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Action, Excitement, Thrills Unlimited in this Powerful Detective Story . . .

The TREASURE



CHAPTER 1.

A Tragedy of the Underworld!

NELSON LEE, Nipper and Inspector Harker of Scotland Yard were striding along a dingy street in the heart of Limehouse, London's "Chinatown." There was a reason for this—several reasons, in fact. There had been several jewel robberies recently in the country. Black Kent, an infamous jewel thief, together with Robert Ball, his lieutenant, had been seen in London in the company of a Chinaman, and Nelson Lee, who had sent Kent to prison on a previous occasion, had been approached by Harker in the hope of

bringing off a capture and ridding the world of a pest—at least, for a time.

They strode on together along the narrow side-street, walking three abreast and giving way for nobody. One could not afford to be courteous in a region where politeness was construed into a sure sign of fear.

Harker paused presently on the outer circumference of a yellow circle of light, shed by a feeble street lamp, and he pointed to a small shop window of opaque glass. Just discernible was the legend:

"WU LING. Chinese Laundry."

"That's the sort of show which has possibilities," he whispered, pointing to the shop.

Starring Nelson Lee, the famous detective and his assistant, Nipper!

of WU LING!



Somewhere in the heart of London's Underworld there lurks the most ruthless and cunning jewel thief the world has ever known—Black Kent. The perilous task of running to earth this deadly human snake is given to Nelson Lee and Nipper—a task they face with typical grit and resource.

“As a matter of fact, I'm keeping an eye on Wu Ling.”

“Is he an old hand?” Lee asked, peering up at the shop.

“No,” Harker said. “Nothing against him at all. He runs a straight laundry, and does pretty well. But he handles more money

than he makes out of the washing business.” Nelson Lee nodded thoughtfully.

“Do you know where he came from?” he asked.

“Liverpool,” Harker said. “But he wasn't there long. He crossed from San Francisco. We got a pretty good report from—”

He stopped suddenly, and the bodies of the three stiffened by the shock of a revolver-shot which rang out deafeningly. It seemed to have come from the back of the very shop at which they were.

Crack! Another shot rang out, and this time the sharp report was followed by a woman's scream—a scream which seemed to pierce the eardrums of the waiting men, till it was drowned in yet another sharp report.

For a moment they stood there irresolute, conscious only of a trickle of cold water along the spine. Then Lee's hand closed tensely over the Yard man's arm. He pointed with the other hand to the door of the shop.

"Your luck's in, Harker," he whispered tensely. "There's something doing here!"

The C.I.D. man nodded grimly, his hand clasp ing instinctively over the butt of his revolver. He whisked it out, swinging round to meet a figure dashing up to them from behind.

He replaced it when he saw the newcomer to be a constable, out of breath and anxious. The sharp report of the two shots had brought him post haste and with unerring instinct to the spot.

"What's up here?" he demanded gruffly as he came up—for he would not have recognised his own brother in that darkness.

There was no time to waste, and Harker was not the man to waste it. He told the policeman quickly whom he was and introduced Nelson Lee and Nipper.

"We must get the back of the house covered first," he said quickly. "Will you go round with this lad, constable—perhaps you know how the land lies?"

"I believe this terrace backs on a timber yard, sir," the policeman said. "Anyway, we ought to get 'em if they try to make off that way. Shall I blow up for assistance?"

"Not yet," Harker said. "Get round, quickly."

The constable knew the topography of Limehouse as he knew the design of his own back garden, and he led Nipper away quickly and without hesitation.

"He's a keen chap!" Harker said. "I don't think he'll let us down. Now for it!"

He clasped the knocker of the shop door, and the next moment it echoed with a clamorous demand for admission. In the silence of the narrow street there was something strange and eerie in the insistent knocking.

Harker bent down and peered into the narrow slit which answered for a letter-box. The man had an iron nerve, and yet a queer feeling ran down his spine when he saw the door of the inner room open and a bent and hideous figure appeared for a moment, peering towards the door of the shop.

Harker straightened himself and groped in his side-pocket.

"We'll have to force it, Lee," he said. "There's someone in here with a face like Beelezebub, and he's too scared to open up."

