorrie, as he continued hauling. "How does that strike you?"

"As a singularly absurd suggestion," said Lee frankly.

"H'm! I thought it would," grunted Dorrie. "But I'd be interested to know why."

"I don't think two members of the enemy would be so foolish as to trust themselves on a rope that's held by us," replied Nelson Lee. "Upon arrival at the top, we've only to let them go, and their fate would be certain. No, Dorrie—Umlosi is on this rope."

They calculated that Umlosi still had another two hundred feet to come up, and all the yacht's party were working vigorously. And then one of Nelson Lee's own scouts crept out of the darkness.

"Quick, sir—enemy's coming!" panted the new arrival.

"What's that?" asked Lee. "What do you mean?"

"I've just seen a big party coming up from the north shore," reported the man. "There's a schooner down there, lying at anchor. She came in so quietly that nobody saw her until five minutes ago."

"Captain Hurricane!" breathed Dorrie.

"And he's coming straight up here!" exclaimed Lee. "Great Heavens! We must get Umlosi to the top at once, or the result will be dreadful! Pull, men! With this handicap, we'll never be able to resist the enemy."

Nelson Lee had realised the position in a flash.

An attack now would be the very height of misfortune, for well over half the yacht's party were hauling on the rope. If they were compelled to drop that rope, in order to resist an attack, it would be the inevitable death of Umlosi and Handforth.

And if they continued their task of pulling the pair to the top of the precipice, they would fall, easy victims to Captain Hurricane's gang!

Could any situation have been more tense?

And, as Fate would have it, the worst happened. For, before the warning was twenty seconds old, Captain Hurricane and his men swept down. They arrived in force—preferring to make a dashing attack.

The wily skipper had reckoned that any delay might mean a shooting fight, and Captain Hurricane had no relish for that sort of thing. His idea was to rush in and overpower the yacht's party by sheer force of numbers. For Captain Hurricane's crowd was of superior force.

With one swoop, they came down.

At the moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Barry were pulling feverishly on the rope, swinging Umlosi and

Handforth to the top of the great precipice in a series of mighty jerks.

They were within fifty feet of the summit. And then the schooner's crowd rushed up. There was the sound of fist meeting flesh and bone—the grunting of men in pain. The thud of blows—and then Nelson Lee and Dorrie found themselves fighting madly, while they were still clinging to that fatal rope.

Edward Oswald Handforth heard the noise of the fight just above. The rope stopped, jerked, and then Handforth and Umlosi began to fall like stones as the rope hissed and shrieked through the pulleys.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UPPER HAND.



DOWN—down!

The unfortunate Handforth thought that his last moment had come. And Umlosi was of the same opinion.

Above, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore knew of the awful disaster. Lee cared nothing about capture now—his one thought was to save the two precious lives at the end of the rope.

"Hold the rope, men!" he shouted madly. "Hold it—hold it!"

With one crashing blow he dealt with an attacker. Then he grabbed at the disappearing rope, the scream of the pulleys in his ears. Lord Dorrimore did the same, and their hands were burned and scorched by the swiftly sliding rope.

Alone, they would never have been able to stay the descent of those two.

But others grabbed the rope, too, in answer to Nelson Lee's call. And, at length, the rope was held.

"There is a man on the end of this line!" shouted Lee. "If this rope is released, it will mean his instant death. For the love of Heaven, keep hold! This affair is bad enough without making it worse!"

"Do you surrender?" roared Captain Hurricane.

Nelson Lee caught his breath in sharply.

"Yes!" he said, between his clenched teeth.

It had cost him an enormous effort to say that one word. If he had said "No," it would have been at the cost of Umlosi's life—and perhaps Handforth's as well. Nelson Lee did not know whether Handforth was on the end of the line.

Surrender was the only possible course. It was the bitterest moment of Lee's life—to give in tamely when every fibre in his being called upon him to fight—to resist.

Without the handicap of that rope, with the two lives hanging on the end of it, the yacht's party would probably have won the day. But they could not fight and pull the rope at the same time. It was one way or the other.

And, having surrendered, the battle was over.

Captain Hurricane issued some sharp orders, and his men rapidly disarmed every one of Dorric's men. And then the rope was hauled up, and Handforth and Umlosi appeared.

They were dragged over the edge of the precipice into safety.

