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SLAVES!**

Intro-
ducing
Nelson Lee,
Lord Dorri-
more, Umlosi,
and the Boys of
St. Frank's.



The chain was unable to stand the strain. It broke at the point where it was joined to Handforth's foot. And I plunged down with full force into the deep, black water of the slow-moving stream.

The Schoolboy Slaves !

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A thrilling story of schoolboy adventure on an unknown island in the Pacific. Nelson Lee, accompanied by the whole of the Remove of St. Frank's, are on a holiday trip as the guests of their old friend, Lord Dorrimore, on his magnificent yacht, the Wanderer. While investigating some strange mystery connected with one of the many obscure islands of the Pacific, the Holiday Party are captured by Captain Hurricane the rascally skipper of the Henry R. Cane, and compelled to work as slaves in a deep pit on the island, from which there is no apparent means of escape. How they eventually extricate themselves from their seemingly hopeless predicament is unfolded in the clever story below.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN HURRICANE'S PLAN!

CAPTAIN HURRICANE brought his fist down on the table with a crash.

"Yes, by heck!" he said harshly, "I've sure got these guys where I want 'em! You can take it from me, Mr. Seelig, that the whole blame bunch is in my power for good. Yes, siree!"

And the skipper gulped down a stiff dose of raw whisky.

"You're feeling kind o' good, cap," remarked Mr. Seelig, with a grin. "Well, you sure got reason. We've cleaned up. These hoboos ain't got no more chance than a crowd o' yaller dogs!"

The captain and the mate of the schooner, Henry R. Cane, were sitting at the table of Lord Dorrimore's state-room on board the magnificent steam yacht, Wanderer. And a

more villainous pair would have been hard to find.

There was one other man present—an individual of the same type named Skinner. He looked somewhat the worse for wear, his face being bruised and battered, and adorned with sticking plaster.

A conference, in fact, was taking place. Captain Cane—known to ill-fame as Captain Hurricane—was discussing ways and means with his chief lieutenants. It was evening, and the Pacific Ocean lay calm and peaceful.

The island was only a small one—just a dot in the vast expanse of illimitable blue. Not more than three miles long by two miles wide, the island was one of the most desolate spots one could imagine.

The only trace of green within sight lay at the top of the high central hill, where two lone palm trees raised their stately heads

towards the sky, bending and nodding lazily towards the sea.

The Wanderer was at anchor in the one little bay that the island boasted. And she was deserted, save for these three men. Her fires were cold, and there was a desolate, forlorn appearance about her decks. No lights were showing save those from Lord Dorrimore's state-room.

What had happened to her crew?

What had become of Dorrie himself, and Nelson Lee, and Umlosi, and all the noisy juniors of the St. Frank's Remove? They had all been guests on board the beautiful yacht. But now—?

Captain Hurricane was telling the grim story in his own words.

"You're right, Mr. Seelig," he said. "These people are sure finished—as far as the world is concerned. They've seen the last of civilisation. I guess they are just the crowd I want, too. Them boys in particular are useful. Strong, healthy, and hard as nails. They'll be good for years. Some of 'em, maybe, will drop out—but that can't be helped."

"The men, too, are nifty guys!" said Mr. Seelig.

"Sure," agreed Captain Hurricane. "Taking everything all round, men, I'm pretty well satisfied with the position. Things looked mighty bad when I first arrived—but now there's no need to worry any."

"I'll say not," put in Mr. Skinner. "We've got the whole crowd, and we've got the yacht. I guess there isn't a soul knows a thing. That crowd will just vanish off the face of the earth."

"Considering how bad things looked, we're lucky," declared the skipper. "I came here and found these blamed fellers inquiring into my affairs. There was a danger of the whole pot of beans being spilt. At first it looked as though I should have to quit. But then we turned the tables. And now that bunch is down in the pit—and down there for good."

The three men continued talking about their affairs.

And it was rather a grim talk, too. Perhaps I'd better be as brief as possible in describing what had taken place during the last few days. These events were remarkable. And if they had not happened to ourselves, we should have been inclined to laugh at the very thought of them.

For the whole situation seemed so crazy—so impossible.

Lord Dorrimore had taken the Remove on board at Los Angeles, in California. We had been having quite a good time in America, and had boarded the Wanderer in the full belief that we were booked for a fine time.

If we had only known!

Dorrie himself was enthusiastic about some trip he intended making. There was an island he had visited in the Pacific. It was this island, of course—the one where the two palm trees raised their heads above the hilltop.

Dorrie, in fact, had been somewhat suspicious. He had been fairly certain there was something queer about the island. And he had returned fully prepared, and with his mind made up. He would ferret out the secret.

He had certainly done so—but the net result was that he and his crew and all his guests were helpless prisoners in the hands of these crooks. That was the long and the short of it.

Captain Hurricane was the chief enemy.

And on this island he kept gangs of slaves—slaves who were worked even harder than the black slaves of the cotton plantations of bygone days. Chained together in gangs, the poor wretches were compelled to work for twelve hours a day, with never a rest, and with nothing to look forward to but death.

In the very centre of the island there was a remarkable freak of nature.

From the exterior, that hill looked just an ordinary hill. Sailing right round the island, one would never have imagined that there was anything peculiar about it. But, as a matter of fact, it was extraordinary.

There was a great deep gash in the centre of the hill—a kind of chasm, five hundred feet deep. This chasm, or pit, extended a mile in one direction, and half a mile in the other, occupying the whole centre of the island. The big hill itself was a fraud—it was not as solid as it looked.

And this great pit, with sides as smooth as the walls of a house, was in reality a gold mine! It was not one that was unknown—it was not a secret which Captain Hurricane had kept entirely to himself.

Many big concerns had attempted to work the mine. But they had all found that it did not pay. The cost of labour and transit was so great that any concern was always on the losing side. The amount of gold-dust that was sifted out was in such meagre quantities that the whole proposition was useless.

For one thing, labour was terribly expensive. Men had to be offered enormous inducements to come to such a terrible place to work—a pit five hundred feet down in the earth, with a humid heat that was almost killing. And so firm after firm had given up the project as hopeless. There was gold there, certainly—but what was the good of it when the very obtaining of it meant a loss?

Captain Hurricane knew all this—and instituted a scheme of his own.

Slavery!

That was the one word that described the whole situation. Captain Hurricane had long been accustomed to obtaining men for his crew by questionable methods. He had shanghai'd hundreds in his time. His reputation along the whole Pacific coast was of the most evil description.

And this rascally skipper—one of the few remaining of that type—had hit upon the scheme of kidnapping men and taking them

to this lonely, desolate island, where no ships ever came, and which had been abandoned by all as a death spot. The island, indeed, was shunned by all superstitious sailors.

Captain Hurricane's prisoners were brought direct to the island in the schooner. They were taken ashore, and lowered down into that pit—and once there, they never came out.

It was quite a simple plan.

In the course of a few months the skipper had got hold of fully forty men in this way. And now they were working down in that pit in chain gangs. They were treated worse than dogs. They were worked until they almost collapsed at their labours. Ill-fed, with never the slightest change, their lives were little better than a living death.

And the gold was obtained—by crude, antiquated methods the precious dust was extracted from the rocky earth. And in this way Captain Hurricane was piling up a fortune.

For it cost him nothing for labour.

Where the big mining concerns had failed, Captain Hurricane succeeded. But only because he employed slave labour. His only outlay was the third-rate food that the slaves existed upon. There were no wages to pay—no shipping expenses of any kind.

By degrees, Captain Hurricane had got the whole affair into trim working order. He had a gang of ruffians who assisted him—men who were really partners in the concern. They were getting rich, too, for there was enough for all. There was never any fear of them blabbing.

And things had been going smoothly when the Wanderer had arrived.

Dorrimore's suspicions being aroused by certain things he had seen, his lordship had determined to get at the truth. But, owing to circumstances that no man could foresee, a big shore party from the yacht had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Nelson Lee and all the others were made prisoners and taken down into that pit.

An attack upon the yacht itself immediately followed.

Taken completely by surprise, the few remaining men had found it impossible to beat the attackers off. And as a direct result, the yacht had fallen into the hands of Captain Hurricane.

Everybody was taken ashore and transferred to the great chasm—the place which was known among the wretched slaves as "The Pit of the Doomed." The entire Remove was there, too.

Nobody in the outside world knew what had happened, Dorrimore had kept his plans a strict secret. There was not a soul who knew of this projected trip to the desert isle.

And that was the position.

There was little wonder that Captain Hurricane was inclined to crow. His success was not due to his own cleverness, but

largely as the result of blind, unsuspected luck.

It will be seen that the rascally skipper's prisoners now amounted to a big number. In addition to the original forty slaves, there were now over twenty men belonging to the Wanderer, including Lee and Dorrie—and nearly fifty members of the St. Frank's Remove.

The prisoners numbered over a hundred and ten. And the majority of them were able-bodied, and in a fine state of health. Captain Hurricane could see that production would be over doubled. There was work for all in that terrible gold mine. The profits would be doubled in one move.

In fact, Captain Hurricane's difficulties were over.

He had been compelled to use extreme caution in kidnapping his men. At the best, he could only hope to bring one or two more prisoners every month. But here he had obtained seventy in one fell swoop! The work of years had been accomplished in one hour!

It meant that he would not have to get any fresh labour for many a long day, for this crowd was as big as the guards could handle. Not that there was any fear whatever of a revolt among the slaves. They were so ground down that the very idea of insurrection was humorous.

Chained together in gangs—day and night—what opportunity was there for revolt? And they were constantly guarded by armed men during the hours of work. At night they were locked up in stout wooden huts. Any movement among the prisoners could be heard by the night guards, for those chains were always sure to rattle. And if one man ever did happen to get free he could never hope to escape.

He would simply be at liberty in that pit until shot, or recaptured. To climb up that sheer precipice was out of the question. And supposing he did? Where could he get to? Merely on to the barren rock of the hillside, with the bare, wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean before him.

The lot of the slaves was, indeed, the most hopeless imaginable.

And the present situation was staggering. For Lord Dorrimore and his crew and his guests were prisoners, too. Their chance of ever seeing civilisation again appeared to be so slim that it was almost non-existent.

For everything was in Captain Hurricane's favour.

"Of course, things are all right now," the skipper was saying. "We've got the whole bunch chained up, and there are ten men on guard. I've given orders for them to shoot—and to kill, too—if there's any sign of insubordination. Them kids are inclined to be a bit sullen at present, but I guess they'll change."

"Sure thing," agreed Mr. Skinner. "They all have their spirit broken after the first week or so. When they fully realise there's no hope, they kind of get dead. They work

like machines—an' they're as easy to handle as a crowd of tame rabbits. We ain't had trouble in months."

"You sure look as if you had, though," said Mr. Seelig.

Skinner cursed as he tenderly touched his bruised face.

"Gosh!" he swore. "This was done by that guy named Handforth! I've got it in for him all right! Gee! To-morrow I'm goin' to make him work until he drops in a faint. I'm goin' to whip him until he howls."

"Guess I'll have something to say about that," growled the skipper. "There'll be no whipping unless them guys refuse to work. Whippin' puts a man out of action. I ain't feeding anybody who don't work!"

"I'll make that hobo work!" snapped Skinner harshly.

"We ain't interested in your troubles, Mr. Skinner," said Captain Hurricane. "There's a problem here, and it's got to be discussed. We've got this yacht on our hands. She's sure a swell craft, but she ain't a mite of use to us. As soon as she's sunk I'll feel more seeure."

"Gee! It's a durned pity!" said Mr. Seelig. "A fine craft like this! Worth tens of thousands of dollars! And she's got to go to the bottom! Gosh! It makes me kind o' sorry!"

"Sorry nothin'!" said the skipper. "If we could sell the blamed ship, I'd make a heap in that way. But as soon as the Wanderer is seen, there'll be a whole heap of inquiries about her crew, and that blamed lord, and all the boys. No, sir! The only safe thing to do is to sink the craft."

"I sure agree," said Mr. Seelig. "But, at the same time, it's an all-fired shame. But, say, I'm thinkin' there's a pile of good stuff on board that might come in useful. We need to think some."

The captain nodded.

"I'm doing it!" he replied. "There's a heap o' these fancy fixings that'll come in handy down in the pit. I've wanted to bring out hundreds of things, but I daren't take the risk. And I guess they're right here now—on this yacht! What we've got to do is to strip her."

"Sure," said the mate, nodding.

"We'll transfer all her stores ashore, down to the last bag of beans," said the captain. "Say, these stores are sure worth thousands of dollars! The wine and the spirits alone are a mighty fine prize. There's fixings, too—the saloon furniture, the kitchens—and, in fact, everything portable. We'll take the whole blamed thing to pieces, and shift everything that can be shifted."

Mr. Seelig was rather dubious.

"I figger that'll be a pretty stiff job," he remarked.

"Sure, it will," said Captain Hurricane. "We could do it at night, and have a whole crowd of us at work. Inside of a week we'll have the stuff ashore. Then we'll take the craft into deep water, and sink her."

"That's the stunt," said Mr. Skinner. "I'm reckoning that there'll be a bit of a sensation in the newspapers over this. The complete disappearance of an English lord an' a whole bunch of schoolboys! Gee! It'll give them reporter guys a job for weeks!"

"Yes, we've got to think pretty smart, too," said the captain thoughtfully. "You can bet your life there'll be warships sent out—every vessel afloat will be on the lookout for the Wanderer, or some piece of wreckage that might give an indication of her fate."

"We'll need to go easy on this," said Mr. Skinner. "When we sink the ship, we'll have to be darned careful there's nothing left afloat."

Captain Hurricane nodded.

"Leave that to me," he said. "There won't be a trace by the time I've done. It's likely, too, that these islands will be searched—this one, and every other deserted spot in the Pacific. Well, by the time that happens, we'll have all the stores down in the pit, out of sight. And search parties will give just one look at this island, and sheer off. We ain't got anything to worry about as long as we act quick."

And the three men continued talking—making their full plans and deciding exactly when the stout old Wanderer should go to her fate.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE PIT OF THE DOOMED!



DAWN came at its appointed time.

And down in the chasm the light filtered slowly. It was some little time before the daylight was strong. For in that deep

pit there was never any dazzling sunshine, except in the very middle of the day.

For the greater part of each day the bottom of the pit lay in shadow. The cliffs were so high on all sides that the sun could only reach to the bottom when it was directly overhead.

It was a forlorn spot, indeed.

Standing down there, one was almost awed by the grim, frowning precipices which towered on every side. They were sheer cliffs of smooth rock, reaching upwards to the sky, and impossible to scale. Not at one point was there the slightest roughness or opportunity for climbing.

The floor of the pit was a kind of valley.

A mile wide, the greater portion of the space was occupied by the gold workings. Here and there were rough patches of grass, curious, stunted shrubs—and a stream of warm, fresh water.

And sprinkled round the valley were all kinds of huts—rudely constructed places, but quite strong. The majority of them were close against the cliff face, with a kind of trodden path running before them all.

At close quarters, the stream proved itself to be quite wide and very deep. It was not one of those shallow, swiftly-running brooks which one can wade with ease. In many points the stream was ten or twelve feet deep.

And as the gold workings extended on all sides, a bridge had been constructed over this river. It was a roughly-made trestle affair, with just a wooden path across the trestles. It was no more than four feet wide, and without any kind of guard.

And this was the scene that I gazed upon. For I was standing at the window of one of the huts, watching the daylight grow stronger. I couldn't realise that we were prisoners here for life. I wouldn't believe it—for the thing was altogether too horrible. The thought was one that might easily drive a fellow into a panic.

But I fully realised the terrible nature of the position.

There were ten of us in that hut. It was only a small place, without any comfort, and without the slightest piece of furniture. I was chained to the other nine fellows, who consisted of Handforth and Co., Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and a few more.

Most of them were asleep.

They lay huddled up, leaning against one another, sleeping with sheer exhaustion. Being strong, healthy juniors it was not in the nature of things for them to remain awake. They had remained talking far into the night, but, one by one, they had all dropped off.

The chains which bound us were fastened to our right ankles. And there was about six feet of chain between each of us. It was impossible for one fellow to get away without dragging at his companions.

These chains were comparatively light, but of strong steel. It was impossible to snap them by the mere pressure of one's hands. And even a strong file would have been of little use.

Round our ankles the chains were secured by means of padlocks. These padlocks were all of a standard pattern, and each guard in Captain Hurricane's gang possessed a master key. If one slave happened to faint through sheer exhaustion, he was unpadlocked and taken out of the slave gang that he belonged to. And the others were still kept at work.

The whole system was revolting—well-nigh unbelievable.

I could not imagine such ghastly cruelties occurring even in the days of slavery in the Southern States of America—or in the heart of the Congo region of Africa. This bondage was horrible.

And it was taking place in the twentieth century—when all slavery in the world was supposed to be at an end. And the slaves were not downtrodden niggers either—but white people.

Among Captain Hurricane's original slave gangs there were one or two American negroes, but most of the men were sailors,



These men were armed with whips, and they slashed at Dorrie's back, and at Nelson Lee's back. The brutes also held revolvers. They were ready to use these at the slightest provocation.

and such like, who had been kidnapped while under the influence of drink.

And I stood at the window, there, staring out.

Quietly I had got to my feet so as not to disturb the others. Handforth was awake. He was the next in line to me, and I had just happened to pull his chain. And he was now awake, gazing almost unseeingly in front of him.

"It's a dream!" he muttered. "I know it is! It can't be true about this slavery business. I've been having a rotten nightmare!"

I looked down at him.

"That's what I thought, old son," I said quietly. "But it's no dream. It's all horrible reality. Oh, I wish I knew where the gov'nor was! What do these fiends mean to do?"

Handforth got to his feet. His chain chinked a bit, but none of the other juniors were disturbed.

"Great pip!" said Handforth, his voice hoarse and husky. "Chained together—just like animals in the Zoo. But that's wrong—because even animals ain't treated as badly as this! It's—it's too awful even to think about!"

"I know it!" I muttered. "But it can't

last, Handy. It's impossible to think that!"

Handforth looked at me soberly.

