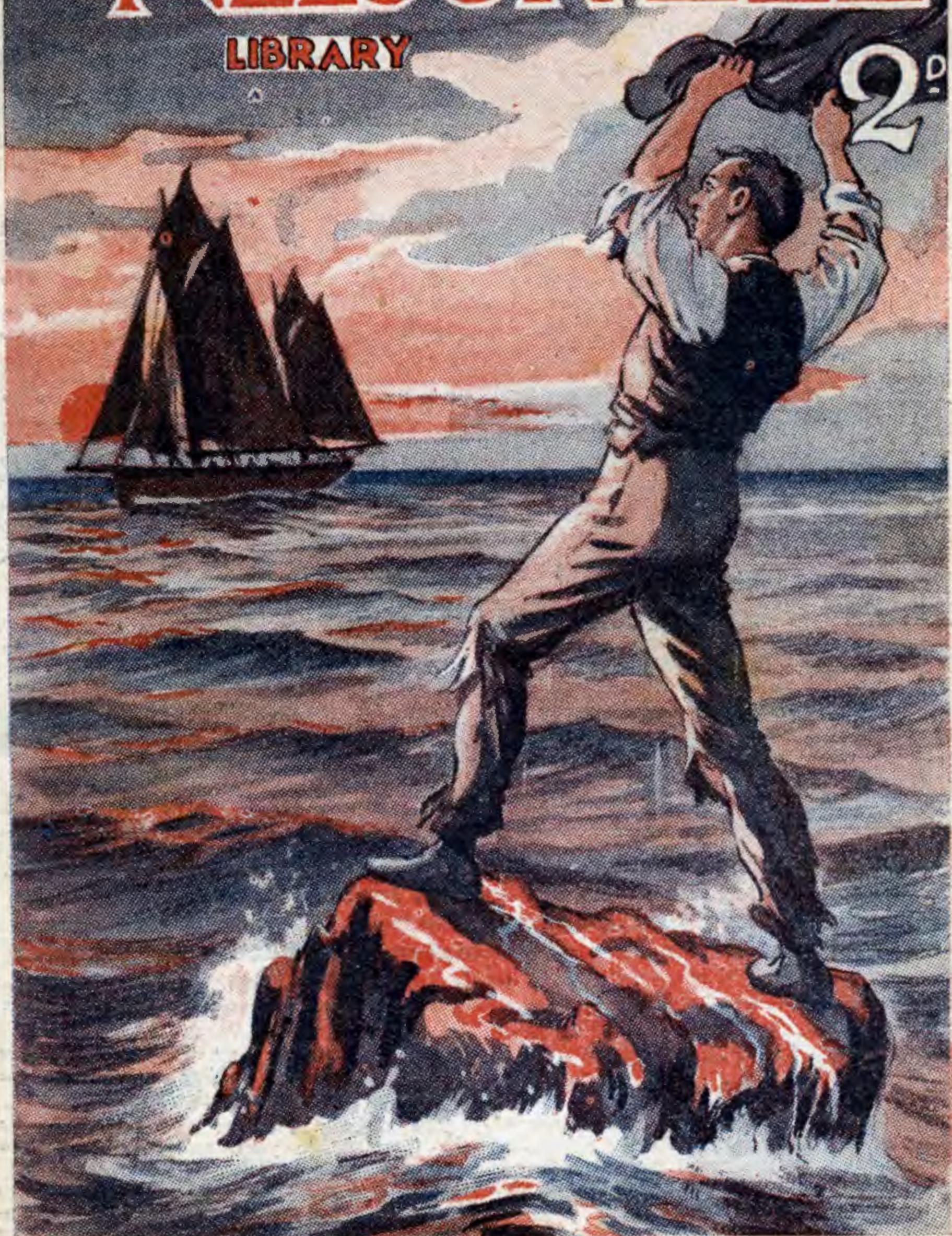


BOOK LENGTH DETECTIVE-THRILLER INSIDE!

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New Series No. 118.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 23rd, 1932.

Extra-Long Complete Story of Mystery, and Intrigue

The SECRET of



Battered by the icy-cold breakers of the North Pacific, swept by the bitter winds from snow-covered Alaska, Salcoth Island lies remote in an isolated corner of the globe. Yet for twenty years it has held hidden under its black rocks a grim secret—a secret that sets ruthless fortune-hunters fighting madly for possession of it.

CHAPTER 1.

The Adventure in the Park!

BIG BEN had just struck the hour of midnight when a well-built youngster, with a great dog at his heels, turned out of Bayswater Road through one of the entrances of Hyde Park.

He made his way along the drive, which moves in graceful sweeps down towards the

Serpentine, and on past the magazine, over the bridge, finally passing out through the Alexandra Gate into Knightsbridge.

The night was rather cold and chilly for the time of the year, and there were few people about the park.

Here and there on a seat one could make out the shadowy figure of some belated individual, and now and again a powerful car would speed past.

... Starring Nelson Lee, The Famous Detective, and Nipper!

SALCOTH ISLAND



Once a solitary policeman passed the lad and the dog, just as the two came beneath a lamp-post. The constable came to a halt and touched his helmet.

"Nipper, isn't it?" he queried.

The youth smiled and nodded.

"Good-evening," he returned.

The constable stooped and patted the broad flanks of the dog.

"Fine dog you've got here," he said appreciatively. "Belongs to you?"

"Mr. Lee's dog."

"Nelson Lee's dog, eh? Ought to come in mighty handy in his work, an Alsatian like that. Is that why he bought it?"

"He didn't buy it," explained Nipper. "It was given to him by Lord Easington. If it had not been for Nelson Lee that rogue, Professor Rymer, would have inherited the

title and estates, and the present earl would not be alive."

"I remember that case," said the constable. "Mr. Lee practically went right round the world looking for a statuette and the missing heir."

"Yes. Lord Easington, naturally, can never thank Mr. Lee enough for all he did, and is often making him presents, the Wolf—this Alsatian—is one of them. We are training him for detective work."

"But oughtn't you to be at St. Frank's, young fellow?" said the constable.

Nipper shook his head.

"Holidays," he explained. "Flu pretty bad down at St. Frank's. Young chap named Willy Handforth started it. He went swimming one night and didn't take his clothes off. A lot of the fellows are ill with it, so we broke

up for a special holiday. It'll stop the epidemic spreading. The gov'nor and I are in town for at least a week, and then we may rush off somewhere for a quiet time—unless something else turns up. You never know with the gov'nor what might happen. But I mustn't hang about here. Got to get back. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Nipper. So long, Wolf!"

The dog snuffed his muzzle into the constable's thick palm, then he and his young master went on into the shadows.

Hyde Park was a favourite place for Nipper and the dog to stroll in at night time. One could always get a breath of fresh air and a clean pair of lungs in that vast breathing space of London.

"Better than being cooped up in a rotten old kennel, eh, boy?" Nipper murmured to the animal by his side.

Wolf wagged his tail in complete agreement with that remark. They passed the magazine, and began to climb the slight rise that leads to the dimly-lighted bridge.

They were half way up the rise when suddenly the silence was broken. Nipper heard a quick call, followed by a splash. Then a moment later another voice rang out.

"Help! Help!"

Nipper made a grab at Wolf, but he was too late. He had ventured to unleash the big dog, and Wolf was off at a tearing gallop up the slopes.

The boy broke into a run, and, reaching the bridge, darted off along its paved side. He saw a dark figure scramble on to the low parapet, and as soon as it was erect it turned towards him.

"A woman in the water!" he called.

Then the next moment the hands had wedged themselves above the head and the figure had vanished in a long and beautiful dive into the dark waters below.

Nipper fumbled in his pocket and drew out a police-whistle, sending a sharp call out into the night. He heard an answering call from the drive beyond, and knew that it was his friend the constable who had heard his signal.

Presently, from beneath he heard a splash, then another, and, his eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, he saw a round, wet object appear close to one of the arches of the bridge.

"Come along, Wolf! We'll have to take a hand in this," Nipper shouted.

As he turned he almost collided with the policeman.

"Hallo, Nipper—is that you? What's the matter?"

"Someone in the water," said the boy. "Quick! Let's get a boat!"

They rushed off along the shore, leaping on to one of the landing stages where a number of boats were tethered. Wolf was the first to leap into the boat, then Nipper scrambled into the stern and the constable dropped in the thwarts, grabbing at the oars.

A strong push sent the boat well out from the landing stage, and, pulling with a lusty strength, the policeman urged the boat through the water at a swift rate.

Nipper in the stern grabbed at the tiller ropes, and steered the craft towards the arches of the bridge. Suddenly, Wolf, in the bow, threw back his head, and gave vent to a low-toned wouff!

"Steady!" Nipper called, dropping the tiller ropes and rising to his feet.

The policeman backed water just in the nick of time. A round, wet head appeared close to the bow, with another by its side. The constable quickly shipped one oar, and the boat glided forward, then Nipper, leaning out, grabbing at the swimmer as he passed.

"Hang on!" he cried.

There was a gasp from the man in the water.

"Take her first," came a panting voice; and the policeman reached out and caught at the wet, sodden garment of the woman in the swimmer's arms.

She was drawn up out of the water and laid across the thwarts, where she lay still and silent, her wet face turned up towards the sky, her lips moving, little broken moans coming from them.

"That's all right," said Nipper. "In you get."

He hooked his arm beneath a pair of broad shoulders, and tugged. The rescuer came up over the side of the boat to roll into the stern along with Nipper. The constable slipped the oars out again, and the boat was rowed back to the shore.

The rescue had been carried out with an extraordinary celerity, and a few minutes later the woman and the rescuer were landed on the bank.

"I'm all right," the man said. "Don't worry about me. Look after that poor girl."

One or two casual stragglers had gathered, and presently a motor ambulance came along. The woman was placed in it, then the policeman, with a nod to Nipper, turned away.

"You will get this gentleman's name and address," he said. "I know you'll look after him all right."

The ambulance moved off and Nipper slipped out of his jacket, holding it towards the rescuer.

"Better get into this, old chap," he said. "Then we'll find a taxi and take you home."

The stranger's teeth were chattering slightly, and he was glad of the extra wrap.

"But I've got no place to go to, particularly," he said. "You needn't worry about me."

"You're coming with me, then," said Nipper, hailing a taxi that was coming along the drive.

He hustled the young fellow into the vehicle, entered close behind him with Wolf, and ordered the driver to take them to Gray's Inn Road.

CHAPTER 2.

A Call of Distress!

TWENTY minutes later they were in Nelson Lee's quiet chambers where he stayed when in London, and Nipper led his companion into his own bed-room and insisted on him changing.

He saw now that the plucky fellow was a youngster of about his own age with a pleasant, tanned face, and his speech, despite a slight northern accent, was that of an educated person.

Nipper insisted on giving his companion a rub down before the change was effected. By the time the stranger had completed his dressing Nipper had managed to slip down and have a word with the housekeeper, with the result that there was steaming hot cup of cocoa and a round of toast waiting, when they entered the quiet sitting-room.

"It was jolly lucky for that woman you were so handy," said Nipper. "What happened?"

"Oh, I was resting on a seat close to the bridge," the stranger explained. "I saw her go past. She looked half-starved and about all in. I had an idea she would do something desperate."

"But it isn't usual to be sitting about in the park so late," replied Nipper.

"I had nowhere to go," said the stranger. "Bad luck, you know."

"You're not a Londoner."

"No. I'm from the north—Grangepool. I've been in London a fortnight. I stayed at Rowton House until I couldn't afford even that. I have failed to get a job. I know no one here and can't even offer a reference as to character. I haven't much hope, you see."

Nipper studied him carefully, and there was no hint of the criminal in him at all.

"I don't want to interfere in your affairs," said Nipper. "But if you care to tell me how you came into this plight I might be able to help you. In the first place, I am a sort of detective—that is to say, I help my gov'nor. His name is Nelson Lee."

"I think I've heard of him," the stranger replied.

"The gov'nor is known all over the world," said Nipper, "not only as a detective, but as one of the best. You did a jolly plucky thing to-night, and he'll help you if he can. So will I. And anything you care to tell me will be quite confidential."

His keen, alert countenance inspired confidence in everyone. The stranger, with a glance at him, nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "I thought I would never tell my story to anyone. Still, if you wish to hear it, I'll tell it to you."

He leaned back in the chair, looking musingly into the gas fire for a few moments.

"My name is Hector Macleod," he began. "My father was once one of the most prosperous men in Grangepool. It was in the old days, when they used to send out whalers and sealers from Grangepool, and dad owned one

of the finest vessels of the lot. They still talk about the 'Seaform' in the old town. It had once been one of a fleet that had gone to the Arctic regions on an expedition."

"What happened?" Nipper put in.

"I'm not quite sure," Hector Macleod continued. "I was only about a year old when dad was ruined. From what I can make out, it was his skipper, a man named Nat Marle, who defrauded him. Marle sailed for the Seal Island, and never came back. I believe that the Seafoam made an immense catch of seals, worth a tremendous amount of money, but it never returned to Grangepool. Dad lost everything, vessel and property, and it absolutely ruined him. He died about two years later. My mother never got over it, and she soon followed dad. I hardly remember her, for I was brought up by strangers."

"Beastly rough luck!" said Nipper sympathetically.

"Oh, I was fairly well treated," said Macleod. "It was a man named James Phillips, a bank manager, who took me in. I have lived with him ever since, and when I was old enough he got me a position in the bank. He is the manager of the Grangepool branch and is quite a wealthy man for that part of the world, and trusted and respected in every way."

"And you have been employed in the bank, have you?"

Hector Macleod clenched his fists and turned towards his companion.

"I see what's at the back of your mind," he went on. "You think I have done something dishonest, but it's not true. All I have been guilty of is falling in love with Ruth Phillips, the daughter of my employer. At first her father did not object. In fact, he seemed to encourage it. But about three months ago a big change came over him. He suddenly seemed to hate me, and he did his best to drive me out of Grangepool. I was not living in his house then. I had found lodgings for myself. But I used to see Ruth every day, and about a month ago her father told me that I was not to see her again. I asked him why, but he would give no reason. He urged me to get another situation, and I refused to do so. At last it came to an open row, and he trumped up a false charge of insolence against me, and sacked me."

"He wouldn't give you a character, then?"

"I wouldn't ask him for one," said Hector. "He treated me so badly that I would not be indebted to him for a thing! As it is, I owe him a lot, for he brought me up; but I'll pay it back some day. Though I doubt if I'll get much chance. I am twenty-one, and who will employ me without a reference?"

He stretched his arms above his head. Then his face changed, and a quiet smile crossed it.

"That's really the whole of my story," said Macleod. "It's not a very exciting one, is it?"

He hesitated for a moment, then suddenly rose to his feet.

"There is something else," he said. "I received a letter from Ruth a week ago. I wrote to her from the Rowton House I was staying at, and she answered me. There is something in her letter I can't quite understand."

"Have you got it with you?"

"It's in my other clothes," said Hector.

He left the room and returned a few moments later with a sodden pocket-book in his hand, out of which he drew a bulky envelope. The envelope was grimed, and the letter inside gave many indications that it had been read and re-read over and over again.

Hector glanced at the letter for a moment, then, with a slight flush, removed the first two pages.

"They—they really concern me," he said.

Nipper half smiled to himself, for he understood perfectly.

"You can read the others," Hector went on, handing the rest of the letter over.

The handwriting was neat and clear, obviously feminine. It ran as follows:

"Dad seems to be getting worse. He hardly ever stirs out of the house now, and he spends long hours alone at night walking up and down his room. I am sure that he has something on his mind, and his changed appearance frightens me. Last Sunday he dropped asleep in his chair, in the study, and I went in with a cup of tea. I didn't dare wake him, and while I stood there he began to speak in his sleep. I do not remember all he said, but it was something about 'prison gates opening and the dead past returning.'

"Have you ever heard of a place called Salcoth Island, dear? Dad mentioned that name twice, and something about a secret it contained. It is all very dreadful, Hector, and I miss you so much! I am almost afraid to live in the house with dad now! You ought not to have left Grangepool, for I miss you dreadfully."

THE rest of the letter was obviously private, and Nipper only glanced at it before he returned the sheets.

"Where is Salcoth Island?" he asked.

Hector shook his head.

"I don't know," he returned. "Never heard of the place."

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the hour of two, and Nipper arose with a start.

"Well, we've had enough jawing for one night, I think," he said. "The gov'nor is away, and will not be back for a couple of days. He's gone down to see a friend of his, the governor of Laidstone Prison. His room is empty, so you might as well use it."

Hector protested, but Nipper bundled his guest into Nelson Lee's cosy room, and waited there until he saw Macleod safely between the sheets. When Nipper found himself in his own bed-room again, he began to undress slowly.

"I wonder what's at the back of all this?" the lad mused. "That chap isn't the sort of fellow that a man would turn away without a cause. I believe he's as straight as a die, too, and if anyone is in the wrong it's the other party. I might as well look into things a bit. It'll be something to do until the gov'nor comes back."

On the following morning, after breakfast, Nipper took Hector Macleod's affairs in hand.

"You might as well go down to your Rowton House first," he said. "There might be a letter waiting for you."

"I had thought of that possibility," Hector admitted.

They went off to the Rowton House which was situated in Hammersmith. There was a letter waiting for Hector, with the postmark dated six days previous. As soon as he had broken the seal and read the contents, Hector turned to Nipper.

"There—there's trouble at Grangepool," he broke out. "I think I—I shall have to go back."

"What is it?"

"Ruth's father has vanished," said Hector. "But, here! Read the letter!"

It was written in a trembling hand, and was very short.

"Dear Hector,—You must come back at once! Dad has gone and I am at my wits' ends to know what to do. He came home on Tuesday night as usual and had dinner with me. He seemed to be in a better humour, but the nine o'clock post brought him a letter which altered everything. He went out at ten o'clock, and has never been seen since. I found the enclosed letter in his study, and send it on to you, for you are the only one I can trust, now. Do come back at once!"

There was another note enclosed, and as Nipper glanced at the heading his eyes lit up suddenly, for it was the official paper which the prison authorities issue to convicts in their charge.

It was headed "Laidstone Prison," and ran as follows:

"Dear Sir,—The man from Salcoth Island will be calling on you by the end of the month. He hopes to hear good news.

"No. 72,053—JOSEPH SMITH."

"That's funny!" Nipper broke out. "Laidstone Prison! Why, that's where the gov'nor has been staying for a few days."

They looked at each other in silence.

"I can't make head nor tail of it," said Macleod, "but I think I shall have to go back to Grangepool. I can walk it in ten days."

Nipper burst into a laugh and caught at Macleod's arm.

"What a waste of time!" he exclaimed. "You come along with me now. I'll advance you the fare and a bit over besides. And if you say a word against it, I'll punch you on the nose!"

This threat brought smiles to Hector's face, and he held out his hand.

"You're a brick, Nipper!" he said. "I met a friend indeed when I met you, but some day I shall make it up to you all right!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Secret of the Past!

A DEEP-TONED bell was rolling out its steady summons, the long notes echoing and re-echoing over the great expanse of moorland, and along the roadways and cart-tracks little squads of men were marching like so many gangs of ants heading for the nest.



They were the convicts returning at nightfall to Laidstone Prison. The grey bulk of the gaol stood stark, isolate and remote, on the edge of a long, rolling, Yorkshire plain.

The grey gate of the prison was open, and two armed warders stood, one on either side, watching the gangs of convicts as they came striding through. They filed on through the half-mist like vague shadows, passing into the yard and wheeling to right or left into the great, gloomy buildings.

Close to the gates of the prison there stood a low-roofed structure, and at one of the windows a man was standing, watching the gangs file in. He was dressed in the prison clothes, and on his under-sized, shrivelled body the loose-fitting garments hung in a shapeless manner. His appearance was extraordinary—a large, dome-shaped forehead, thick, beetling brows, beneath which two black eyes shone. There was a suggestion of vulture in the visage—the small, pointed chin, the hooked nose, and the thin, cruel lips.

His head was craning forward as he stared at the groups of convicts as they passed.

Presently there came swinging in through the gate another gang. The man at the window peered out, and his eyes rested on a massive figure marching in the front rank. A giant of a man he was in his convict clothes, with bull-like throat, strong, merciless countenance.

Just for a moment the huge figure turned its head towards the low-roofed building. Raising a claw-like hand, the man behind the window tapped on the pane. The tall

convict nodded a quick return to the signal; then the gang passed on, and the man at the window turned his head and glanced into the interior of the long chamber.

It was the hospital of the prison. On either side were arranged long rows of narrow cots. At one end of the ward was a cubicle marked "Dispensary," and a fire was glowing at the top.

At that moment there was only one other man in the ward. He was lying on the cot nearest the fire, and as the wizened little man came closer, the patient stirred uneasily and raised his head.

"That you, matcy? My head's bad. Give me summat!"

"It's against orders," replied the other. "But I'll do it."

"You're a good 'un—better than the doctor here. He don't know nothing, he don't." The patient laughed weakly. "Anyone can see how he looks up to you in this sort of game," he went on.

The attendant shrugged his shoulders.