In a moment Harker produced a light steel jemmy and two light, strong sections which clamped in securely, and gave it a powerful leverage. He inserted it dexterously in the chink of the rather crazy shop door and thrust it back.

With the first wrench it groaned and creaked and all but responded. With the second it gave way, and flew open as a result of the kick which the Yard man gave it. As the two detectives entered the little shop a shaft of light from the torch in Lee's hand swept searchingly round the place.

It was only a little shop and very barely furnished. There was a counter and a small cash-desk, and along two sides were small, simple racks in which were stored the various bundles of laundry work.

The shop seemed empty until Lee bent and directed his torch under the counter. Harker bent at the same time and dragged what seemed at first a bundle of washing from underneath.

"Come out of it!" he rasped.

The bundle of washing became suddenly and pitifully animated. The withered and yellow-parchment face of a very old Chinaman blinked in the light of the torch, and his claw-like hands were extended in feeble supplication.

Evidently he was deplorably terrified of something.

"Please you no shoota Chong!" he pleaded rather pipingly. "Him velly old man. Him velly honest. Him do shorts and collars myself allee time. Him velly bad man in dere"—he pointed with a wizened paw towards the inside room—"him shoota Mrs. Wu. Mister Chang velly good fella."

Harker reached forward, and, grabbing a handful of his clothes, he jerked him towards the door.

"Go in there and do what you're told," he said gruffly.

The old Chinaman, gibbering strangely, hobbled forward into the inner room; and as he did so he glanced back over his shoulder at the men following, as though he were afraid of what they would see.

Nelson Lee strode inside, and a sudden gasp broke from him—a gasp echoed by Harker the next moment. A quick glance told them that they had stumbled on a double tragedy.

Face downward upon the polished floor of the little room lay a big man—a revolver lying a few feet from his extended hand as if it had fallen as he dropped.

Beyond the small centre table on the other side lay the figure of a woman, half upon the floor, half upon the settee. She was a Chinese woman—Lee could see that at a glance—and she was fairly young; not more than twenty-six or twenty-seven.

Even in this moment, when the two detectives stood surveying the tragedy of the scene, Lee was conscious of the extreme tidiness and cleanliness of the room.

The burning eyes of the old Chinaman were fixed in fear upon the face of Harker, who had stopped in natural consternation. When he looked up there was light in his eyes which did not ease Chang's mind.

"What's the meaning of this, you yellow devil?"

The old man waved his yellow claws protestingly.

"Chang not know. Chang honest man," he piped. "Him velly bad fella on the floor. Him shoot Mrs. Wu."

"And who shot him?" Harker asked quickly.

The old Chinaman stammered a bit and then shook his head in a mixture of confusion and fear.

"Chang sittee in shop allee time. Him no like-a Wu friends."

A glance passed between the two detectives.

"Is that Mrs. Wu?" Lee asked, pointing to the figure of the woman.

"Yes, sir," he piped. "She velly good wife to Wu!"

"And where is Wu Ling now?"

Once again the old man betrayed a hopeless confusion. He shook his head and expostulated with his yellow claws.

Nelson Lee deduced, with some trouble that Mr. Wu had been in the room, and so had another man—but they had both disappeared, where, Chang could not say.

The detectives, however, did not pause long over the preliminary questioning of the old chink. They moved quickly over to the figure of the woman, lifting her on to the settee.

Her dress was stained with blood, and her thin, yellow face showed ghastly against her jet black hair. She lay still, absolutely inert.

"It's a case, isn't it?" Harker muttered, as Lee bent over her.

"Very nearly, I'm afraid," Lee said.

He raised the limp wrist and felt the pulse beating still—but very feebly. He pulled down the eyelids, and they betrayed the seriousness of the position.

From his pocket Nelson Lee took the small flask of brandy which he always carried, and he moistened the rather thick lips of the unconscious woman. Almost immediately there was a response on the part of the pulse—and he looked up at Harker.

"They could keep her alive with brandy till they got to the hospital," he said. "She ought to be got away at once."

Harker took the tip and strode to the front door. A small knot of curious people had gathered round and were peering inside. It was the work of a second to send a young fellow flying for the ambulance. Then Harker returned to the room to find Lee examining the woman.