"It can't last?" he repeated. "But what's to prevent it? I mean, how can we do anything? Chained up like this, with armed men guarding us, we've got no more chance than mice in a trap! Even Nelson Lee can't do anything. You can bet he'll be chained up even stronger than we are."

"I know!" I said brokenly. "It's stunning, Handy—it's like receiving a blow! I think some of the fellows will go mad before long—they'll never stand it, you know—they won't be able to."

Handforth didn't reply.

He was thinking the same as myself. The more we thought of this position, the more desperate we became. Indeed, the thing didn't bear thinking of at all. In that direction lay insanity.

With nothing to live for—nothing to look forward to—life in this ghastly pit would be far worse than death itself. It was hardly surprising that the impulsive Edward Oswald Handforth was sober for once in his life. He had been sitting there, thinking deeply, and even his indomitable spirit was in danger of weakening.

And this before any actual slavery had commenced!

What would we be like after a week? What would happen to us all after we had been in the place for a month? I tried to picture the result. I know I failed, but I at least obtained a slight impression.

We should be spiritless—we should have had every ounce of manliness knocked out of us. Our ambitions would be killed—our lives a misery from one week-end to another.

We had seen the other slaves—the men who had been here for months. And they were just like dumb animals. There was a glazed, hopeless expression in their eyes. They obeyed orders mechanically. They shrank cringingly when any of the guards happened to come near them.

Strong, burly men—men who had been fine examples of manhood—shrank with terror in their hollow eyes when Captain Hurricane or one of the others approached. It made one feel almost ill to watch. For these strong men were no longer men at all—they were slaves without a soul of their own. They had ceased to look upon life as ordinary human beings regard it. They were just waiting, dully and listlessly, for death to come as a relief.

Could anything be more appalling?

And when I thought that we were all booked for the same fate I nearly went crazy with rage and helplessness. My very inside burned at the thought of these foul beasts who had us in their power.

They were not men at all—but fiends.

Outwardly they looked very much like other men. They laughed, they joked, they regarded the whole affair as a business, but they had been in the game for so long that the horror of it had ceased to impress them.

They had become hardened until they were callous. They even looked upon their prisoners as so many insects. If one or two died, what mattered? The bodily sufferings of their slaves meant nothing to them.

In warfare, soldiers become hardened to the fearful horrors of the battlefield. Sights that would revolt and sicken them in ordinary life are as nothing to soldiers after a certain amount of fighting.

And it was just the same way with these men here. They had grown so accustomed to treating their slaves harshly—they were so used to seeing the poor wretches suffer—that they no longer cared. Every atom of human kindness had been driven from their make-up.

And these were the men who had us at their mercy!

As I have already said, the more I thought about it, the more I became appalled. And I was still pondering, when I noticed some of the guards appearing from their own huts—which were superior to those of the prisoners.

Mr. Skinner's quarters, for example, were quite comfortable. He had a living-room, a good bed, and everything to make life in this place as bearable as possible. And he always had slaves to wait upon him.

For Mr. Skinner was the chief down here—during the absence of Captain Hurricane and his mate.

Most of the guards were men of a similar type—brutal fellows, who looked villainous and as hard-hearted as stone.

While I was looking, I started.

A gang had appeared—slaves. And they consisted of Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, Captain McDodd, Mr. Barry, Umlosi, and the chief engineer of the Wanderer. These were chained together as a gang.

And they were being forced along by two guards.

These men were armed with whips, and they slashed at Dorrie's back and at Nelson Lee's back. The brutes also held revolvers. They were ready to use them at the slightest provocation.

"Good heavens!" I muttered thickly.

"Look—look at that!" muttered Handforth. "Oh, it can't be true! Why don't they fight? Why don't they go for these horrible beasts?"

I didn't answer. For my heart leapt into my mouth. Lord Dorrimore was resisting—he was refusing to walk! And he was slashed again and again with that cruel whip.

"Darn you, I'll make you squirm!" shouted the guard, his voice coming to me clearly through the unglazed window. "Think you can jib, eh?"

Lord Dorrimore suddenly squared his shoulders, and then laughed heartily.

"All right—have your little pleasure!" he said mockingly. "I won't descend to any defiance. What's the good? You've got the best of it now, but, by gad, one of these

days I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

Nelson Lee said nothing. He was slashed again and again with the whip—not because he was resisting, but simply because it pleased that brutal guard to show his power.

If Nelson Lee ever proved his courage, he proved it then.

For he did nothing. Every fibre of his being called upon him to defy this vile treatment. His manhood revolted against him. But he held himself in check—for to give way meant nothing but added humiliation.

And the chained gang went on towards one of the gold workings.

Soon afterwards another gang appeared. This was one of the old ones—consisting of men who had been doing this work for weeks and months. They slouched along with bent shoulders and listless gait. It was pitiful to watch them. They were as docile and manageable as tamed animals.

And then came a third gang.

I stared hard. Reggie Pitt was there, and Jack Grey, and De Valerie, Bob Christine, Timothy Tucker and Fatty Little—twenty fellows, in fact. They were chained together by their ankles, and were compelled to march in single file. Many of them were shouting with rage—heaping insults upon the two guards who had charge of the gang.

And again and again the whips were used.

Fullwood and Co. were in that gang, and they howled and screamed with agony as the whips slashed them. It was awful to watch.

And after that our own hut was opened, and we were all dragged out. The sleeping juniors were aroused by lusty shouts from the two ruffians who were to take charge of us.

We were each given some hard ships' biscuits, and a tin mug of water. And we were provided with five minutes in which to eat and drink. This was our breakfast. There was no other meal until midday.

And this would consist of a kind of greasy soup—something to keep body and soul together. Our life in this awful place would be worse than anything that could possibly be conjured up in the human mind.

We were soon at work.

Provided with pickaxes, shovels, and other implements, we were told what to do. And we laboured on throughout the morning. Our hands became blistered and raw. We ached, and it seemed as though we should go mad. Such work was not familiar to us.

Some juniors in the other gangs grew so exhausted that they almost staggered at their work. They were whipped until they howled and showed further signs of life. Many fellows—juniors who were ordinarily quite plucky—broke down and sobbed. But the stronger among us hardened our hearts and clenched our teeth. Some day, we told ourselves, the chance would come to repay.

Little did we imagine that our servitude was to end almost as soon as it had begun! For some startling events were brewing!

CHAPTER III.

THE AFFAIR ON THE BRIDGE!



HOW we finished that day I can never describe.

If we had been destined to continue this life for weeks and months our lot would probably have been easier. For after we had become hardened to the treatment, it would not have seemed so bad. And with our spirits broken, we should have accepted insults and kicks without that burning rage which now filled us.

That first day was the worst of all.

For we revolted all the time—some outwardly, some inwardly. Those who succeeded in keeping their balance were let off more lightly than the others. But it was an awful experience for all.

By dusk we were sore and aching in every bone and muscle. Some fellows were suffering from livid weals—the result of whiplashes. And all our hands were raw and grazed and bleeding.

Even in this short time many spirits were on the point of breaking.

The chain-gangs were ordered to stop work. The order came as a message of deliverance. Rest! Until to-morrow, at least, we should have a respite from this grinding toil. The thought of the huts, so filthy and comfortless, was almost joyful. And hunger assailed nearly all the juniors. They were ready to eat anything.

With the other slave gangs it was the same.

Nelson Lee and his party were marched into their own particular hut. They had been kept at work with picks and shovels all the day through. Captain McDodd, his officers and crew—they, too, had had no rest.

But it was worse for the boys than anybody else.

Nelson Lee kept a face as unemotional as a statue. But his thoughts were more than he could have expressed. His greatest worry was for the boys. That they should suffer in this way was sheer torture to him.

And he was helpless—he could not lift a finger!

Plans of escape occurred to him, only to be dismissed. For they were incapable of being put into execution. Look at it as he would, there seemed to be utterly no chance of liberty.

This spot was, indeed, a Pit of the Doomed!

When I was marched towards the huts I felt more sorrowful than anything else. I did not think of my own hurts and my own troubles. I was looking at poor Willy. Handforth minor was smaller than the Re-

move chaps. Yet he had been kept at work just the same.

And the brave youngster had never complained. He had accepted kicks, slashes, and knocks without flinching. He was too proud to give in. He kept a fierce, contemptuous expression on his face all the time.

But he had suffered terribly.

Willy was almost unable to crawl. As he walked he swayed from sheer physical exhaustion. He was chained to the gang near myself. And almost at every footstep he faltered.

We were just near that crazy bridge I have already described. We had to cross it in order to reach our huts. And Willy stumbled badly as his lagging foot caught against an obstruction. He staggered and fell, pulling up the whole chained line of fellows.

"Get up, you young brat!" shouted one of the guards. "Up, doggone you!"

Slash—slash!

The cruel whip hissed across Willy's shoulders. The junior had half risen, and he sobbed with intense pain. He staggered again, and fell, moaning.

Handforth, next to me, seemed to go mad.

"You filthy brute!" he roared, his voice charged with indignation. "Leave my young brother alone—"

"Why, you whelp, I'll teach you to talk to me!" raved the guard.

He slashed at Handforth, and I quickly stepped before Edward Oswald. I feared that his anger would lead him into something grave. This man was capable of firing his revolver.

"Haven't you got any humanity?" I asked in a quivering voice. "Can't you see the poor kid's nearly fainting?"

"Get out of it, blame you!" cursed the ruffian.

He caught hold of me, and gave me a terrific punch. It was an awful blow, and I hardly remember what happened. I was dazed and bewildered, and flashes of light danced across my eyes.

I know that I staggered for several feet. I was standing on the bridge, and I pitched forward, lost my footing, and plunged down towards the water. The other juniors were yanked violently by their ankles.

The sudden wrench brought cries of agony to their lips.

Snap!

The chain was unable to stand the strain. It broke at the point where it was joined to Handforth's foot. And I plunged down with full force into the deep, black water of the slow-moving stream.

As I went under my head cleared.

The sudden immersion had the effect of restoring my wits. I knew what had happened. The chain had broken, and I was in the river. Then I touched the bottom, and my groping fingers caught against one of the wooden piles which held the whole structure up.

Some instinct told me to cling there.

I did so, and in those few seconds my brain acted like lightning. Never before had I thought so quickly, or to such good purpose. Never for an instant did I believe that any actual result would come; but I was in the position of a drowning man clutching at a straw.

There might be a chance—a faint hope!

And in our dire position we could not afford to neglect the flimsiest opportunity. Although my head was singing, and throbbing with agony, my wits worked acutely.

And I really think I was possessed with added thinking power.

What would happen if I didn't rise? In all probability they would assume that I had been swept away by the stream, and had drowned. And my knowledge of these inhuman hounds made me realise that they would not care.

So, as my hand touched that pile, I clung to it.

I remained there for some seconds, and then commenced expelling every atom of breath in my lungs. Great bubbles arose towards the surface. But I could only keep this up for a very short time.

And when my supply was exhausted, I felt as though my head would burst. I wanted to inhale, but to do so would be to drown. With supreme effort I held my breath, and then began working my way towards the bank.

There were plenty of these wooden piles down there. From one to another I worked, clutching at each in turn, and still remaining on the very bed of the river, among the thick mud, ten feet from the surface.

All this took place, you must understand, within the space of a minute. And I was considered to be a bit of an expert swimmer and diver. So the task I was performing was by no means a remarkable one. It was simply a matter of taking advantage of the opportunity that had arisen.

With my mind in its acute state, I remembered that just near the bank there were some thick, coarse reeds. And the bank, at this point, was rocky and overhung slightly.

Edging my way along, clinging for dear life to those slimy wooden piles, I at length reached the bank itself. And, inch by inch, I allowed myself to rise, head foremost. Even now I don't know how I managed to save myself from gulping in a vast lungful of water.

But, at length, my face rose over the surface.

This was the crucial moment.

If I was seen, my ruse had been all in vain. Only my mouth, nose and eyes were out of the water. I took in a deep, life-giving breath. And not until then was I able to see. Opening my eyes, I saw immediately above me, only five inches away, a flat piece of overhanging rock.

I had come to the surface right against the bank, where it hung over. And the

reeds completely surrounded my face. From the bridge itself I was invisible, because I was nearly underneath. And I could not be seen from the bank, either, owing to that overhanging portion.

I clung there, hardly daring to breathe further.

In the meantime, those above had been watching and waiting.

I had disappeared—I had plunged into the water, and Handforth and the rest forgot all about the incident with the guard. They turned, and stared down into the river. And there was no sign of my rising.

Quick!" shouted Tommy Watson frantically. "He's drowning!"

"The young cub will come up in a minute!" snapped the guard, who was rather flustered. "Get in line, there! The first boy who refuses will be shot! Curse that kid in the river!"

The man slashed his whip, and then yanked out his revolver menacingly. The juniors, half scared by the evil expression on the man's face, hastily got into line.

And the guard gazed over into the river. He saw numbers of bubbles rising to the surface. And then nothing—nothing! There was no sign of any body coming up, and the surface of the water was undisturbed.

"Oh!" moaned Watson, white to the lips. "Nipper's drowned!"

"Aren't you going to rescue him?" demanded Handforth fiercely. "You brute! You murderous dog! Aren't you going to do anything to rescue him? He hasn't come up—there's no hope for him unless somebody dives in! Let me go!"

"Me, too!" pleaded Watson frantically. "Unfasten these chains, and let me dive in!"

"Aw, let him stay there!" snarled the man callously. "Can't get him up now, anyway; I guess the chain must have caught somewhere. The skipper'll be darned mad, but I done my best!"

"Beast!" shouted Handforth, hotly. "You've left him there to die!"

He stared down into the water, and all the other juniors followed his example. There was not a ripple on the surface. And by this time, of course, any ordinary human being would have come to the surface long since.

It was utterly impossible for anybody to live under water for such a period. And those rising bubbles had been dreadfully significant. They indicated that I had been held down in some way or other, and that I was now dead.

The guard himself was raving wildly. Inwardly, he was alarmed and nervous. He had never intended to really harm me. And he realised that there would be a row with Captain Hurricane.

But there was one good feature in the occurrence.

It would be a lesson to the others—a

grim object lesson that they would never forget. It would do more to tame them than any other possible method. And this was certainly right.

The chain gang was hustled off the bridge, with both guards using their whips, and using violent language. I was given up for lost. Later on the guards reported to Captain Hurricane that I had been drowned. Insubordination had led to my falling off the bridge.

Nelson Lee himself heard about the shocking tragedy. And the poor old gov'nor was staggered. He hardly said a thing—but his eyes burned and blazed with a fire that was deadly dangerous.

Nelson Lee registered a vow that the murderers should hang for their foul crime.

"Old man, I don't know what to say!" murmured Lord Dorrimore brokenly, as he and Lee were standing in their own hut, still chained to the others. "Nipper's gone—the first victim of these devils! I wish to Heaven it had been me!"

"They shall pay, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly, his voice sounding utterly unlike his own. "Before Heaven I swear they shall pay!"

"And it was my fault—all my fault!" muttered his lordship brokenly. "May I be forgiven for bringing you all out to this accursed place! If I had realised what was to happen, I would——"

"It doesn't do any good, Dorrie—that sort of talk only makes things worse!" interrupted Nelson Lee huskily. "Please, old man. I can't bear to talk now; I'm too full of sorrow for that poor boy."

Nelson Lee's voice almost broke, and Dorrie himself had a lump in his throat as big as an egg. Soon afterwards Mr. Skinner entered that particular hut, and Lee burst upon him like a tempest.

All the famous detective's pent-up feelings came out.

"Do you intend to continue this murderous policy?" he concluded, his voice shaking with anger. "Are any more of these boys to be brutally sacrificed? You have murdered one——"

"Murder nothin'!" snapped Mr. Skinner harshly. "It was an accident. And, say, cut out that talk! Guess it was a good lesson to the other young guys. They'll sure pay more attention to orders to-morrow."

And Skinner flung himself out of the hut, and slammed the door for the night. And darkness descended upon all the hopeless prisoners.

The first day of slavery was over, and all believed that one precious life had been sacrificed. Was this ghastly nightmare to continue? Or would deliverance come?

Even Nelson Lee, who had been in so many tight corners in his life, nearly convinced himself that this was a torture from which there was no release.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAY OF HOPE!



BUT outside, in the intense gloom, lurked a silent, waiting figure.

Of course, that figure belonged to me. Far from being dead at the bottom of the river, I was so much alive that I was making active plans for the deliverance of the guv'nor, Dorrie, and all the rest of the crowd.

This seemed to be a wild dream, but if nothing is attempted, nothing is done. And here was I, with an enormous advantage in my favour. I realised to the full how fate had placed all the prisoners in my keeping.

Never had I been so sober. Never had I felt such a grave, terrible responsibility. In my hands was the means of liberating all the slaves. And I fully intended to do my utmost.

Naturally, I appreciated the fact that we were all in a pit, five hundred feet deep, and that even if we got liberty down there, it was a great question whether we should ever get out of the chasm.

But to be free in the pit would be better than this ghastly slavery. And, surely, among the lot of us, someone would be able to devise a scheme whereby we could scale the precipice?

I was looked upon as dead.

That, of course, was the one deciding factor in the whole case. For over an hour I had lurked there, immersed in the water, with my head amid the reeds. On three occasions I had felt that discovery was certain.

For Captain Hurricane had not left me to float away down the stream. The very moment the affair was reported to him, he and Skinner and three other men came and searched the river.

They walked along the banks, scanning the dark surface of the water. Every effort was made to locate my dead body. But as my body was fully alive, this was a somewhat hopeless quest.

Twice the searchers passed right over the bank near me. I felt that I was doomed to discovery. And on another occasion Skinner, from the opposite bank, seemed to be looking direct at me. But the gloom was thick, and only a few inches of my face lay above water.

He saw nothing.

And then the search was abandoned. I heard the skipper saying that my body had evidently been caught by some rocky projection on the bed of the river. On the morrow he would rake for it. But it was quite possible by then that the current would have dislodged me, and I should have floated down into the narrow tunnel where the river disappeared underground.

And then complete darkness came. And with it, this part of the pit was left

utterly deserted. The guards were off duty, for the most part. With all the prisoners locked up in their various huts, and with every door secured, there was no need for men to be out in this section.