"The doctor is in rather a difficult position," he replied. "Years ago he was a student in the hospital of which I was the head."

The man on the bed gave vent to a chuckling laugh.

"Blow me, that's funny, that is! Thought there was summat like that in it," he said. Then a sudden idea occurred to him. "But what about me?" he asked. "You ought to know. Shall I get better?"

The vulture face twitched for a moment.

"If you want to know the truth, my friend," the attendant returned, "you are going to die."

The feeble hand gripped the attendant's arm.

"But I tell you I must not die—I ain't going to die! They were goin' to let me out, they were. I only 'ad another two or three days to go; then—then—" The voice broke off into a wailing cry. "How long—how long d'you give me to—to live?"

"You may last another day," came the reply. "Certainly not longer."

The figure dropped back on the bed and tossed to and fro, the chest rising and falling, thin, broken sobs coming from between the parted lips. The attendant sat down on the side of the cot and looked at the huddled figure.

Read . . .

"SHADOWS OF DOOM!"

A BRILLIANT NEW DETECTIVE-THRILLER

of dramatic adventure and sinister mystery, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper . . . in next week's issue.

"I think you ought to be glad to die. You're a lifer."

"No, no; I heard they was going to let me out for good conduct. I was expecting to go this month, and I—I was looking forward to—to revenge!"

A sudden change came over the patient. The weak, childish expression on his face died away, and he turned towards his companion.

"Twenty years ago I did a man a bad turn," he said. "And I didn't reap any benefit out of it, either. It seems to me now that someone else has reaped that benefit, and I want to put things square."

The sunken eyes were fixed on Zenn's face.

"There's a matter of twenty thousand pounds in this," the dying man went on, "and that's a big sum of money."

"What is your story?" asked Zenn.



The bank manager reached the end of the sea wall and, measuring his distance, dived clean into the black, swirling water below . . .

"What's your name?" he asked. "Tell me. It may be worth your while!"

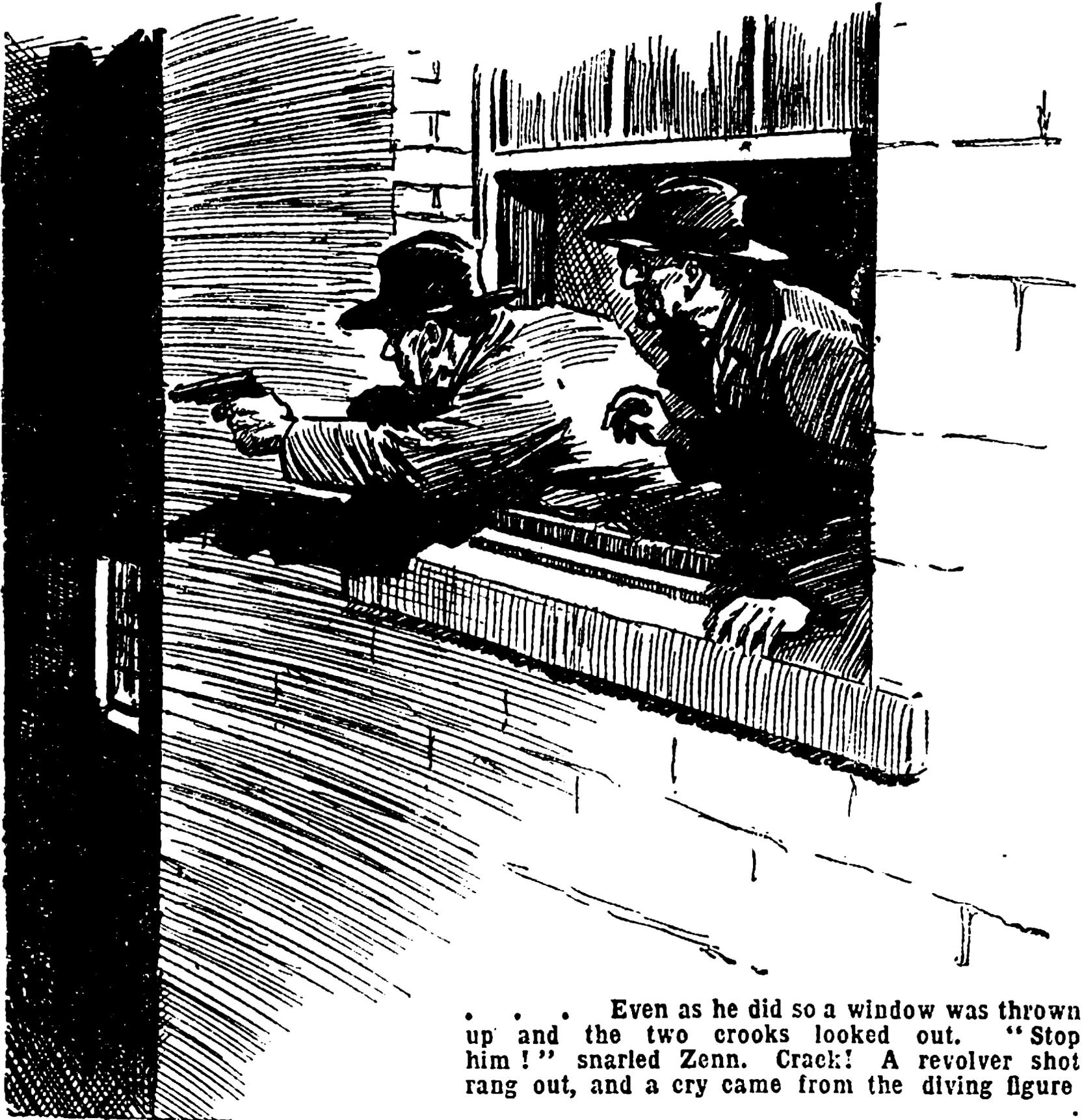
The vulture-like man leaned forward slightly.

"In London I was known as Doctor Zenn," he said. "But I doubt very much if you have ever heard of me, my friend. You have been in prison nearly twenty years, and that's a long time."

There was another silence, then the man on the cot turned his head again.

"In here I am known as Joseph Smith, but my right name is Nat Marle. Years ago I held a master's certificate, and I was captain of a sealer that sailed from Grangepool. The Seafoam was her name, and she was just as stout a boat as ever tackled the Arctic Seas."

"Well, one season I was in charge o' the Seafoam, and we struck it rich, we did. Inside of a month we was absolutely packed up wi' pelts, the best haul that a sealer ever made. It was when we were just about to start for home that the thought came to me



Even as he did so a window was thrown up and the two crooks looked out. "Stop him!" snarled Zenn. Crack! A revolver shot rang out, and a cry came from the diving figure

of all the money that was down there in the hold. I knew I could find a free market for the goods anywhere, and I went for'ard and talked it over with the men. They was all agreeable, and, to cut a long story short, I sold the Seafoam and its cargo to an American skipper. I gave a fair share to the crew and kept the rest for myself, and that was the best part of twenty thousand pounds."

"What did you do then?"

"I went back to Grangepool," the patient went on. "I'd grown a beard and wore specs, so nobody recognised me. I slipped into a bank there, and deposited the twenty thousand with the manager. His name was James Phillips. He gave me a receipt for the money, and I cleared out o' Grangepool that same night."

"I did another voyage, and this time went to the Russian parts. There's an island called Salcoth, and on it there's a hut where a half-caste Eskimo always lives, year in and year out. I had the Seafoam's papers and the deposit note with me, and just to make things sure I left them in the hut. They are in a little steel box buried in the floor."

"Yes, go on."

"I was unlucky that trip. Two days before we got back to England there was a row on board, and in the fight the first mate was killed. I struck the blow, but I never meant to kill him. Anyhow, I was collared, and had to think meself lucky I wasn't hanged. I got a life sentence."

"And this James Phillips—did he know at the time?"

"Yes. I wrote to him twice while I was waiting for trial, but he never answered my letters. I might have got off if I'd had more money and could have hired the proper lawyer chaps. But James Phillips, the manager of the Grangepool and District Bank, never answered my letters, although I saw him in the court."

"Then he knows you're a lifer. What has he done with the money?"

"Stuck to it, I'll swear," came the hoarse whisper. "It really belonged to my owner, Malcolm Macleod. I swindled him out of it, and it practically ruined him. Phillips knew who I was all the time, but he kept that to himself. He stuck to the twenty

thousand pounds, and all these years I've waited."

"What were you going to do?"

"I wrote him only a few days ago—last Tuesday," came the grim reply. "I'd heard they were going to let me out soon, and I warned Phillips that I was on his track. Then this thing happened, and you tell me I'm going to die."

Zenn was looking at the man intently.

"Yes, you're going to die," he said. "Not even I can save you."

"I—I must put things straight," the man on the bed murmured. "I know that Malcolm Macleod had a boy—a baby he was when I left. The money ought to be his. I'd like to give it back to him. Couldn't I manage that, if I was to tell the governor—couldn't he arrange it for me?"

Into the black eyes of the attendant there leapt a sudden malicious light. The story he had heard had caught at his keen intellect. Already Zenn had planned one great move, and now the news that Marle had given him made his scheme take another shape.

"I think I will tell the governor. He would arrange it."

The man on the cot was talking half to himself, and Zenn rose to his feet, glaring down at the patient.

"Do you hear me, matey?" Marle's voice rang out. "Tell the doctor that I want to see the governor. He'll be coming round presently."

It seemed as though Marle, now that he had reached the end of his wasted life, was desirous of making restitution. It was certainly a belated penitence, but it was obvious from the anxiety in the voice that it was sincere enough.

"All right, I'll tell him."

Zenn slipped away from the cot and shuffled down towards the dispensary. He disappeared inside, and as soon as the door closed behind him his slothful manner vanished. He darted across to where a number of bottles stood on a shelf, and with quick, certain fingers, took out one or two phials.

Bending down, Zenn picked up a piece of cotton wool. He had measured out several drops of the fluids from the various bottles into a test tube, then, lighting a spirit lamp, he held the test tube in the blue flame. The liquid in the tube began to splutter, and from it there came up a yellow, pungent smoke.

Zenn held the cotton wool in the smoke for a few moments, then, extinguishing the flame, he emptied the test tube into the sink and rinsed it out. He had just completed his task when the clock began to chime the hour of six. He hurried out of the little cubicle and walked towards the cot.

The sound of voices came to his ears, and he recognised the clear one of the surgeon. Darting to the bedside, Zenn lunged forward suddenly and placed the cotton wool over the patient's mouth and nostrils. There

was a feeble struggle, a choking gasp or two, then the heavy figure of Marle went limp and his hands relaxed, falling to his sides.

Zenn withdrew the cotton wool, and, keeping it at arm's length, ran to the fireplace, dropping it in the flames. There spurted up yellow light for a moment, then the wadding was consumed.

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CHAPTER 4.

Bitter Blood!

HARDLY had the flames died away than the door at the end of the ward opened, and Zenn saw the surgeon appear. He was accompanied by a man in quiet blue serge. They came up the ward together, and Zenn, leaning in the shadows of the fireplace, watched them. The surgeon bent over the patient. Marle was breathing thickly, heavily, with an ominous rattle in his throat.

"Orderly!"

There was a certain deference in the surgeon's voice as he called. Zenn's misshapen figure straightened up, and he came forward slowly to the side of the cot. The surgeon pointed to the patient.

"I think he's nearly finished, don't you?"

The vulture-like man leaned forward and pretended to examine the convict on the bed. The lips were parted and the breath was coming and going in thin gasps.

"He may linger for an hour or two," said Zenn, "but I don't think he will recover consciousness."

At the sound of his voice the man who had been standing beside the surgeon started slightly and took a pace forward. Zenn, still bending over his patient, turned his bird-like face and looked up. Into the hawk-like eyes there flashed for a moment a look of utter hatred, which was answered by a stare from the steel-blue ones above him.

"You have met this—this man before, then?" said the surgeon, turning to his companion.

The clean-shaven face was set and grim.

"Yes," said Nelson Lec, "I have met him before."

Zenn had moved away from the cot now, and was standing in a sullen attitude at the window.

"All right, orderly. You had better call me when any change takes place."

Zenn bowed with a quick, sardonic smile, and the surgeon turned away, pacing off down the ward, accompanied by Lec.

"An extraordinary man, that," said the doctor. "I have no doubt he is a criminal, but, well—he was one of the cleverest physicians in London."

"I know Dr. Zenn very well," said Blake with a grim smile. "In fact, I, personally, am responsible for his present position. He was a clever doctor; but he was also a clever criminal, and the world is the better for his absence." He looked at the prison surgeon.

"Personally," he added, "I would not trust him in there."

"Oh, but what harm can he do?" the surgeon asked. "He is very useful in the ward, and he certainly would be no good outside. He is physically unfitted for the hard work on the moors, but his long hospital experience makes him valuable where he is now."

"Perhaps so," said the detective. "Still, I wouldn't trust him."

They made their way across the wide yard, and, from the window of the hospital, Zenn watched them go. His claw-like hands were folded until the knuckles gleamed dully through the white flesh.

"Lee!" he murmured beneath his breath. "He turns up again, just when I have practically completed my plans!"

His eyes fell on the man on the cot, and he laughed sullenly.

"That was a near thing," he muttered. "Had you spoken, it would have spoilt everything. As it is, I made you dumb—in the nick of time!"

In the governor's house that evening Nelson Lee sat down to his last meal there. At about nine o'clock the surgeon joined them, and, before seating himself, he made his report.

"Convict No. 72,053 is dying, sir," he said. "I thought the poor beggar was doomed."

"Yes. It's hard lines on him," the governor returned. "He was a good-conduct man, and was going to be released very soon."

"Is that the man I saw in the hospital this evening?" Lee asked.

"Yes," the surgeon replied. "Mr. Lee doesn't like the idea of Zenn being in the hospital, sir," he said to the governor. "He doesn't trust him."

The head of the prison, a blonde giant, laughed.

"There are two of Mr. Lee's particular enemies in Laidstone just now, doctor," he said. "The man Zenn and that huge fellow who is a recent arrival, No. 24,750. In the outer world he was known as Count Ivor Otho."

"I don't think I know him," said the surgeon. "At least, he has never come under my care."

"I'm not surprised," said Lee, laughing. "Ivor Otho is hardly the man to be put in a hospital ward. He's as strong as a bull."

The governor puffed at his cigar.

"Yes, doctor. Mr. Lee has been trying to make me feel anxious. He doesn't like the idea of those two men being under the same roof, but I think I can trust my staff to keep their eyes on them."

"I hope so, certainly," said Lee quietly, "for, in my opinion, those two are the most dangerous criminals in the world."

"You can leave 'em to me, Lee, my dear chap," said the governor. "Otho and Zenn are in Laidstone, and here they'll stop. We don't have the mists and fogs they have at Dartmoor, you know. It is impossible to

escape by night or day from Laidstone. There has been only one attempt in ten years, and he was shot before he got a hundred yards."

He laughed—a rollicking, jovial sound.

"In fact," he added, "I can assure you that everything is just as it should be at Laidstone, and if Otho and Zenn can escape from here, then they will have to do so by some superhuman method."

WHEN Lee entered the train that evening at the quiet railway-station he had a foreboding in his heart that he could not quieten. He leaned out of the carriage window to catch a last glimpse of the huge pile of Laidstone Prison.

"There is something in the wind," he told himself. "Zenn is plotting. I'm sure of it. I saw fear in his eyes when he looked up at me, and that could only have been inspired by one thing. He must have some scheme afoot, and I am the only man who has ever checked him. Jove, I'd give anything to prevent him getting into the world again! The man is ruthless and merciless, and behind prison walls is the only place for him."

CHAPTER 5.

The Vulture!

AT about nine o'clock in the morning of the day following Lee's visit to Laidstone Prison, the bell in the chapel began to toll, and its mournful notes came to the ears of the gang working on the lonely moor.

There were only a few chimes, then silence, but the hard-featured men glanced at each other and the whisper passed round:

"No. 72,053 is dead!"

No. 10 gang, the one in which Count Ivor Otho worked, was engaged in making a road—a broad smooth track from the main highway to the prison. Otho was one of the barrow-men, and the strength of the convict was visible in the way in which he handled the heavy loads on the barrow.

He worked, as a rule, in a sullen, aloof silence, and, as the warders observed, even the men in his own gang seemed to treat him as a superior being.

That morning, however, as the bell tolled in the chapel, a glint came into Otho's eyes, and for the rest of the day he seemed as though he had found a new strength. He was indefatigable, and the grim-jowled warder in charge of the gang spoke to him at last.

"You needn't overdo it," the man said. "You'll kill yourself if you go on at that rate."

The warder had meant the remark kindly enough, but there was a sardonic smile on Otho's face.

"It pleases me to work hard," he said.

At dusk, when the work was over for the day, the gang fell in to be marched back to the prison. Otho placed himself, as usual, in the leading file, the warder gave the gruff word of command, and the gang began to trudge wearily towards the prison gates.

Just as they entered Otho shot a quick glance to the right. The door of the hospital was open, and standing in it was the wizened figure of Zenn. An imperceptible signal passed between the two; then Zenn nodded towards a rough gravel path.

There was a round, white pebble lying directly in Otho's track. The big convict stumbled, apparently tripped, and fell on his face. The gang came to a halt, and the warder whipped round with an angry word. He was just in time to see Otho pick himself to his feet again. There was a faint trickle of blood on the man's cheek, and the warder stepped up to him.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I came over faint," replied Otho. "I'm all right, now."

The warder looked at him doubtfully, but Otho straightened his shoulders.

"All right!" he repeated, and, apparently satisfied, the warder marched the gang on up the yard and into the prison.

Before the men were dismissed to their cells they were searched as usual, but this was a somewhat perfunctory ordeal. Otho, with a little white pebble in his mouth, did not allow a muscle to relax as the warder ran his hands over the convict's clothes.

The gang was marched up to the second floor and along the iron corridor. Otho's cell was an end one, and he passed into it, while the door clanged behind him. Stepping over to the hard wooden bed, the master criminal seated himself on it, then extracted the pebble from between his lips, and looked at it.

To an ordinary observer it appeared just a common piece of flint, with the usual

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coating of chalk. Otho began to scrape the chalk away with his fingers until at last he had a heap of white powder, just about as much as would cover a sixpence, in the palm of his hand.

He placed the powder carefully on one side, then thrust the bit of flint into a corner of his cell. Half an hour later the clang of a heavy handle indicated that the final meal of the day was being brought round. Otho leapt to his feet, and scraped the white powder into his hand, glancing at it for a moment.

"I must risk it," he muttered. "Zenn is no fool. Here goes!"

A moment later the powder was placed on his tongue, and swallowed. Otho sat upright in his cell waiting.

A sudden icy thrill ran through his bones, from head to toe; he felt the cell swing round, and, staggering to the door, he beat on it with clenched fists. A half-strangled cry came from his lips that carried to the ears of the warder in the passage. The man came hurrying down, and opened the door of the cell.

Otho was lying on his face, his fists clenched, his eyes closed. For a moment the warder thought the convict was dead. He dropped on one knee and leaned forward. Heavy laboured breathing came to him, and he leapt to his feet again.

Four minutes later a couple of convicts, carrying a creaking stretcher, came swinging across the yard and entered the hospital ward. Otho's heavy body was lifted on to one of the cots, and the surgeon was hastily summoned. The unconscious man's appearance suggested a touch of apoplexy, and Zenn, standing on the other side of the cot, nodded his head as the surgeon gave his verdict.

"It's only a temporary collapse," the doctor said. "To whose gang does he belong?"

"To mine, sir," said the warder.

"Has he been taken like this before?"

"No, sir; but he was working rather hard to-day. In fact, I told him not to overdo it. Then he had a bit of a collapse as he entered the gates."

"Oh, well; that's all right. Twenty-four hours will see him on his feet again."

The doctor wrote out a prescription and handed it to Zenn, who took the paper without a word. During the two years that Zenn had served in that prison he had been of exemplary character, and, little by little, the young medical officer had commenced to trust the man.

"You know what to do, orderly," the surgeon said, as he turned away. "Let me know if he gets worse."

He left the hospital, followed by the warder. As soon as they were gone a swift change came over Zenn's attitude. His meek attitude vanished, and he darted up the ward into the dispensary, returning a moment later with a tiny glass of amber-coloured liquid.

Raising Otho's head, he poured the liquid between the lips, then held him steady for a moment. There was a tremor and a movement from the massive convict, and Otho opened his eyes, staring round him dazedly for a moment. Gradually his eyes fixed themselves on Zenn's face, and dawning intelligence entered them.

"All right, my friend," said Zenn. "We arranged that very nicely."

"I thought you—you'd tricked me," Otho broke out. "That drug was lightning-like in its effect."

"I meant it to be," said Zenn, with a sardonic smile. "Our worthy doctor felt sure that it was apoplexy. You're safe for twenty-four hours. Get up!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Escape!

Otho swung himself round and stood up. He staggered at first, but gradually his reeling brain righted itself.

"Wonderful!" he said. "I feel as fit as ever."