There was no doubt that Wu Ling was well off. This prosperity was evidenced by the jewellery which Mrs. Wu wore upon the fingers of each hand—rings with settings of

pure diamonds, which scintillated in the lamp-light.

Nelson Lee called Harker over to see.

"Look at the size of these stones," he said, indicating some very large ones, and the Yard man nodded frowningly. "She's got two thousand pounds on her two hands, if she has a penny."

"Wu Ling didn't buy those out of his laundry," Harker said significantly. "But let's look over the place, Lee."

Nelson Lee remained in the room, keeping an eye upon Chang; while Harker, with his revolver at the cock, made a swift survey of the house. He returned after a few minutes.

"The place seems empty," he said, "but the back door was wide open. I wonder if Nipper and the constable——"

He paused, as there came from the huddled figure of the man across the room a feeble groan. It was the first indication they had had that he was still alive. Lee sprang quickly across and took up his pulse. It was still beating.

"If the ambulance is here quickly——" he said significantly, and then he got up and glanced at his watch and moved through the inner door into the shop.

"It is ten minutes since we came here," he muttered to himself, "ten minutes since Nipper went round to watch the back of the house. If he has laid anyone by the heels we ought to know by now."

But the investigator and Harker were to know a little later on that Nipper and the constable were more dramatically occupied than they were.

CHAPTER 2.

Mysterious Wu Ling!

THE constable had led the way quickly and silently to a gap in the terrace of small houses—a gap occupied by a wheelwright who drove a precarious trade in all sorts of timber lumber. His lumber yard, littered with spokes and felloes and rusty wheel-rims, was divided from the narrow street by a rickety fence about seven feet in height.

It was here that Nipper and the constable paused, breathing as silently as they could, their faces flushed and expectant.

"This is at the back of the Chink laundry, I'm certain," the policeman whispered; "and this yard makes a good getaway for 'em if there's any trouble. I think if we stand here——"

"Hist!" warned Nipper in a whisper. "What's that?"

The constable restrained Nipper for a moment, his hand clasped over his arm, and then, above the heavy breathing and muttering, a howl of pain rose suddenly, a howl followed by a volume of strange curses in what sounded like an Oriental lingo.

"Someone's laid the Chink by the heels," the constable said. "I reckon it's your boss. Come on!"

In spite of the man's girth and size he was athletic and perfectly trained. Leaping

up, he drew himself to the summit of the rather crazy fence and vaulted down silently, Nipper following him without more noise.

They began to grope and to pick their way forward through the rubbish and impedimenta of the yard, when, as if for their especial benefit, the light of a candle sprung out from the back window of one of the small houses which adjoined the yard.

It was a feeble enough candle, and the window was filthy dirty, but an anæmic stream of yellow light fell, nevertheless, across the yard, and there, among a heap of debris in the corner, stood two figures in a strangely contorted attitude.

Nipper could discern a rather tall, muscular man in a dark overcoat and cap, who, by a vicious arm-lock, held in helpless agony the writhing figure of an Oriental.

The sight of a Chinese rendered helpless by ju-jitsu, which was an Eastern art, savoured somewhat of irony. In the feeble light the figure of the man in the cap seemed to Nipper unmistakable.

"It is the guv'nor," he muttered to the constable. "Put the torch on them!"

He stepped over towards the struggling pair, for the Chink, apparently was willing to go as near to getting a broken arm as possible.

"You've got him, then, guv'nor?" he said.

"Yes, I've got him, my boy!" came the gruff response, and a little thrill of surprise ran through the lad, for the voice was not that of Nelson Lee at all.

The next moment the constable's torch gleamed out, and Nipper saw that the captor was not Nelson Lee. Who it could be he could not imagine, and the constable was rather taken aback.

They knew the next moment, however, when the man spoke with an air of quiet assurance which held at the same time something of impatience and excitement.

"Here, catch hold of this stink-ape, constable," he said hoarsely. "I'm glad you came. I was just going to blow up for you. You haven't got any 'cuffs, have you?"

"No," the policeman said. "Er—by the way—who are you, sir?"