It was a full half-mile from the camp—the place where the huts were erected. These wooden buildings straggled along, closely hugging the cliff on one side. Every other part of that deep chasm was uninhabited.

So I had the place to myself.

And I was able to pull myself out of the water, and to crawl towards some of those thick, stunted bushes. Whether I should ever succeed in my daring scheme remained to be seen.

I didn't even know how to set to work.

I was feeling weak and shaky, although I tried not to let this affect me. The food I had had during the day was of a kind that had done little to sustain me. And I had been compelled to work until I was nearly exhausted. And that hour in the river had not done me much good.

For a time I felt as though I could only lie down and allow myself to completely relax. But I feared that sleep would come—a dull, heavy sleep which would seize hold of me until morning. In my exhausted state this might easily happen. And that would be fatal.

So I used every ounce of my will-power—I forced myself to keep awake. I tried to throw off that feeling of weakness. And, in a large degree, I succeeded. It is astounding what one can do if one has sufficient determination.

I pondered over the task that lay ahead of me.

It was a task that might well have caused many a stout heart to falter. For I did not see where to begin. How could I approach the huts, and unlock the doors, and unfasten the fetters of the prisoners? All these difficulties seemed to be insuperable.

But there was a way—there had to be!

I found that it was quite useless to attempt any plans at all. I simply couldn't decide upon any course. The only possible way was to prowl about, and then order my actions according to what I heard or saw.

The first thing of all was to get near to those huts.

But this had to be done quietly. If I was seen or heard, there would be inquiries—investigations. They would begin to suspect that I had tricked them, and then they would all be on the alert. It would be impossible for me to lift a finger in aid of the others.

But there was a ray of hope. If I fulfilled the charge that Providence placed in my hands, all might yet be well.

After I had begun to move, edging my way nearer and nearer to the huts, I found that my weakness was passing. The necessity of the moment—the tenseness of the

whole situation—was giving me a greater strength.

I was comparatively near to the wooden shacks when I heard voices. I flung myself flat upon the ground, and lay there, perfectly still, only concealed by the darkness.

Captain Hurricane and Mr. Seelig came by. They were not near enough for me to hear what they said, but I saw them go into Skinner's hut. The door was closed, and all became quiet again.

A few lamps were burning near the slaves' quarters. These lamps were of the cheap storm variety, and were standing on the ground, so that the principal huts would be illuminated.

And the night guards were pacing up and down on their own beats, with rifles slung over their shoulders. There was little chance of escape with sentries like this on duty.

And these men would patrol until morning. My heart sunk a little as I watched them. But now, at last, a definite idea had come to me. I would attempt to crawl to that little wood shack that Captain Hurricane had entered.

The window stood wide open, and a small light was gleaming within. And the faint-murmur of voices came to me.

Creeping on all fours, I approached. I needn't tell of the difficulties that beset me. It will be enough to say that I crept along until I got to the hut itself—and crouched there beneath the window.

The voices of the men within came to me distinctly.

"Guess we'll be going right away," said Captain Hurricane. "All this time is being wasted—and time's valuable. We'll leave the camp in charge of Jose. He's reliable, and we can trust him."

"Do you figger it'll be safe?" asked Mr. Seelig doubtfully.

"It sure will," replied the skipper. "Thunder! What the heck can these guys do, anyway? Even if they get out, they



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ain't any better off. Come on—let's go! You hustle around, Skinner, and get the crowd here."

"Everybody?"

"Everybody except Jose and four others," replied the captain. "We need every hand on this job. Shifting those stores will be a darned hefty piece of work, and we ain't got any too-much time to waste."

"All right, cap—you know best," said Mr. Seelig. "Gee! We'll have these guys workin' in good order inside a week. Pity that kid got drowned. One of the most useful boys of the lot, I believe."

"Never mind that young brat now!" said Captain Hurricane. "We've got this work to do—and one slave more or less don't matter a cuss! I guess we've got a few to spare now!" he added, with a coarse laugh.

I lay there, in the darkness, quivering. Their callous conversation regarding myself

did not affect me in the least. But the news that had come to my ears was almost too glorious to be believed.

They were all going—the whole gang, with the exception of Jose and three others!

This meant that these four guards would be left in the pit by themselves—four men to look after over a hundred prisoners!

After all, four was sufficient. For the prisoners were chained together in gangs, and locked in the huts. And all the guards were armed with rifles. It reminded me of a prisoners' camp during wartime.

As Captain Hurricane pointed out, the thing was quite safe because the prisoners would never know that only four guards were on duty. They would still believe that the full force was on hand. And the work of getting the stores out of the *Wanderer* was highly important.

Unless it was done at once it could not be done at all. For the sooner the yacht was sunk, the better. Captain Hurricane would not feel really safe until all trace of Dorrie's steam yacht had been sent to the bottom of the sea.

But Hurricane was unaware of one thing.

He did not know that I was so very much alive, and I was in possession of his plans—and, moreover, free! Those four armed guards would unquestionably have been sufficient under ordinary circumstances.

But with me lurking in the darkness, the circumstances were not ordinary.

I waited with intense eagerness for the skipper and his men to go. For after they had departed, I should be able to act. And now I was so thrilled with the thought of what the result might be, that I never even thought of my exhausted condition. I didn't feel tired—I was tense, active.

The iron clamp which had chained me to the rest of the gang was still round my ankle. But I had managed to wedge this with the cloth of my trouser leg, so that it neither rattled nor scraped my skin. It was rather a weight there, but not such an inconvenience as I had believed it would be.

I didn't dare to move. Even if men came along with lanterns, I should still be secure, for I was at the end of the hut—and not in close proximity to that roughly-trodden pathway in front. But there was a kind of bush here which helped to conceal me.

I heard the men leave the shack, and others came along from different parts of the camp. There was a good deal of talk, but at length this died away; I ventured to creep round the angle of the building.

A few lights a little distance away told their own story. The cage which was used to convey passengers to the top of the precipice was in operation. Hurricane and his men were leaving the pit.

This cage was a roughly improvised elevator. It hung from thick ropes and was operated by means of pulleys and balancing weights. The thing was capable of carrying five or six men at once—and

ten at a pinch. And it was quite strong enough for the work.

I felt that it was safe for me to creep a little nearer, and I did so. My eyes being accustomed to the gloom, I could watch that cage, and see it slowly moving up the enormous face of the smooth cliff.

It reached the top, paused for a short while, and then came down rapidly. Then it started up again with another load. Once more it did this—and remained at the top.

The fact was significant.

It could mean but one thing—that all the members of the enemy party had gone. There were only four guards left. Four men! And I was there, my presence unsuspected!

Would I be able to deal with these men?

If I could only put them out of action, the rest would be simple. I didn't dare to conjecture what the result might be. I was so thrilled with the prospect that I set about my task at once.

In my prowling I had come upon a thick piece of wood, which I discovered to be a broken pick-axe handle. It would make a splendid weapon. One blow with such a club would knock any man senseless.

Taking observations, I saw that the four guards were all patrolling their various beats. They were stretched out in a long line, walking up and down in front of the prisoners' quarters. One was only two or three hundred yards from them. The last man was invisible.

For the buildings themselves hid the two further guards when one was close against the face of the cliff. Thus, I calculated that if the first two were knocked out, the other two would know nothing about it—unless they deliberately came along for the purpose of conversing.

And I realised that I could not afford to waste any time.

I crept over the ground like a Red Indian—nearer and nearer to the first guard, who was unsuspecting of any kind of danger. At last I managed to get just behind the wall of a small hut. My observations had told me that the guard would come just to this point, and then turn.

I could hear his footsteps approaching.

And then he arrived—paused for a moment, and then turned. I leapt up, swinging my club high. Then it descended in a hissing, sweeping attack.

Thud!

The pick-axe handle crashed upon the head of the man with awful force. He didn't utter a sound, but just crumpled up into a motionless heap. I had stunned him with one blow—and I had done it without the slightest compunction.

Fairly shaking with excitement, I bent over the man for a second, and satisfied myself that he was only temporarily knocked out. I grabbed his rifle, and was about to move on when a sudden startling thought came to me.

Perhaps he had some keys on him!

It was a thought that made me jump. I

knew that all the huts were fitted with the same kind of locks—one key fitted the lot. And all the ankle padlocks were of the same pattern, too.

Feverishly I turned the brute over, and commenced to search his pockets. I could have cried aloud with mad joy when I found a steel ring with two keys fixed to it. They were the very keys I required!

I stood up, half undecided. Should I enter one of the huts at once, or should I deal with the other guard—the one that was nearest?

I decided upon the first course. Alone, I might fail. I could not afford to take the slightest chance. With these keys in my possession I could release some of the prisoners, and should at once have help.

I have already said that I was close against one of the sheds. And as I stood there, my heart thumping, I heard a curious kind of rumble. Then I recognised it as Umlosi's voice. The great black chieftain was in this very hut! And he was chained to Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee, and to one or two others!

Could Fate have been more kind to me?

My hands shook so much that I could hardly fit the key into the lock. I had satisfied myself that the senseless guard was safe for at least five minutes. Even now I wasn't sure whether the key would fit.

The first turn of my hand was enough—the key twisted. And I pushed open the door, and entered into the black interior.

"Guv'nor!" I breathed softly. "Dorrie! Are you there?"

I heard some quick breathing—a gulp—an incredulous gasp.

"It—it must be my imagination," came Dorrie's voice. "Lee! I say, old man! Did you hear it, too? I thought I heard Nipper—I think I must be goin' mad! The poor youngster's dead——"

"Yes, about as dead as you are," I interrupted tensely, and my heart thumping with wild joy. "Guv'nor! It's all right—I'm alive! I tricked 'em all! I spoofed the brutes!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" came Nelson Lee's voice, shaking with emotion. "Nipper! I never expected to see you again——"

"Guv'nor!" I breathed. "Quick! Where's your ankle? I've got a key here—but be careful not to rattle the chains!"

"By the Lord Harry!" came Dorrie's voice. "It's Nipper himself—an' he's like the bally fairy in Cinderella! He's come here, and' he's performin' acts of magic! Good man! I live again!"

I found Nelson Lee's ankle, and in less than a minute the padlock was opened, and the guv'nor was free. Then Dorrie was treated in the same way, and Umlosi—and all the rest.

But Nelson Lee and Dorrie didn't wait.

They had no sooner gained their freedom than they passed outside. While unlocking them, I had breathlessly explained that there were only three active guards in the camp!

I gave the guv'nor my rifle, and he and Dorrie vanished.

And by the time the other members of that slave gang were free, Nelson Lee was back. That fact alone was enough to announce victory. There had been no shots—no commotion of any kind.

"Well, guv'nor?" I asked, clutching at him.

"The four guards are senseless!" replied Nelson Lee grimly. "We succeeded in rendering them very quiet—and now they are all chained up with their own chains, and locked in one of the huts. But I don't fancy they will come to themselves for at least an hour. And they will be very sick men for quite a few days."

"Hurrah!" I said, in a cracked voice.

"And we have to thank you for this, Nipper—you young bounder!" said Dorrie, a catch in his throat. "By gad! An' we were sayin' that we were doomed to stay here for an age! Miracles do happen—because this is one! What do you say, Lee?"

"It seems to be one, at all events," replied the guv'nor quietly. "Half an hour ago we believed Nipper to be dead—we thought that our own lot was without a single ray of hope. And now we know that Nipper is alive, and we have liberty. Captain Hurricane's time has come!"

"As they picturesquely put it in New York—you've said a mouthful," murmured Lord Dorrimore.

CHAPTER V.

VICTORY!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH worked my arm up and down like a pump handle.

"Good man!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "By George! That was a wonderful wheeze of yours! I couldn't have thought of anything better myself! It was a giddy brain wave!"

"Rather!" said Church and McClure.

"Good old Nipper!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie Glen-thorne. "Dash it all, the laddie is a kind of bally wizard! He whizzed about like anything to set us free! In other words, he's not only a wizard, but a whizzer!"

All the juniors were crowding round me—excited, flushed, and filled with a wonderful new hope. Many of them had been awakened from an exhausted sleep. They cared nothing, now, for aching hands and blisters. After all, they could suffer such pains with fortitude.

The day they had passed through seemed like some distant dream—some ghastly nightmare that had gone. They no longer looked forward to the morrow with fear and horror.

It seemed that liberty was near at hand.

They had all been freed from their chains, and were now standing in groups in the

darkness, outside the huts. And Nelson Lee was busily freeing all the members of the yacht's crew.

Presently he came among the boys.

"Naturally, I understand your enthusiasm, boys, but I must impress upon you the vital necessity of remaining quiet," he said earnestly. "We are not out of the wood yet, by any means."

"But we're on our way!"

"We've got free of those rotten chains, anyway, sir!"

"Yes—but there may be some grim fighting before the night is over," replied Nelson Lee, his voice grave. "We must thank Heaven that we are all safe and practically uninjured. But we can be quite certain Captain Hurricane will not admit defeat lightly."

"But we can easily smash him now, sir."

"No, not easily," replied Lee. "You must remember that there is only one way out of this dreadful pit. We cannot escape at once, for there is not sufficient time. But we can frustrate Captain Hurricane and his gang if we all pull together."

"We'll do it, sir!"

Lee told the fellows very seriously that silence was essential. And it was not necessary for him to tell them again. They realised the necessity for quietness as much as the gov'nor did.

And they knew, also, the peril.

That dreadful experience of the day had been sufficient. Never in their lives before had they had such a grim peep into tragedy. Most of the fellows were still pale and shaky—not so much from their physical exertions, but from the moral effect.

The whole situation was changed.

With the slaves at liberty, it meant just the difference between servitude and liberty. And Lee was already making active plans for the complete defeat of the enemy.

"Much as I should like to free every slave, I fear that it would not be advisable," said Nelson Lee, as he talked with Lord Dorrimore and Captain McDodd and one or two others. "I am referring now to the unfortunate wretches who have been here for so long."

"The original slaves, sir?" asked Mr. Barry.

"Yes."

"But why not release them at once, old man?" asked Dorrie. "The more the merrier, eh? We want all hands on deck, so to speak, an' some of those fellows are pretty tough—although they have been through an awful time."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, I agree with you, but it might be a mistake," he said. "These men have been slaves for so long that unexpected liberty may turn their heads. They will give way to their exuberance and become noisy. Hurricane and his gang will get the alarm. I think it is most probable that that would happen."

"I agree with you, Mr. Lee," said Captain McDodd.

"And, of course, we must fully realise that our own position is still very precarious," continued the detective. "The boys, of course, are very much excited because they think that we have the upper hand. Really, we have not. We are still prisoners in this pit."

"I've been thinkin' the same thing," said Dorrie. "If Hurricane gets to know the facts, he's only got to cut the ropes of that cage, an' we shall be in a pretty nice pickle. With five hundred feet of sheer precipice to scale, there won't be much chance for us. We shall stay here until we starve."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You are beginning to see my line of reasoning," he said. "Much as I pity these poor fellows, we have ourselves to think about—and, of course, in thinking of ourselves, we are making liberty certain for them, too."

"Those men are a tough crowd, sir," said Mr. Barry. "Most of them look like seamen and other rough characters. Under ordinary circumstances, I wouldn't trust one of them—they look ruffians. But they're in such a pitiable condition that I get a lump in the throat when I think about them. And they wouldn't be any good for fighting, anyhow."

And so it was decided.

Nelson Lee would not free the forty old slaves—the original set, so to speak—until after Captain Hurricane and his men had been dealt with. It would only be a short delay, anyhow.

For this grim business would be over, one way or another, long before the dawn. It could not possibly drag on.

Serious as the situation was, there was every prospect of success, if precautions were taken. The first thing, Nelson Lee decided, was to get a strong fighting party out of this deadly place.

Every available man was prepared. Rifles and revolvers had been found in one of the sheds—most of these weapons being Lord Dorrimore's property. They were the spoils of the previous fight.

And the whole party made its way to that part of the cliff where the cage operated. They were to be taken up to the top of the cliff in three batches. And then, in one swoop, the yacht was to be attacked.

There would probably be bloodshed—there might be one or two deaths. But this thing had to be fought out—it was no good hesitating. Once and for all, Captain Hurricane's gang had to be subdued.

(Continued on page 15)

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dangerous and unscrupulous opponent, Professor Mark Rymer.

THE START OF THE RACE.

ON the east side of Pitt Street, in Sydney, Australia, not far from the famous Circular Quay, stands a handsome building known as Vickery's Chambers. The greater part of the building is occupied by an insurance company; but on one of the floors, approached by a private staircase, is a commodious suite of offices, the windows of which are screened by wire blinds, on which is the inscription, "Sinclair's Detective Agency."

A few minutes before three o'clock on the afternoon of Saturday, April 16th, 19—, a tall, distinguished looking Britisher stepped out of a cab at the door of Vickery's Chambers, and mounted the private staircase already mentioned.

"Can I see Mr. Sinclair?" he asked a clerk in the outer office.

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

The new arrival handed him a visiting-card. The clerk gave one glance at it, then jumped down from his stool and dived through an adjoining door. A moment later a stalwart Australian, with ruddy face and piercingly light-grey eyes, burst into the outer office with a breezy shout of welcome, grasped the Englishman by the hand, and literally dragged him into the inner office.

The Englishman was Nelson Lee, the celebrated London detective. The Australian was Dudley Sinclair, the leading crime-investigator in the Commonwealth of Australia.

"I can't tell you how delighted I am to see you again," said Sinclair, as he pushed

Nelson Lee into the easiest chair. "It must be ten years at least since we last met. When did you arrive?"

"This morning," replied Nelson Lee.

"And you've called to see me this afternoon!" said Sinclair. "Now, that's what I call real friendly on your part!"

"Don't be too sure of that!" rejoined Nelson Lee, with a smile. "It isn't altogether friendship which has brought me here this afternoon. I want some help from you——"

"Which I shall only be too pleased to render," broke in Sinclair. "In what way can I be of assistance to you?"