"The antidote was as strong as the drug," said Zenn. "Besides, I want you to have all your strength. You'll need it. Now listen to me. Smith died last night. He told me his story and wanted to tell the governor, but I objected. He accordingly became unconscious and remained so to the end. Otherwise, what I want to do would have become impossible."

Very briefly Zenn told Otho the strange history that the man Marle had revealed to him. Suddenly, Zenn rose to his feet.

"I have made my plans. I wanted a man like you to help me," he went on. "You are very like Marle, and with very little alteration I can make you to resemble him exactly. Anyhow, this bank manager, Phillips, has already been warned that Marle was coming back for his money. I think that Phillips must have stuck to the money, but even if he hasn't it doesn't matter. In a hut on Salcoth Island there is hidden the ship's papers of the Seafoam, and also the deposit note given to Marle by Phillips twenty years ago. When we escape from here we will go to Grangepool first and tackle Phillips. Then the twenty thousand pounds will be ours."

He threw back his head and laughed, his yellow teeth gleaming.

"Yes, it sounds good," returned Otho. "Twenty thousand is a nice sum to start business again. But how are we to escape?"

"I have arranged that," said Zenn. "We escape to-night. At about nine o'clock this evening the big laundry van comes to take away the dirty linen. It's a motor-van. He calls here last. I have usually a couple of baskets for him. Of course, there's a warder, but he waits outside watching the van. The vanman comes in here, takes the baskets

out, puts them into the van and drives off. I'll show you what I mean to do."

He led the way down the ward into an ante-room. There were a couple of huge laundry baskets standing in one corner. Zenn raised the lid of one, revealing the fact that it was full of soiled linen. Then he stepped on to the other and opened it. It was empty.

A moment later the doctor had stepped into the basket and dropped the lid over him. His small frame was easily concealed in the capacious basket. Presently he pushed up the lid and stepped out.

"Now for details," he said. "But we must talk softly."

He drew Otho over to the fireplace and spoke to him rapidly, in whispers. Eventually, he stepped back and surveyed his partner.

"What d'you think of that?" he asked.

"It has every chance of success," the count returned.

It was ten minutes past nine before the heavily-laden laundry-van, having completed its round of the dismal prison, came to a halt outside the door of the waiting-room of the hospital. There was a warder in attendance, who was anxious to get the job done. The van-man alighted and stepped up to the door and turned the knob. He entered the ante-room to find Zenn waiting for him.

"How many to-night?" the man asked.

Zenn pointed to the two baskets, and the laundryman, a hefty fellow, tilted one of them up, and swinging it on to his broad shoulder, stalked through the doorway to his van. He slid the basket into its place, pushing it well into the interior, so as to leave room for the second one.

Zenn had stepped aside as the man left the room, and from his pocket the criminal drew out a small tube. There was a plunger at the end of the tube, fully drawn. Zenn, leaning against the wall, waited.

The vanman entered again, and as he passed through the door Zenn slid his foot forward and pushed the door to. It swung noiselessly into place, and the vanman was just leaning over the second basket as Zenn turned. A few catlike strides brought the doctor close to the man. The tube was aimed and, with a quick thrust of his palm, Zenn pressed the plunger forward. A little, feathery spume of yellow smoke shot out from the tube, enveloping the head of the vanman. There was a choking gasp, the man's hold relaxed, and he rolled over on to the basket, then to the floor.

"Quick, Otho!"

The door leading to the ward opened, and Otho leapt through it. Zenn was already bending over the inanimate form, tugging at the buttons of his coat. In a few moments Otho had dressed himself in the long overcoat, and had drawn the peaked cap down over his eyes.

"Lift him up! Come along!"

Zenn reached for the man's feet, and Otho took the shoulders. Then, at a run, they carried the unconscious laundryman into the

ward, and laid him on the cot that Otho had recently vacated, drawing the sheet over his head. They rushed for the small room again, and Zenn leapt into the basket, drawing the lid down, while Otho turned the key in the little padlock.

A moment later the powerful criminal had slung the heavy basket on to his shoulder, and was stalking out through the door. He went round to the back of the van, placing the basket on the tilt and pushing it into the interior. Then, leisurely he raised the tilt, adjusting it into its place and lowering the flap of the canvas.

"All right, now?" asked the warder, anxious to be gone.

"Yes," Otho returned, with a nod of his head as he made towards the front of the motor.

The engine of the lorry was running, so all that Otho had to do was to take his seat at the wheel, and slip in the clutch, and the heavy van lumbered slowly forward, out through the prison gates, and turning to the left sped off down the road. Otho heard the clang of the iron gates as they closed behind him, and he drove at a furious pace.

For seven miles he held on his way; then, coming to a halt at a lonely part of the road he leapt from his seat and went round to the rear of the van.

He lowered the back, then, clambering inside the vehicle, he unloosed the padlock and lifted the lid of one of the baskets. Zenn arose up like a goblin, and he was bathed with perspiration.

"How far have you come?" he asked.

"About seven miles," said Otho.

Zenn stepped out of the basket and turned towards the other one that had been taken from the hospital. With a quick wrench he undid the lock and lifted the lid. Then, rummaging through the soiled linen, he produced a couple of bundles of clothes.

"Where did you get these?" Otho asked, with surprise.

"One suit belongs to the governor of Laidstone, and the other to my friend the doctor," said Zenn grimly. "I cleaned some of their clothes with a preparation of my own invention, and they were so pleased they sent me these suits for cleaning. They will come in handy. We'd better change now."

A few moments later they had discarded their prison clothes for the civilian suits. They clambered aboard the van again and drove on for some distance at a terrific speed until they came to a bridge, with a low parapet, that spanned a deep river. Here Zenn called a halt and alighted.

"Could you fix it so that the van will go over into the river?" he asked.

A deep laugh broke from Otho's lips.

"Yes, I can manage it."

He set the van in motion and steered deliberately for the parapet. He hung on to the wheel until the front of the bonnet was only a yard away from the low parapet, then, opening the throttle to the full extent, he leapt for safety.

The lorry went butting at the parapet full tilt. There was a crash and a jar, then the low wall gave way, and the heavy vehicle went hurtling into the stream below.

Zenn was leaning over the edge of the parapet farther along, and he nodded in grim approval of what he saw.

"I am hoping they will think we met our deaths there," he said.

"I hope they will," agreed Otho, with a laugh. "It will give us a clear run."

They went on across the bridge, trudging along the dark roadway until they reached a point where the road splayed out into three different tracks.

"We will go north," said Zenn. "Grangepool lies north, and that is our happy hunting ground for the moment."

Side by side in the darkness they went on, to vanish at last into the silence of the night.

Half way through the tea the electric-bell on the front door whirred, and a few minutes later a trim servant entered, bearing a silver salver.

"Doctor Kay," Ruth read, glancing at the card. "What does he want, Mary? Who is he?"

"I don't know, Miss Ruth," the maid replied. "The gentleman said he wanted to see Mr. Phillips. I told him he was not at home, but that you were in, and he said he would like to have a few words with you."

"I think you had better see him in here, dear," said Hector.

Ruth turned and nodded to the girl, and a few moments later the door of the drawing-room opened again and two men entered. They were Doctor Zenn and Count Ivor Otho. Zenn was dressed in a well-made lounge suit, and was wearing a pair of dark

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CHAPTER 7.

Sinister Visitors!

GRANGEPOOL is a seaport town with a splendid history, but much of its glory has gone. The vast fleet of whalers and sealers no more sail from its harbour, and it depends on the coal trade alone, the grimy vessels sailing for all parts of the world.

The house of James Phillips was in the newer portion of the town—a handsome red-brick structure, standing in its own grounds.

One afternoon, about two days following the escape of Otho and Zenn from Laidstone Prison, Hector Macleod was seated in the drawing-room of the house, while Ruth Phillips poured out tea. She was a striking beautiful girl, tall and slender. But now there was an anxious expression in her eyes.

"You haven't heard anything, I suppose?" she began.

"Not a word! I've been down to the bank again this morning and made inquiries. Fortunately they haven't missed him yet. The note that he sent has made everything all right for the time being."

James Phillips, the manager of the bank, had disappeared, but his firm did not know it. At first Ruth had had a vague fear that all might not be well with the bank, but the officials there, beyond a few courteous inquiries, had not troubled about their manager, chiefly because a letter had been slipped in the letter-box on the Tuesday night, in Phillips' handwriting, which had stated that urgent private business was calling him away and he might be absent for some time.

glasses. He had made but very little attempt to disguise himself, for his features were not of the type that could be easily altered.

The man behind him, however, would hardly have been recognised as the huge convict who had marched at the head of Gang 10. Zenn's disguising of Count Ivor Otho was a masterpiece. The hair had been tinted to a slight iron grey at the temples; the hawk nose had been broadened, the eyebrows altered, for they were now heavy and drooping. Zenn had studied the face of the man Marle, and Otho's face was now almost an exact duplicate.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Phillips," said Zenn in his chirping voice. "I hope I do not disturb you. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Free."

Otho bowed, and the girl indicated two chairs.

"Please be seated," she said. "I understand you have called to see my father. He is not at home just now." Then, turning towards Hector, she introduced him. "This is Mr. Hector Macleod."

It might have been imagination on Hector's part, but he fancied that Zenn started slightly, and the thin face was turned in his direction, while a pair of hard eyes peered at him from behind the smoked glasses.

"Mr. Hector Macleod?" Zenn repeated. "Are you any relation to Mr. Malcolm Macleod?"

"I am his son. Did you know my father?"

"I never met him," said Zenn slowly, "but I have heard about him. He was a well-known man in Grangepool once, I believe?"

Zenn's lips twitched for a moment. To him there was a certain grim humour in this

meeting, for here was the boy who, if Marie's story was correct, had been defrauded out of the very money that Zenn and Otho were now seeking.

"And your father, Miss Phillips," Zenn went on. "I understood you to say he is not at home. Will he be back soon?"

"I don't know," the girl replied cautiously. "He has been called away on very important business, and I don't know when he'll be back."

"When did he go?"

"He left Grangepool last Tuesday week," said Ruth.

Otho and the doctor exchanged glances. So far they had had no proof of the truth of Marie's statement, but now the fact of Phillips' sudden flight seemed to indicate that the dying convict's story was true enough.

"Oh, well, in that case, we might as well go," said Zenn, rising to his feet. "Our business was not very important, and can wait."

He bowed politely to Ruth, an action followed by Otho; then, after a nod to Hector Macleod, Zenn and his companion left the drawing-room.

"I wonder what the dickens they are after here?" said Hector eventually. "They are not Grangepool men, although they seemed to know about my father."

"Yes, so they did. That was rather strange, wasn't it?"

"I can't make it out," Hector went on. "Dad was well known in Grangepool, but he has been dead some time now. Why should two strangers know about him?"

It was certainly rather curious that these two men should have known of his father, and after he left the house and made his way back to his humble lodgings, Hector found his brain returning to that question again and again.

"They were evil-looking beggars," Hector thought. "Of course, they were polite enough, but, gosh, I think that what they are is stamped on their faces clearly enough! The big fellow looked like an ex-convict. Gosh!"

A sudden inspiration had flashed into his mind. He remembered the mysterious message that Phillips had received, the letter that Ruth had sent on to him whilst in London.

"Can it be possible?" the lad thought. "Gosh, I think I'm right! They are in search of Ruth's father, and he is hiding from them!"

He made up his mind that he would call on Ruth the following morning and let her know his suspicions. It would have been wiser had he gone back the same night, but he did not want to be seen at Phillip's house too often.

The servants knew that there had been a quarrel between Hector and Mr. Phillips, and he did not want them to think that he was taking advantage of the owner's absence. Yet it would have been better had he pocketed his pride that evening. For about ten o'clock, Ruth, seated in her father's study, heard the

clatter of the letter-box, followed by a double knock on the door.

She knew that the servants had retired for the night, and, rising to her feet, she went into the hall. In the letter box she could see the outlines of an envelope, and she hurried to the door and opened it. There was no one in the porch, and, although she went to the top of the steps and looked down the avenue, she found it was quite deserted.

The girl went into the hall again, and, closing the front door, she opened the letter-box and withdrew the envelope. It was thumb-marked and dirty, but the handwriting brought a quick thrill into the girl's heart. It was that of her father's!

Standing in the dim light of the hall, she hurriedly tore the envelope open and drew out the sheet of paper.

"My dear Ruth"—the letter ran—"I want you to open the second drawer of my desk and take out a notebook and a bundle of notes that you will find there.

"Do not let a single soul know that you have heard from me. I am in great danger, and have to leave Grangepool at once. I am staying at present at 23a, Ravells Alley. If you take a tram down to the Old Town and get off at the terminus, Ravells Alley is the third turning on the right. No. 23a is quite close to the docks. It's a very low neighbourhood, but I don't think there is any fear of you being molested. Anyhow, you are a brave girl, and I know you will help your father. Bring me the money and notebook to-night. As soon as you have read this letter destroy it."

Ruth crushed the paper in her fist and looked about her. Her face was bloodless, and in her eyes the gathering fear had deepened.

"Second drawer in the desk," she repeated. "I must go and get the things at once."

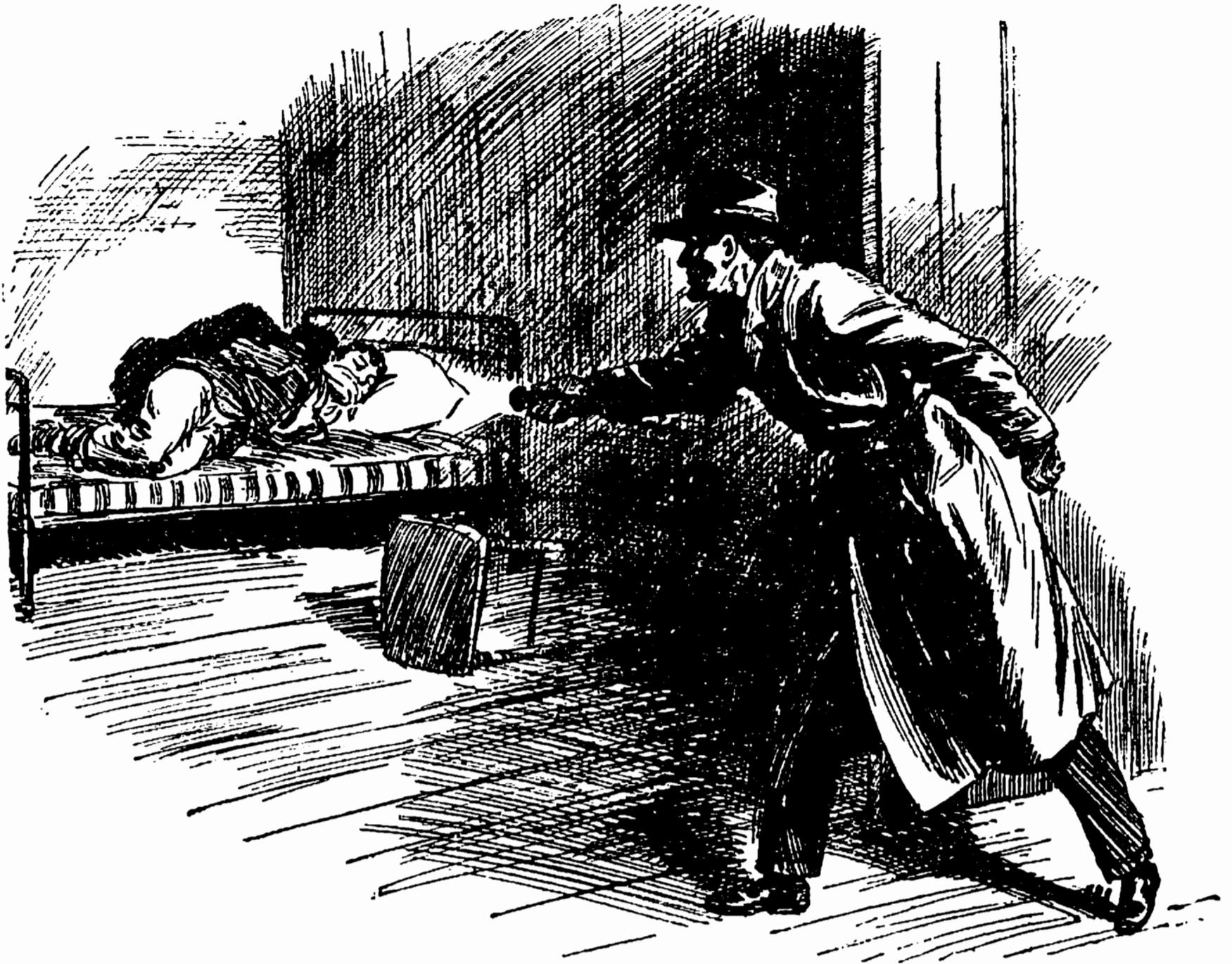
She darted off to the study again, and, finding a bunch of keys in the desk, she drew out the second drawer. A bundle of notes was the first object that met her eyes. Below the bundle was a notebook, just as her father had said. It was old and rather faded, but Ruth did not stop to do more than glance at it. She closed the drawer again and left the study, hurrying upstairs, to return a few moments later wearing her hat and coat.

As she emerged on to the edge of the pavement she halted for a moment, glancing to right and left. The street was deserted, so far as she was aware, and she began to walk swiftly down the hill towards the main thoroughfare.

CHAPTER 8.

Blackmail!

NO sooner was her back turned than a figure detached itself from a gateway belonging to a house opposite and began to move along the wall. As it passed the third house, another figure, a taller one this time, emerged.



Nelson Lee darted into the room. His torch stabbed the darkness, and he gave a cry as his gaze fell on a bound and gagged figure lying huddled on the bed. "Nipper!"

"She lied to us," said Zenn in a thin voice. "I thought as much. She is going to see her father now."

From the moment they had left the house, these two men had hung about. They had seen Hector Macleod depart, and at last their long vigil had been rewarded by the sight of Ruth. If it had not been for the fact that they had followed Hector part way to his lodgings to make sure he was not in communication with the missing man, they would have seen who had brought the strange letter.

The two convicts followed Ruth to the trams. They were old hands at tracking, and the unsuspecting girl had no idea that she was being followed. When she turned down into Ravell's Alley, the unmistakable tang of the sea came to her, and at the end of the alley she could see the mast of some ship moored to the quay.

The girl crossed the passage, and, coming to halt beneath a lamp-post, peered at the doorway opposite. It was No. 22, and, hurrying on, Ruth stopped again in front of 23a. Her knock on the door was answered by a figure in blue. It was dirty, dishevelled, with a growth of stubble on its chin. For a moment Ruth stared at it, not recognising her father, then Phillips put out his hand and caught his daughter's arm.

"Ruth," he whispered. "Good girl! Come in!"

She was drawn in through the narrow doorway, and the door was closed behind her. The two fugitive figures drew closer and waited in a dark doorway opposite. They had not long to wait. Three or four minutes later Ruth emerged, and now her father, in his dingy blue serge accompanied her.

The girl was silent, her small hand resting on her father's arm, and they walked up to the end of the alley. Otho and Zenn, watching from the darkness, saw a quick farewell take place, and Ruth, with bowed head, hand over her eyes, tottered towards the lighted thoroughfare.

For some time Phillips stood in the shadow of the alley, looking after his daughter, then wheeling, he began to retrace his steps. He reached 23a, and found that the door was still open. He entered, closing it behind him, then turning in the narrow hall he stepped into the room on the left.

It was in darkness, and fumbling in his pockets, Phillips struck a match. As he did so he saw two faces looming in the darkness in front of him. With a muttered cry of fear, the man staggered back, the match slipping from his fingers. He turned and made a blind rush for the door but he was too late. Before

he could reach it, two powerful hands shot out, gripping him, and he was hurled aside.

Another match spluttered, and the gas jet above the fireplace was lighted, revealing the shabby interior of the room. The man who had hurled him aside was now standing at the door, a massive figure he was, while underneath the gas-jet stood Zenn. Phillips, drawing back a few paces, turned his head from side to side, eyeing the two men.

"What's the game?" he asked, in a thick voice. "What are you after?"

Otho took up his part then. With a quick movement he turned the key in the lock, then advanced across the room towards Phillips, at the same time removing his cap so that the light would fall on his closely cropped head.

"Don't you know me?" he said. "Twenty years in gaol makes a lot of difference to a man, but you ought to recognise me again."

It was the crucial moment of their scheme, and Zenn leaned forward slightly, his eyes fixed on the face of James Phillips. The bank manager stood stock still, staring into the hard face in front of him.

"You—you are Marle?"

"Yes," said Otho. "Nat Marle, alias Joseph Smith. I've come to have a reckoning with you."

The wretched man tottered to a chair and collapsed on it.

"You got my note?" snarled the burly convict.

"Yes." With a sudden energy Phillips drew himself to his feet. "Yes, I got your note," he said. "I've been waiting for you, expecting you. All these years I have been haunted by that one crime. Now, what is it you want of me?"

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Otho harshly. "That's what I want from you. Twenty thousand pounds—and interest—interest for twenty years. That makes a tidy sum, Mr. Bank Manager, and you've got to hand it over."