"Inspector Wilson, of the C.I.D.," the man said. "I thought I was pretty well known to most of you. I've been watching this little shack for some time. Who's round the front?"

"Inspector Harker, sir," the constable said, "and Mr. Nelson Lee, the private investigator."

"I thought it was Harker. They told me at headquarters they would probably tell him off for the job. And he's brought Lee, eh? Good! Here, catch hold of this parchment-faced joss, constable. There's another guy mixed up in this little affray, and I think I know where he's gone!"

Wilson had been speaking quickly and quietly, as if explanations were a waste of time, as doubtless they were when time was important. Now and again, in the middle, the Chink whom he held prisoner attempted

to speak in what seemed excellent English, but directly he opened his mouth it was just to utter half a word, followed by a groan of pain which sealed his lips immediately—a groan wrung from him by an agonising pressure upon his half-broken arm.

The Chink seemed too exhausted to make any bid for liberty when he was being transferred to the secure hold of the constable. But directly Wilson was freed of his charge he seemed alert for further action.

"You'd better take him round the front to Harker," he said, "and tell Harker not to leave the premises until I come round. I may have another joint to bring with me."

"Very good, sir. We'll take the Chink round now. Take his other arm, will you, my lad?"

Nipper took the Chinaman's other arm, and the Yard man who had captured Wu Ling led the way to the gate of the yard, raising the wooden bar and opening it. A moment later he had disappeared quickly and with a purposeful step along the narrow street, and Nipper and the constable led their yellow prisoner round and through the narrow passage-way to the street in which stood Wu Ling's shop.

The constable made one or two remarks to the Celestial as they pushed him along, but he seemed now to have changed his mind about talking. He remained silent and morose, as if reconciled to his fate.

Around the entrance to the shop they found a knot of curious people, but the policeman thrust them aside unceremoniously and forced his way through into the inner room, where Nelson Lee and Harker were making investigations; the old Chinaman, Chang, cowering, terrified, in a corner.

His yellow, bird-like face went even more hideous when the constable and Nipper appeared in the doorway, the sullen and helpless figure of Wu Ling between them.

A look of relief and pleasure sprang into the face of Harker as he turned quickly round; and Lee, also, was visibly pleased.

"You've got him?" Harker cried.

"Yes," said the constable. "This is Wu Ling!"

The Yard man stared sternly at the prisoner.

"Here, my beauty," he said gruffly, "have the mitts on!"

Wu Ling raised his hands meekly, and the cuffs were clasped over his wrists.

In the meantime Nelson Lee had bent to obtain a closer view of the features of the man whom Wu Ling had regarded with such intense hatred—for those features had awakened suddenly in the detective an abnormal interest. He propped the head, face upwards, upon a shabby hassock, and, bringing the lamp, he peered down at the features.

A gleam came into his eyes as he straightened and turned to Harker.

"We've picked up the trail of Roger Kent, Harker," he said grimly. "This man is Jim Ball, his right-hand man!"

CHAPTER 3.

Wu Ling's Getaway!

WU LING sat huddled up in a chair, his shoulders drooping, his eyes fixed upon the floor in a dazed way, an inscrutable smile, which held no semblance of mirth, playing at the corners of his thin-lipped mouth.

He seemed unaware now of the manacles upon his wrists; he seemed unaware of Nelson Lee and Harker and those about him. The Yard man produced a small notebook and a pencil from his pocket.

"Wu Ling," he said slowly, "it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used as evidence against you. Have you any statement to make concerning the shooting of your wife and this man?"

There came a perceptible shrug to the shoulders of the captive. It was his only sign that he had heard what was said.

"We'll just see what you've got on you, anyway," Harker said. "Put up those claws of yours!"

Wu Ling raised his hands listlessly and Harker proceeded to make a swift search of his loose robes. A moment later, from a voluminous pocket, artfully concealed within the loose robes of the Celestial, he took a wad of banknotes which seemed absolutely new.

"Money!" said Harker shortly, examining them slowly. "Plenty of it! We will mind these for you for a time, my friend."

The Chink shot at him a glance of hatred and suspicion, but he made no protest. Harker handed the wad of notes to Lee, who examined them carefully. They were perfectly new and ran in consecutive numbers, as if only recently issued from a bank.