"Before I answer your question," said Nelson Lee, "I must first tell you that three months ago Lord Easington, of Easington Towers, in Cornwall, was thrown from his horse, and died a few hours later. He had always been supposed to be a bachelor, and Professor Mark Rymer, of the Westminster University, had always been regarded as his heir. On his deathbed, however, Lord Easington confessed to me and Mark Rymer that he had contracted a secret marriage in 1895, and that his wife had borne him a son, who is now, of course, the lawful heir to the title and estates.

"This confession was made at Penleven Grange, which is nearly twenty miles from Easington Towers. Before his lordship could give me the full particulars of his marriage, or the present address of his son, he was suddenly taken worse, and was unable to proceed. Just before he died, however, he managed to gasp out the words, 'The proofs of my marriage—go to my house—the Silver Dwarf!'

"This sounded very much like gibberish; but I afterwards found that the Silver Dwarf was the name of a quaint little silver figure which stood upon the mantelpiece of one of the rooms at Easington Towers. To all appearance it was solid, but in reality it was hollow, and inside it were a number of documents relating to his lordship's marriage and the whereabouts of his son.

"When I tell you that Professor Rymer is an exceedingly clever and thoroughly unscrupulous scoundrel, you will, doubtless, be able to guess what happened next.

"Lord Easington had made me promise to find his son, and restore him to his rightful position. Before I could do this, of course, it was necessary that I should obtain possession of the Silver Dwarf and examine the documents inside it. But the Silver Dwarf was twenty miles away, and almost before the breath was out of Lord Easington's body Mark Rymer was on his way to Easington Towers. He had heard Lord Easington's dying words, and he was shrewd enough to see that if he could get to Easington Towers first, and destroy the Silver Dwarf before I arrived, it would then

be impossible for anybody to prove that Lord Easington had ever been married, or to find the missing heir.

"I lost no time in following him. But when we arrived at Easington Towers we found that the place was in flames, and the Silver Dwarf had been stolen!

"From that day until to-day Mark Rymer and I have been engaged in a neck-and-neck race in pursuit of the Silver Dwarf. From Easington Towers we tracked it to Paris, from Paris to the south of Spain, from Spain to Morocco, from Morocco to Ceylon, and from Ceylon to Sydney, where, at last, we ran it to earth at the house of a certain Mrs. Robinson, who lives in the suburb of Waverley.

"Mark Rymer was the first to reach Mrs. Robinson's house, and when I arrived he had just secured the Silver Dwarf, had torn up the papers, and was in the act of burning them. Fortunately, I was just in time to save them from total destruction; but in the confusion Mark Rymer escaped.

"This happened about half-past eleven this morning. Since then I have pieced the papers together again, and have deposited them, together with the Silver Dwarf, at the Sydney branch of the Bank of Australasia.

"According to these papers, Lord Easington was secretly married, under the name of Bruce, in 1895. In the following year his wife gave birth to a son, who was christened Richard Bruce, and nine days later she died.

"The nurse who attended her in her last illness was a widow named Seymour, and his lordship states that he gave this woman a thousand pounds to adopt the child as her own. Henceforward, therefore, the child was known by the name of Richard Seymour.

"This brings me to the point where I want your help.

"In one of the papers found in the Silver Dwarf, Lord Easington states that Mrs. Seymour and her adopted son emigrated to New South Wales. He further states that he wrote to you nearly twenty years later and asked you to ascertain, privately and confidentially, if Richard Seymour was still alive, and where he was living. He gives the substance of your reply, but unfortunately the paper is badly burned at that particular place, and all I can make out is that you reported that Richard Seymour was employed as a stockman on one of the stations, or sheep-farms, in the interior of this colony. What I want you to do, for me, therefore, is this: I want you to turn up your books and give me the same information as you gave to Lord Easington. Will you do so?"

By way of reply, Dudley Sinclair rose to his feet and began to pace the room with rapid, agitated strides. Presently he came

to a halt, and laid his hand on Nelson Lee's shoulder.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," he said, "but I'm afraid I've been fighting against you. Not knowingly, of course, but in total ignorance of the true state of affairs."

"What do you mean?" demanded Nelson Lee.

"In the first place," said Sinclair, "it was I who gave Mark Rymer Mrs. Robinson's address! He cabled to me from Ceylon, giving me the date of Mrs. Robinson's arrival in Sydney, and asking me to find out where she lived, and wire the address to him at Adelaide. This I did, and when he arrived at Adelaide, and read my reply, he wired again, stating that he would arrive at Sydney at eleven o'clock this morning, and asking me to send a man and a car to meet him at the station. Needless to say, I had no idea what he was after, so I sent the car, and thus enabled him to beat you in the race to Mrs. Robinson's house."

"Ah, well, you needn't worry about that now," said Nelson Lee. "It might have been a serious matter, of course; but, as I have already explained, I arrived at Mrs. Robinson's in time to nip his schemes in the bud, and the papers he wished to destroy are now in the strong-room at the bank."

"But that isn't all," said Sinclair ruefully. "I not only helped him to beat you in the race to Mrs. Robinson's, but I have given him certain information since which will probably help him to beat you in the race for the missing heir!"

Nelson Lee leaped to his feet.

"You have given Mark Rymer Richard Seymour's address?" he gasped.

"No," said Sinclair, shaking his head. "There was no need for me to do that. He knew it already."

"How?"

"He must have read the papers before he tore them up, I suppose."

"Impossible! He hadn't time."

"Well, he must have glanced at them, at any rate," said Sinclair. "But I'll tell you exactly what happened, and then you can judge for yourself."

"When Mark Rymer arrived at Sydney, at eleven o'clock this morning, he sent his luggage here, and drove straight to Mrs. Robinson's. What happened there I didn't know, of course, until you told me; but it is quite evident that after he had made his escape he jumped into the car and drove to my office."

"He arrived here almost exactly on the stroke of noon. He paid me for what I had done for him, and asked me to telephone for a taxi to drive him and his luggage to the Grand Hotel. Whilst we were waiting for the taxi he turned to me, quite casually, and said;

"Some years ago you were commissioned by my cousin, Lord Easington, to ascertain the whereabouts of a young friend of his

named Richard Seymour. You informed his lordship, I believe, that Seymour was at that time employed as a stockman on one of the stations in the interior of New South Wales. You said that the name of his employer was Andrew Macpherson, and that the station at which he was employed was situated on Garoo Downs, about sixty miles to the south of Nyngan. I have an urgent and important message to deliver to Seymour before I return to England. Would you mind referring to your books and telling me if I have got his address quite correctly?"

"I referred to my books, and found that he had repeated my letter to Lord Easington almost word for word."

"Is Garoo Downs far from Sydney?" was Rymer's next question.

"About three hundred and seventy miles," I replied.

"Can I get there by train?" he asked.

"You can get as far as Nyngan," I said. "From Nyngan you will have to travel to Garoo Downs on horseback."

"Is there a good service of trains between Sydney and Nyngan?" he asked.

"No," said I. "There's only one train a day. It leaves Sydney at nine o'clock at night, and reaches Nyngan the following afternoon."

"He stamped his foot with vexation when I told him this."

"Then I can't leave for Nyngan until nine o'clock to-night?" he said.

"You can't leave then," I replied. "To-day is Saturday, and the train doesn't run on Saturdays and Sundays. You will have to wait until Monday."

"Impossible!" he cried, with a vehemence that surprised me. "All my plans will be ruined if I have to wait so long as that. Think! Is there no possible way by which I can leave before Monday?"

"I pondered for a moment, then a sudden idea occurred to me."

"Why, yes!" I said. "It has just come into my mind that the engineer-in-chief of the Government Railways is going to Nyngan by special train this afternoon in order to report upon the state of the line between Nyngan and Cobar. If you are a cousin of Lord Easington, you are probably not without influence; so that it is just possible that you might be able to persuade Mr. Harrison-Smith—"

"Mr. Harrison-Smith!" he cried. "Is he the engineer-in-chief?"

"Yes," said I.

"Then the thing is as good as settled!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Harrison-Smith was a pupil of mine at the Westminster University. He will not only take me with him to Nyngan, but will also stand sponsor for me at one of the local banks, and thus enable me to replenish my almost exhausted exchequer. Do you know what time the special starts?"

"At two o'clock, I believe," I replied.

"And where shall I find Mr. Harrison-Smith?" he asked.

"At the Public Works Department, Philip Street," said I.

"Then I must go there at once," he said. "Thank you very much indeed. You have rendered me a service to-day for which I can never be sufficiently grateful."

"He shook me warmly by the hand, went downstairs, entered his taxi, and drove away. Shortly after one o'clock, I happened to call at the Commercial Bank, in George Street, and whilst I was there I saw Mr. Harrison-Smith and the professor come out of the manager's private room. It is evident, therefore, that Mr. Harrison-Smith has helped the professor to provide himself with a fresh supply of money, and I have no doubt he has taken him with him to Nyngan. At any rate, I'll soon find out."

He darted from the room, and went to the telephone in the outer office. A moment or two later he returned.

"Yes," he said. "I've telephoned to the Public Works Department. The special left for Nyngan at two o'clock, and is expected to do the journey in a trifle over twelve hours and a half. There were only two passengers aboard—Mr. Harrison-Smith and Professor Mark Rymer."

"Then there isn't a moment to be lost!" cried Nelson Lee, pulling out his cheque-book. "I have prevented Mark Rymer destroying the proofs of Lord Easington's marriage; but unless I can prevent him destroying Lord Easington's son my labour will have been in vain."

"What, then, are you going to do?"

"I'm going to engage a special train, and follow him."

"But you can't possibly catch him up! He left at two, and is due to arrive at Nyngan at half-past two to-morrow morning. At the earliest, you won't be able to leave Sydney until half-past four, so that you won't reach Nyngan until five in the morning—two hours and a half after the professor!"

"True," said Nelson Lee. "I may not be able to catch him up before he reaches Nyngan, but there are sixty miles of bush between Nyngan and Garoo Downs, and I may be able to overtake him there. At any rate, I'm going to try. Give me a cheque in exchange for this."

He wrote a cheque for a couple of thousand pounds, and handed it to Dudley Sinclair, who gave him a cheque for a similar amount in return.

Ten minutes later Nelson Lee was back at the bank of Australasia, where he opened an account with Dudley Sinclair's cheque, and drew out three hundred pounds in notes and gold.

A quarter of an hour later he was closeted with the traffic manager at the Redfern Station. At twenty minutes past four he shook hands with Dudley Sinclair, and stepped into the private saloon of his "special"

"Good-bye, and good luck to you!" said Sinclair.

"And confusion to Mark Rymer!" added Nelson Lee.

Then the whistle blew, the wheels of the train began to revolve, and the race for the missing heir had started.

THE RESCUE OF DARGO.

BEFORE leaving Sydney the detective had provided himself with a large scale map of the district to the south of Nyngan. Having studied this, and having made himself thoroughly acquainted with the route to Garoo Downs, he wrote out a telegram, addressed to the stationmaster at Nyngan, asking him to arrange for a saddle-horse to be in readiness at the station when the special arrived. On the back of the telegram he scribbled the words, "Please see that this is sent off at once, and keep the change."

Then he folded the telegram up, with two half-crowns inside, and whilst the train was passing through Penrith Station he tossed it through the carriage window to one of the porters on the platform. Following this, he turned into his sleeping-berth and snatched a few hours' sleep.

It was a quarter to five on Sunday morning, and broad daylight, when the special arrived at Nyngan, a thriving little township on the banks of the Bogan river. The stationmaster had turned out to meet him, and greeted the great detective with effusive cordiality.

"Mr. Harrison-Smith?" he said, in answer to Nelson Lee's inquiry. "Yes, sir; he and his friend arrived about half-past two, and they went to the Great Western Hotel. I ordered your horse from the Great Western, so the ostler, no doubt, will be able to tell us whether Mr. Harrison-Smith and his friend are still there or not."

The detective accordingly accompanied the stationmaster to the road outside, where a wiry-looking Australian horse, ready saddled and bridled, was standing in charge of a sturdy but diminutive ostler.

"You come from the Great Western, I understand?" said Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, touching his cap.

"Mr. Harrison-Smith and another gentleman came to your place about half-past two this morning," continued the detective. "Are they still there?"

"Yes, sir," said the ostler. "Mr. Harrison-Smith is staying there for a day or two, but the other gentleman is going south this morning, and has ordered a horse for six o'clock."

The detective's eyes lit up with triumph when he heard this news. Mark Rymer had arranged to start for Garoo Downs at six o'clock, and it was now ten minutes to five! In other words, the detective had gained a clear hour's start on his unscrupulous rival.

Having tipped the stationmaster and the ostler, and having ordered his solitary port-

manteau to be sent on to the Great Western Hotel, Lee mounted his horse and rode away.

For the first two hours his route lay along the banks of the Bogan river, where signs of human habitation were comparatively frequent. After that, however, he struck out towards the west, and by twelve o'clock he had practically left all traces of civilisation behind him. Henceforward his route lay across a dreary and desolate table-land,

away, the wooden roofs of the little mining settlement of Bobalong. Between him and the settlement was a struggling plantation of eucalyptus-trees fringing the edge of one of the numerous gullies.

As he approached this plantation he was startled to hear a piercing yell, whilst a moment later the silence was rent by a series of ear-splitting screams, mingled with roars of brutal laughter.



Half dazed by the blow, Black Pete staggered back, missed his footing on the edge of the ravine, and fell headlong into the abyss.

thickly covered with prickly scrub and interspersed with numerous deep ravines. Here and there the monotony of the scene was varied by a tiny coppice of blue gum-trees, but for the most part his eyes encountered nothing save an endless expanse of bush, which stretched away on every side like a limitless sea.

Shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon he saw in the distance, five or six miles

The detective put spurs to his horse and galloped in the direction from which the sound proceeded. The sight which met his gaze when he reached the heart of the plantation sent a thrill of horrified indignation through his frame.

Hanging head downwards from the branch of a tree, immediately over a blazing bonfire, was the writhing form of an Australian native. Seated on the ground in front of

him, shaking their sides with laughter, were half a dozen villainous-looking miners, evidently from the neighbouring settlement of Bobalong. Each had a rifle by his side.

Five of the six men were of ordinary stature, but the sixth, who was evidently the ringleader of the party, was a burly, swarthy-complexioned giant, whose jet-black hair and beard had gained for him the nickname of "Black Pete."

As the detective afterwards learned, these fiends in human shape had taken a Sunday afternoon stroll into the bush, and had encountered the unfortunate native. At Black Pete's suggestion they had promptly taken him prisoner, and had then proceeded to "amuse" themselves by slinging him up to the nearest tree, head downwards, and lighting a bonfire under him.

So engrossed were the ruffians in their brutal "amusement" that Nelson Lee was in their midst before they realised his approach. Acting on the impulse of the moment, they leaped to their feet and took to their heels in panic-stricken flight.

Knowing that it would not be long before they returned, the detective hurriedly sprang from his horse, kicked the blazing brushwood aside, and severed the rope by which the native was bound.

Scarcely had he done so ere a bullet whistled past his ear, and the next instant, before he could mount his horse again—before he could even whip out his revolver, three of the miners dashed out of the wood and flung themselves upon him.

Despite the odds against him, the detective defended himself with so much vigour that for fully a minute he more than held his own. At the end of that time, however, the other three miners came trooping back, and with their assistance he was finally overpowered, and bound hand and foot.

In the meantime the native had seized the opportunity to make his escape, and though two of the miners were promptly despatched in pursuit, they presently returned with the news that he had easily outdistanced them, and given them the slip.

"Escaped, has he?" growled Black Pete. "Then what d'yer think we ought to do to this chap for spoiling our pleasant Sunday afternoon?"

"Shoot him!" said one of his companions.

"String him up!" said another.

"Chuck him into the ravine!" suggested a third.

"I know a better dodge than any of those," said Black Pete, with a malignant chuckle. "He spoiled our sport with the nigger, so it's only fair as he should take the nigger's place."

"'Ear, 'ear!" cried the assembled miners. "That's the ticket, Pete! Bully for you! Hang him up by his heels!"

"No, no!" said Black Pete, shaking his head. "That's all right for niggers, but it wouldn't answer with this chap. He wouldn't squeal or squirm like that nigger, and we

shouldn't get no fun out of him. I'll tell you my idea. See that tree?"

He pointed to a tree growing on the very edge of the ravine. One of its lower branches projected, and beneath it was a sheer drop of a couple of hundred feet, terminating in the rocky bed of a dried-up watercourse.

"We'll sling two ropes under his arm-pits," continued Black Pete, "and we'll hang him to that branch that sticks out over the gully. We'll then have a little shooting competition—two shots apiece—and the man what cuts the ropes and drops him into the gully shall have his horse as a prize."

This diabolical suggestion was received with a yell of applause; and without loss of time the ruffians set to work to put it into execution.

The detective's arms were already pinioned to his sides and his legs were lashed together from the ankles to the knees. Two shortish lengths of rope were passed between his arms and his chest—one on each side—and secured with running nooses just above the shoulders.

With much difficulty he was then hauled into the tree, and the two ends of the ropes were fastened to the projecting branch, about eighteen inches apart.

Whilst this was being done the detective was supported in the arms of two of the miners, but as soon as the ropes were knotted he was cautiously lowered, and was finally left hanging, with two hundred feet of space between the soles of his dangling feet and the rocky channel below.

Two hundred paces were then stepped out along the edge of the ravine, and lots were drawn to decide the order of shooting.

To Black Pete's disgust, he drew the lot which entitled him to the last turn of all—a result which was greeted by the rest with an ironical cheer.

"All right, my lads, grin away!" he growled. "You think because I'm last on the list that I haven't a chance. But I've seen you fellows shoot before, and I don't believe there's a man amongst you what could hit a haystack, let alone a rope, at two hundred paces. However, we shall soon see. Fire away!"

The shooting began.

The first three men missed everything. The fourth man missed with his first shot, and struck the branch of the tree with his second. The fifth man grazed the detective's cheek with one shot and his boot with the other.

"What did I tell yer?" cried Black Pete. "The horse is as good as mine! This is the way to shoot!"

He placed his rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim, and fired.

Mingling with the crack of the rifle came a roar of applause, for the bullet had severed one of the ropes, and Nelson Lee was swinging to and fro, like the pendulum of a clock, at the end of the other!

"Bullseye number one!" said Black Pete, as he reloaded his rifle. "Now for number two!"