"It's impossible," the distracted bank manager replied. "I haven't got such a sum of money in the world."

"What have you done with it, then?"

"It—it saved me from ruin," said Phillips. "The very time when you came and deposited your money I was on the verge of being found out. As it was, your twenty thousand pounds saved me. I paid off everything, and the bank never discovered my defalcations."

Otho glowered at the figure opposite him.

"If you were able to swindle twenty years ago, you're able to swindle now," he said. "That twenty thousand pounds is mine, and I mean to have it—d'you hear?"

Zenn, who had been a silent observer of the scene, came forward now. He was rubbing his thin hands together, and he glanced at Phillips.

"You must not mind my friend, Smith," he said. "He is rather inclined to lose his temper."

"I'm entitled to," said Otho. "I want my money."

"Oh, quite so—quite so!" Zenn agreed in his cackling voice. "But you will have to give Mr. Phillips time. I have no doubt he will be able to arrange something. Say, a little in advance."

He was eyeing Phillips with his hawk-like stare. There were beads of sweat on the hunted man's brows, and he was trembling visibly.

"Just a little advance on the capital," Zenn went on. "Perhaps two or three thousand pounds. You might manage that—eh, Mr. Phillips?"

"I must have time—time to think," the bank manager broke out. "I am not a rich man. I never have been; and this crime has haunted me like an evil dream always."

"That is not our affair," said Zenn. "Who lives in this house?"

"Nobody," replied Phillips. "It is my property. I am here alone."

Zenn crooked a finger, and he and Otho went across to one corner and whispered together for a moment. Then Otho slouched back and surveyed Phillips under bent brows.

"Look here," he said, "we are going to stay here the night, and you will have to do the same. Have you any money?"

Feverishly Phillips drew out the bundle of notes from his pocket.

"That is all I possess," he said.

Otho seized the notes and counted them. There were sixty one-pound notes.

"We will give you till to-morrow night," he said. "By that time you will have to hand over at least a couple of thousand. Your name is good enough for that amount in Grangepool, I know, and it will keep me quiet for a little while. You understand?"

ZENN had left the room, and with a candle he had found he made a quick tour of the house. He found that it was a small cottage affair, with two rooms on the ground floor and two upstairs.

It was arranged then that Phillips should occupy one of the rooms, while Otho and Zenn slept in the other; and when Phillips entered the back room Otho turned the key in the lock—a grim hint that the bank manager was a prisoner.

"It works," said Otho, when he and Zenn found themselves alone. "We will make that man fork out to the last farthing."

He drew out the bundle of notes, and counting out thirty handed them to his companion.

"That's the first," Otho said—"the first I have earned for many a long day. Let's hope it won't be the last."

In the other room James Phillips had removed his boots, and now he was walking up and down in the darkness with long nervous strides. He felt like a caged beast, and his heart was like lead within him.

He had fled from his house on receipt of Marle's note, and had sought sanctuary in Ravell's Alley, guessing that the ex-convict would turn up to demand a settlement. He had remained hidden during the day, and had only ventured out at night.

He had gone to the docks, and that very day, had arranged to join an out-going tramp. The vessel was due to sail with the turn of the tide at two a.m., and Phillips knew that it was now riding at anchor in the harbour, with the little tug waiting to draw it out into the North Sea.

That was the reason why he had written to Ruth for the money and the note-book which contained the story of his crime. And now, all his plans had collapsed, and he was in the hands of his enemies.

From somewhere in the distance a clock chimed, and he listened to the solitary boom of one o'clock. Within the next hour the cargo-steamer would be sailing. It was bound for San Francisco, and Phillips knew that it was from the city of the Golden Horn that the sealers had sailed for the islands.

His plan had been a desperate one. He had meant to make his way to San Francisco, and there ship aboard a sealer in the hope of reaching Salcoth Island. He knew that Marle had deposited all evidence against himself in the little hut, and if he could only reach the hut in time, and possess himself of the Seafoam's papers, and also the deposit note, he could deny all knowledge of the old crime.

He paced up and down, finally halting in front of the narrow window. He could see the square yard beneath, and beyond it, a glimmer of the dark waters of the harbour. He stood for a long time staring into the dusk, then into his brain there leapt a desperate plot.

The Kittywake, the tramp vessel on which he had agreed to sail as a common seaman, was lying in the centre of the harbour, a good mile from the quay. In his youthful days Phillips had been a fairly strong swimmer, but he had given up the pastime years ago. But now, as he listened to the sluggish swish of the slow-moving waters, it came to him that this was his only chance. There was no other means of escape from those grim-jawed, merciless captors of his.

He realised what their game was—black-mail. Little by little they would bleed him, drive him into fresh crime, make him a fugitive and a criminal.

Leaning forward, Phillips drew the rusty catch aside, and inch by inch lifted the lower half of the window. He saw that the low wall which divided the narrow courtyard of 23a from that of next door, was some five or six feet below the level of the window, and a little to the left.

He felt in his pocket to make sure that the note-book was there. Then slipping through the window he lowered himself out until he was hanging on the sill. A swift move of his body saw him swing out to the right, and his feet came into contact with the top of the wall.

He released his hold, and his body swung on. It was touch and go whether he would fall into the yard below, but he managed to keep his balance and, doubling up his body, Phillips ran along the top of the crazy wall, reaching the end one. The tide was rising

now, and the water was lapping against the foot of the wall. Measuring his distance he raised his arms and dived clean into the black swirling waters.

As he did so a window was flung up, and the shadowy outlines of two heads appeared. An arm was outstretched and revolver shots split the echoes of the night.

Crack!

Quite clearly Otho heard a bullet find its mark as Phillips' body shot out from the wall; then they heard the splash in the water below. Otho darted across the room and opened the door, and he and Zenn rushed down the stairs, making their way to the back of the house. They stumbled across the garbage-filled yard, finally reaching the end wall.

Otho, with a cat-like spring, was on the top of the wall in an instant, and craning his bull-like head forward, the criminal listened. Plainly to his ears there came the sound of steady breathing and the splash of moving hands.

"I must have missed him," he whispered, leaning down and stretching an arm towards his confederate.

Zenn caught at the powerful fist, and, with an easy swing, Otho drew him on to the wall by his side. From the dark harbour they could still hear the steady progress of the swimmer as he made his way out into the darkness. They listened until it died away. Then Zenn turned to his companion.

"We must get a boat and try to follow him," he said. "There's sure to be one about here. Come along!"

The two were out in the alley in a few moments, and they quickly made their way towards the quay, where they saw a heavy skiff moored to the weed-covered side. Otho dropped into the thwarts and Zenn seated himself in the stern, releasing the painter. Then with powerful strokes Otho sent the heavy boat forward. For half an hour they moved to and fro, and, at last, they found themselves close to a buoy in the middle of the harbour.

Suddenly to their ears came the long shrill whistle of a siren, and the beating of a screw. A panting tug, sending a shower of sparks up from its stack, was moving down through the shipping, dragging behind it the huge black hull of a cargo steamer.

Just as the tramp passed, another skiff, that had been dragged alongside, was released, and it danced up and down on the foaming waters.

Five or six strokes brought Otho close to the little boat, and he hailed it. It proved to be the skiff that had taken the pilot out to the tramp, and the figure in it, swathed in oilskins, glanced rather doubtfully at Otho.

"We're looking for a friend," said Otho. "Fell off the quay, and was carried away into the harbour. We're afraid he must have been drowned."

It was only a chance shot, but it brought an unexpected reply.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, I can tell you he ain't drowned. He's aboard the Kitty-

wake. It was just touch an' go with him, but we managed to pick the beggar up."

"Was that the Kittywake that passed just now?"

"Yes, and 'Frisco is the first port she touches," the seaman returned, "so it strikes me your friend will have a long time to wait before he sees you again."

Otho released his hold on the boat and they drifted apart. Then the massive criminal took to the oars again, and rowed towards the docks in silence. For the moment James Phillips had escaped from the toils—but only for the moment!

CHAPTER 9.

Nelson Lee is Called In!

WHAT can I do for you, Sir Donald?" Nelson Lee, the famous detective, looked up as the elderly, sprucely attired gentleman entered his room. The card which the housekeeper had handed to Lee bore the name of Sir Donald Bardale.

"I am chairman of the Grangepool and District Bank," began Sir Donald, "and my business with you is to ask you to try and help me discover the whereabouts of our manager, Mr. James Phillips."

Lee drew forward a paper pad and poised a pencil between his fingers.

"You say that Mr. Phillips has disappeared?"

"Yes," the baronet replied. "As a matter of fact, there is a little mystery attached to the matter. He was last seen at the bank some six or seven days ago. It might be a week or a little over, I'm not quite certain. He left a note, however, saying that he had been called away on important business, and we did not pay any particular notice to it at the time. Mr. Phillips has the handling of a great deal of the business of the bank, and we have every faith in him."

"Then, when did you really make up your mind that he had, in fact, disappeared?"

"Only yesterday morning," said Sir Donald. "I was rung up at about ten o'clock, and the chief cashier at the bank asked me to go down to the premises at once. I found Miss Ruth Phillips awaiting me there. She seemed very much distressed, and she told me that she feared some harm had come to her father."

The portly gentleman fidgeted for a moment.

"Of course, anything you may say to me now, Sir Donald, will be treated with strict confidence," said Lee, with a slight nod.

"Yes, yes; I quite understand. But, well—my position is rather a difficult one. You understand that I do not for one moment cast any sort of doubt on the conduct of Mr. Phillips. As a matter of fact, the books of the bank have been carefully gone through, and we find everything exactly as it should be."

He drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Lee. The detective unfolded the

note it contained. It was from a firm of auditors, and it stated that the work of checking the books of the bank had been completed, and everything was found correct.

"That must be very satisfactory for you, Sir Donald?" said Lee.

"It is, and yet, it is isn't," the baronet replied. "Mr. Phillips' daughter seemed to imagine that her father had been murdered, or got at in some way. She inclines to the belief that it was blackmail, and that it has something to do with Mr. Phillips' position at the bank."

He glanced across at Lee.

"I am anxious to preserve the dignity of the firm," Sir Donald went on, "and that is the reason why I do not wish the matter to get into the papers. In fact, I have been to Scotland Yard, but without any definite proof of foul play they are scarcely interested, and suggested I should come to you. The point is, will you accept the case?"

The baronet's story was not a very exciting one, and under ordinary circumstances, as Mr. Phillips had himself explained his lengthy absence, Lee might have refused the case. But the fact of Scotland Yard having sent Sir Donald to him put a different complexion on the matter.

"I'm quite ready to do what I can, Sir Donald," he said.

"Good! Then, if you are disengaged, I should like you to come to Grangepool with me this afternoon. There is a train at four. I have to make one or two calls in the City, but I will meet you at the station if you are prepared to join me at four o'clock."

"Very well, I will be there," said Lee.

A few moments later Sir Donald left the room and Lee went into his quiet dining-room, where Nipper was awaiting him.

"I can see you've got something on, guv'nor," said Nipper. "What was the old gent after?"

"The 'old gent,' as you call him, is Sir Donald Bardale," said Lee, with a quiet smile. "He is a very important person in his way. He's the chairman of the Grangepool and District Bank."

Nipper leaned forward in his chair and his lips pursed into a whistle.

"The Grangepool and District Bank!" the lad repeated. "Gosh, that's funny!"

"I can't see any humour in it," replied Lee. "What d'you know about the Grangepool Bank?"

Nipper told him all that had happened in Hyde Park, and the ensuing adventure. The detective was frowning deeply by the time Nipper came to the end of his report.

"I think it's very curious, guv'nor, don't you?" the lad said. "For, you see, this Hector Macleod worked in the same bank you have mentioned."

"It's more than curious, Nipper," said Lee, "it's a most singular coincidence. Sir Donald has come to me now and has asked me to try and trace James Phillips, the manager of the bank."

"Gosh, gov'nor, it is a bit of a coincidence," said Nipper. "I haven't heard a word from Macleod since he went back to Grangepool, and I think that's rather strange. But perhaps he's been too busy to write." He looked at Lee eagerly. "I don't think you can leave me behind this time, gov'nor," he went on. "I know a lot about the affair already, and I could help."

"All right, Nipper," smiled Lee. "That's quite true. You can come along with me. But I shouldn't say anything to Sir Donald about Hector Macleod's story. That can keep."

Over the meal Lee discussed the various points in the case. More particularly did the letter which James Phillips had received from Laidstone interest him. To Lee that letter was really the big clue.

"I must drop a line to the governor of Laidstone, and find out who this Joseph Smith was," he said.

Nipper rose to his feet suddenly and vanished into the study, to return a few moments later bearing a bulky volume. It was an atlas of the world—one of the latest of its type.

"I've never thought of looking it up before, gov'nor," he said, "but I'm going to see if there is such a place as Salcoth Island. 'Why,' he exclaimed after a time, "it's right away up off the coast of Alaska, miles and miles away from anywhere apparently."

He had placed his pencil on the little dot that represented the island, and Lee studied the atlas for a moment.

"It's in the sealing grounds," he said presently. "But what the dickens did a man from Salcoth Island want with Mr. Phillips?"

"That's a question we have to decide later," Lee returned.

At half-past three they left Baker Street, reaching the station a few minutes before the train was due to leave. Sir Donald had engaged a first-class compartment. He eyed Nipper rather doubtfully until Lee introduced the youngster as his assistant. The journey to Grangepool was a long one, and it was getting on for nine o'clock before the train finally ran into the station of the old town.

Sir Donald invited Lee and Nipper to be his guests at his house, but Lee refused.

"I don't think that would do, Sir Donald," he said. "My assistant and I will take rooms at the Station Hotel here. If we have to make inquiries we must do so cautiously, and we don't want anyone to know what we are up to."

It was arranged then that Lee and Nipper should call at the bank on the following morning at ten o'clock, when Sir Donald and the board of directors would be ready to see them. The baronet entered his car and was driven off, while Nelson Lee and the youngster sought rooms in the hotel. When they had washed and changed and had had a light meal, Lee arose.

"It's fairly early yet," he said, glancing at his watch—"only a quarter to ten. I think that we might as well stroll up and see if we can have a word with Miss Phillips."

CHAPTER 10.

The Clue!

IT was a few minutes after ten when Lee rang the bell of James Phillips' house. The maidservant answered his summons, and he and Nipper were ushered into the quiet study. They had only to wait a few moments, for suddenly the door was swung open, and Hector Macleod pushed into the room and darted across to Nipper with extended hand.

"Jove, old chap, I am pleased to see you!" he cried. "You must have thought it beastly of me not writing to you, but I have been worried to death."

"Guv'nor, this is Macleod," said Nipper.

He introduced Hector to Nelson Lee, and the youngster shook hands heartily with the great detective.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Lee," he said. "It seems to me something like a miracle that you should have turned up here. You're just the very man that I would have most wished to see."

"The gov'nor has been employed by Sir Donald Bardale to find Mr. Phillips," Nipper explained. "That's why we've come down here."

"So Sir Donald has gone to the police," said Hector anxiously. "I thought he would." Then he glanced at Lee. "But I mustn't keep you talking here. Ruth—I mean, Miss Phillips—has sent me for you. Come along!"

He crossed the hall and entered the quiet drawing-room. Ruth Phillips, a white-faced ghost of her usual happy self, arose to her feet and bowed as Hector introduced the visitors.

"I've heard about you, Mr. Nipper," said the girl, giving the lad a warm greeting, though not in his correct surname. "You—you were very kind to Mr. Macleod when he was in London."

In a few brief words Nipper explained what had brought Nelson Lee and himself to Grangepool.

"I am going to meet Sir Donald and the board of directors in the morning," said Lee, "but I thought it might be worth while to come and see you first. Has anything happened that will help us in this case?"

"Yes, there is," said Ruth.

And she gave Lee a brief account of the letter she had received, and of her visit to the squalid house in the little alley, then continued:

"I didn't sleep a wink all that night, Mr. Lee. You see, in the few moments that I had had with dad he told me something about himself. He said that he had to leave the country at once; that a man he had known in the past was about to be released from prison, and—and had threatened to ruin him."

"Did he give you any idea of what he was going to do?"

The girl was silent for a moment.

"He—he said that his only hope of salvation lay in him getting to Salcoth Island first. He said he was leaving Grangepool that same night, and told me to—to wait here for him until he returned."

"Then in all probability he has gone on his journey."

"Ruth has forgotten to tell you, Mr. Lee," interposed Macleod, "that a couple of men called here earlier on the same afternoon as she received the letter from her father. I was here when they called, and I did not like the look of them. They were just like two ex-convicts. The next morning, when I came round here to see Ruth, she asked me to accompany her to Ravell's Alley. We got there about eleven o'clock. We found the door ajar. The back door was also open, and on the end wall, which is on the edge of the harbour, we—we found bloodstains."

"And this!"

Ruth produced a handkerchief. It was smeared with blood. Lifting one corner of it, she indicated the initials—"J. P."

"This belonged to my—my father," the girl said.

Lee examined the handkerchief closely.

"About these two men who called here to see Mr. Phillips," he asked. "What were they like?"

"One was a hideous creature," said Ruth with a shiver. "I never saw such a face in my life before. It looked to me like the face of a man dead to all human feelings." She leapt to her feet suddenly. "I can draw it!" she said, hurrying across to a little desk.

The girl picked up pencil and paper; then, in a few quick lines, she drew a portrait. The detective's eyes were fixed on the sketch for a long moment; then he handed it over to Nipper.

"Have you ever seen anyone like that?" he asked.

Nipper stared for a minute, then leapt to his feet.

"Jiminy, gov'nor—it's Zenn!"

"Zenn—Zenn?" repeated Ruth quickly. "He gave his name as Doctor Kay."

"Can you remember what the other man was like?" asked Lee.

The girl gave her description, which was correct enough, but Zenn had altered Otho's features.

"A broad nose, heavy ears, narrow, arched eyebrows."

Neither Nipper nor Nelson Lee could recognise the description.

"There's one curious point about it," said Hector. "They seemed to know me. Doctor Kay, as he called himself, spoke to me and mentioned my father. I could not make head or tail of it, then, and can't do so now, for my father has been dead for the best part of eighteen years."

After they had talked together for nearly an hour, Lee rose to leave.

"I believe your father is the victim of a clever scoundrel," said the detective. "I must say that there are a great number of points in the case which baffle me for the moment, but the mere presence of one particular man in it proves to me that your father, dead or alive, has been victimised."

He glanced down at her white face. "You haven't told the bank about your last interview with your father, I suppose?"

"No," she said. "I dared not do that."

"Perhaps it's just as well," said the detective, "and you have really nothing to fear from the bank. From what I have heard from Sir Donald, everything there is in perfect order, and they have no sort of charge to bring against Mr. Phillips at all."

His quiet words and the assurance that he



From his hiding-place in the life-boat, Hector watched figures went limp. There was a cry and the next headlong in

gave brought something like a ray of comfort into the heart of the girl.

Hector Macleod left with Lee and Nipper, and the youngster fell into pace by their side.

"I shall be glad if I can help you in any way, Mr. Lee," he said. "Before we quarrelled, Mr. Phillips was very good to me, and I'd like to make some sort of return. Won't you give me the chance?"

"Yes, I think I can promise you that," said the detective. "In fact, I need someone who knows Grangepool fairly well."

He arranged an appointment with Macleod for the following morning. The lad had to be down at the railway station hotel by eleven. This would give Lee and Nipper time to get their interview at the bank over.

When Lee and Nipper were in their room at the hotel, the detective went across to his case, and, opening it, drew out a notebook from which he extracted a buff-coloured envelope.

"This came to me before I returned to



a grim struggle on the deck. Suddenly one of the
ent the two crooks had sent their enemy hurtling
e sea!

London," he said. "The governor of the
prison sent it on to me. Read it."

Nipper glanced at the message. It was
laconic enough in all conscience.

"Your prophecy was correct. Otho and
Zenn have vanished!"

"Gosh, gov'nor!"

Nelson Lee's face was grim, and his blue
eyes were set and stern.

"Two of the most dangerous criminals in
the world," he said, "at large again!"

CHAPTER 11.

The House of Mystery!

NELSON LEE'S interview with the bank
directors proved of little value beyond
confirming all that Sir Donald had
said. When it was over Nipper and
Nelson Lee met Macleod at the Station Hotel,
and promptly went to 23a, Ravell's Alley in
order to take up the trail from there.

Lee had searched the lower rooms first, find-
ing many tell-tale proofs that the house had
been occupied—fragments of food, a litter of
dirty crockery, tobacco ash, and one or two
stumps of a good-class Egyptian cigarette.
He had shown one of the stumps to Macleod,
and the lad had recognised it.

"Yes," said Hector, "that's the brand that
Mr. Phillips used to smoke."

Lee was standing close to the table, when
suddenly he knelt down, and drawing a
magnifying glass from his pocket, bent over
the boards. Hector came up to the table and
looked down. On the dirty boards was a
faded imprint where a wet boot had rested
for a moment. Nelson Lee measured the
mark and then rose to his feet.