But what a terrible blow! For, although saved from that dreadful death, they were now prisoners in the hands of the arch-enemy! Almost as soon as they were on their feet they were seized.

Umlosi commenced to fight with all his strength, but Lee interrupted.

"Stay, Umlosi!" he said quietly. "I have given my word of surrender."

Umlosi halted as though struck by lightning.

"Thou, my master!" he rumbled incredulously. "Thou, man of mighty courage thou hast surrendered!"

"Old friend, there was no other course," replied Nelson Lee.

Umlosi drew himself up, and his great chest heaved.

"Thou didst do this thing to save the lives of the young master and myself!" he exclaimed, his voice quavering. "I understand, Umtagati. Indeed, that was the bravest action of thy life! For it needed much courage to give thy word of surrender to this scum—for thou art a man of iron!"

"Say, quit that fool talk!" cut in Captain Hurricane harshly. "Line up in pairs—and step lively!"

All the prisoners were too enraged to speak. They had been caught at a terrible disadvantage—they had not even been able to put up a trace of a fight. It was too galling for words.

Captain Hurricane had triumphed by a mere fluke of fate.

And now the most valuable men of all were prisoners. On the yacht there only remained Captain McDodd, a few other members of the crew, and the Remove. And what could the Remove do against this desperate, villainous crowd?

Nelson Lee did not accuse himself of guilt. He was not foolish enough to accept blame when no blame was due. The whole affair had been a sheer matter of ill-luck.

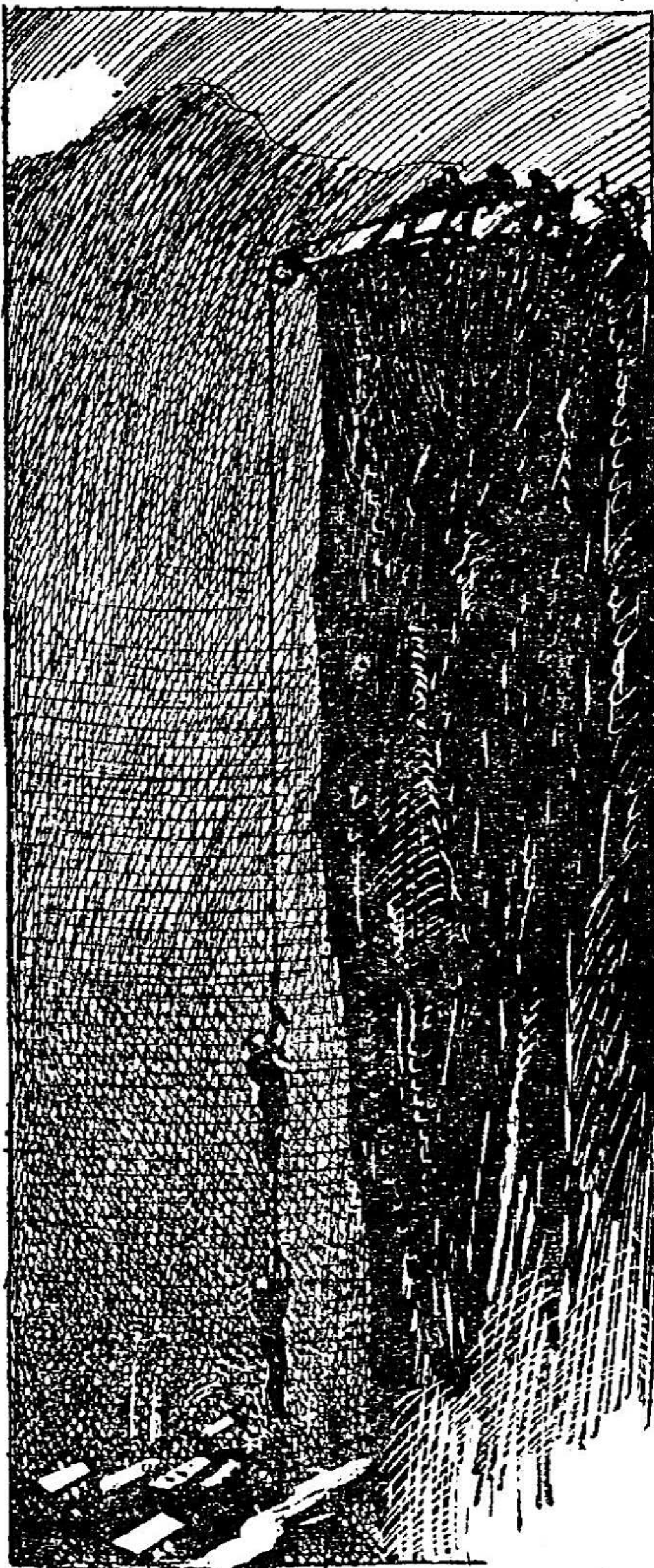
It was one of those mishaps that occur in warfare—when, at times, a whole gallant regiment may be sacrificed. The one thankful feature about this present disaster was that no lives had been lost. At least, all the members of the yacht's party were safe.