For the second time Black Pete raised his rifle to his shoulder, but even as he did so a boomerang came whizzing through the air and struck him a violent blow on the head.

Half-dazed by the blow, he staggered back, missed his footing on the edge of the ravine, and fell headlong into the abyss. The next instant the air was rent by a chorus of discordant yells, and almost before the bewildered miners had realised what was happening, they found themselves confronted by a score or more of bushy-headed natives, led by the man whom Nelson Lee had rescued.

After a random volley of revolver-shots, in which nobody was injured, the cowardly miners broke and fled. Somewhat to Nelson Lee's surprise, the natives made no attempt to follow them, but hastened to release him from his perilous position, and cut the ropes by which he was bound.

Whilst so engaged, the man whom he had rescued explained in broken English that his name was Dargo, and that he was the head-man, or chief, of a neighbouring tribe of aborigines. Whilst he and a number of his followers had been hunting in the bush, he had strayed away from the rest, and had been captured by the miners. After his escape he had hurried back to his followers, had told them what had happened, and had brought them back to rescue the man who had rescued him.

"But why didn't you pursue the scoundrels?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Plenty much no time!" said Dargo, shaking his head. "More bad white men coming from Bobalong. Listen!"

The detective strained his ears, and distinctly heard the far-off murmur of excited voices. The five men who had fled had evidently fallen in with another party of miners coming from the settlement at Bobalong. Reinforced by these they were now returning to avenge the death of Black Pete.

"You hear?" said Dargo. "You no want stay to meet dem?"

"No!" said Nelson Lee. "I've had more than enough of their company for the present. But what about you?"

"We plenty able take care of ourselves!" replied Dargo, with a grin. "Where white fellow go?"

"To Garoo Downs," said Nelson Lee.

"Den you jump on horse, and ride away fast as can. We draw bad white fellows away from you, and lead dem on wrong trail. Black fellows dey mighty clever foolin' white fellows dat way. You ride off. Nebber fear 'bout us."

There was no time for hesitation or discussion, for the voices were by now unpleasantly near, and were coming nearer still every moment.

Moreover, the detective had urgent reasons for wishing to lose no further time. He had, it will be remembered, set out from Nyngan at five o'clock in the morning. Two

hours had been spent in the middle of the day in rest and refreshment for himself and his horse. Another hour had been wasted in his encounter with the miners. Altogether, therefore, he had been in the saddle something like eight hours, and had covered over forty miles, so that Garoo Downs was still about twenty miles away.

Now Mark Rymer, as the reader may also remember, had arranged to leave Nyngan at six o'clock—an hour after Nelson Lee. So that if Rymer had ridden at the same pace as Nelson Lee, and had spent an equal time in resting, he ought by now to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of the very plantation in which the detective stood.

Under these circumstances, it will be readily understood that Nelson Lee was desperately anxious to resume his journey. He hardly liked the idea of leaving his dusky allies to battle with the miners alone; but, on receiving Dargo's assurance that they had no intention of showing fight, but merely intended to lure the miners away on a false scent, he swallowed his scruples, mounted his horse, and cantered away.

The moment he reached the confines of the little wood he stood up in his stirrups and swept the surrounding bush with an eager, circling glance. No sooner had he done so than his eyes fell on a solitary horseman some two or three miles ahead. Without drawing rein, he whipped out his field-glasses and raised them to his eyes. Then a thrill of excitement shot through his frame. His forebodings were justified—the horseman was Mark Rymer!

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RYMER'S DESPERATE RUSH.

THE housemaid departed. A moment or two later a matronly looking woman entered the room, and greeted him effusively.

"So proud to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lee!" she said. "Both my husband and I, to say nothing of Tom, have long revelled in the published accounts of your wonderful adventures. Whatever is the exciting mystery connected with that silver statuette?"

The professor smiled.

"Is the statuette here?" he asked, striving to speak calmly, though every nerve in his body was tingling with excitement.

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Robinson. "It is in my husband's safe. But he left me the keys, in case you called before he returned."

The professor bowed.

"If you will kindly let me see the statuette," he said, "I will show you in a moment where the documents are concealed."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a tall young fellow entered the room.

"My son," said Mrs. Robinson. "Tom, this is Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective."

Tom greeted the professor with anything but enthusiasm. It was plain that the young fellow was bitterly disappointed with his first view of the "famous detective."

"Mr. Lee would like to see the statuette now," said Mrs. Robinson, handing Tom a bunch of keys. "Would you mind fetching it?"

Tom left the room, and presently returned with the Silver Dwarf in his hand.

"There's a taxicab just driven up to the front door," he said, as he placed the statuette on a small, round table in front of the professor. "I wonder who it can be?"

The door-bell rang.

"I expect it's the doctor," said Mrs. Robinson. "It's a week ago to-day since he was here, and he said, if you remember, that he would call again in about a week's time and thoroughly overhaul you, and then he would be able to tell us how long it would be before it was safe for you to return to England. Tell Mary to show him into the dining-room, and you can see him after Mr. Lee has gone."

Tom darted to the drawing-room door. The maid was just passing, on her way to the front door.

"If that's the doctor," said Tom, show him into the dining-room, and tell him that I'll be with him in a few minutes."

The servant passed on, and Tom returned to the drawing-room, closing the door behind him.

"And now, my dear Mr. Lee," said Mrs. Robinson, turning to the professor, "there is the statuette. You say that it contains important documents—may we hope that you will gratify our curiosity by showing us where they are concealed?"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, madam!" said Mark Rymer, with a courteous bow.

He took the statuette in his hands.

"To look at this thing," he said, "you would say that it was composed of a single, solid piece of silver. This is not so, however. In reality, the head is formed of one piece, and the body of another, the head being slotted in the body in a remarkably ingenious manner, the secret of which was only known to the late Lord Easington and myself. In order to separate the statuette into its two component parts, I take the head in one hand—so—and the body in the other. I give the head a slight turn to the right—thus—and the body a slight turn to the left. I pull the head—you see how the neck is lengthening—turn it round until the face is looking backwards; push it down;

turn the face to the front again; pull it up; and behold!"

A cry of wonderment burst from their lips. In one hand the professor held the body of the Silver Dwarf, in the other he held the head.

"The body, as you see, is hollow," he said, as he laid the head on the table. "Inside it, as you also see, are the documents of which I spoke."

He drew out a packet of papers, folded into the smallest possible compass, and fastened together with red tape.

Amid breathless silence, and without a tremor of his long, thin fingers, he untied the knot of the tape and unfolded the papers, which consisted of three certificates and a sheet of ordinary notepaper, covered with writing.

Then somebody rapped at the door.

"Come in!" cried Mrs. Robinson, somewhat impatiently.

The door opened, and the maid appeared.

"If you please, ma'am, it isn't the doctor," she said. "It's a gentleman who wishes to see you, and who says his name is Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Nelson Lee!"

It was Tom who spoke—shouted would be the better word.

"I thought you said your name was Nelson Lee!" he said, addressing the professor.

"So it is!" bluffed the professor.

"I don't believe it!" said Tom hotly. "I believe you're an impostor! At any rate, I'll soon find out!"

He sprang to the door, and vanished in the direction of the dining-room.

"I—I hope there's no mistake!" faltered Mrs. Robinson, who was trembling like an aspen-leaf.

The professor shrugged his shoulders, but did not reply. He knew that he was trapped—that he could not hope to escape with the precious papers—yet never for an instant did his presence of mind desert him. He knew that he had only to destroy the papers before the detective reached the room, and all would be well.

With lightning-like rapidity he glanced at the contents of the sheet of notepaper; then he placed it on the top of the three certificates and ripped the whole packet across—once, twice, thrice.

Mrs. Robinson sprang towards him and caught him by the arm.

"Why are you tearing them up?" she demanded.

He pushed her aside, and laid the little heap of paper on the tiled hearth of the fireplace. There was no fire in the grate; but a tiny paraffin lamp—unlighted, of course—was standing on the mantelpiece. To snatch up this lamp, to turn it upside down, to drench the papers with oil, was the work of a couple of seconds.

Again Mrs. Robinson caught him by the arm, whilst at the same time she raised her voice in a piercing cry of alarm. Again he shook her off, and even as he did so

an answering shout was heard from the dining-room, followed by a rush of hurrying footsteps.

He whipped out his matchbox and struck a match. He applied it to the little pile of papers on the hearth, and in the twinkling of an eye they were wrapped in a sheet of dazzling flame!

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

"Too late my friend, too late, too late!" the professor exclaimed. "Too late to save the papers, but just in time to see the blaze!"

A single glance sufficed to show the detective what had happened. Without an instant's hesitation he snatched up a small skin rug and darted towards the fireplace; but, quick as thought, the professor whipped out a revolver and planted himself in front of him.

"Stand back, or I fire!" he cried.

Nothing daunted, the detective took a flying leap at his exultant foe, and literally toppled him head over heels. Ere the professor could scramble to his feet, Tom threw himself upon him and pinned him to the ground, whilst at the same instant the detective flung the rug on the top of the blazing documents and trampled on it with his feet.

When the last trace of smoke had ceased to issue from beneath the rug, he cautiously lifted it up. No sooner had he done so than a ringing cry of triumph broke from his lips. The professor, as already described, had drenched the documents with paraffin. By so doing he had partly defeated his own ends, for the oil had merely blazed away on the surface of the scraps of paper, leaving the paper itself comparatively uninjured.

In one or two instances, where the oil had burnt itself out, or where some particular scrap had escaped the professor's drenching, the paper was scorched, or even charred; but in the main the precious documents—barring the fact that they had been torn up into fragments—were little or none the worse for Mark Rymer's attempt to destroy them.

The detective carefully gathered up the paper scraps and laid them on the table. He then drew out his revolver and turned to Tom, who was still kneeling on Mark Rymer's chest, with his hands on his throat.

"You may let him get up," he said.

Tom sprang to his feet and secured the fallen revolver. Mark Rymer rose more leisurely, and rearranged his disordered dress with studied deliberation. Then he stood for a moment facing Nelson Lee, blinking like some half-awakened owl.

"You can lower your revolver," he croaked at last. "I know when I am beaten! It has been a fair, stand-up fight between us—"

"Fair?" interrupted Nelson Lee, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"All's fair in love and war!" murmured

the professor, softly rubbing his hands. "You have beaten me—beaten me on the post, as the saying is—but I bear you no ill-will. It is the fortune of war. With a little luck, I should have beaten you."

He turned to Mrs. Robinson.

"Will you believe, madam," he said, making her a courteous bow, "that the thing which I most deeply regret in all this morning's proceedings is the fact that I acted somewhat rudely towards you a moment or two ago? Mr. Lee will tell you that I am a scoundrel. Perhaps I am! At any rate, I trust I am a gentleman, and, as such, it is a matter of profound regret to me that I should have forgotten even for a moment the courtesy due to a lady. Accept, madam, my sincere and humble apologies."

He turned to Tom, who was standing with his back to the fireplace.

"As for you, sir," he continued, "I am delighted to find that my old University—for I am a Cambridge man myself—is still capable of turning out young men of brawn and sinew! At the same time, I am rather inclined to think that some of us old fogies are more than a match for you youngsters even yet. You smile! You are thinking that recent events disprove what I say. But how about this?"

He was looking at Tom; but at the same instant as he uttered these words, and without turning his head, he lashed out with his fist and caught Nelson Lee a rasping blow on the point of the jaw!

So completely was the detective taken off his guard that he staggered back, stumbled over the little table on which he had placed the paper scraps, and measured his length on the ground.

Even before the detective reached the ground, the professor lowered his head, rushed at Tom, and butted him backwards into the fireplace. The next instant, with a mocking cry of triumph, he darted out of the room, rushed from the house, and sprang into the car which had brought him from the station.

A quarter of an hour later the car pulled up at the door of Sinclair's Agency in Pitt Street, and, as Mark Rymer clambered out, he muttered softly to himself:

"The prize isn't lost even yet! I may not have been able to destroy the proofs of my cousin's secret marriage, but I have found out where his son is, and if only I can polish him off before Nelson Lee arrives, I shall then be the sole and undisputed heir to the title and estates!"

IN WHICH THE SILVER DWARF AT LAST GIVES UP ITS SECRET.

TWO hours elapsed. It was half-past one. Mrs. Robinson and her son, together with Nelson Lee, were sitting in the drawing-room at Ivanhoe House. With the help of Tom, the detective had pieced together the fragments of paper in their proper order.

The three certificates, being written on

one side of the paper only, had been pasted on three separate sheets of foolscap.

In the case of the sheet of notepaper, which was covered with writing on both sides, the detective had pasted it on to a square slip of glass, so that both sides could be read with equal ease. Several of the paper fragments, as already described, had been badly scorched by the flames, and some had been completely charred. The consequence was that there were several blanks in the reconstructed documents, while in other places the writing was more or less illegible.

Taking the Silver Dwarf in his hand, the detective turned to Mrs. Robinson.

"This statuette," he said, "belonged to the late Lord Easington, who was the richest man in Cornwall, and who was always supposed to be a bachelor. That scoundrel who was here this morning was Lord Easington's cousin—Professor Mark Rymer, of the Westminster University. If Lord Easington had really been a bachelor, or if he had died without issue, the title and estates would have descended to Mark Rymer, as his lordship's next-of-kin."

"Lord Easington met with an accident in the hunting-field about three months ago, and was carried to Penleven Grange, the country residence of Mr. John Langley, the famous electrical engineer. When the doctors told him that he was dying, he asked Mr. Langley to send for me. Mr. Langley had already sent for Mark Rymer, and the consequence was that the professor and myself arrived at the Grange together."

"His lordship then confessed that he was not really a bachelor, but that he had contracted a secret marriage twenty-five years before, that his wife had borne him a son, and that to the best of his knowledge and belief that son was still alive. When Mark Rymer heard this, he was convulsed with rage and disappointment, and it is my firm conviction—though I cannot prove it—that he gave Lord Easington a poisonous draught which had the effect of hastening his lordship's death, and preventing him giving me any particulars with respect to his marriage and the whereabouts of his son. Even in the throes of death, however, Lord Easington managed to gasp out the words: 'The proofs of my marriage—go to my house—the Silver Dwarf!'"

"By means which I need not now describe, I discovered that the Silver Dwarf was the name of this statuette, and that the proofs of Lord Easington's secret marriage were contained within its hollow interior."

"Under these circumstances, you will readily understand that both Mark Rymer and myself were equally anxious to get hold of the Silver Dwarf—Mark Rymer for the purpose of destroying the proofs of his cousin's marriage; myself for the purpose of securing the proofs and restoring the long-lost heir to his rightful position."

"I will not weary you by describing the

long struggle which took place between us. Suffice it to say that we traced the Silver Dwarf from Cornwall to Paris, from Paris to the south of Spain, from Spain to Morocco, from Morocco to Marseilles, from Marseilles to Colombo, and from Colombo to your house. How Mark Rymer got here first, how he obtained possession of these documents, and how I arrived in the nick of time to save them from destruction, you already know."

He picked up the sheet of paper which he had pasted on the slip of glass.

"This," he said, "is Lord Easington's own statement, written by himself. In one or two places, as you see, the paper has been

a bachelor, but . . . on February 14th, 1898, I was secretly married to Edith Armstrong, the orphan daughter of . . . married at the parish church of Wrexham, in Wales. I was married in the name of Reginald Bruce . . . wife never knew that I was Earl of

"Ten months after our marriage my wife gave birth to a son . . . registered as Richard Bruce. Two days later my wife was taken ill, and within a week she was dead. The nurse who attended her . . . widow, named Catherine Seymour, and I gave her a thousand pounds to adopt the child as her own. I never told her that I was the Earl of Easington . . . and in November, 1899

BECOME ACQUAINTED

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destroyed by the flames; but the greater part of it is perfectly decipherable. Read it for yourself."

Mrs. Robinson took the slip of glass and perused the following statement—the dotted lines representing the places where the paper had been destroyed, or where the writing was illegible:

"Easington Towers,
March 10th, 1920.

"I do not know whether I shall ever have the courage to make a public confession of the following facts; but, by way of easing my conscience, I have decided to place on record the true . . . I am supposed to be

she emigrated to New South Wales, and took the child with her

"For eighteen years . . . but in 1917 I was seized with a fit of remorse, and made up my mind to . . . So I wrote to Sinclair's Detective Agency, Pitt Street, Sydney . . . full particulars . . . utmost secrecy . . . asked them to find out if my son was still alive and where he was.

"I received their reply in December, 1917. They told me that Richard Seymour, as he is called, was still alive, and was employed as a stockman . . . one of the stations . . . bush . . . interior of New South Wales. The name of his employer, they said, was Andrew Macpherson, and the station at

which he was employed was situated
Downs, about . . . miles south of . . . gan.

"By the time I received this news . . .
fit of remorse passed away . . . no further
action . . . have written this . . . conceal
it, with the proofs of my marriage, in the
Silver Dwarf. Some day, perhaps . . . tell
the truth.

"(Signed), . . . EASINGTON."

Having read this interesting document,
Mrs. Robinson handed it back to Nelson
Lee.

"Those other papers, I suppose," she said,
"are the proofs of his lordship's marriage?"

"They are more than that," replied the
detective. "This which I hold in my hand
is a copy of his marriage-certificate. This
is the baptismal certificate of his son, who
was christened Richard Bruce, who is now
known as Richard Seymour, but who is
really and truly—now that his father is
dead—the tenth Lord Easington.

"And this last of the three certificates, is
a copy of the certificate of death of Edith
Bruce, otherwise Lady Easington, who is
certified to have died of puerperal fever on
January 2nd, 1899, nine days after the birth
of her son.

"If I have understood you aright," said
Tom, "you promised the late Lord Easing-
ton to find his son and restore him to his
rightful position?"

"That's so," said Nelson Lee.

"Then your next step, I suppose, will be
to hunt for Richard Seymour, as he is
called?"

"Exactly."

"But how will you set about it? The
only clue you have is Lord Easington's state-
ment that his son was alive in 1917, and
was at that time employed on one of the
stations, or farms, in the interior of New
South Wales. That was five years ago. He
may be dead by now."