The footprint was quite clearly defined, and
although small, had the broad heel mark of a
man's boot.

"There has been another person in this
room," said Lee, his eyes travelling slowly
round. "But we will leave it, now. I want
to look upstairs."

He went up the rickety stairs and turned
first to the room that had been occupied by
James Phillips, to discover that the door was
locked.

"We found it like this when we came
down," said Hector.

Lee stooped and peered through the key-
hole.

"The key is not in the inside," he said.
"I think we shall have to break it open."

He stepped back to the wall, raised his foot,
and drove it hard against the door. There
was a crash and the door swung open. Lee
stepped into the room, and the open window
attracted him at once. He went across to the
window. On the dust of the sill were the
clear imprints of fingers. Bending over, Lee
looked down at the brickwork. Here and
there were fresh scratches in the wall.

"If James Phillips was in this room," he
said, "he must have been a prisoner, and he
escaped by getting out of the window. Look,
you can see the footprints on the side wall!"

The top of the wall was flat and grimy.
Quite plainly they could see the feet marks.

"He had evidently taken off his boots,"
said Lee. "You can see the shape of the foot
if you look closely."

"But why should he do that, Mr. Lee?"
Hector Macleod said. "What made him risk
his neck getting out of the house through the
window?"

"He was a prisoner here," said Lee. "Or,
at least, someone had locked him up in this
room, so that he should not escape."

The detective withdrew his head and began to examine the inside of the room. It bore evidence that it had been much used. The bed was ruffled, and there were numerous cigarette ends on the floor, and also in a tin that stood on the table close to the bedside. There was a handful of candle-ends in the fireplace.

"He must have been hiding here all the time," said Hector.

Nipper had been standing close to the bed, and he suddenly caught sight of a corner of a paper sticking out from beneath the pillow. He reached out a hand and drew the paper forward, disclosing it to be a half-sheet of note-paper. Someone had been attempting to draw a map, and presently the lines became familiar to Nipper. It was the coast of Alaska, and a pencil mark had been made at a certain spot.

Nipper turned and held the paper towards Lee.

"Look here, guv'nor," he said, "the man who was in this room has been hunting up Salcoth Island!"

At the top of the map the longitude and latitude had been written, and below the map someone had scrawled a few lines in shorthand, which Lee had no difficulty in transcribing.

Papers and deposit note in Eskimo hut, above south beach."

Nelson Lee folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket.

"There is a great deal here that I can't make much of at the moment," said the detective, "but they will all have their uses, and sooner or later we will find the key to the puzzle."

He left the room, and crossing the landing went into the other one. The first thing that caught his eyes was a key on the window-sill.

"You might try this in the lock of the other room, Nipper," he said.

The young assistant slipped away to obey the order, and returned a few moments later.

"That's the correct key guv'nor," he said, as he re-entered.

Lee had now crossed the room, and was standing before the open window that looked out into the yard. Suddenly his eye was attracted to something on the brickwork outside. He reached out his finger and drew it across the surface. A little smudge of black appeared on his finger.

"Gunpowder," he said. "There is no mistaking the smell!"

The detective measured the distance where the gunpowder had appeared on the paint.

"It was a tall man who fired," he said. "The average man invariably levels his gun before shooting. This man must have been close on six feet, for you will notice that the mark on the brick is five feet above the level of the floor."

"Then if he was a tall man, guv'nor, all I can say is he had jolly small feet," Nipper put in.

Nelson Lee turned towards his young assistant and smiled.

"Can't you see it, yet, Nipper?" he said. "There were two visitors—possibly the two who called at Mr. Phillips' house. They might have followed Miss Ruth to this place, had an interview with Mr. Phillips and locked him in the other room, but he escaped. The man who fired at Mr. Phillips did so from this window and in the dark. It is more than probable that he wounded him, but that would be all. The very fact of Mr. Phillips using his handkerchief to staunch the wound, proves that he was not mortally hurt."

NIPPER had been walking leisurely round the room, and suddenly he turned and called to Nelson Lee.

"I think this might interest you, guv'nor," said the sharp-eyed youngster, pointing to the panel of the door.

Lee came across the room and looked at the mark indicated by Nipper. It was the imprint of a thumb, clearly and well defined. The paint on the door was old, and Lee drew out a sharp penknife and cut away the portion of paint to which the thumb-print adhered. The paint came off in a huge flake, and the detective, folding the precious clue in a piece of cotton-wool, slipped it into his pocket.

He spent another ten minutes examining the room, but no further clues were found, and the trio went down into the narrow hall again.

"I suppose you have a harbour-master here?" said Lee.

"He has an office at the south basin," replied Hector.

It did not take them long to reach the office.

"How do you do, Mr. Marshley?" Macleod said to a portly man in a blue reefer-jacket with brass buttons. It was the harbour-master, and Hector introduced Nelson Lee to him. The detective chatted with the man for a while, then presently he put the question that had arisen in his mind.

"Any vessel sailed on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning?" the harbour-master repeated. "Yes, there was one. The Kitty-wake went out on the high tide. Must have been about two o'clock in the morning. We don't have so many sailings as we used to."

Lee looked out across the south basin. It certainly did present a rather deserted appearance, but he noted that there was a fair-sized steamer down up close to the quay, not far away from the hut. There was a feather of smoke rising from her stack, and the Blue Peter flew at her peak.

"That's one clearing shortly, I see."

"Yes, sir. That's the Anastor, bound for 'Frisco," said the harbour-master. "She clears the quay at twelve to-night, and I expect she'll sail at dawn."

"Do you have pilots?"

"Oh, yes. We have two or three of the old hands. But the Anastor won't carry a pilot. Old Cap'n Turner knows the way out as well as any of us here."

"Did the Kittywake have a pilot?"

"Yes, sir; she did." The harbour-master straightened up, and, glancing along the quay, pointed towards a stout man who was seated on a bale. "Old Jack Timmins is the pilot who took the Kittywake out," he added.

At that moment the telephone bell rang, and the harbour-master, with a nod to Lee, turned and entered his little office. The detective sauntered up the quay and spoke to the weather-beaten old fellow seated on the bale. By offering his tobacco pouch Lee soon brought a smile to the pilot's face.

"Yes, sir; I did take the Kittywake out. I don't suppose I'll have another job like it for three or four weeks. Things ain't what they used to be."

"I'm rather interested in the Kittywake," said Lee. "I wonder whether you could tell me if a passenger arrived aboard late last night."

THE pilot lowered his voice.

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, there was someone did come aboard the Kittywake. It was just as I took the bridge. The vessel was due to sail when I saw one of the seamen rushing aft to the port companion-way. We heard him give a hail, and he went down the ladder, and presently we saw him come up carrying a man over his shoulder. Half dead the fellow were, too, with a nasty bullet wound in his arm, but it seemed to me as though the skipper was expecting him, for the man was bundled below at once. When I was leaving the ship I asked after the man and the cap'n told me he was doing all right."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Lee. "Is that all the information you have concerning him?"

Timmins scratched his stubble chin.

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, it ain't. My mate, who put me aboard the Kittywake, said as how he came across another boat with a couple of men in her. Just rowing about the harbour they were. They said as how they were looking for a pal o' theirs who'd fallen into the water. But my mate didn't believe that yarn. It was pitch dark, and he couldn't see 'em very well, but he didn't like the sound of their voices."

"Did he describe them to you?"

"Well, all he could see of 'em was that the fellow at the oars was a big chap, while the other seemed a little fellow—more like a monkey than a man."

Lee slipped his hand into his pocket, and money passed from him to the pilot.

Nipper and Hector Macleod found Nelson Lee strangely silent when they made their way back from the south basin to the hotel. The detective insisted on Hector remaining for lunch, and after the meal was over he turned to his young assistant.

"I'm going to Laidstone," he said. "I can catch a train at a quarter-past one, and I ought to be back here by nine to-night. In

the meantime, I can make use of you both. Young Macleod can go to the south basin and keep an eye on the Anastor. You would know this Doctor Kay and his companion again if you saw them?"

"I shall never forget them," said Hector.

"Good. I am half-inclined to believe that they will try to get away from Grangepool aboard the Anastor."

He turned to Nipper.

"Your job will be to hang round Ravell's Alley," he went on, "and I would suggest that you disguise yourself. You know who to look out for, and you also know just how clever they are. You must take no risks."

CHAPTER 12.

Trapped!

NELSON LEE found out much that he wanted to know at Laidstone, but the gist of his inquiries were concerning the dead convict, Joseph Smith, the man who had sent the letter to James Phillips, describing himself as the man from Salcoth Island. The remarkable thing was that this man Smith was serving a life sentence for a murder committed aboard a sealing vessel.

It was clear that Zenn must have learnt the man's secret before he died, and after escaping from Laidstone with Otho, had proceeded to make money by blackmailing the unfortunate bank manager. But what hold he had over James Phillips still remained a mystery, especially as there was nothing wrong with the books at the bank.

When he arrived in Grangepool he found Ruth Phillips waiting for him at the hotel, an anxious expression on her face.

"I've been waiting for hours," she said. "I wondered what had become of you all."

"Hasn't Nipper and Hector turned up yet?" Lee asked.

"No," the girl said with a shake of her head. "And I feel afraid that something has happened to them."

"We must go and look for them," said Lee.

The hour was late, and it was almost midnight before the two left the hotel. He tried to persuade the girl to go home and allow him to search for his assistants alone, but this she resolutely refused to do. Accordingly, they made their way to Ravell's Alley.

"Nipper should be somewhere about here," said Lee. "I told him to stay on guard."

The alley was in pitch darkness save here and there in the upper windows of some of the wretched houses where a feeble light glimmered. Lee and his companion went down until they came opposite 23a. There was no sign of Nipper.

Lee gave a low whistle and waited. It was a signal that was often used by himself and Nipper, but there was no reply.

Then the girl peered through the darkness, gripping Lee's arm.

"The door is open!" she said.

"What? But the last time I left the house I locked it!" replied the detective.

Fearful for Nipper's safety, he strode to the door and entered the house. An electric torch was drawn from his pocket, and he searched the lower rooms, but found them empty. Then, darting up the stairs, he leapt into the room on the right. A huddled figure on the bed caught his eye, and, with a rush, Lee was across the room.

"Nipper!" he gasped.

Nipper, bound hand and foot, and gagged, lay quite unconscious on the dirty mattress. Lifting the lad in his arms, the detective carried his burden downstairs. A knife quickly severed the bonds, then Ruth began to attend to the youngster, and at last Nipper opened his eyes and sat up.

He looked very sick and dazed, and for a few moments seemed lost to his surroundings. Then suddenly his eyes cleared, and he nodded up at Nelson Lee.

"Thought I was done for that time, guv'nor," he said in a weak voice. "The beggars tricked me. I was at the head of the alley and saw them come along. I recognised them at once. They went into 23a, and I followed them. They must have done it to trap me, for as soon as I stepped inside the door I got this!"

He raised his hand to his head and disclosed a huge wound.

"I don't remember much after that. What's the next move, guv'nor?"

"I must get down to the south basin," Lee returned. "I feel sure that Zenn and Otho are trying to board the Anastor, and, besides, I want to find Macleod."

"I'll come, too," said Ruth.

"No," Lee replied. "You will have to go back to the hotel and look after Nipper."

"Just a moment," put in Nipper. "I've just remembered something. I was hanging around here and got talking with an old sailor chap who said he'd been away for years and years. He left here on the Seafoam, but was taken ill at San Francisco and left behind. When he tried to rejoin his ship he found that the skipper, a man named Marle, had sold the ship, together with her cargo, to an American, and vanished with the money. This chap was here to try and find the owner of the Seafoam, but he said the man was dead. He asked me if I knew anyone of the name of Macleod, and I told him to come to the hotel in the morning."

"You did right," said Lee, his eyes glittering. "That story sounds like the key to the mystery. In the morning we will question that chap. But now you and Miss Phillips get back to the hotel and wait for me there."

Invaders of ST. JIM'S!

My name is Frank Monk, and I lead the Grammar School juniors. Those miserable wrecks from St. Jim's think they can lick us at any time, but of course they're quite wrong. The trouble is that we seldom get the chance to do our stuff, because it isn't easy to get into St. Jim's. But, O Boy, our chance has come at last! Not a word to anyone, mind you, but the Grammar School is closing down for a bit, and we are going to St. Jim's! Just think of it! We shall be living in the old casual ward that Tom Merry & Co. call a school, for some time—and believe me, we're going to make Tom Merry & Co. sing small. How, you say? Sorry, I can't let you into that, but you can find out for twopence. Just buy a copy of this week's GEM and read "The Invaders of St. Jim's!"—that's us!



THE GEM Every Wednesday **2d.**

CHAPTER 13.

On Board the Anastor!

HECTOR MACLEOD had taken up his task of watching the Anastor with a keen zest. As he made his way down to the quay a slight, drizzling rain began to fall, and Hector, diving into one of the numerous little shops in that region, emerged presently wearing a second-hand oilskin coat and a blue peaked cap.

He went down to the south basin, and presently found himself on the quay to which the Anastor was moored. It was evident that the loading of the vessel had been completed, for the hatches were down and the tarpaulins tight over them.

One or two of the crew were hanging about on the deck, and, after watching for a few moments, Hector saw a thick-set man emerge from one of the companions and come to the end of the gangway. The man looked to right and left, then, apparently enraged about something, came down the gangway and stepped on to the quay, close to where Hector was lounging against a hogshead.

"I've been waiting all day for a young scamp to turn up," he said. "But he hasn't come yet. He's my cabin-boy, and I'm chief engineer of yon hooker. If ye want a job ye can hae his."

Instantly Macleod saw his opportunity.

"When d'you sail, sir?" he asked.

"Midnight," came the reply. "I'll tell ye what I'll do. Come on board now and set my cabin to rights, and if that young scoundrel doesn't turn up before the ship sails, ye can take his place. If he does turn up, why, I'll pay ye well for what you do."

This exactly suited Hector's rôle, and, a few moments later, he was striding up the gangway behind old Thomson. He was led along a narrow galleyway and shown into a small cabin on the right.

"There ye are," said the chief engineer, "jest put this place to rights. I haven't time to bother about my kit now. I must look after the engines."

He stopped for a moment to point out the various articles to Hector, then, with a nod to the lad, the chief engineer turned and stalked away, his iron-shod shoes clanging on the steel steps of the alleyway.

Hector crossed the cabin and looked out of the porthole. He saw that it was just level with the quay and close to the gangway that ran up at a sharp angle. If anyone came or went by way of the gangway, Hector was bound to see them. He slipped off his oilskin coat, removed his jacket and waistcoat, then, rolling up his shirt-sleeves, set to work.

It was quite dusk now, and one of the seamen came round lighting the lamps. A lamp was hung above the gangway, its yellow gleams shimmering on the wet boards. At the end of an hour Hector was summoned by a man in greasy dungarees to "come and have a bite o' food." He followed his guide along the deck and into the fo'c'sle, where

he found a gang of men seated in the stuffy quarters.

The young bank clerk hurried through his meal and slipped back to the cabin where he could keep watch. Somewhere about ten o'clock he saw two or three men come on board, and one of them, a sturdy individual, was wearing the regulation captain's cap. Hector had seen Cap'n Turner before, and he recognised the old skipper.

The coming of the skipper seemed to be a signal for a fresh bustle on board the Anastor. Hector heard one or two sharp commands ring out, followed by the clatter of feet on the deck above. A whimsical expression crossed the lad's face, and he drew back from the port.

"Gosh, it looks to me as if I shall be carried off on this old tramp unless I'm careful," he mused.

He dressed himself again, slipping into his oilskin, and stepped out of the cabin, hurrying along the alleyway and gaining the upper deck. He had no desire to find himself a member of the crew, and he made up his mind to slip ashore at the first convenient moment.

JUST as he reached the upper deck six bells sounded. It was eleven o'clock. The echoes of the bell had hardly died away when Hector, standing close to the rails, heard hurrying feet on the quay. A little undersized figure was just coming up the gangway, and behind him came a huge broad-shouldered man. As the pair came higher the lamp swinging above the gangway shone on their faces. Hector drew back and turned up the collar of his oilskin over his ears.

He had recognised them at once. They were the men he knew as Doctor Kay and his huge companion.

As soon as Zenn reached the deck he halted a moment. The captain's cabin lay aft and there was a light in the doorway. Hector heard a whisper pass between the two, then Zenn and Otho headed for the lighted doorway. The young clerk waited until he saw the door of the cabin open and the two figures pass inside, then with a quick rush he was across the deck, and passing round to the back of the cabin, he raised his head and gazed through the porthole.

Zenn and Otho were standing in front of a table at which Captain Turner was seated.

"The matter can be settled here and now," Zenn's voice was saying. "There's a hundred pounds for you for a passage for myself and friend to San Francisco."

"This is not a passenger vessel," Turner's voice replied.

"No, I quite understand that. We are prepared to rough it."

Turner realised, of course, that there was something shady in these two characters in front of him. But then, within the hour, the Anastor would have sailed, and Turner knew that once he was clear of England he

would be safe, especially as the tramp was not fitted with wireless.

After more talk, the matter was settled and the captain sent for the steward. Hector slipped away from the port-hole, and from a safe hiding-place behind one of the boats, he watched until the steward had entered the cabin and emerged again, followed by Otho and Zenn.

The trio went along the deck towards the stern, and Hector, moving noiselessly, saw them vanish at last into a little cabin, from which a few moments later the steward returned alone.

Hector ventured up to the cabin, and cast one glance inside. Otho had flung himself on to one of the bunks, smoking, while Zenn, perched like a bird on the opposite bunk, was speaking in low tones.

Hector drew back, a grim expression on his face.

"You've managed to do the trick after all," he thought. "Gosh, what am I going to do, now?"

It was impossible to find a messenger to take the news to Nelson Lee, and if he went, himself, he felt that the ship would sail before he could return. Deep down in his heart he felt it to be imperative to keep in close touch with these two ruffians, and he meant to do.

It was certainly the best thing he could have done, under the circumstances, and he slipped off along the main deck and went down into the galleyway in which the chief engineer's cabin was situated. Thomson was there, seated at the little table.

"Hallo!" cried the man. "Where've you been?"

"For'ard, sir," said Hector. "I did all I could here."

"And ye've done it fine," said Thomson. "That ither chap hasn't turned up, so ye can sign on in his place. I'll fix ye up wi' sea-goin' togs, and show ye where tae sleep."

The old chap finished his hasty meal, then led Hector along the alley and opened a door. It was really a store-room filled with kegs and bales of waste. In one corner a hammock had been slung, and there was a small locker close to it.

"There's ye quarters, laddie," said Thomson. "Ye'll find togs in the locker, there. Slip into 'em, then come along tae the engine-room, and Ah'll keep ye busy."

Hector would rather have remained on deck, but he realised that it would have been impossible. Eventually, he managed to make his way down the steel ladder into the bowels of the vessel, and Thomson beckoned to him. The engineer was standing on a little iron bridge that spanned the engines. He pushed an oil can into Hector's hand, and indicated a small gauge.

"Jest ye shun up there and fill up that tap," he said.

Hector obeyed, but his mind was constantly returning to the deck above. He was, however, forced to remain below, and presently the sharp clang of a bell sounded. Thomson handled the levers, there was a rush of steam,

a sharp throb, and the huge piston-rods began to rise and fall. The Anastor was under way!

ANOTHER clang, and then for a time there was a deal of bell ringing, and Thomson had to work hard obeying the command of the skipper on the navigating bridge, as the ship threaded her way out to the deep water beyond the bar. The first long swell of the ocean lifted the tramp, and Hector caught at the rail of the little bridge to steady himself.

"Ye'd better go oop on deck, now," said Thomson. "The reek o' the oil might upset ye for a bit, but ye'll soon find yere sea legs."

Hector was only too glad to escape, and clambered up to the deck. He saw the lights of Grangepool receding in the distance, and he wondered if he had done a foolish thing. Then he remembered the presence on board of Otho and Zenn. He decided to have another look at them, and he made his way towards their cabin. There was no light in the place, and a glance through the port-hole told him that no one was inside.

He moved away and halted a moment beside one of the lifeboats. Several minutes passed, then he saw two figures emerge from the companion way that led to the saloon. With a quick movement Hector drew himself up into the lifeboat, upon which the usual canvas covering had not been fastened, and he hid below the thwarts.

He peered over the side of the boat. Zenn and Otho were just turning the corner to enter their cabin. He heard the metallic click of the door as it was opened; then, suddenly, Zenn's harsh voice sounded:

"Quick! Get him!"

There was a scuffle and a rush, and three figures came swaying out from the cabin to reel across the deck, locked in a fierce embrace. Hector saw that Otho had wound his arms round the shoulders of the centre man, while Zenn was struggling furiously to release his arms from the grip of the stranger. They thudded against the lifeboat, then went down on the deck in a sprawling heap. The man they fought with seemed to have the strength of ten. Somehow, the stranger came to his feet and had evaded one wild rush from Otho, but in doing so he had flung himself against the heavy iron stanchion that supported the lifeboat. Hector heard the impact of the head against the iron, and it fairly sickened him.