"What about the money we found on Ball," Lee said. "Don't these run in the same sequence?"

For they had been through Ball's pockets already.

"I believe they do," Harker said. "If so, it's important. Shows there has been some money transaction or—here we are—let's see!"

He drew from his pocket a small wad of new notes which he had taken from the pocket of the prostrate man. They were five ten-pound notes, and their numbering preceded the sequence of the notes which had been found in the Celestial's possession.

"Wu Ling has been doing some paying out, it seems to me," Harker muttered. And then, looking over at the Chinaman: "Where did you get this money from?"

Once again Wu Ling refused to answer. He simply ignored the question; so completely, in fact, that Harker became annoyed.

"You'll have to speak later on, my yellow beauty," he said, with some bitterness. "We'll—"

Harker stooped suddenly and glanced over, wondering, at a corner of the room, for there had issued from it suddenly the rather pitiful cry of a little child.

The cry seemed to galvanise Wu Ling to a sudden activity. Before anyone could restrain him he had leapt across the room and thrust aside the crouching figure of Chang. Throwing aside an elaborate curtain of Chinese tapestry, he bent and took from an equally elaborate cradle the little slant-eyed child.

The child's crying stopped immediately as the father crushed it to him tenderly; and then Wu Ling turned round upon the others and faced them defiantly, a strange light of scorn in his narrow eyes.

Harker seemed to read something of the fear in the man's eyes.

"Don't worry about your kid, Wu," he said. "That will be taken care of while we are taking your evidence."

The child had settled comfortably again, and now Wu Ling bent and laid it back tenderly into the cradle, pulling the curtain across once more. Then his eyes sought the prostrate figure of the woman on the couch, and with a cry he threw himself upon his knees beside her, thrusting his yellow, manacled hands over his face, moaning pitifully.

It was at this moment that Nelson Lee heard the warning clang of the approaching ambulance, and though there were plenty of curiosity-mongers outside to indicate the house in question, he sent Nipper out to bring them in.

There was a certain amount of confusion as the ambulance men entered, examined the injured man and woman, lifted them to the stretchers, and carried them out to the waiting ambulance. All the time Wu Ling stood there staring into vacancy, and apparently unaware of all that was going on.

But no sooner had the door closed on the ambulance men than he seemed to become aware of the existence of those in the room. His eyes were fixed upon the erect figure of Harker, and they blazed with sudden hatred.

He lowered his hands and worked them horribly till, with a swift and alarming suddenness, he slipped his hands from the cuffs with perfect ease, and in a trice the manacles were hurtling through the air straight at the Yard man's face.

At the same moment as they struck Harker, Nelson Lee leapt upon Wu Ling; but the Chinaman had become possessed again with a strength and a feverish agility which was almost maniacal. He was like a rubber man, eluding the detective's grasp, slipping here and there like an eel.

Catching Lee unawares, with a spasmodic wriggle, he brought his elbow back into the detective's face with such force that Lee was momentarily stunned, and in that moment Wu Ling seized his opportunity. As Nipper leapt at him, he fell back, and, with a trick of ju-jitsu, sent the youngster hurtling over his head with such force into the side of the dresser that nearly five minutes elapsed before Nipper's interest in anything revived.

The next moment he turned, and with a cat-like vault hurled himself head foremost at the square of the window which gave on the small backyard.

There came a sudden splintering of glass, a sharp cry from the constable. A moment later Wu Ling had disappeared from the room, and in the glass of the window was a gaping hole.

"The yard—quick!"

The words broke from Lee hoarsely, and he darted out into the back of the house, closely followed by the constable and Harker, who was dashing the blood from his bleeding face.

Nelson Lee snatched out his automatic as he ran, intending to use it without compunction. He dashed from the back door, into the narrow passage-way which gave on to the yard of the house.

He was just in time to see Wu Ling dart across the garden and spring, cat-like on to the rickety fence which gave on to the wheelwright's yard.

CRACK!

An automatic spoke, and a bullet plugged only too audibly into the very plank which Wu Ling was clutching. He jumped wildly, chancing where he landed.

Crack! Crack!