"It is possible," said Nelson Lee. "In
that case, of course, my labour will have
been in vain, for Richard Seymour's death
would leave Mark Rymer undisputed heir
to his cousin's title and estates."

"It's a good job Mark Rymer doesn't
know where Richard Seymour is," remarked
Tom.

"A very good job," said Nelson Lee. "If

he knew where to lay his hands on his
cousin's son, you may be sure he would
strain every nerve to murder him!"

"There is another difficulty I foresee,"
said Tom. "Supposing that Richard
Seymour is alive, and that he is still at
the same place as he was in 1917, how are
you going to find him? There is an un-
fortunate gap in Lord Easington's state-
ment—where the paper has been burnt—and
all you know is that Richard Seymour is,
or was, employed by a man named Andrew
Macpherson, who owns a station on some
unknown Downs, an unknown number of
miles to the south of some unknown place,
the name of which ends in—gan!"

The detective smiled.

"I don't anticipate much difficulty on that
score," he said. "You appear to forget that
Lord Easington states that he wrote to
Sinclair's Detective Agency, in Pitt Street,
Sydney, and that it was from them that
he received the information embodied in his
statement."

"Ah, now I understand!" cried Tom.
"You will go to Sinclair's Agency, and ask
them to look up their books and give you
the exact address of the place where Richard
Seymour was living in 1917?"

"Precisely!" said Nelson Lee, rising to his
feet. "My cab is still outside. I shall
first drive to the Bank of Australia, in
George Street, and ask them to take charge
of the Silver Dwarf and all these documents.
I shall then drive on to Pitt Street, and
interview Mr. Sinclair, and as soon as he
has told me what I want to know, I shall
proceed at once to Mr. Macpherson's station,
wherever it may be.

"If Richard Seymour is there, my long quest
will be ended. If he is not there, I shall
have to find out where he is gone, and fol-
low him. It may be that my task is almost
ended, or it may be that it is only just
beginning. In either case, my determination
is the same.

"I have sworn to find Lord Easington's
son, and, no matter how long it may take,
I will never rest nor turn aside until my vow
has been fulfilled!"

Ten minutes later Nelson Lee drove away,
little dreaming that Mark Rymer had
already obtained Richard Seymour's address,
and was even then, at that very moment,
on his way to Macpherson's station.

THE END.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

New Derek Clyde story, entitled:

"THE ECCENTRIC BURGLAR!"

(Continued from page 14)

It was no good waiting for the enemy to attack—the best form of defence was to start an offensive.

But, as it happened, this battle never took place.

For Captain Hurricane played into our hands.

The boys, naturally, were not allowed to take part in any of the action. They had been told to remain quiet. They could move about as they wished, but there was to be no shouting and no loud talk.

The party, with Nelson Lee in charge, had just arrived at the cage position when a discovery was made. The cage itself was high above, where Hurricane had left it. Down below on the ground only the dangling rope told of the contrivance. It could easily be hauled down from this end.

And these ropes were vibrating significantly.

It meant only one thing—that the cage had just commenced its descent! The enemy were coming down—at least, some of them! In all probability, the rest were ready to make the descent.

More time had elapsed than we realised, and the work for the night was over, at the yacht. I knew that the rascals had gone there to shift some of the Wanderer's stores. But this was a job that would take several days. The first spell was over.

"We must deal with this situation drastically," exclaimed Nelson Lee keenly. "As these men get out of the cage, we must capture them with complete silence, if possible. We don't want the others at the top to know."

"It'll be a bad job for us if they do!" murmured Dorrie.

They all stood waiting—crouching there in the darkness, ready to pounce upon the enemy as they arrived. Those in the cage were Mr. Skinner and five other men. They were tired after some heavy work.

The cage bumped upon the ground at the enemy's long descent, and the men walked out—right into the arms of the waiting lurkers. The surprise was complete and absolute.

Mr. Skinner and his men had not had the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong down in the pit. They had believed that all the prisoners were still closely guarded and chained.

And then, out of the darkness, these crouching figures pounced.

The job was a complete success.

Every man was marked, and he was borne to the ground before he could utter a cry. Upon the whole, it was a wonderful achievement. The six were nearly choked during those exciting seconds.

They merely made one or two gurgles—and then they were beaten. With three to one to contend against, they had no chance.

They were roped up, and all sorts of articles were bound round their heads so that they could make no outcry. Nelson Lee himself jerked the ropes, as a signal that the cage was now empty. They waited, wondering if the roughly-made elevator would ascend.

It did so—proving that more were at the top, waiting to come down. There was now a period of rest—for it would be at least ten minutes before the cage arrived for the second time.

Under Mr. Barry, a detachment of men rushed the prisoners off to the nearest hut. Here they were more securely fastened and gagged. Then Mr. Barry's crowd came back, arriving in the nick of time.

For the cage was now just on the point of arriving with its second batch. As it came down, the voice of Captain Hurricane could be plainly heard. Now and again he laughed heartily. And Mr. Seelig, the mate, was there, too.

They were all feeling in the best of spirits.

Things had gone well with them. Never before had Captain Hurricane brought off such a big coup. And, as far as he could see, everything was perfectly safe, and his prospects for the future were rosy.

He didn't know what awaited him!

The cage arrived at the bottom of its journey, and the skipper stepped out, with Mr. Seelig and four others. They commenced walking leisurely towards the collection of huts.

"I shan't stay down here long," Captain Hurricane was saying. "I guess I'll sleep on the yacht to-night. We've only three men there, but—By Heck! What's the matter with that infernal Skinner? What's he done with all the lights?"

"Cap'n!" gasped Seelig abruptly. "I can see figures—"

"By gosh!" roared Captain Hurricane fiercely. "What in heck—"

He broke off abruptly, startled and staggered.

For, from all sides, dim figures appeared—leaping at them in the most startling manner. And Captain Hurricane and the other men were soon fighting desperately and madly.

They had been pounced upon in just the same manner as the first batch. They stood no chance. They were borne to the ground, silenced, and roped up. Then they were carried swiftly into that same shack.

Nelson Lee ran his eye over the entire capture.

"Three missing!" he said curtly. "Good! This simplifies matters a great deal. Captain Hurricane was good enough to tell us that the other three are on board the Wanderer. I think we can safely say that our efforts have met with entire success. The day is ours!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SET-BACK!



CAPTAIN HURRICANE cursed with lurid violence.

"That sort of thing may relieve you, captain, but it does not improve your position in the slightest degree," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Perhaps you are beginning to realise that your villainy will soon get its reward!"

"You—you doggone son of a hobo!" snarled the enraged man. "How in the name of blazes did you get free? There's been treachery here! That dog of a Skinner—"

"You are maligning Mr. Skinner," interrupted Nelson Lee. "He fell into our hands first—and had nothing whatever to do with this matter. And I certainly do not feel inclined to give you any explanation as to how we obtained our liberty. You are unfit to talk to decent men!"

And Nelson Lee walked out of the shack and locked the door behind him.

Even now there was no shouting among the juniors.

There were still three members of the enemy party on the top of the cliff—and these could have us in the hollow of their hands if they got to know the truth. Until they were captured, it would be useless celebrating.

Lord Dorrimore himself led a party on that mission.

Umlosi accompanied his lordship, to say nothing of half-a-dozen able seamen and four hefty stokers. They mounted in the cage in two batches. And it was good to feel the sea breeze fanning their cheeks.

It was even better to see the good old Wanderer lying there in the bay—as peaceful and as sturdy as ever.

"Good old tub!" said Dorrie softly. "So they meant to send you to the bottom, did they? The miserable rabble!"

"Thou art indeed wise in thy choice of words, my father," rumbled Umlosi. "These scum are but the offspring of the jackal! Wau! 'Tis a great pity that we had no real fight. Dearly did I long to thrust my spear into their foul carcasses! I am of sad heart."

"That's all very well, old man, but we couldn't start slicin' them up until they did somethin' of the same kind to us," said Dorrie. "It was far better to capture them whole, instead of in pieces."

"Thy opinion is different to my own, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "But my understanding is good. I know that the laws here are different to the laws in mine own Kutana-land. There we would act differently."

"I believe you," said Dorrie. "A good old gory fight, and a sort of general burial afterwards, eh?"

They all descended the hillside, and found that one of the yacht's boats was handily

pulled up on the beach. The capture itself was a very tame affair. The three men were found down in Lord Dorrimore's own cabin, making free with a bottle of Scotch whisky.

The rascals assumed that the newcomers were members of their own gang, and did not even take the trouble to turn round when the door was opened. They got the scare of their lives when they were thunderously ordered to stand up and to raise their hands.

Five minutes later they were in irons, and taken below to a temporary prison. Since all the captives had to be taken away on the Wanderer, there was no sense in removing these three to the pit.

"An' now we can ehout as we like!" roared Dorrie. "By gad! We've got the whole bunch tied up—an' the island's ours! An' we were just beginnin' a life of slavery!"

"I can hardly believe it, sir!" said one of the crew delightedly. "So much has happened in a little time that it's—it's—"

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "It's a bit too much, eh? Well, let's have a celebration. Let's send up a few fireworks!"

Five minutes later the island was made brilliant by the sizzling ascent of dozens of rockets, starshells, and such like. They burst high in the sky with loud reports.

Blue, green and red stars hovered up there in the heavens—and great white balls of fire which turned darkness into daylight.

The display was easily seen down in the pit itself.

Not the fireworks, but the reflection from the light. And that whole grim pit was illuminated by the coloured radiance. Everybody knew what it meant—for Dorrie had promised to send up fireworks if the mission was successful.

And then the juniors let themselves go.

"Hurrah!"

"We're free—we're free!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"He's the chap who did it!"

"Good for the Remove!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

The juniors were so excited that they fairly shouted themselves hoarse, forgetting all about their blisters and aches and pains. A few things like that were only trifles now.

And Nelson Lee let them celebrate.

It would be like poison to Captain Hurricane and his fellow rogues. Just when they had thought victory was theirs, their defeat had come.

And the next thing was to transfer everybody out of the pit and back to the yacht. This was a big proposition. It would, indeed, take all night to complete the work. The cage would be kept going continuously.

Now that the truth was out, and there was no further any need for silence, Lee turned his attention to the other prisoners—those poor, half-starved wretches who had been down here for so long.

Even now Nelson Lee was doubtful about them.

"It seems dreadfully cruel to leave them

chained up, but I think I shall do so," he said to Captain McDodd. "A few hours more will make little difference—and I want to get these boys out."

"I agree, sir," said the captain.

"I am more concerned about the boys than anything else," continued Lee. "My one fear is that the slaves will give way to excitement. Can anything else be expected? And we want to avoid confusion more than anything. When the boys are up, then we will release them."

This was Nelson Lee's decision—a decision which proved his great wisdom. For the famous detective could foresee what would happen if liberty came to these wretches at once.

But Nelson Lee's plan was foiled.

For Mr. Barry, in the goodness of his heart, had taken it upon himself to act without instructions. He did this entirely because of his sympathetic feelings for the poor brutes who had been slaves for so long. He had had only one taste of it himself, and so he knew what their misery must be like.

Mr. Barry, indeed, did not even think that instructions were necessary.

He had heard that the forty men were to be released as soon as the news came from the yacht that all was well. Mr. Barry did not know that Nelson Lee had decided otherwise.

The second officer entered hut after hut—four of them. Armed with his padlock key, he unfastened every man.

"It's all right—you're free!" he said briskly. "Captain Hurricane and his brutes are prisoners. Come on out and join in the celebrations! We're going to take you back to civilisation."

The result was rather startling.

The men could not understand it at first. Apparently dazed, and with strange cries, they ran out of the huts into the open—unable to grasp what all the excitement meant.

Freedom for them was so strange that it even felt as though their shackles were still about their feet.

They came crowding out like so many sheep—staring—staring. And then first one, and then another, broke into hoarse cries. The truth was beginning to dawn upon their dulled intelligence.

They were free—free!

"Nelson Lee gave a sharp exclamation as he caught sight of those crowding figures. Then he hurried up, and came face to face with Mr. Barry, who was smiling delightedly and was pleased with what he had done.

"Did you release these men, Mr. Barry?" asked Lee quietly.

"Why, yes, sir," said the second officer. "You said it would be all right after we'd heard from the yacht. It seemed so mean to leave them there while we were cheering and celebrating."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"I admire your motive, Mr. Barry, but

I do not admire your discretion!" said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"But, great Scott!" gasped the second officer. "I've not done wrong, have I, sir?"

"I fear so——"

"But we couldn't leave them chained up, sir!" said Mr. Barry, aghast.

"Only for another hour or so," replied Lee. "I am very doubtful if they will keep their heads. This new-found freedom will go to their brains like an intoxicant. And, at the best, it is a rough crowd."

"I'm sorry, sir!" said the officer, concerned. "I didn't stop to think of that! I was only trying to help——"

"I am not criticising you, Mr. Barry, for your action," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You did it with the very finest of motives, and perhaps all will be well. In any case, it is too late to make any alteration now. I will see what can be done. In the meantime, I should like you to superintend the operations at the cage. Get the boys to the surface as quickly as you can."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Barry crisply.

He ran off—vaguely uneasy at Nelson Lee's talk. The officer had congratulated himself upon what he had done. But now he was changing his mind. He regretted not awaiting orders. But he hadn't even thought that orders were necessary.

Nelson Lee went straight among the recent slaves.

"Listen, men," he shouted. "You all know what took place during yesterday and to-day. Captain Hurricane defeated us and brought us into this place as slaves—to work side by side with you."

The crowd stared at Lee strangely.

"But now we have turned the tables," went on Lee. "We have full liberty, and very soon you will be on your way back to civilisation. Let me urge you to keep your heads in this moment of victory. You will all be transported to the top of this precipice as soon as ever the boys are up. They must have the first consideration. They are young, and this whole experience has been a ghastly one for them.

"The top of the precipice!" shouted one of the men. "Gosh! We ain't seen the sea for months!"

"We're goin' now—come on, mates!"

"Hooray! Let's get to the cage—let's go up!"

One huge, burly man flung up his arms. Nelson Lee had observed this fellow during the day—he had stood out from the others, head and shoulders. His hardships had seemed to make no impression.

"Say, listen to me, boys!" he roared. "We're gonna quit! Get me? We'll get up to the top o' this blamed cliff if we have to climb it with our durned eyebrows! We're free—we're all free again!"

"All right, 'Frisco—we'll follow!"

"Where's the cage—where's the cage?"

The excitement grew by leaps and bounds. In a space of fifteen seconds that crowd of released slaves had become a mob of

wildly excited men—a sheer rabble, out of all control!

The leader was 'Frisco Mike—the man who stood out above all the others. And he commenced lumbering rapidly towards the cage—which was just filling with the first batch of juniors. The other slaves followed—shrieking, cursing, and behaving like madmen.

And Nelson Lee stood there, breathing hard.

He had feared this—for his knowledge of human nature was extensive. He had been almost certain that the rough men would act in this way. They were drunk—absolutely intoxicated with the wine of freedom.

It was the unexpectedness of their liberty that had caused this result. They had given themselves up for lost. They had never believed that they would see civilisation again.

And now it had come in one dizzy moment. They lost their mental balance—for the time being they were crazed.

And they were an ugly mob, indeed, as they dashed at that ramshackle cage. Something had to be done quickly—instantly.

Nelson Lee hated the very thought of threatening violence to the poor brutes—for, even now, they were to be pitied. They were not responsible for what they were doing. This sudden excitement was the direct result of Captain Hurricane's foul treatment.

But, much as Lee disliked it, it had to be done.

Swiftly he gave some orders. He told a number of men to guard the cage, and to threaten death to those crazed men who resisted. The lives of the whole party depended upon this single frail cage.

Unless things were done in an orderly fashion there might be a tragedy, even yet. In the very moment of release, imprisonment might follow. For if anything went wrong with that ramshackle elevator, there would be no getting to the summit.

But Lee's efforts were unavailing. Mr. Barry and all the other yacht's men shouted in vain. They threatened, they even fired several shots into the air. But the rabble was now out of hand completely—a sheer mob of madmen.

Led by 'Frisco Mike, the whole forty swooped down upon the cage, even fighting one another to be among the first. Their one thought was to get to the top—to be out of that place that had been a torture to them.

The juniors were swept out, and pushed aside. It was a real wonder that many were not injured. They were bruised, battered, and half-scared out of their wits. But they managed to get clear.

And the panic-stricken mob fought like tigers to be amongst the first batch. Nelson Lee gave one glance at them, and knew that nothing could be done. The only thing was to wait—to let these men go to the top.

After they were all up—then it would be

all right. They would cool down as soon as they saw the sea, and the peaceful Wanderer. And by the morning they would have got completely over their intoxicated excitement.

Lee led the boys away—for the whole sight was revolting.

Fighting, cursing, kicking and scratching, the crowd was a sight to sicken anybody. And yet, all the time, it was pitiful. One could only stand by, and gaze helplessly. Nothing short of machine guns would have brought this maddened crowd to reason.

And they went up—in batches that strained the cage to its utmost. And at last, after about an hour, all had been taken to the top. Here there were fresh scenes of wild excitement.

Now most of the men had run down the hillsides, shouting wildly at the sight of the sea, and the Wanderer lying there in the bay. A ship was there—a ship, ready to take them to liberty.

And 'Frisco Mike was one of the first to calm down.

He gathered the mob around him, and shouted to them until they paid him attention.

"Why shouldn't we take the ship?" he demanded, his voice hoarse with much shouting. "These guys ain't anythin' to us, anyway—not a thing! We'll take the ship, and leave the island!"

"That ain't no good, mate!" yelled one of the men, with a cockney accent. "Wot's the idea of that? These 'ere blokes rescued us, didn't they? Lummy! We can't do the dirty on 'em!"

"You stow yer lip, Hawkins," roared 'Frisco Mike. "We've got a chance here of making our fortunes! We'll take this yacht, an' have it for ourselves! If we let them guys out o' the pit, they'll treat us like dogs! But here we've got the chance of having the ship for our own! We'll sail off, and get back to the States! I know enough about navigation to do it!"

"Yes, we're ready!"

"It's up to you, 'Frisco!"