"Now, Otho—quick! We've got him!"

Hector, shifting his position to the other side of the lifeboat peered over. He was just in time. He saw the body of the stranger being pressed slowly over the rails. The man was unconscious and unable to save himself. The tense body tilted forward and went head-long into the sea.

Quick as a flash, Otho and Zenn darted back to their cabin. Hector, aghast with horror, stumbled across the boat. His foot came into contact with a lifebelt, and a moment later he had lifted it out and cast it



There was a muffled report, a blinding flash, and the tube in the master-crook's hand exploded. In a moment deadly poison gas enveloped the struggling figures of Nelson Lee and Zenn.

out into the water. As he did so his foot slipped and fell sprawling over the side of the boat to the deck below. His head struck an iron bolt, and for a few moments he lay there senseless.

Eventually he came round and struggled to his feet. There was a light in the scoundrels' cabin now, and Hector went across and peered through the port. Otho was lying on his bunk, while Zenn was bandaging his left wrist.

"You and I have been in at the death, Otho," said Zenn. "Nelson Lee will trouble us no more!"

"Nelson Lee!" Hector staggered back, aghast. The man who had been flung into the sea was Nelson Lee! Nelson Lee was dead!

CHAPTER 14.

A Fight For Life!

THERE had been no mistake about it. The man Otho and Zenn had flung into the sea was, indeed, Nelson Lee. The detective had been just in time to see them walking along the deck of the *Anastor*, from the captain's cabin to their own.

The detective could have called the police and had them arrested as escaped convicts, but really, that part of it was not actually his affair. Besides, if he had done so he would have been no nearer discovering the truth concerning the disappearance of James Phillips.

He crept on board and concealed himself on deck, then, when the two scoundrels went

below to the saloon he made an entry into their cabin. Producing his pocket-torch Lee touched the switch and a light flashed out. There was a head of clothes on one of the lockers, and going up to them Lee began to examine the pile. He made no scruples about emptying the pockets, and eventually he came to the jacket Zenn had worn, and in the breast-pocket of this garment Lee's hand came into contact with a bulky notebook.

Seating himself on the side of one of the bunks, Lee turned the pages of this notebook and read by the light of his torch. He saw an address—Mr. James Phillips, the Grangepool and District Bank, Grangepool. Beneath it were other entries, and Lee read them swiftly.

"Joseph Smith, alias Nat Marle, one-time captain of the Seafoam."

The mystery was becoming clearer to Nelson Lee. Zenn had always been a methodical man, and had noted down all the important points of his scheme.

"Deposit of twenty thousand pounds made in Marle's name at Grangepool and District Bank. James Phillips signed receipt for money. Ship's papers and deposit note hidden in Eskimo hut, Salcoth Island."

Then underneath was a more recent entry.

"Phillips got away, but no matter. He was convinced that Otho was Marle."

When he had got thus far, Lee heard the two rogues approaching. He switched off his torch, thrust the notebook into his pocket and tried to get out without being seen, but they were too quick for him. And in the fight that had followed the detective had been distinctly unlucky.

But the water revived his reeling brain, and restored him to consciousness, so that he was able to fight for his life. In the welter of water that followed the wake of the ship, Lee came struggling to the surface, gasping for breath. The Anastor was fast receding in the distance, and to shout for help would have been useless. He thought he saw something floating in the water, and he struck out towards it, gasping with relief as his fingers clutched the life-line round the edge of a life-belt.

He saw the name "Anastor" on the belt, and it puzzled him.

"Who could have tossed that at me?" he mused. "Certainly neither Otho nor Zenn. And it couldn't have been one of the crew or the ship would have turned to pick me up." Then a swift intuition came to him. "Jove, it might have been young Macleod! He may have been carried off aboard the ship while watching Otho and Zenn. Well, he can use his wits, and I wish him luck. For the moment, I have all my work cut out to save myself."

Through the long hours of darkness he floated, sometimes resting in the belt, at others swimming inside it. Fatigue began to claim him, and he had to fight against the dangerous coma that began to creep over him.

Then, with the dawn, he saw a thin white flicker of foam appear for a moment on the surface of the sea, then vanish. He watched it wearily, and then, in a flash, it had a meaning for him. He was close to a sunken reef, and the foam he saw was the waves breaking over a half-submerged rock. He struck out for it grimly.

With difficulty he reached it and dragged himself up on to it, while the falling tide withdrew. For many hours he remained on that rocky platform, thankful that the weather was calm, and at last, in the waning light of evening, came rescue. The brown sails of a fishing smack appeared. The detective pulled off his jacket and waved it round his head. He was seen, and the smack hove to, while a small boat was lowered to take him off the reef!

THAT evening Ruth Phillips, a prey to a thousand fears and doubts, heard a knock sound on the door of the little sitting-room of the Railway Hotel, and she leapt to her feet. The door was opened, and a burly man in blue clothes came into the room supporting another man by the arm.

"Mr. Lee!" cried Ruth. "I thought you had gone for ever."

Nelson Lee was weak and tired, and his burly companion helped him across the room and made him sit down on a chair. Ruth saw then that the detective was dressed in ragged blue trousers and a thick jersey which was redolent with the unmistakable odour of fish. His face was white, but the eyes were as clear and courageous as ever.

"How is—is Nipper?" he asked.

"He is quite all right, Mr. Lee," she returned, "but we have been so anxious. What has happened? You look ill."

The deep-chested man who had accompanied Lee turned to the girl and laughed.

"He's all right, miss," said the fisherman. "The sea don't make no difference to a man like him. Jest run along and get him something hot, and he'll be as right as ninepence in five minutes!"

Lee had almost finished the strengthening food when Nipper burst into the room. He had been out all day searching for Lee, and was on the verge of utter despair when he heard that the detective was safe and in the hotel.

"Oh, gov'nor!" Nipper broke out. "You gave me the scare of my life that time."

"That's all right, old chap!" replied Lee. "I've had a close shave, but—well, it isn't the first by a long way."

He told them all that had happened to him, and how he fully believed that Hector Macleod was aboard the Anastor.

Some time later Nipper took Ruth to her home as there was no need for her to remain at the hotel any longer. When Nipper and Lee were alone together, the detective went on to say all that he had no desire to say before the girl.

"The case is working out, Nipper," said Lee. "But, tell me—did that sailor fellow call here this morning?"

"No," Nipper shook his head. "And I've ransacked the town for him, and even got the local police looking for him, but he's vanished into thin air. Maybe he's gone to some other seaport in the hopes of getting a ship, or else someone has paid him to keep his mouth shut. Anyway—he's gone!"

"A pity," murmured Lee. "But it can't be helped. Now, according to his story, Nat Marle, the captain of the Seafoam, sold his owner's vessel and the cargo for a large sum of money and then absconded. It all fits in, Nipper. I have found out that Nat Marle, under the name of Joseph Smith, was aboard another sealer, and during a fight killed the mate, for which crime he was serving a life sentence in Laidstone. He recently died there. But before he went to prison he must have deposited his ill-gotten gains at the bank, and had received a deposit note signed by James Phillips. Now, read these notes from Zenn's notebook."

"Jiminy, I see it all right!" exclaimed Nipper. "Zenn was looking after Marle in the prison hospital. Marle told him his story."

"It's a diabolical scheme," said Lee. "Zenn has altered Otho's face so that he resembles the dead man, and it is evident that Phillips has been deceived by it. The bank manager believes that Marle has reappeared from the grave, almost, to claim the return of his money. If that money were still in the bank in Marle's name, James Phillips need not have run away. That is why I did not mention this in Miss Phillips' presence. Phillips must have turned that money, guessing it had been obtained illegally, to his own purposes. And now he has gone to Salcoth Island to destroy, if he can, the Seafoam's papers and the deposit note, so that the two blackmailers will lose their hold upon him. The trouble is that Zenn and Otho are following him on the Anastor."

"Then what do we do next?" asked Nipper.

"Well, it'll be 'Frisco first," said Lee. "We ought to reach there before the Anastor. We will travel by the Mauretania to New York, then across America by rail. I believe the Anastor goes round the Horn. Even if she goes through the Panama Canal we ought to be there before her."

"By jiminy, that's the ticket, gov'nor!" Nipper cried.

But, the next morning, when they told Ruth that they meant to go to 'Frisco after the Anastor, she faced them boldly.

"Then I'll come, too!" she declared. "You say that Hector is aboard the Anastor. If you will not let me accompany you I shall go to San Francisco by myself."

"We are going on a long and very hazardous journey," said Lee. "It would be far better for you to stay here. But if you

really insist on coming with us I will not refuse you."

"I do insist," Ruth cried. "If I remain here I shall do nothing but think all day, and it will drive me mad!"

Thus it was arranged that these people who had been thrown together in such a curious way, should travel together half across the world.

On the following day they left England.

THE long journey first across an ocean and then across a continent, although vastly interesting, was without any remarkable incident. Nelson Lee had been in San Francisco before, and knew his way about. He went to the harbour authorities first, and made inquiries, and learned to his horror that the Anastor was, at that moment, in the harbour, and had arrived the day previously.

"But how can that be?" cried Lee. "The Anastor is simply a tramp steamer, and she had to sail through the Panama Canal, while I have come direct via New York. It is true that we thought we had plenty of time and wasted some of it looking round New York. We also broke our journey across the continent to take a look at the Yellowstone Park. Even then, as the Anastor had cargo to deliver at New Orleans——"

"She didn't stop there, sir," said the official. "It seems, so the skipper told one of our men, that they had a couple of passengers aboard who paid handsomely for the ship to be driven at full-pelt to 'Frisco. The cargo that was to have been landed at New Orleans—well, there's no time limit on it, and the Anastor is going back that way. In addition to that, sir, they drove that ship like mad, and broke all their records for the trip, and the captain is well pleased with what he made out of it."

Nelson Lee went out on the water front, dazed and helpless, and he was returning to the hotel when he saw a policeman seizing a young fellow—a young seaman, by the look of him. And yet there was something familiar about the prisoner. Lee looked again, and then with a bound he was on the spot.

"Hector Macleod!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Lee!" The youngster was amazed, yet pleased, to see the detective. "You can explain, sir. I had to desert from the Anastor in order to follow those others. But they've given me the slip."

"I'll fix it for you," said Lee.

The charge against Hector was simply one of wandering, and Lee soon got him out of that scrape by means of his fame alone. He took Hector back to the hotel with him, where Ruth received him with joy.

Hector told his story and the detective learned that his guesses had all been accurate.

"During the voyage," said Hector. "Otho and Zenn mostly kept to their cabin, and as my work lay in the engine-room I was able to avoid them. They bribed the captain and

we did not call at New Orleans, and we drove the ship at a terrific speed all the way here. As soon as we got here Otho and Zenn went ashore, and I jumped ship and followed them. I saw them go aboard a sealer called the Paul S. Modie, and I would have tried to get aboard with them, but Zenn turned and saw me. What was worse, he recognised me, and I had to bolt for it along the waterfront. I escaped them, but fell into the arms of the police, who wanted to know to what ship I belonged and where my papers were.

And then you turned up, Mr. Lee."

But Nelson Lee was at the telephone, calling up the harbour-master.

"Has the sealer Paul S. Modie left here yet?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," came the answer. "She passed through the Golden Horn an hour ago."

"They have stolen a march on me," said Lee, as he replaced the receiver, "but I know where they are going, and I know the vessel they are on, and with a little bit of luck we may arrive at the place they are bound for before they do."

Later, when Ruth had gone to her own room, he looked at Hector Macleod for a moment.

"We have found out several things concerning this affair," he said, and then he gave Hector a brief account of all he had discovered. The young clerk leaned back in his chair and was silent for a time.

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked eventually.

"My duty is to guard James Phillips against these blackmailers," Mr. Lee said; "but what happens to Phillips afterwards depends upon you. If this story is true, and Phillips knew who Marle was, then he has been guilty of a crime. It was his duty to notify the police that he had recognised Marle, and the money that Marle had deposited should have been claimed by your father. Now, as your father is dead, the money is really yours."

"Then I shall never claim it," said Hector. "In many ways Mr. Phillips was good to me, and, besides—there's Ruth. If you can save her father from these brutes, sir, that's all I want. The rest we can settle between ourselves!"

"Well said!" the detective broke out. "That's what I wanted to hear from you. Whatever James Phillips has done, he has paid for in many ways, and especially in his present terrible position."

"But have you any idea where he is?"

"I think we will find him," said Nelson Lee. "Salcoth Island will prove the final phase. To my mind there is no doubt whatever but what Phillips set off to try to get to Salcoth Island, and possess himself of the incriminating papers before those two scoundrels could do so. And now, that's where we've got to go!"



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CHAPTER 15.

At Salcoth Island

ON a great lichen-covered rock a man was seated, his elbows resting on his knees, his chin in his hands. On his left there ran a long line of beach on which a grey sea was breaking monotonously, the voice of the surf rising and falling to the lift of the tide. It was a grey, desolate spot, and a thin sea mist, moving in great swathes, circled now and again around the lonely figure.

James Phillips had arrived at Salcoth Island. He had touched at Vancouver, and had succeeded in persuading one of the sealing vessels to land him on the island. It was really too early in the season for Salcoth, and the sealer had gone on, leaving James Phillips on the beach with his kit around him.

He had gone exploring and had found a hut out of which a trail of smoke was rising, and presently he had introduced himself to a squat, fur-clad figure. The Eskimo had a smattering of English, and in the phlegmatic manner of his race had displayed no surprise at seeing this solitary Englishman on the island.

James Phillips had made arrangements with the man to live in the hut, and a space had been provided in one corner for him to sleep. But it was soon revealed to Phillips that his search was not going to be easy. The hut was on the east beach, and presently the owner explained the reason for that. It appeared that eight or nine years previously the seals had, for some unknown reason, completely deserted the south beach, and had made new breeding quarters on the east side of the island.

The south beach was a great stretch of boulder-clad ground behind two spurs of land. It was the best part of two miles from point to point, and day after day Phillips searched up and down the long beach, trying to discover the site of the old hut. But as day followed day, despair gradually began to eat into the man's soul. The place was a wilderness of rocks and boulders, and he realised that his search might take him months, for there was very little chance or any indications of the site remaining after the long lapse of time. Even if part of the building had been left, there was little doubt but what the swift-growing moss that covered the rocks of the island would have effectively concealed it.

Phillips' only hope lay in his being able to discover what had once been the fireplace, for ashes and burnt wood are the only things that resist the steady march of the lichen. As he sat on the boulder, chin in hand, staring straight ahead, the mists cleared slightly and gave him a view of the sea.

From the shore, as far as the eye could reach, lay the grey waters, and he could see little black dots moving along the surface. He had had a few words with the Eskimo on the previous night, and the man had told

him that the seals were coming in their thousands to the east beach. For some time Phillips watched the scene. Then the sea mist began to thicken to a fog again, blotting out the view and creeping over the island. He rose to his feet, realising that he must return to the hut before the fog caused him to lose all sense of direction. But it swirled up over the sea faster than he would have thought possible, and in a very short space of time it was so dense that he could scarcely see his hand before his face.

He wandered on and on, but failed to find the hut. At intervals he shouted to the Eskimo, but received no answer, while the dim light of the miserable day faded and night came on, with the fog still hanging over the earth in a clammy shroud.

Phillips found a niche between two boulders, and making himself as comfortable as possible, tried to sleep. The cold was so acute, however, that sleep was almost impossible, and his teeth were chattering and his limbs a quiver.

THEN, from out of the fog, came a low hoot, the note of a steamer's siren. He listened intently. The sound was repeated again and again, but the whirling mist made it impossible for him to locate the quarter from whence it came. The siren was sounded three or four times, then there was silence, and although he strained his ears, Phillips could not hear any further sound.

The morning came, wet and chill, with the fog still brooding over the island. Stiff and sore, the bank manager arose to his feet, and ravenous now, began to move onward again. The fog baffled him, and he stumbled amongst the menacing seals before he realised that it would be better to keep along the shore as a guide. The result was that after three hours' steady search he saw the black hulk of the hut looming up in front of him. A gasp of relief broke from the man's lips, and he staggered forward, turning round the corner of the little shelter and pushing the door aside, tottering into the interior.

It was empty, and Phillips, crossing to the range of shelves beside the fireplace, drew down a tin of biscuits, and grabbing a handful, began to eat hungrily, voraciously. When he had taken the edge off his appetite and had dried his clothes slightly, Phillips began to wonder what had happened to the owner of the hut. As a rule the squat fellow hardly ever left the place except for a few moments at a time.

Suddenly he glanced at the corner in which his bed was placed; then he rose to his feet with a muttered exclamation. For beside the cot was lying a pair of small leather shoes. The manager of the Grangepool Bank crossed to the rude cot and picked up the shoes. They were obviously of European manufacture, and so small that Phillips' hand could easily span their length. He had never seen the shoes there before, and he

knew that the Eskimo did not possess such things. The discovery made him glance around the hut, and presently he found something else of interest.

It was an oilskin coat, and on one of the wooden pegs behind the door, he saw a sou'wester hat hanging. Then, most curious of all, close to the fire were one or two ends of cigarettes. They were of the oval Egyptian type, gold tipped.

"Visitors," murmured Phillips. "No doubt they have gone out with the Eskimo. Jove, that explains the siren last night!"

He went out of the hut and stood for a moment gazing moodily at the thick bank of fog. He knew that the hut was only about a hundred yards from the beach, and beyond it lay the bay in which, no doubt, the mysterious ship was at anchor.

"Who could come to this desolate spot? Were they ordinary sealers, or were they his enemies?"

The scrape of a foot on the boulders ahead roused him. He glanced forward, and there came through the mist the squat figure of the Eskimo. Phillips rushed towards the man and caught him by the arm.

"I was lost," he said. "But—tell me, what about the men who came to your hut? Where are they? What are they doing here?"

"They over there," said the Eskimo, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "They look for something, same as you, as the south beach."

Phillips' heart was like stone, and he was afraid, guessing who had come to Salcoth Island.

"Did you tell them that I—I was here?"

"No," returned the Eskimo dully. "They no ask me."

"Good!" exclaimed Phillips, sighing with relief. "If they don't know I am here, there is still a chance for me." He turned to the Eskimo. "I'm going to the south beach again. If they come back don't tell them I'm here. You understand?"

"I no mention you to anyone," said the Eskimo, making a promise which, although Phillips was little aware of it, was to have a curious result.

The banker released his hold on the man's arm and swung off into the grey mists, while the Eskimo, without even turning his head, trudged on into the hut. James Phillips was assured of his way now, for, by keeping a sharp watch on the boulder as he passed, he could recognise the marks he had made. At the end of an hour's steady trudging he found himself within earshot of the surf breaking on the south beach.

His pace broke to a slow walk, then he began to pick his way carefully over the moss-covered ground, stopping every now and again to listen. His cautious advance was continued for some time. then, suddenly, he came to a halt, every nerve on the alert. A voice had come to him through the fog! He was not able to make out what it said, but it guided him, and, dropping on his

hands and knees, he crept from boulder to boulder, until he was close to the spot. He found himself behind a huge rock, and, worming his way up this, he raised his head over the top.

The fog was not so dense now, and he could see the place quite clearly. About ten yards away, seated on a low boulder, was the figure of a man in oilskins, contentedly smoking. About five yards away were two figures. The taller of the two had a short-handled tool in his hand with which he was scraping the moss from the ground. The other figure, a wizened creature, was leaning over the cleared space, examining it intently. Phillips saw now that already a great portion of the space had been cleared, and the surface was broken.

"I guess you've gone far enough that way," said the sealer on the rock. "Come a little more to y'r right."

O THO straightened his broad shoulders and dashed the sweat from his face. He started work again on the spot indicated by the skipper of the ship in which they had arranged passage to the island. This skipper had known the old hut years before and reckoned he could guide them to the actual spot.

Motionless, James Phillips knelt, watching; then, at last, there came a quick cry from Zenn's lips.

"All right!"

Otho dropped the tool and bent forward. Zenn was digging feverishly at a certain spot in the cleared ground. Gradually, the hard surface was removed, and Otho, pushing Zenn aside, caught at the embedded object and tugged. The box came up out of its twenty-year-old hiding-place, and a moment later the rusted hinges had been broken off, and Zenn's lean hand closed round the papers.

He stood up and glanced at them, Otho's head thrust over his shoulder.

"Yes, they're all here—ship's papers and the deposit note."

What happened then Phillips was never able to explain. It seemed to him as though a sudden, mad impulse drove all caution from him. He launched himself straight out from the rock in one mighty leap, hands thrust forward, fingers opened. It was a mad effort, and came near to success. Phillips' lean body landed straight between the two men, and Zenn, taking the full force of the impact, was sent rolling over and over on the lichen-covered ground.

A snarling yell broke from Phillips' lips, and his hands closed over the precious papers, snatching them out of Otho's grip. The giant criminal, taken aback, was sent staggering a pace or two.

"They're mine—they're mine!"