But what was their ultimate end to be? Slavery!

Captain Hurricane openly gloated over his triumph—just as though he had cleverly engineered a great feat of generalship. He did not appreciate the fact that his victory had been presented to him.

All the prisoners were tied with their hands behind their backs.

And then they were lowered in batches



It was only a matter of time before the pair reached the top. They rose higher and higher—slowly, but steadily.

down into the chasm—into the Pit of the Doomed! Here they were hustled away into various huts, and locked up in such a fashion that no escape was possible.

On board the Wanderer nothing was known of the disaster.

The Remove was still terribly anxious concerning Handforth. All the fellows were

aware that the rescue-party had set off, and the Wanderer was left quiet and peaceful.

The one scout who had known of the catastrophe had been taken a prisoner as well—so he could not bring any word of warning to the yacht. And quite a number of juniors hung about on the Wanderers' decks.

"I don't suppose there's much good waiting here," Church said miserably. "They may not be back for hours."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned McClure. "I wonder what's happened to poor old Handy? If—if the old chap's been killed——"

"Don't!" muttered Church.

"Well, you never know," said McClure, his voice almost toneless. "These men are murderers—you know that! Look at the way they tried to ambush Mr. Lee and the others! And if they shoot Mr. Lee down in cold blood, they'd probably do the same to old Handy."

Church clenched his fists.

"Why doesn't something happen!" he muttered between his teeth. "Why don't they come back? This—this is worse than anything—this suspense!"

I strolled up, much concerned.

"Don't worry so much, you fellows," I said. "I don't suppose Handforth has come to much harm. It's no good imagining all sorts of things—that only makes us worse."

"I know, but what else can you do?" said Church.

They mooched about the deck restlessly. Sleep was out of the question. Until they learned what had happened to the rescue-party they would not even go below. They had to wait up there on deck.

Even the other juniors, who were not so closely attached to Handforth, were greatly worried. And, as for Willy, he had not been seen for quite a time. At first I thought the poor kid had gone ashore somehow—desperate in his anxiety to learn something about his brother.

But Willy was below—in his own cabin.

I found him there, but he didn't see me. Peeping in through the doorway, I saw Willy with his face buried in the pillow. He was sobbing convulsively. I withdrew as silently as I had entered.

Willy was sensitive—he would have been terribly upset if he had known that I had looked in upon him.

But I felt a kind of lump in my throat as I went on deck. Willy was almost mad with anxiety. He couldn't face the other fellows—he could only remain below—waiting in a perfect frenzy of worry. For even Willy had terrible fears that Edward Oswald had met with tragic disaster.

And there was no sign from the shore—no indication of the return of the rescue-party.

It was Reginald who detected the first sign of anything unusual.

He was leaning over the rail amidships, staring out towards the shore. The surf was beating upon the beach with a musical, swishing sound. Only the faintest suspicion of phosphorescence could be seen. Beyond,

the bulk of the island lay in intense darkness.

Up on the bridge, a man was pacing up and down on duty. Two other members of the crew were forward, near the bows. Captain McDodd was in his cabin, talking with the chief engineer and another of the engine-room officers. These, indeed, were the only men left on board. All the rest had been taken by Nelson Lee on the hunt for Handforth.

Yet the Wanderer had plenty of men for defence. Surely, only one or two were necessary? For what attack would be made on the yacht? It was never imagined for a moment that the enemy would dream of such a daring move.

But the arrival of Captain Hurricane with his villainous crew had made all the difference in the world.

Reggie Pitt, as I just remarked, was the first fellow to notice anything strange.

Leaning over the rail, trying to make out the forms of the breaking waves, he suddenly nudged Jack Grey, who was by his side.

"What's that?" he asked, in a queer voice.