It was a mad, insane project. Even these men themselves would have realised it if they had been in a different condition. But all they wanted was freedom—complete freedom.

The very thought of their recent rescuers treating them as slaves was enough to make them go to any length. And they thought it quite possible. 'Frisco Mike drove this right home.

"You ain't got any sense!" he thundered. "What is this crowd, anyhow? They come here, an' as like as not they thought of makin' Hurricane quit! They want the island for themselves—an' they'll still keep us down there, slavin' away for them! I say—leave 'em down in the pit!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You're right, 'Frisco!"

The seed had been planted—and it rapidly developed. The rabble was ready to believe

in a very few minutes that unless they seized the yacht they would be flung back into that pit, to resume slavery.

And who could blame them?

After their terrible life of torture they wanted nothing but freedom, and at the faintest inkling of a fresh period of servitude, they were ready to commit any act of madness.

And they would take no chances!

Here was a ship ready for them to get away in. They would seize it, and steam off. It was theirs for the taking. And what did it matter to them if those others languished down in the pit? Let them have a taste of what it was like!

"We've had our share—it's time for some others to have theirs!" shouted 'Frisco.

And in next to no time ninety per cent. of the men were with him. Just a few stuck to the British seaman who had protested—the fellow Hawkins. But these men were in a tiny minority. They had no voice.

Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi received a rude shock.

For the rabble descended upon the yacht, and swarmed over the deck. At first, Dorrie merely thought that they were so excited at being at liberty that they hardly knew what they were doing.

But then his lordship was seized. Umlosi was seized, and so were the other men. And they were taken to the edge of the precipice, bundled into the cage, and lowered to the bottom.

The rabble had found the cage still at the top. For 'Frisco Mike, having his scheme in his mind all the time, had cunningly



The first turn of my hand was enough—the key twisted. And I pushed open the door, and entered into the black interior.

"Guv'nor!" I breathed softly. "Dorrie! Are you there?"

wedged the contrivance so that it could not be lowered by those in the pit.

Dorrie and his companions were barely allowed to get out of the cage before there came some swishing thuds.

The ropes came tumbling down.

Nelson Lee, seeing what had happened, turned pale.

"Heaven help us now!" he murmured. "Those fools have left us down in this pit, and there is no way of escape! Mr. Barry—Mr. Barry! If you had only waited for my instructions!"

CHAPTER VII.

'FRISCO MIKE TAKES THE LEAD!



REGINALD PITT stared upwards, and there was amazement in his eyes.

"What's happened!" he ejaculated, in a startled voice. "The ropes have come down! They've cut the ropes at the top!"

"Great Scott!"

"It must be some mistake!" said Jack Grey. "They wouldn't do it on purpose! We rescued them—we gave them their liberty! They wouldn't leave us down here in this pit!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Gadzooks! That would be poisonous, you know! I mean to say, the dashed bounders must have a spark of decency, and all that kind of rot! Here we are, as it were, in the jolly old soup, and the chappies we came to rescue are out of it!"

De Valerie looked a bit dazed.

"It's too much for me," he said hoarsely. "First we're prisoners, and then we're all set free, and then this happens! Those slaves went mad, got to the top, and now they've cut the ropes so that we can't get up! They must be absolutely crazy. Let's ask Mr. Lee what he's going to do."

A crowd of juniors surrounded Nelson Lee.

"I don't know, boys—let me think!" replied Lee, as they shouted questions at him. "We cannot blame those poor fellows very much. Perhaps they distrusted us—perhaps they thought that we should make slaves of them again. In their maddened condition they were capable of anything."

"But can't we get out, sir?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Nelson Lee lightly. "Of course we can get out."

"Oh, thank goodness!"

"But how, sir?"

"I cannot tell you exactly how—at the moment," replied Lee. "But there must be a way—we will find one. Take my advice, boys, and get some rest. Try to sleep until daylight. By then, perhaps, I will have a plan."

He spoke soothingly, and with supreme confidence—although his heart was as heavy as lead within him. The juniors were greatly comforted by the words, and they felt more satisfied.

Mr. Barry was nearly distracted.

"I hope you will forgive me, sir!" he said brokenly. "If I had known what would happen I would have cut my right hand off sooner—"

"Don't worry yourself, Mr. Barry—you have nothing to reproach yourself for," interrupted Lee quietly. "It was a mistake—but a natural one. You didn't stop to consider—but that is not a fault. You acted as nine men out of ten would act. The result is bad, but perhaps not tragic."

The second officer clenched his fists.

"But I never dreamed of this!" he said, in a distracted voice. "Good Heavens!

What a fool I was—what a mad fool I was! It was all my fault, sir—I take all the blame."

Lee comforted the poor fellow—for, after all, he was accusing himself undeservedly. His action in releasing the prisoners had been prompted by nothing but pity and kindness. And surely he could not be blamed for that?

And while consternation reigned down in the pit, 'Frisco Mike and his band were in charge of the Wanderer. The scenes on the yacht were of a wild and terrible order for the first half-hour.

Whisky was found, and partaken of. Food—good, refined food. The men fell upon it like wolves. They quarrelled among themselves. And for a time there was not the slightest attempt to keep law and order.

But 'Frisco Mike was a leader.

But for him these wretches would have drunk themselves into a condition of helpless intoxication. 'Frisco kept them away from the drink—and gave his orders in a thunderous, violent voice, accompanied by oaths.

'Frisco himself had been the mate of a sailing ship—and he knew how to handle men.

"You're a bunch of fools—you ain't got any more sense than a coyote!" he roared. "We've got to get away from here quick—we've got to quit this island right now!"

"Aw, ther' ain't that hurry!" shouted somebody.

"Yes there is!" retorted Mike. "We've got to quit right now I tell you! How do we know what those swell guys will do? What'll happen to us if they get out, an' come down on us? They've got guns—rifles, and six-shooters! If we ain't careful we'll all be took again, and put to slavery! The sooner we're away from this cursed place the better."

'Frisco's right!"

"Let's go away as he says!"

The men were beginning to calm down a trifle. With the yacht in their possession, with her sturdy decks under their feet—they felt a greater sense of security. Their newly-found liberty was still intoxicating, but they had now another thought. They wanted to get away.

Hawkins, the British seaman, did his utmost to gain supporters.

"You're all a lot of mugs!" he shouted contemptuously, addressing a crowd to himself. "What's the idea of takin' notice o' that bloke? 'Frisco Mike ain't nothin' more than a fool! An' what kind of chaps do you call yourselves—to go away an' leave them poor kids down in that pit!"

"We can't help their troubles!"

"Can't help 'em!" shouted Hawkins indignantly. "Lummy! If you ain't a bloomin' crowd of ungrateful 'ounds! Them gents come along, an' they sets us free. We didn't never think of bein' set free, neither! An' arter they done that, all you can do is to turn on 'em!"

"They'll set us to work again—chained up!"

"Garn!" said Hawkins contemptuously. "You ain't got no more sense than a 'cap o' fleas! One o' them blokes is Lord Dorrimore, an' another is Mr. Nelson Lee—real gents! I don't know but wot you ain't barmy!"

"Stow your lip, anyway!" snarled one of the others. "I guess you're a durned fool, at the best! Here we've got a chance to get away—an' you want to try to persuade these fellers to go back to that pit!"

"Nothink of the kind!" said Hawkins. "Crikey! I've had enough o' that place; too! Seein' as I've been there for four blinkin' months, I ought to know what it's like! I'd cheerfully strangle that there Cap'n 'Urricane! If I 'ad my way, I'd make 'im walk the bloomin' plank! But where's the sense in turnin' on the very coves what 'elped us? It don't seem right to me!"

"Quit that talk, you!" snarled 'Frisco Mike, striding up.

"Oh! 'Oo says so?" demanded Hawkins aggressively.

"I say so!"

"You can go an' boil your 'ead!" said Mr. Hawkins.

"By heck! I'll teach you something!" snarled 'Frisco. "I ain't allowin' any guy to preach mutiny! We're altogether in this thing—an' if you ain't careful I'll pitch you overboard."

"'Oo—you?" bellowed Hawkins.

"Yes."

"Try it!" shouted the British seaman.

'Frisco Mike did try it. He suddenly lashed out with all his strength, and aimed at Mr. Hawkins' head. But that gentleman ducked like lightning, and the next moment the pair were fighting, hammer and tongs.

It was an unequal battle.

Mike was nearly a head taller than Hawkins, and he was a great, burly brute who had been known in the 'Frisco underworld as a killer. Mr. Hawkins was merely a wiry, plucky seafaring man who hailed from Wapping.

Probably he might have succeeded in beating Mike if the latter had stuck to fair means—for Mr. Hawkins had a good deal of skill when it came to boxing. But he was no match for Mr. 'Frisco in foul-ling.

The burly Mike suddenly delivered a fearful blow under the belt. Hawkins doubled up, and as he did so, 'Frisco brought his knee up with a sudden swing, and it crashed against Mr. Hawkins' head.

The unfortunate man rolled over, senseless.

And when he came to, lying in one of the scuppers, he found active preparations on foot for getting the Wanderer under way.

The furnaces were being got going. A

man with a knowledge of engines was in the engine room, looking over the machinery. And after a brief inspection, 'Frisco had declared that they could easily take the yacht out to sea.

There were forty of them, and 'Frisco himself was a navigator. Having been a fully certificated mate, he was quite capable. He appointed himself skipper of the yacht, and within three hours all was ready for departure.

The supporters of Hawkins kept quiet.

They would much rather have done the square thing, and left the island in the proper manner. But they didn't want to be left behind. The only thing, in their opinion, was to stick to 'Frisco Mike.

And so the Wanderer prepared for sailing—manned by this mob of men who had recently been the slaves of Captain Hurricane.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRISONERS OF THE PIT!



LORD DORRIMORE thoughtfully lit a cigarette.

"Good thing I brought a supply of these in my pocket," he remarked.

"It was only by luck that I happened to slip the box in—before those crazed idiots sprang upon us."

"Yes, Dorrie, they are certainly soothing," said Nelson Lee, and he drew his own cigarette. "And I trust that they will aid us in thinking out this problem—for it certainly is a problem."

"It's too much for me," said Dorrie. "Ah, me!" he added, with a sigh. "What a life! Well, it's nothin' if not excitin'!"

"Unless we get out of this terrible place there will not be much excitement," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I have led the boys to believe that everything may be all right—but I am intensely worried."

"Wan! Thy words are justified, O, my master!" said Umlosi. "Many places have I been in—many wondrous valleys and caves. But surely, this is the most terrible of all!"

He swept his hand towards the sky, and stood looking upwards.

"Those frowning cliffs are a bit uncomfortable I'll admit," said Dorrie. "The worst of it is, they're all the way round—there isn't a single spot where anybody could climb up."

"And now that the cage is useless, we are just as helpless as though we were in the very bowels of the earth," said Nelson Lee. "These cliffs are nearly five hundred feet high—and that is an appalling distance. No matter what ingenuity we employ, I fail to see how we can conquer such an insuperable obstacle."

"Then it means that we've got to stay here," said Dorrie. "We're simply out of the fryin' pan into the fire. It's queer

how these things happen, old man. But they do. Perhaps something will turn up yet."

"Thou wert always of stout heart, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "Not many hours since we were prisoners in the hands of the dog of an enemy. Little did we think that freedom would be ours so soon. Mayhap something will turn up, my masters. 'Tis the unexpected that happens."

The three of them were talking in a little group just against the derelict cage. For some time Nelson Lee had been examining the cut ropes. But he could not see any hope there.

The majority of the juniors were sleeping. Somewhat comforted by Nelson Lee's words, they had decided to rest until dawn. Their day's work had utterly exhausted them—and only the sudden excitement of liberty had aroused them to activity.

And now a kind of reaction had set in, and they could do nothing but sleep. They were strong and healthy, and sleep was their due.

Other members of the party were standing about, talking also. During the last hour almost a complete circle of the pit had been made. In the gloom, every cliff had been examined.

But there was no way out—no escape. "What about these ropes?" asked Dorrie, kicking against one of them. "Couldn't we do somethin' with them, Lee? If we could only get one of them to the top we might be able to—"

"I have considered the possibility, Dorrie, and it is out of the question," interrupted Lee. "There is plenty of rope. I will admit—but how could we possibly cast a rope five hundred feet upwards?"

His lordship shook his head.

"It's a bit of a poser," he admitted.

"It is a task that no human being could accomplish," said Nelson Lee. "Armed with a gigantic catapult we might be able to do something. If only we had some rockets, they might be of some use. For those wooden arms still project over the edge of the cliff. But what is the good of talking? It is a mere waste of words to discuss the matter."

"But we've got to do somethin'," said Dorrie firmly.

"Yes, we have—and we shall."

"Eh?" said Dorrie, looking at Lee. "Got an idea?"

"I think so."

"Of course—you would have," said Dorrie calmly. "You stand there, pretendin' to be absolutely flummoxed, and you've got a scheme all the time. You cunnin' old rascal! What do you think of him, Umlosi?"

Umlosi grunted.

"Umtagati is a man of much wisdom," he exclaimed. "Is he not truly named?"

For surely he is indeed a wizard among mortals. Methinks he is capable of performing wondrous acts."

"I'm sorry, old man, but there's nothing at all wonderful in what I am about to suggest," said Nelson Lee. "Of all the suggestions that have occurred to me, only one seems feasible."

"Let's hear it."

"It struck me," replied Lee. "that there may be another method of escape from this pit—"

"But we've looked, an' haven't found one."

"I mean a secret method," continued Lee. "I give Captain Hurricane credit for being a man of great resourcefulness. He is one of the greatest scoundrels unhung, but I rather fancy he has a great liking for his own skin. He would not like to be imprisoned down in this terrible hole for ever."

"My brains," said Dorrie, "are dormant. I don't follow."

"What I mean to suggest is this—is it not likely that Hurricane has a secret method by which he can escape?" said Lee shrewdly. "I should surely think he would provide a way out in case any disaster occurred to the cage. It would merely be a matter of common precaution. And it would also be quite in keeping with Hurricane's character to keep a secret of the auxiliary exit."

Lord Dorrimore put his head on one side.

"You're right," he said. "If Captain Hurricane hasn't provided such an exit from this pit he's a fool," said his lordship. "But it occurs to me that we shall strike a somewhat nasty snag there."

"You mean that Hurricane will not speak?"

"I do," said Dorrimore. "If we question the man, or any of his gang, it isn't likely that they'll give any answer. Because, you see, they'll know jolly well that we mean to use that way of escape for ourselves. Of, course, you can put it to Hurricane that it means his own liberty as well, but I'm afraid it wouldn't wash. The man's booked for hanging, anyway."

Lee nodded.

"It wouldn't be a bit of use questioning any of them," he said. "And so I shall take another course. I'll set them at liberty."

Lord Dorrimore stared.

"I don't think I'm gettin' deaf," he said. "But it seems to me that I didn't catch that right. You'll set them all at liberty?"

"Yes."

"Then I did catch it right," said Dorrie. "Man alive, you're crazy!"

"I think not," said Lee, with a grim smile. "There's a method in my madness."

"Kindly trot it out—I'm vastly interested."

"I, too, my master," rumbled Umlosi.

"Well, it is quite simple," said Lee.

"Yes—when you know it."

"What will Captain Hurricane's first impulse be?" inquired the detective. "Findin' himself at liberty, he would undoubtedly think of escape. And as soon as he saw that the cage no longer can be worked—well, I think you'd better imagine the rest."

"You mean he'll go to his own secret exit?"

"Precisely," said Nelson Lee. "What we shall do is to disarm these men, and set them free. They cannot harm us, for we are in greatly superior numbers, and we are all fully armed. We will keep a sharp watch on Hurricane, and note his every movement."

"Wise words, O Umtagati!" said Umlosi, with approval. "Thou art indeed a man of much wisdom. Thou art a student of human nature—and methinks thy ruse will bear fruit. Wau! I admire thee, my master!"

Having decided upon his course, Nelson Lee acted.

It was the only thing he could do—the one slim chance. And he went straight to the shack where Hurricane's gang was imprisoned, and unlocked the door. Dorrie and Mr. Barry and Umlosi were there, too. They carried in lanterns.

Captain Hurricane glared at them ferociously.

"Come here to taunt us, eh?" he snarled. "You've got the best of it now, but my turn will come—"

"One moment, Captain Cane!" interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "I have no intention of conversing with you—we have come here to set you at liberty."

"Good gosh!" muttered Mr. Seelig.

"Say, what's the big idea?" demanded Hurricane gruffly.

"Your late slaves have escaped from the pit, and have thoughtfully cut the ropes of the travelling cage," replied Nelson Lee. "We are all prisoners together—and I do not fancy the task of looking after you."

Lee gave no further explanation.

And five minutes later Captain Hurricane and his men were turned loose. Lee had thought of the advisability of letting Hurricane go alone, and at first he had half decided this.

But it was quite likely that Hurricane himself did not know of another exit, for he only visited the island at intervals. It was more probable, perhaps, that some of his gang had prepared a second way.

And, after all, there was not the slightest risk in setting these men at liberty. For the whole yacht's crew was there, fully armed. This mob could do no harm at all.

By waiting until the morning, perhaps, Lee would probably have been able to discover the secret himself. But he badly wanted to get out of this pit at the earliest possible moment.

For Lee feared that Frisco Mike and his

supporters would make off in the yacht. He calculated that it would take them some hours to get steam up. Therefore, if Captain Cane could only show the way out now there might still be a chance of setting everything to rights.

And Nelson Lee's scheme succeeded.

I may as well say that at once, because there's no need to keep you in suspense. And the brutal skipper wasted no time. He was in a state of fear and panic. Now that he was the under-dog, his courage had gone.

He had expected nothing but the very worst.

Never for a moment had he believed that Nelson Lee would be fool enough to give him his liberty—even within the confined space of this pit. But now that he was free, Captain Cane acted.

His one thought now was—escape.

His whole game was up, and he knew it. But if he could only get away there might still be a chance of evading the law's penalty. And the wily captain took Mr. Skinner and Mr. Seelig with him, and hastened across the pit.

"Say, it seems that these durned guys are in a fix!" he exclaimed. "They got the best of us, but they've been left in the cold. Well, we'll leave 'em there! There's still the schooner—an' we'll quit!"