The shrill shriek broke from Phillips' lips, and he whipped round, pressing the papers to his breast. In another moment he would have escaped, and neither Otho nor Zenn could have stopped him. But as he leapt

away, the sealer skipper thrust a hand into his pocket. When it appeared again the arm was extended, and a whip-like crack sounded.

There was a scream, and half-way in his leap for safety, Phillips reeled and collapsed, the papers escaping from his clutch, and scattering on the damp moss around. There was a rush, and Otho was on top of the bank manager, who went limp, a death-like pallor on his face, unconscious.

Otho bent forward, peering into the face of the man beneath him, then an oath broke from his lips as he leapt to his feet.

"It's Phillips!" he said, turning to Zenn.

The doctor had paid no attention to what Otho had been doing, being too busy collecting the scattered papers. This task completed, he came forward to peer into the upturned face lying on the wet moss.

"So it is," Zenn returned. "How did he get here? If he——"

"Hoo-o-o!"

Suddenly from the mists there came a long, warning note from a siren. The sealer gave vent to a quick cry of alarm. He darted across to where Otho and Zenn were bending over Phillips' body.

"You heard that?" he said. "That's the signal! Quick! I told my mate to sound if he saw any sign of a patrol boat. If you fellows want to get out o' here safe, you'd better scoot at once."

It was obvious that the skipper was alarmed, and he was not the sort to be alarmed without due cause.

"But this man," Otho began.

"He's dead!" snapped the skipper. "Come on! There's no time to waste."

They gave way to his alarm, and, with a last glance at the prone figure of Phillips, the two criminals slid away into the fog at the heels of the captain, while on the wet moss the lone figure of James Phillips lay stretched, mute and still, his fingers clutching the soft growth.

CHAPTER 16.

Closing In!

"D'YE see yon bank o' fog?"

Captain McPhail of the *Mary Barton* stretched his finger out, and Nelson Lee, standing beside him on the little bridge, nodded his head.

"Weel," said the Scotch skipper, "that's hangin' over Salcoth Island."

The *Mary Barton* was a snug little steamer used principally for coasting purposes along the bleak Alaska coast. Nelson Lee and his party had chartered it mainly because the skipper, Andy McPhail, knew the island.

"It's the south beach ye want?" asked the captain.

"Yes."

The *Mary Barton* took a long sweep seawards, finally heading towards the shore again. The captain had done that in order

to miss the headland that jutted out into the sea. The tide was running strongly out of the bay and the engines were all out, the propeller thudding, as they breasted the current. It was this fact that was fraught with great results, for, as the *Mary Barton* moved onward, out of the fog came a long hoot of a siren.

"Hallo, there's someone else up at the east beach," said Captain McPhail. "That's strange, for it's rather too early for the sealing. Maybe it's a patrol boat."

They listened, but the sound was not repeated, and the *Mary Barton* continued on her way round the dangerous coast of the little island.

Yet that hoot was the same signal that had drawn the sealer skipper and the two nefarious scoundrels away from the south beach. Otho and Zenn, stumbling along behind the skipper, finally reached the east side, to find the boat that had already been launched to fetch them aboard the *Paul S. Modie* was waiting on the shingle. They were soon rowed out to the ship to find the mate anxious and worried.

"Heard a ship out beyond the bay, going at a fair lick, by the sound of her screw. Listen—you can hear her now."

They listened, and out of the fog came the distant sound of the ship's propeller—a sound which, especially in foggy weather, carried for a considerable distance.

"A blooming gunboat!" growled the skipper. "We'd better clear out while we're safe." And he gave the necessary commands.

He was mistaken, but he was not to blame for that. Anyhow, his abrupt departure saved his two rascally passengers.

It was three hours later before the *Mary Barton* came to anchor at the south beach, and one of its boats dropped down into the water. Two seamen tumbled in, and held it steady while Ruth, Nipper and Hector Macleod went down the ladder into the boat, to be followed by Nelson Lee and Captain McPhail.

The little boat was rowed off into the fog, and presently it scraped on the shingle. The mist had begun to move uneasily now, and the captain, raising his head, sniffed at the slight breeze.

"Wind coming," he announced. "It'll clear this fog."

They went ashore and trudged off, leaving the two seamen to guard the boat. The captain was striding ahead with Nelson Lee, and the sailor was silent for a long time.

"I don't see any sign of the hut," said Lee.

"No," replied the skipper. "It's gone. But I know just exactly where it used to stand."

The skipper stood for a moment studying the ground, then his memory guided him aright, and he turned on his heel and began to move off over the rocky ground. The old fellow seemed to be wonderfully agile, for, despite his years, he soon put a gap of

twenty or thirty yards between him and the rest of the party.

Hector and Nipper had dropped behind to help Ruth over the rough places. They went on for the best part of a quarter of an hour; then suddenly they saw Nelson Lee hurrying back towards them. Nipper gave one look at the stern countenance of the detective, then came to a halt.

"What is it, gov'nor?"

"Oh, it's—it's all right!" Lee returned with a swift glance at Ruth. "Only I don't think you need come any further. Captain McPhail has—has found the place where the hut was, and I am afraid that we—we are too late!"

Ruth had been studying Nelson Lee's face, and suddenly her quick intuition brought a dread into her heart. She came forward, catching the detective by the arm.

"You are hiding something from me, Mr. Lee," she said. "Quick! Let me know! What is it?"

There was a gentle expression in Lee's eyes, and he looked down at her.

"Well, Miss Phillips, I am afraid that we have—have found your—"

With a quick cry the girl broke away from Lee, and, hardly stopping to see where she placed her feet, she darted off over the rough ground until she came to where the skipper stood over a prostrate form.

NELSON LEE had not paused to examine the body, his first kindly thought being to save the girl from unnecessary agony. With a groan, Ruth dropped on her knees beside the ragged, bearded man.

"Dad—dad!" she wailed.

She leaned forward, raising the head and straining it to her breast. As she did so, Captain McPhail, who had drawn aside, saw the fingers twitch.

"Mr. Lee!" he called. "He's alive! Quick!"

The detective went up to Ruth and gently drew her aside; then a brief examination told him that the skipper's words were true. The life had not quite left James Phillips' body. There was a great bruise at the back of the head, and the bullet had made an ugly wound in the thigh. But the man still breathed.

Instantly the skipper whipped off his heavy coat, and Nipper did the same; then the garments were knotted together, and the unconscious figure of Phillips was placed on them. Nipper and Hector acted as stretcher-bearers, and they carried their burden back along the beach, followed by Ruth.

Nelson Lee had stepped aside, and was examining the moss-covered space. He saw the hole out of which the box had been drawn, and just above the small iron-bound box. He held the box in his hand, gazing at it.

"This is the cause of the fight," he said. "We have come across half the world to find this, only, unfortunately, we have arrived just a little too late. Those two rogues were here before us."

"But this couldn't have happened long ago. Maybe they're still on the island," suggested the skipper."

"You have forgotten that siren we heard. They must either have seen or heard us approaching, and have given us the slip."

He and Captain McPhail turned and followed the melancholy group ahead. James Phillips was lifted into the boat and rowed back to the Mary Barton. As soon as the injured man was made comfortable below, Lee sought out the skipper.

"You need not waste any more time on this side," he said. "You can take us round now to where the seals are. I suppose there's a hut or something there?"

"Oh, yes!" said Captain McPhail. "There's always someone here to look after the seals. They're mostly Eskimo."

The Mary Barton was under way again, and this time the skipper cracked on all speed, with the result that within an hour he had dropped anchor in the little bay opposite the Eskimo's hut. He went ashore with Nelson Lee and had a word with the Eskimo. The detective saw the small shoes, which, in his haste, Zenn had not been able to recover.

The Eskimo, in his broken English, gave an account of what had happened so far as he knew, and Lee was able to reconstruct the grim scene that had taken place on the south beach.

"They've got the best of us, Nipper, and that's the long and short of it," Lee said afterwards, when he and his young assistant were alone in their cabin together. "But there's one point in our favour now. It is evident that they believe that James Phillips is dead, and although they have the Sea-foam's papers and the deposit note they may find it rather difficult to turn that deposit note into money."

"And what are we to do now, gov'nor?" Nipper asked.

Lee smiled.

"In that case," he said, "we are going to head straight for England, and there's just a possibility of us getting there ahead of those two scoundrels. If we do so—well, we can prepare a grim reception for them."

BUT the Paul S. Modie returned to the island early the next day, and Zenn talked with an Eskimo, who, for all his pretended languid manner, had been very interested in all that had happened, although he would not speak until Zenn made it worth his while. Then he told of the coming of the other ship, of the party, with a girl in their midst, who had landed, found the body of the man on the south beach, and had taken it away with them. And, what was more, he was able to tell them that James Phillips still lived!

After that Otho and Zinn talked earnestly with the skipper of the Paul S. Modie, who left the sealing grounds and headed south until he crossed the tracks of the liners that sailed between Vancouver and Yokohama. He transhipped his passengers, and was well

paid for his trouble. Unknown to Nelson Lee, both Otho and Zenn were on their way to England.

CHAPTER 17.

Disguised!

SEATED on the edge of the kerb, outside Grangepool Station, was a grotesque figure. It was that of a bent, silver-haired man. A tattered hat was drawn over his brow, and over one eye was a black patch. On the pavement stood one of those dingy organs, and the beggar was turning a handle and grinding out a discordant melody.

Opposite where he sat was the entrance to Grangepool Station. It was a bright day, and there were a good number of people about the streets. A little girl took a penny from her father's hand, and, running across the pavement, dropped it into the tin pannikin.

"Thank 'ee kindly, missy," said a hoarse voice, and the child, running back to her father's side, went into the station.

At five o'clock the London express steamed into the station, and its passengers began to emerge from the wide entrance to the station. The beggar-man began to turn his organ anew, the wheezy notes rising above the clatter and noise.

There was a large number travelling by the evening train, and the bearded face of the beggar was lifted, watching the stream of people as they came out. Presently a taxi came slowly through the station gates. Inside were seated a girl and a tanned, good-looking lad. The beggar craned his neck and caught a glimpse of a third figure leaning back in the shadows inside the taxi. It was an elderly man, whose white, pallid face suggested convalescence after a serious illness. The girl was very attentive to the man as the vehicle sped off towards the New Town.

Ten minutes later the beggar packed up his organ, and, carrying his folded camp-stool under one arm, hobbled along the main streets of the busy town. It seemed to be as much as he could do to move; his legs were bent under him, and he hobbled, painfully, slowly, along the edge of the kerb.

He turned into a quieter street, and made his way along it, then found himself at last in a lane which led into a long range of allotment gardens, stretching behind the newer streets of the fast-developing town. In one of these streets was James Phillips' house.

The beggar turned by a clump of trees and went towards a shabby-looking caravan. From the little tin smoke-stack of the caravan the smoke was rising lazily, and as the beggar reached the short flight of steps that led to the door of the vehicle, it opened, and a figure appeared in the doorway. It seemed a very fair match for the grotesque figure on the steps. It was a wizened old man, dressed in drab garments that hung loosely round his shrivelled frame.

The shuffling figure at the foot of the steps swung the small organ from its shoulders and slipped it under the caravan, then climbed the steps, while the man at the head held the door open with a wrinkled, claw-like hand.

The door closed behind the tottering figure, and as soon as it had done so, a great change came over the bent form. The legs seemed to straighten, the whole figure grew tense, and the crouching body stood up until its bulk almost filled the caravan.

"They have arrived."

It was the deep voice of Count Ivor Otho that sounded, and the wizened figure at the door whipped round towards him.

"You're sure?"

The hoarse voice came from between the thin lips, and, with a quick movement, Zenn drew the smoked glasses from his eyes. Otho strode across the caravan and dropped on to one of the bunks.

"Hector Macleod, the girl, and James Phillips, came in by the five o'clock train, and have gone up to the house in Fairview Avenue."

"I knew they would have to return here," said Zenn, an evil smile crossing his vulture face. "All his interests lie here and we had only to wait. Now, we must act—quickly—before Nelson Lee can get on our track."

That same evening Otho left the caravan, not in the guise of the beggar, but as Nat Marle, the ex-skipper of the Seafoam. He made his way along by the wall of the garden at the back of the house and clambered over, then crept forward towards the house until he reached the broad balcony that ran round the front part. He climbed on to the balcony, slipping over the rails, and, keeping close to the wall, found himself at last beside a window, the blind of which had been drawn. He noted, however, that the lower part of the window was slightly open, and, dropping on one knee, reached forward, catching at the bottom of the blind, and lifted it.

He found himself peering into the study. James Phillips sat in an armchair.

Raising himself, Otho strode across the balcony, reaching the door. It had not been closed, and a push was enough to send it back on its hinges.

Then he stepped into the wide hall, closing the door behind him. He made no sound as he crossed the hall, and opened the door of the study. Stepping into the room, his eyes sought the figure in the armchair. James Phillips had drawn the chair up towards the fire, and the cup of tea, untasted, stood on the little table by his side.

The crooks crossed the room, slowly, and was close to the table before Phillips sensed his presence.

"That you, Hector?"

The question was spoken without the man raising his head. The deep curt laugh that Otho gave made Phillips swing round.

"You—you!"

O THO'S broad, criminal face was set and grim. He strode up to the nerveless man, fixing him with his eyes. Beneath that fierce gaze Phillips was like wax.

"Yes," said Otho. "I hold the deposit note that you gave twenty years ago in return for twenty thousand pounds. That money you misappropriated, you must now deliver up."

"I—I can't! I do not possess anything like that sum."

"Then what you do possess I shall have," the relentless scoundrel went on. "Every penny you have belongs to me. I am going to give you a chance, Phillips. I'll give you twenty-four hours. By this time to-morrow night, eight o'clock, you must meet me at the corner of this avenue, and you will have in your possession at least ten thousand pounds, in Treasury notes. Understand? Ten thousand! That is only half you owe."

"I—I will do my best," faltered Phillips.

"Well, remember, you have twenty-four hours!" snarled Otho.

As the words left his lips he heard a thud on the outer door, followed by the sound of a key in the lock. With a swift rush the criminal was across the room and had lifted the lower half of the window. He swung the blind aside, and slipped his great bulk through the gap, then turning round, he fixed his eagle eye on James Phillips' face.

"Until to-morrow night!" he said.

Then, dropping the blind, he vanished, just as Ruth and Hector Macleod came into the room to see Phillips staring wild-eyed at the open window.

CHAPTER 18.

Poison Gas!

FOR some time Otho and Zenn, disguised as the two beggars, had been living in the caravan by the allotments, waiting and watching for James Phillips to return to Grangepool. They had never taken any notice of the men working on the allotments, but there were two who never lost sight of what happened around the caravan. These two were, really, Nelson Lee and Nipper, who had obtained this employment for the express purpose of watching the two crooks.

Lee had guessed that the deposit note was of no use to Otho and Zenn unless they could use it to blackmail the bank manager, and this they could not do until James Phillips returned to Grangepool. The detective could have secured the arrest of Otho and Zenn at any time, as escaped convicts, but his job was to save the bank manager from the blackmailers, and that would be impossible without the destruction of the Seafoam's papers and the deposit note.

One thing only handicapped Nelson Lee, and that was the hours he had to work to satisfy his unsuspecting employer. During

the time he was compelled to be on the allotments he could not follow the criminals, but he could watch the caravan.

Nelson Lee knew just when James Phillips had returned, and he was waiting for the criminals to act. Otho had gone to Phillips sooner than the detective had expected, but his return was duly noted and the watch went on unceasingly, until the night when Otho had arranged to meet James Phillips.

The darkness had increased, and there were only a few stars gleaming in the sky. Ahead, as Nelson Lee and Nipper stood by the dark allotments, they could see the caravan, and, by its side, a dull glow revealed the presence of a small fire. As they watched they saw the huge bulk of Otho stealthily moving away from the caravan towards the Fairview Avenue.

"We had better divide forces," said Nelson Lee to Nipper. "You had better go down to the house and try to find out what is happening there. Be careful how you go, and don't let anyone see you. When you have found out how things are, you can come back and wait for me here."

Nipper, rising to his feet, slipped across the road, and vanished into the dusk. Lee waited four or five minutes before he, also, arose. He kept well in the shadows of the high wall as he approached the caravan, until at last he found himself within twenty yards of it.

Flat on his face the detective began to move through the grass until, at last, he was under the side of the caravan close to the steps. About five yards away from him was the fire, and, seated on an upturned box, was the grotesque figure of the beggar. Once, the figure turned its head, and Lee saw the hawk-like features of Zenn standing out against the faint glow from the fire.

Ten minutes passed, then a sudden thought seemed to strike the crook. He came to a halt in the middle of his pacing, wheeled towards the van, and, striding forward, climbed the short flight of steps.

Noiselessly the detective wriggled out from his cramped hiding-place, and, kneeling beside the flight of steps, raised himself until at last he was level with the glass-panelled door.

The door was slightly ajar, and through the gap Lee saw the shapeless figure of Zenn. The crook was kneeling in the centre of the van, and in front of him lay the old organ. Zenn wrenched up the top part of the organ, and, thrusting in his claw-like hand, began to draw out paper after paper.

He rose to his feet at last, folding the papers into a bundle, which he thrust into his pocket. As he did so he heard a board creak. There was a mirror above the locker, and Zenn threw his head up and glanced into it. Just for a moment he had a fleeting vision of a grim, rugged face staring at him.

Then, quick as a flash, Zenn leapt aside, thrusting his hand below the pillow of his bunk. But, even as he withdrew his hand, an iron grip fell on his wrist, and, flinging

himself round, Zenn struck at the unknown intruder.

His hand was now free from beneath the pillow, and in it was a long, gleaming tube. Lee had pinned Zenn's wrist against the side of the bunk, but the talon fingers were still gripping at the tube, and twice Zenn tried to level it. But Lee, putting up all his strength, succeeded in keeping the hand rigid.

Slowly and remorselessly, the detective tightened his grip until the bones of the wrist creaked to his pressure. He had flung his other arm under Zenn's shoulder, and the side of his hand was pressing against the lean throat.

Suddenly the crook made another desperate effort, and, just for a moment his hand moved from the hard side of the bunk. The tube dropped, but even as its hollow end swept towards Lee, the detective drove his arm forward and up.

Zenn's knuckles rapped against the side of the bunk, there was an oath and a scream, then the tube fell, and a faint click sounded. There was a muffled report, such as an air-rifle gives. Something flashed out of the tube and burst against the wall above Zenn's head. A greenish smoke hung for a moment over the two men, then, enlarging rapidly, descended on them both.

Nelson Lee felt a burning sensation in his eyes and nostrils, and, quick as a flash, he dropped to the floor, dragging Zenn with him. He knew that it was a poison gas that the skilled criminal had tried to use on him, and there was only one way to escape from it.

With Zenn's lean body clasped in one arm, Lee wormed his way to the door. One swing of his disengaged hand saw the door open, then Lee and Zenn went sprawling down the steps, rolling over on to the green grass. Lee had never released his hold on his enemy, and, when they fell together, the detective, with a quick swing, was uppermost. Zenn's body was rigid, and his arms, hanging motionless by his side. The vulture head was back, and the eyes closed.

Lee, peering at the face, drew back with a quick breath, for he saw that there was a faint greenish hue on Zenn's lips. The poison had reached Zenn first, and its deadly effect was apparent.

Raising himself to his knees, Lee felt in the folds of the garment, and presently his fingers touched the little packet of papers. He drew them out and slipped them into his pocket.

As he bent over the figure there came to his ears a crash, followed by a shot. Lee straightened up, and, leaping over Zenn's prostrate body, darted into the road. There was another flash and a report, and he saw the blue flame flick out in the darkness.

Dropping into a run, Lee sprinted along the road, and found himself beside the lane that ran down at the back of the houses in Fairview Avenue.

CHAPTER 19.

Settlement in Full

THE darkness deceived Nelson Lee, and, as he darted on, someone came tumbling over the top of a wall right on to his shoulders. Lee, taken by surprise, was carried off his balance, and a moment later a pair of powerful arms were round him and he was pinned to the ground.

Lee, however, had one arm free, and he drew back his fist, and was about to dash it into the face of the man he was struggling with when the unknown shouted:

"Quick, Nipper—quick! The beggar's getting away!"

Lee's fist dropped and he peered into the face above him.

"Why, it's Macleod, isn't it?"

There was a gasp, and the arms round his body were released. Lee moved aside, and Hector scrambled to his feet. Another rush and a scramble sounded, and Nipper came shinning over the wall.

"It's Marle," Hector broke out. "He—he got away into the lane. I followed him, and he fired at me twice."

Instantly Lee realised his mistake, although he was scarcely to blame. There were a number of dark doorways set in the wall higher up, and he had not paused to examine them.

He whipped round, and, followed by Nipper and Macleod, went sprinting off up the lane. They emerged on to the high road, and, turning to the left, headed at once for the caravan. Lee was ten yards ahead of his companions, and, as he reached the fire, Nipper heard him give vent to an exclamation of dismay.

He had left Zenn prone and helpless beside the little heap of cinders, but there was no trace of the ungainly figure now.