"Eh? I can't see anything——"

Jack Grey paused, and caught his breath in. For he could see something—now. On the water there was a darker patch some little distance away. But it was some moments before the juniors recognised that dark patch as a boat.

And it was coming quickly towards the yacht's side.

"My goodness!" breathed Pitt. "They're coming back!"

"The rescue-party!" gasped Jack Grey. "But why are they so jolly quiet about it? Reggie, I don't like this!"

"They—they may be the enemy!" muttered Pitt shrewdly. "Stop here! I'll buzz to the skipper, and tell him."

Pitt dashed away.

But, even as he did so, there was a thudding, scraping sound on the other side of the Wanderer. As a matter of fact, the motor-launch, gliding along with engines shut off, had bumped against the yacht's side.

Men swarmed on board in a flash.

Over a dozen swarmed over the decks. And before Pitt had reached the skipper's cabin, the boat on the other side had reached the accommodation-ladder. The second party of men rushed up.

"Hands up, the whole darned crowd o' you!" roared a coarse voice.

Confusion reigned in a second. Captain McDodd flung himself out of his cabin, and a rifle was instantly pushed into his chest.

"Hands up, or you'll drop dead as you stand!" shouted Captain Hurricane—for it was he who held that rifle.

"What the thunder——"

"Up with 'em—durn you!" exclaimed Hurricane. "By heck! This ship's mine—and the first man who resists will be shot!"

Crack! Crack!

Two revolver-shots snapped through the air. And one of the men forward fell, a bullet-wound in his arm. He had attempted to resist attack. These men were absolutely in grim earnest.

I stood looking on, aghast—almost terrified at this unexpected turn of events. The other juniors were struck dumb, too. The very thought of fighting these scoundrels was out of the question. At the first sign of a rush from us we should have been shot at in cold blood.

Within ten minutes the good old Wanderer was in the hands of Captain Hurricane.

One disaster had led to another. But it must be said, for it is the rascal's due, that the skipper of the Henry R. Cane acted with the precision of a real commander. He had seized his chance while it was there. Delay might have meant failure—instant action had given him command of the whole situation.

Captain McDodd and his men had been unable to put up any fight. Caught by surprise, they fell easy victims. As for the Remove, it was not to be expected that they should enter into a battle against armed ruffians.

Many of the fellows had wanted to fight, but it was impossible.

And long before the night was over the helpless prisoners were marched up the hill. When we were all down in that fearful pit—then we knew the worst. For Nelson

Lee and Lord Dorrimore and every other man of the party was there before us—locked up.

We did discover that Handforth was safe. To Willy this was the most wonderful news in the world. He didn't seem to mind being a prisoner. Handy was alive as well! And Church and McClure were thankful, too. Some of their consternation was lessened.

Just before dawn the affair was over.

The entire party of us were down in that place of misery, and the Wanderer was at the mercy of Captain Hurricane.

The latter amused himself by going to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and assuring them that we had all seen the last of the world. Once in that pit—there was no escape!

We were slaves from now onward—down-trodden slaves, who were there merely for the purpose of making money for our master! And the Wanderer was to be taken out into the open sea and scuttled—sunk without a trace.

We should vanish from the face of the earth, and our disappearance would be set down as one of those mysterious disasters of the sea that do occur at infrequent intervals.

And thus the episode closed.

There we were, slaves of Captain Hurricane's greed. What hope was there for us? What chance was there for us to ever escape?

A lot—if we had only known it!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

My dear Readers,

With the conclusion of the above story, the whole of the Holiday Party, comprising Nelson Lee, the Remove, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, Captain Dodd, and the crew of the Wanderer, are the prisoners of the scoundrelly Captain Hurricane. They are condemned to slavery in the inaccessible pit of the island for the remainder of their lives. Like the pirates of bygone days, Captain Hurricane acts on the callous principle that "dead men tell no tales." To all intents and purposes the Holiday Party are dead to the outside world, for their chances of escape are exceedingly remote, and, with the destruction of the Wanderer, the only remaining link with civilisation will have disappeared. Even supposing these unhappy prisoners could surprise and overpower their guard, they could never climb the steep cliffs that surround them on every side. Neither could they leave the island if they succeeded in getting out of the pit.

THE SCHOOLBOY SLAVES!