"Gee! You mean the hidden crevice?"

"Sure!" said Hurricane tensely.

They went to a far side of the pit—a distance of over a mile. In the darkness they made their way over the gold workings, and at length they reached a spot where the sheer precipice frowned down upon them as smooth as the side of a house. Captain Cane edged his way along, feeling the rock.

And after about a hundred yards he came to a halt.

At this point there was a curious formation of the rock. At one angle, a narrow crevice could be seen—but only in this one position. From all other angles the rock face appeared to be smooth and undisturbed. Clutching his fingers round the rock, the captain drew forth a stout, thick rope.

It came right away from the cliff, and Hurricane pulled it with a grunting murmur of satisfaction. Even in full daylight, a dozen searchers might have passed that spot without seeing the crevice. By night, it was a matter of absolute impossibility to detect it.

The crevice itself extended up the cliff face for a hundred feet. From that point the rope was exposed—but it was exactly the same colour as the cliff, and was not easily seen. Unless one was looking for such a thing it was invisible.

The rope itself was knotted at intervals of about a yard. And Captain Hurricane swung himself upwards.

"Gee!" muttered Mr. Seelig. "I'd forgotten this durned rope!"

He swung himself upwards behind his skipper. And Skinner followed. Above, Captain Hurricane looked down.

"You blamed fools!" he snarled. "It ain't strong enough for the three of us!"

"Quit that foolery, cap!" said Mr. Seelig. "I guess this rope's strong enough for a dozen. We ain't takin' any chances."

All the men knew that the task of climbing that rope was one that might well have caused the stoutest heart to have qualms. It was an effort of endurance that only strong men could accomplish.

They were about ten feet from the ground when there was a sudden rush.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and several more came up. In the blackness they had not seen the men climbing until they were well away from the ground.

"Stop!" shouted Lee curtly. "Come down!"

"By the good gosh!" snarled Captain Hurricane.

"Unless you descend at once, we'll fire!" shouted Nelson Lee.

"Doggone you—fire!" growled the skipper.

He climbed upwards with renewed vigour—having an instinctive feeling that Nelson Lee would not shoot in cold blood. And Captain Hurricane was right. He and his two companions were allowed to climb upwards.

But Umlosi was swarming up that rope, too—swarming up like a cat. He was doing this as a matter of precaution. For Umlosi had no intention whatever of letting Captain Hurricane slash the rope through when he got to the top. To climb up at once was the only safeguard.

But even this was fraught with horrible risk.

For the men might manage to slash the rope before Umlosi could pull himself over. They might push him back into space. But Umlosi did not think of these things as he climbed.

Matters were desperate—and there was no time for scruples.

At last Captain Hurricane reached the summit. He was well nigh spent from his long climb. He crouched over, breathing hard.

"Say, make it snappy!" he panted. "Climb up here, and we'll send that dog-gone nigger to his death!"

"We sure will!" agreed Mr. Seelig breathlessly.

He climbed over the edge, too—and Skinner followed. Captain Hurricane already had his sheath-knife out, and he leaned over the edge of the precipice while Umlosi was still three feet from the top.

The edge of the knife touched the rope. Crack!

From far below there came a tiny spurt of red fire. Something sang past Captain Hurricane's ear as he leaned over. He started back, cursing violently.

Again the same crack came from below. Another bullet hissed by—well clear of

Umlosi, but so close to the skipper that he was startled.

It was only possible for him to slash that rope by leaning well over—and it was too risky. The nearness of those bullets gave a grim indication of Nelson Lee's deadly aim.

Before the skipper or his men could do anything further, Umlosi was at the top. With one extraordinary bound, he was over the edge. They were ready for him. With one rush they attempted to hurl Umlosi to his doom.

"Thou pigs of Satan!" boomed Umlosi.

He met the rush like a solid wall—even though he stood almost overhanging the deadly chasm. And his three assailants nearly fell over in their own mad rush.

Crash! Umlosi's fist thudded upon Captain Hurricane's chest. At the same moment Umlosi delivered another blow at Skinner. The great black's only regret was that he had not brought his spear with him. Under the circumstances, this had not been possible.

The three ruffians did not wait. Having failed in their foul intentions, they fled. As though demons were at their heels, they raced down the hillside towards the sea. And Umlosi stood there, roaring imprecations at them in his own native tongue.

Then he turned and leaned over the chasm.

"'Tis well, N'Kose!" he shouted boomingly. "Thou canst climb!"

"Thank Heaven, Umlosi—I thought those devils would get you!" came Nelson Lee's voice from far below.

"Fear not, my master—they have fled!" called down Umlosi. "Like the wolves of the night they are, they have slunk away. And 'twill hearten thee to learn that the Wanderer lies in the bay."

Lord Dorrimore clapped Lee on the back.

"What did I say?" he chuckled delightedly. "I knew you'd do the trick, old man! By gad! You're a livin' marvel!"

CHAPTER IX.

MAROONED ON THE ISLAND!



A GAIN had come a dramatic change!

Nelson Lee's ruse had succeeded beyond his wildest hope—for Captain Hurricane had revealed this secret way of escape the very instant he had obtained his liberty. And it was indeed glorious news to hear that the Wanderer was still in the bay.

But time was precious.

Lee took command of the situation in a flash. Men guarded that fatal rope—a strong cordon was placed round it, every man armed. No other members of Hurricane's cut-throat party would come near!

And, in a steady stream, four men came to the surface. And then the rope

was unfastened at the top—Umlosi and Mr. Barry and two others holding it so that there could be no possibility of a slip.

With all haste possible, they raced round the edge of the precipice until they arrived at the platform where the cage was accommodated. Here the big beams stood out, with the pulleys still there.

And the ropes at the bottom of the pit were tied to the other rope and all hauled up. The sailors skilfully climbed out over that dizzy chasm, and slipped the ropes through the pulleys.

Splices were made, and within twenty minutes the cage was in complete operation once more. With those cuts repaired, the contrivance was just as serviceable as ever it had been.

And the first load came up.

The juniors knew nothing of all this, for they were fast asleep. And only half the yacht's crew came up. The remainder stayed guarding that precious cage—for there were still a good many members of Hurricane's party in the pit, and there had been no time to round them up.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore took deep breaths of pure air as they stood on the top of the hill, looking down at the Wanderer.

"Gad! It's a sight for sore eyes!" declared Dorrie softly.

"Yes—but we must hurry," said Nelson Lee, his voice filled with anxiety. "See! They have got up steam already!"

"By the Lord Harry! So they have!"

They all raced down the hill at the top of their speed. And when they arrived on the beach itself they saw, to their utter chagrin, that the yacht was slowly but surely steaming out to sea.

"Wait!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Ahoy, there!"

There was no reply—not a sound. It was just as though Nelson Lee's shouts had not been heard.

"This is galling, indeed!" exclaimed Lee, biting his lip. "Ten minutes earlier, and we should have been in time."

"The low down scum!" said Dorrie furiously. "Stealin' my yacht like that! They're mad! What's the good of it to them? It's more than I can imagine!"

"My dear Dorrie, these men have had fear in their hearts for months," replied Nelson Lee. "Even though they have gained their liberty—and they know full well that we gave it to them—they still fear that we might be just enemies of Captain Hurricane, who wish to seize the gold mine. They think that we shall cast them back into that pit to endure indefinite slavery."

His lordship calmed down somewhat.

"Yes, that's the only explanation," he said. "An' lookin' at it in that way, you can't very well blame the poor devils. But, dash it all, they might have given us a chance to show what we are!"

"They took no chances," said Lee. "This yacht was there, and they seized it."



Captain Hurricane already had his sheath knife out, and he leaned over the edge of the precipice while Umlosi was still three feet from the top.

The edge of the knife touched the rope.

It meant liberty—everything that life holds good. And we are now in the position of the celebrated Mr. Robinson Crusoe."

"Marooned, by gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "But look here! I've just thought of somethin'. What about Captain Hurricane's schooner? We might be able to seize it."

"I think not!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

He pointed out to sea in the opposite direction. And after a few moments Lord Dorrimore detected a black patch against the night sky. Captain Hurricane and his two companions had already gone—risking the possibility of storm—with only three men on board. They were thinking of their own skins. And with the yacht gone, too, it simply meant that the whole St. Frank's party was marooned. This was a development that had hardly been expected.

It could not be said that the position was an ideal one.

Yet it was greatly improved.

At least, they were not prisoners in that terrible pit, without the slightest hope of escape.

"Well, what shall we do?" asked Dorrie.

"There is one thing that we must do at once," replied Lee. "We will get all the boys up—see, the dawn is just about to break. It will be fully daylight by the time we get back into the pit. I don't want those youngsters to stay in there another moment. They are young and impressionable—and that ghastly place will horrify them if they remain there much longer."

"An' what about Hurricane's men?"

"They will be left down there—and I shall take that step without the slightest compunction," replied Nelson Lee. "We will pull all the ropes up so that the rascals cannot possibly escape."

"That's a good idea, of course," said his lordship. "But I can't say that I'm yelpin' with joy over the prospect. It won't take us long to starve here, old man. There's not enough grub on this island to feed a cockroach!"

"We will deal with that aspect of the matter later," said Nelson Lee. "You have apparently forgotten that there is a big supply of stores down in the pit. As for getting away from the island, we must devise some scheme. For one thing, we have plenty of wood. We can even tear the majority of those huts down, and construct a powerful raft."

"I think we can trust you to get busy on some stunt, or other," said Dorrie calmly. "It makes me wild to see the Wanderer going out like that, but when I think of what those poor brutes have been through, I calm down a bit. Let's hope they don't do much harm to the good old tub."

"I fancy they will be questioned pretty closely by the first ship they come in contact with," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "But we need not discuss that now, old man.

The position is fairly serious, but by no means grave. I don't think it will be so very long before everything comes to rights."

They were soon back at the pit.

And the daylight was coming in rapidly now. Both Lee and Dorrie, in spite of the setbacks, were feeling almost lighthearted. They had half an idea that this stealing of the Wanderer was just the madness of a moment. Perhaps those men would realise the folly of their act, and return.

At all events, the chief thing at the moment was to get out of the pit.

All the juniors were awakened almost at once, and they found that full daylight had come—and that great changes had taken place. They had gone to sleep with the comforting thought that Nelson Lee might be able to do something.

And they awoke to find that the cage was in full running order, and that they were to be removed from the great chasm at once.

It was a pretty long job, for the cage could not accommodate many at once.

However, the task was accomplished by the time the sun was well up. And by now the juniors knew the full truth.

It shocked them at first—they were startled to find that every means of escape from the island had gone. When they found themselves on the hillsides the Wanderer had vanished. And so had the schooner.

The sea, in every direction, was deserted.

"Well, this is a fine state of affairs, if you like!" I exclaimed. "We're simply getting out of one fix and into another all the time. Goodness knows what will turn up next."

"I hope it's a ship!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Not much chance of that," I pointed out. "This island is right off the track of all ships, and there isn't one comes here once in a blue moon. But, of course, there's no need to worry."

"Why not?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Well, these men on the Wanderer are bound to come within sight of a ship before long," I replied. "And, although they left us here, they'll report the whole story. And that'll mean rescue for us. We can't be here for more than a week or two, at the very most."

"Well, let's go down to the beach," said Handforth. "My hat! I feel like a dip! And we can all do with one, too. After that awful experience yesterday we're as black as a lot of sweeps!"

"Dear old lad, you're right!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, we're simply wallowing in several cartloads of the good old grime. I'm dashed glad there's no bally mirror on hand. I should get a frightful shock if I gazed at myself."

The juniors were, indeed, somewhat grubby. And there was a general move towards the sea. Practically all the fellows were in the best of spirits—for the very

fact of coming out of that pit was enough to make them happy.

The Wanderer had gone, but there was no need to be greatly alarmed. If there had been a little more comfort on the island, nobody would have minded. But it was such a barren, unfriendly kind of a place.

The juniors made a discovery on the beach.

There, piled up in great disorder, lay numbers of boxes, cushions, settees, deck-chairs, and a hundred and one things that had been brought ashore from the yacht.

At first the juniors couldn't understand it.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed, at length. "Don't you remember? Captain Hurricane and his men were bringing these stores ashore last night. Supposing we find what there is?"

"Good wheeze!"

"Great bloaters!" gasped Fatty Little. "There might be some grub! I haven't eaten anything for hours and hours—and I was starved all day yesterday! Let's open these boxes."

It didn't take the fellows long to do so.

Several cases were opened. And great was the delight when it was found that the majority of them contained food supplies. Tins of biscuits, sardines, preserved fruits, jam, potted meats, and a large assortment of other foodstuffs—all of the very choicest variety.

And when Nelson Lee and Dorrimore came down to the beach, to see what all the juniors were doing, they found the entire Remove indulging in a terrific feed.

"Well, by gad!" exclaimed his lordship. "If this doesn't beat anythin'! A bally feast goin' on, an' we haven't even been invited!"

Dorrie piled in at once. He just discovered that he was famished. A good many others followed, including Captain McDodd and Mr. Barry. It was a great relief to find all these stores here."

"There's enough food to last us for a clear month," declared Nelson Lee, after he'd examined the prize. "And there is a big heap of awning material—and sundry other useful articles. We can bring those

tents up from the pit, and set up a camp here, on the beach."

And long before the day was over, the camp was completed. There had been several tents down in that pit, and when these were erected and everything else put into shipshape order, there was not much to grumble at.

The Remove had now all the comfort it needed, and a full and certain supply of food. The Wanderer's chef and his entire staff had a tent to themselves—and they gloated over the fact that Captain Hurricane had brought ashore a plentiful supply of cutlery and plate and cooking utensils. Indeed, one case contained crockery of every description. With only a very little roughing it, the entire party would be comfortable.

Cooking facilities were primitive, but what did that matter?

And to be out of that hole of slavery was like an escape from living torture. It was nothing but a nightmare-like memory in the minds of the juniors.

The few members of Captain Hurricane's band were still down there—and there was no prospect of their escaping, for there was no way out for them.

But nothing could alter the fact that we were marooned. It was ironical that we should have been left in the lurch by the very men we had come to rescue! It seemed utterly wrong and opposed to all ideas of human gratitude. But, knowing what terrible trials those poor fellows had been through, we did not find it in our hearts to blame them.

They had fled from the island as though it were a plague spot—fearful lest they should be kept there for some reason.

They had gone—and we were in sole possession.

How long should we be compelled to remain castaways on Dorrimore Island?

The answer to that question forms another episode altogether. But I can give just a whisper here—we were all destined to get back to dear old St. Frank's almost in time for the autumn term. And when we did arrive we were booked for several kinds of a shock.

But nuff said just now!

THE END.

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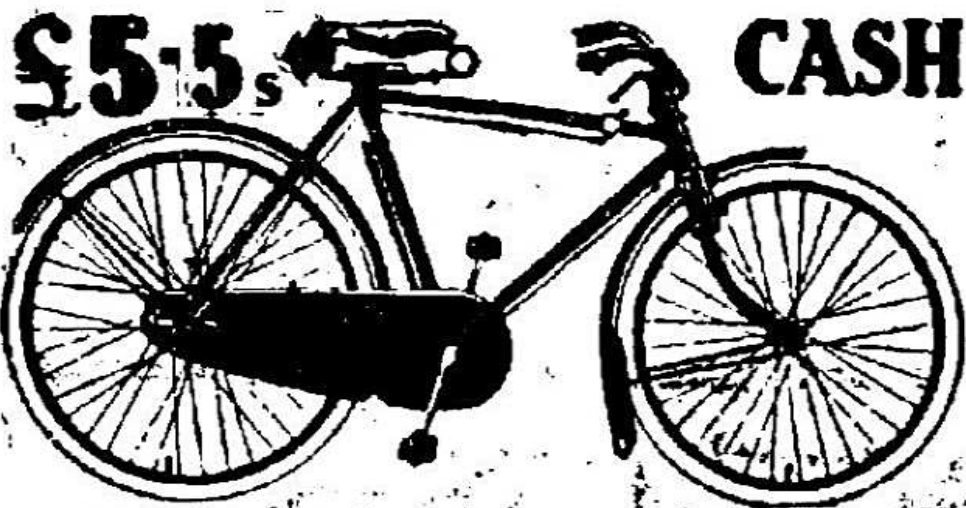
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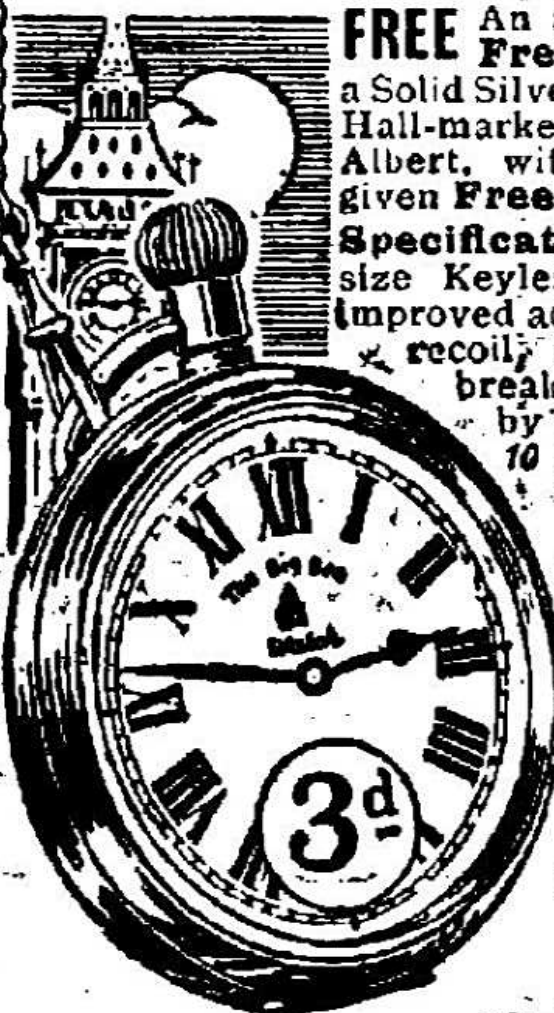
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