"They've gone away," said Lee. "Come on, Nipper—hunt for 'em."

But even as he spoke a car came to a grating standstill on the distant high road. There was a scuffle, a cry of pain, and a thud, then the car sped off again at a reckless pace.

Lee guessed what it all meant, and rushed to the road just as a chauffeur in uniform came scrambling to his feet.

"What happened?" asked Lee tersely.

"Two fellows hailed me, and I pulled up for 'em," said the man. "One was a big chap and the other was like a monkey. Before I could speak the big one grabbed me by the throat, pulled me from my seat, and smashed me down in the road. Then they entered the car and drove off."

"They've got away," said Lee grimly.

It was true enough. Nipper went racing to the police-station with the number of the stolen car, but that was of little use. The two crooks had a good start, and two hours later the stolen car was found abandoned many miles from Grangepool.

"It was all my fault, guv'nor," said Nipper. "I ought to have known the beggar would have made a dash for it."

"It was as much mine as yours," put in Hector. "I ought to have kept a better watch."

"What happened?" Lee asked.

They had returned now and were retracing their steps towards Fairview Avenue. Nipper's report was a very brief one. He had made his way to the house, and, gaining admission by the back wall, had stumbled across Hector in the kitchen. Hector had told Nipper that James Phillips had insisted on going out an hour before, and had not yet returned.

Ruth was beside herself with fear, and Hector had been trying to prevent the girl from going out in search of her father. Nipper and Hector had made a hurried plan, and, while Hector waited in the house, Nipper had gone off in search of Phillips.

He found the wretched bank manager locked in a fierce struggle with the burly figure which Nipper recognised as being that of Otho. James Phillips, rather than allow himself to be blackmailed, had made a desperate attempt to kill Otho, and it was only the master-crook's swiftness that had saved his life. Nipper had only been in the nick of time, for Phillips was pinned to the fence of his own garden, with Otho at his throat.

The young detective had not stopped to consider his actions, but had leapt straight at the ruffian. Otho had struck out at Nipper, sending the lad reeling; then the huge criminal had darted through the white gate, while Nipper, gathering himself together, had made after him.

Otho had flashed across the garden and down beside the house with the young detective at his heels. The youngster had called out to Hector, and the plucky clerk had leapt out of the kitchen just as the huge crook came down the path.

IT was well for Otho that he had been in that garden before and knew his way, for the two youngsters were close on his heels by the time he had gained the barrier. He had leapt on to a wooden barrier, which had given way, and that was the crash that Lee had heard. Then, from the top of the wall, Otho had fired a shot which had grazed Hector's temple.

The crook had dropped into the lane and Hector, drawing himself up on to the wall, had run along the parapet like a cat, following the man below. Near the head of the lane, Otho had fired again, and this time the bullet had caused Hector to lose his balance as he ducked, sending him toppling into the garden below.

The youngster had clambered on to the wall again, and, seeing a dark figure beneath, had flung himself bodily on to it, only to find that he had collared Nelson Lee.

"It's rotten luck," Macleod broke out. "I don't know what we shall do. It seems to me as though Mr. Phillips is going to be hounded by those men for the rest of his life."

Lee made no reply, and when they arrived at No. 14, Fairview Avenue they came up

with Mr. Phillips, who was staggering home.

Lee took the man's arm, and they walked up the broad drive together. Two minutes later a silent party was gathered in the study, James Phillips in the deep armchair, while Lee stood at the table, with the little pile of papers in front of him.

"Here are the records of the Seafoam's last voyage to Salcoth Island, and also the deposit note which Marle received from you. Nat Marle died in Laidstone Prison quite recently, and his testimony can never be given against you."

It was the first time that James Phillips had heard the truth, and he listened to Lee's words with breathless interest.

"Marle dead—Marle dead!" the man repeated, over and over again.

"Yes," said Lee. "So far as Marle is concerned he can never claim his illgotten gains."

Then, with a quick pace forward, Lee stepped up to James Phillips and put the papers into his trembling hands.

"But, you will remember, Mr. Phillips, that that twenty thousand pounds did not belong to Marle. He had swindled his employer, Malcolm Macleod, and the rightful owner stands—there."

He pointed towards the bronzed youngster. Phillips raised his sunken eyes and looked at the lad.

"Yes, yes, I know that," the bank manager said brokenly. "But you will admit that I—I did my best for you, Hector. It was only when that first letter came from the prison, and I knew that the past was rising up against me, that I—I got rid of you. Can you forgive me for that, Hector?"

Macleod felt a small hand steal into his, and he closed his own round it.

"There is nothing to forgive, sir," he said. "And if you feel you are under any debt to me—well, I know a way of repaying it."

"You mean that? Can I repay it in any way?" said Phillips quickly.

Hector stepped aside and Ruth drew forward.

"Give me your daughter, sir. I have loved her for years, and she is more to me than money."

James Phillips rose to his feet, and coming forward, placed the Seafoam's papers and deposit note in Hector's hands.

"They belong to you," he said, "but if you are in earnest about what you said just now, I am only too ready to agree."

There was a fire burning in the grate. Hector, releasing his hold of Ruth for a moment, stepped forward, and, with a quick swing of his hand, tossed the deposit note and ship's papers into the heart of the flames.

"And that's the best place for them," he said quietly.

THE END.

(Next week's issue contains another brilliant, New Long Detective-Thriller entitled "SHADOWS OF DOOM!" No lover of sensational fiction should miss reading this story.)

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HIKING!

"Roy," of Dalston, London, is going on a hiking holiday soon. He's heard so much about hiking, as a good medicine, and as a golden chance of getting to know the countryside, that he's going to get first-hand information on the subject. He wants to know what I think about it.

Well, Roy, hiking's good. I've tried it myself, and I find that it is distinctly good. So I strongly advise you to try a dose of the "medicine" yourself. But just one word of warning. You're new to the game. And you may in your enthusiasm be inclined to over do

it on the first few days. Take a tip and don't. The golden rule of the hiker is—"Take it easily." And whilst on the subject of rules here are two others: "Don't overload yourself with unnecessary equipment," and "See that your boots or shoes are in good order." Gee, there's nothing so bad as a heavy load and bad boots.

Well, good hunting, "Roy," and don't forget to take a copy of the NELSON LEE with you. The old paper's a great companion.

READERS WIN FINE PRIZES for JOKES!

Old Gent (to convict in prison): "Why did you come to prison?"

Convict: "Competition! I made the same sort of banknotes as the Government, and they were jealous."

(E. Jarvis, 49, Morieux Road, Leyton, E.10. A penknife.)

Lady: "My good man, have you ever taken a bath?"

Tramp: "No, mum, I never took anything bigger'n a silver teapot!"

(F. Chant, 72, St. Benedict's Road, Small Heath, Birmingham—a penknife.)

Tommy (reading from book): "The sandy coves of Cornwall are very picturesque."

Teacher: "What is a sandy cove?"

Tommy: "A bloke with red hair."

(H. Blake, 60, Northway Road, E. Croydon, Surrey—a pocket wallet.)

Miggs: "Now that your son is attending school I should like to buy him an encyclopedia."

Briggs: "Certainly not. He's got to walk the same as I used to."

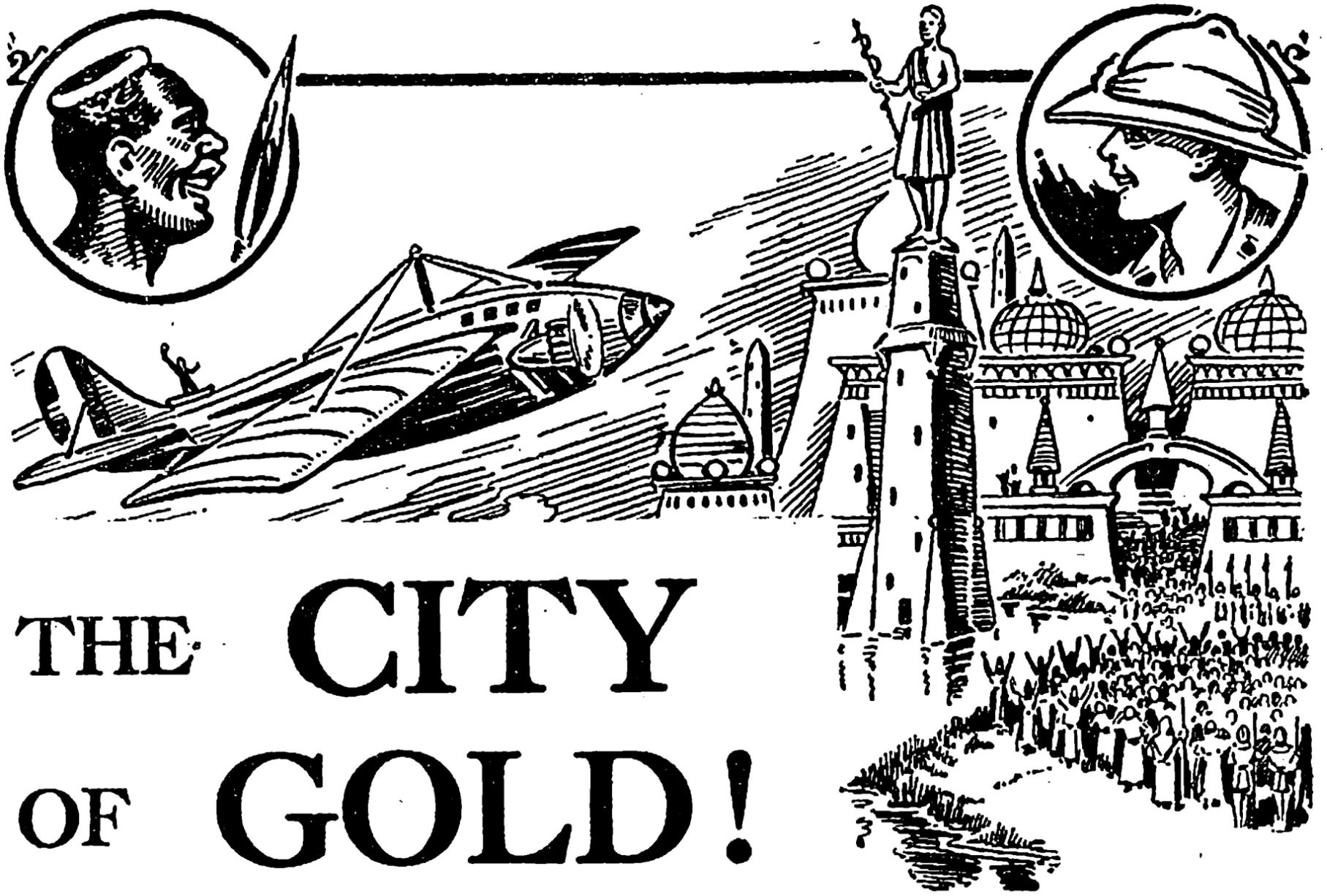
(T. G. Morton, jr., 19, Christmas Field, Sible Wedingham, Essex—a penknife.)

Teacher: "What comes after G in the alphabet?"

Tommy: "Whiz!"

(J. Dunn, Railway Hotel, Launceston, Cornwall—a penknife.)

Greatest Story of Adventure In Mysterious Africa Ever Written!



THE CITY OF GOLD!

By *HERBERT FORD*

Tom Cook and his cousin, Al Vandeck, have travelled in their wonder craft, the "Flying Fish," to the City of Gold in Central Africa. Here they discover that Tom's ancestor, once ruled as a god and now a statue of gold has been set up at the entrance to the city to his memory. As this statue bears a remarkable resemblance to Tom himself, he is proclaimed by the people as their god returned to life again. But a high priest, Gobo, jealous of the white boy, plots to kill him. His plot, however, has been discovered by the adventurers.

The Speaking Idol!

TOM and Lulu had been dropped in the top gallery of the arena behind the temple whilst the Flying Fish beat back towards the forest to await the time set for the "coronation," when Alva would put his mysterious plan into operation. Tom had an idea that his young American cousin had something pretty good up his sleeve, though nothing he could say would get more from him than a cryptic "Wait and see!"

Stealthily the Zulu and his "young baas" crept into the narrow, winding passages with only the spotlight from Tom's torch to light them. It was an eerie experience for the lad, as he had no idea where they were making for; but Lulu took it all as coolly as if exploring catacombs under the earth beneath a heathen temple was an everyday occurrence.

Which was not altogether surprising considering his ability to see in the dark; and, in addition, he had a wonderful memory and sense

of direction, and led his companion direct to the hidden doorway to the temple as unerringly as if he had been used to going to it every day of his life.

Once inside the temple they could hear the murmurs of the multitude which was already gathering in the market-place to await the opening of the temple and the promised coming of Tomkuk the Great. They stood in a surging mass staring up at the sky into which their "god" had disappeared and from whence they expected him to come again, probably with another firework display.

"Plenty room here, baas," Lulu whispered, as he opened the back of the idol and squeezed his way in. "Have no fear; none will interrupt us. The old serpent told me that he alone knows the working of the idol. The secret was handed down from father to son, and thus only the high priest can make the oracle speak. Though the other priests know that it is but a false and deceptive god, they know not the

workings. They are cunning men, these priests, as ever. Take your ease, baas; time is young. 'Set! Look through this spyhole, baas; the priests are coming!"

The great figure of "Tomkuk" was provided with numerous small sliding shutters which could be used for the different gadgets which worked the mechanism of the huge fake, and through one of these Tom watched interestedly as the figures of the priests flitted hither and thither lighting concealed lanterns so that the mysterious-looking rays of light should be concentrated solely upon the idol, the main part of the temple being left in total darkness until such time as it pleased the priests to light the congregation up.

Tom's keen ears caught the sound of a rattle from his left as for a moment a part of the panelling was pushed back and he caught a glimpse of the vulture-like head of Gobo thrust through as the high priest exchanged some hastily whispered words with one of his satellites.

"So that's where you are, is it?" Tom muttered. "Did you see him, Lulu?"

"Ja baas, I see him. Behind yonder pillar. Keep there, old serpent; perhaps your god Tomkuk will give you food for thought 'ere very long."

At last the outer doors of the temple were thrown open and the people, marshalled by a troop of the gold-armoured guard, were ushered in. They were quiet enough under the eyes of the priests, who did not hesitate to shove them about or lay their long, white staves about the shoulders of those who did not get out of the way as quickly as they desired.

Tom noticed that there was no desire on the part of the crowd to get into the front rows, as it was evidently thought safer to be as far away from the great idol as possible. Probably they had learnt wisdom from experience.

Half a dozen cunning-looking priests took up their position on the first steps of the sort of altar on which the huge pedestal of the god stood.

One of them was immediately under the upraised hand of Tomkuk. He was a big, brawn-looking man with a cruel-looking face and Tom noticed that he had the sleeves of his robe rolled up above the elbows, displaying his sinewy arms, whilst the grip of a big, jewelled dagger showed in his belt.

Those nearest to him eyed this formidable-looking figure with fascinated and fearful eyes whilst he glared around at the huddled people as if picking out prospective victims. Lulu also spotted this formidable-looking person, and a quiet chuckle came from his lips as he noted just where the man was standing. In fact, the Zulu appeared to be thoroughly enjoying a little private joke of his own throughout all the proceedings.

He had already lighted the strong lamp which illuminated the eyes of the idol, and the people stared fascinated as the somewhat menacing eyes of the "god" appeared to scan them. Lulu was quite busy dodging about seeing that the various levers, handles, ropes, and pulleys which he had to use were all in working order.

Tom, looking through his peephole, saw the savage-looking "executioner" priest drop a

handful of some powder through a grating just in front of the idol, and immediately a dense smoke arose until the features and majestic form of the idol were almost obscured from the view of the multitude.

"Down on your faces!" thundered the big priest. "Know that you are in the presence of Tomkuk, the Great, the Merciful, the All-Seeing, who dies not and whose word is Law! Silence, kneel, kneel and kiss the earth which is scared to his majesty!"

From somewhere at the back of the temple the silver trumpets gave a clarion blast and the people flopped down, touching the cold, marble pavement with their foreheads.

"Now shall Tomkuk speak words that will astonish Gobo at least!" grunted Lulu, and threw over a switch which made the great head of Tomkuk move slowly from side to side. Another operated the right arm and hand which held the Golden Serpent, and as this was raised in blessing the people thundered out:

"Hail, mighty Tomkuk! We, thy people, greet thee! Baihete, Baihete, Baihete!"

As the echoes died down they rose to their feet and stood waiting in dead silence.

Lulu applied his lips to the mouthpiece of the megaphone arrangement which communicated with the mouth of the idol, and his gigantic bass voice, multiplied a dozen times by the instrument, bellowed forth:

"WHAT WANT YE?"

The sullen-looking priest gave a quick glance up at the statue, for these were by no means the opening words which has been arranged for Tomkuk to speak; and the tremendous voice was a novelty, besides. He had a moment's doubt whether the recent events and the arrival of a living "Tomkuk" double of the "god" had not indeed made some difference.

He scratched his head as he deliberated, for there had been set speeches arranged, and this was all wrong so far. Suddenly the huge head swung round in his direction, and Tomkuk's baleful eyes were fixed directly upon him as the god bellowed angrily:

"Why stare ye, priest? Where is my servant, my high priest, Gobo?"

"He—he is s-sick, mighty Tomkuk!" quavered the man, with an anxious glance towards the spot where he knew the aged old sinner was concealed.

"Sick, is he? Ye lie!" bellowed the appalling voice; and the great hand dropped downwards and sideways, sending not only the executioner priest spinning, but three more of the luckless brothers who had been listening open mouthed.

"Where are my servants, the true servants of Tomkuk the Great?" grumbled the mighty voice. "Hither, and show this scum that Tomkuk has resources they know not of! Hither, come from the air to do my bidding!"

"Whoo-oo-oo-oo-augh!"

From high above the temple came the sound of the Fish's syren, nearer and nearer until it sounded outside the very doors. Then, as these were thrown open, Tom Cook got the surprise himself that his cousin had promised him, for the flying-boat glided in with her headlights

full on and ploughed her way through the lane of people to take up her position right in front of the great idol.

"Well, I'm jiggered, so that's what you meant? You cunning old bird!" grinned Tom, as he spotted the carefully kept secret of the flying-boat.

By some arrangement under the hull a skeleton under-carriage with heavy, rubber-tired wheels had been let down so that the Fish, which could either swim in the water or fly in the air, could now travel on land.

Lulu had evidently been in the secret, for as the great searchlights illuminated the face of the idol his mighty voice thundered out:

"Where is Tomkuk—my son Tomkuk—whom I have sent to rule ye and teach ye my will? Come hither, Tomkuk, beloved of my heart!"

"Whoo-oo-oo-oo-augh!"

As the raucous voice of the syren blared out again, Lulu hastily whispered:

"Hambe gachle, baas; that is for you! Speak to them and fear not. Remember you are Tomkuk the Great—or so they think."

An opening appeared at the side of the idol, and as Tom stepped through the lights were switched off for a moment, to come on again with redoubled volume and show him seated upon the gigantic hand of the idol which he so closely resembled.

There was an awestruck murmur, which died away into a deathly silence as Lulu's solemn voice pealed out from the mouth of the "god":

"Behold, my people: Tomkuk is with you! Tomkuk the Great, who dies not, has returned to ye for a space to rule ye and bring ye peace and prosperity!"

Tom, from his lofty perch, caught a glimpse of the angry but seared face of the old high-priest peeping out from his hiding-place. It was evident that Gobo was both thoroughly mystified and bewildered by the strange words that

were proceeding from the mouth of the idol which he thought his creature, **Lesardu**, was controlling.

As it was, "Tomkuk," was not only speaking words which were never intended to come from his lips, but here, actually, was this golden-haired duplicate of his held up to the people as their ruler acknowledged by the "god" whom the old priest knew to be a fake and supported by his "servants" which this wonderful flying-boat which seemed to have appeared from nowhere at his call.

TOM COOK, standing full in the light of the blazing headlamps of the "Flying Fish," could not see the people or the flying boat out in the darkness of the temple, but he knew the position of the Fish and worked accordingly.

He stretched his arms out to the people with a smile on his lips as again they thundered out the welcoming "Baihete, Tomkuk!" the royal salute for ages of the rulers of the Golden City.

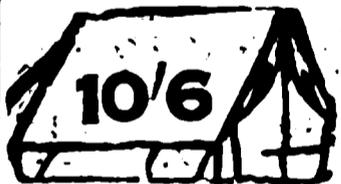
Then he swung his left arm around until his hand was pointing direct at the secret panel behind which the old priest, Gobo, was concealed.

"Come forward a few paces in front of that second pillar and train your gun on the panelling. Al!" he called. "That old humbug is hidin' there. Can you blow that panelling out without shootin' the old cuss? He may be mightily useful later!"

"Okay, chief; sure thing," chuckled his cousin; "we've just got the very gadget right here. Ben, load that starb'd gun with aqua ferocio and mind you don't spill it!"

(More Thrills and amazing adventures in next week's chapters of our Great African Story, boys! Don't miss 'em!)

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