It is not an enviable position for either

Nelson Lee or Lord Dorrimore, both of whom feel the responsibility for the safety of the boys under their charge. The unexpected hand of Fate that had brought them to this awful predicament was destined, however, to bring them succour. How it came about, and to some extent altered their hopeless outlook, is another story, which will be related next week in "The Schoolboy Slaves."

THE NEW NELSON LEE SERIAL.

I have had so many letters testifying to the popularity of "The Silver Dwarf," which concludes next week, that I am starting in the same number of Our Detective Story Section the sequel to this remarkable detective story. It will deal with the further exciting adventures of Nelson Lee versus the cunning and unscrupulous Professor Mark Rymer.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

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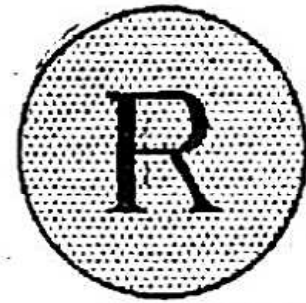
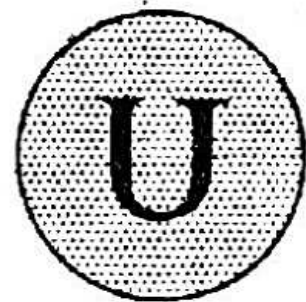
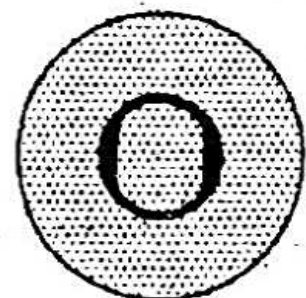
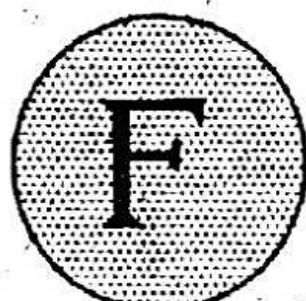
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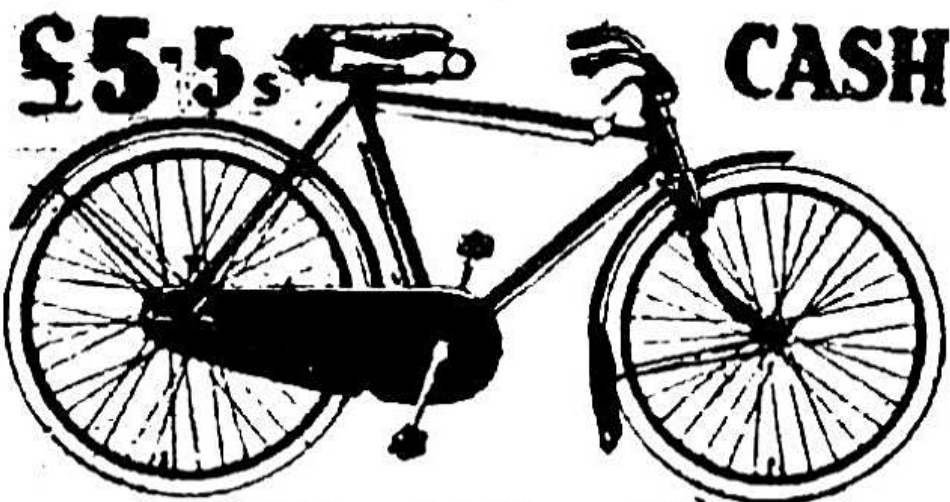
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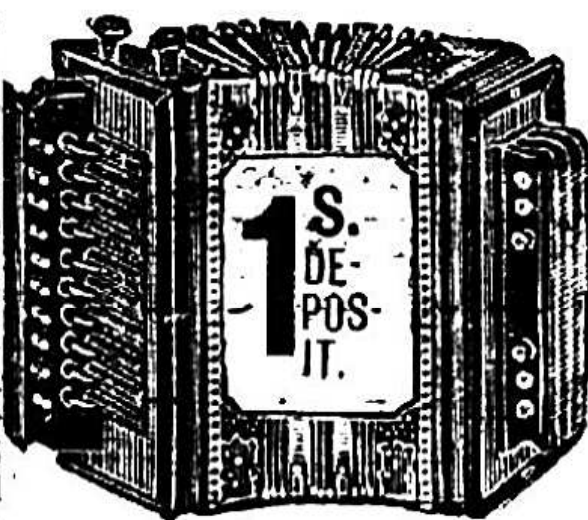
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