Something whistled in the Chinaman's ear, and it seemed simultaneously that something hot had fallen on his hand. As he fell among a heap of wheels and spokes, he felt the warm blood flowing from a flesh wound; but he did not stay to bind it up.

He fled precipitately—and it was good for him that he did. For he had only just scrambled across the yard and through the gate when Lee appeared over the fence behind, his automatic levelled in deadly earnest. The weapon, however, did not speak again, and Nelson Lee turned back with a frown of intense annoyance into the house.

"Never mind, sir," the constable said, glad that there were others superior to him to stand the brunt of the getaway, "he ain't got away yet! Chances are Mr. Wilson will get him."

"Yes, Inspector Wilson will probably be on the prowl round the back," Nipper said, collecting his thoughts gradually.

Nelson Lee looked over with ill-concealed impatience.

"What the deuce are you rambling about, young 'un? Who's Wilson?"

"Yes, who's Wilson?" echoed Harker—and he was in no better temper than Lee.

"He—he was the man who caught Wu Ling first," Nipper said. "He handed him over to us."

"Handed him over to you," cried Lee impatiently. "What do you mean?"

Harker was looking in perplexity at Nipper. He now directed a questioning glance upon the constable, who proceeded to explain hastily.

"We got into the yard just in time to

see someone get a stranglehold on the Chink," the constable said. "Of course, we jumped up at once, and he seemed glad to see us, as I suppose he was. He'd got a proper ju-jitsu hold on the yellow devil, else he'd never had managed him."

"But who was this?" Harker asked.

"Inspector Wilson, of the Yard," the constable said. "He told us that he'd been watching Wu Ling's place for a week or more. He seemed to know you were round this side. Hadn't you any idea he was——"

"Idea?" queried Harker quickly. "Wilson? Are you sure he said Wilson?"

"Positive," put in Nipper. "And he looked like one of your men, Mr. Harker. He said he was a C.I.D. man. I expect they forgot to tell you that they'd told him off on this job as well."

Harker frowned darkly.

"They didn't forget any confounded thing of the sort," he snapped. "They told me distinctly that I was the only man they had told off for the job from H.Q. Besides, what is a man prowling round——"

"Wilson wasn't doing a small stunt on his own, I suppose?" Lee suggested.

"Wilson isn't the sort to do stunts out of working hours. Besides, it's all durned rot. Wilson is in Ireland on a job, and has been for weeks. He's likely to be there for weeks to come. How the deuce could it be Wilson?"

"He said his name was Wilson, anyway," said the constable, rather piqued. "And he handed us the Chink. He was after another one, he told us, who had got clear of him. It's pretty plain there were two, and——"

"He was the second!" put in Lee bitterly.

"What?" cried the constable, and Nipper looked over amazed.

"I said he was the second party," Lee repeated.

"But how could he?" protested the indignant policeman. "How could he be implicated if——"

"Easily," Lee said. "His name was not Wilson. But I think I can tell you what it was."

"What's that?" Harker said quickly.

"Black Kent," Nelson Lee said. "The Master Rogue and jewel thief!"

CHAPTER 4.

Cross-examination!

THE amazement written on the face of the Yard man was comparatively mild compared with the utter surprise and dismay revealed in the countenance of Nipper, when he heard Lee's words. A gasp broke from him.

"Black Kent, gov'nor?" he reiterated.

"That is my opinion," Lee said.

"But how could it have been him?"

"Without any trouble," Lee said. "What sort of a man was this?"

"Something after your own build, gov'nor. Of rather slim build, but muscular. He was wearing a dark overcoat, and a cap, too. I thought at first that it was you."

"It's Kent's description, without a doubt," Lee said, with a wry smile. "Did you see his face?"

"Yes. Rather thin, with a slight moustache."

"Wilson is clean-shaven. It was Kent, right enough."

"And he quietly handed Wu Ling over to us—eh, gov'nor?" Nipper said, with some

words; but his remark had always finished in a groan of agony and a writhe of pain. Certainly his recollection in this instance seemed to bear out what Lee said.

"But, confound it, Lee," Harker muttered, "this yellow-faced Celestial could talk to us afterwards. If Kent did this shooting, if Wu Ling is simply the victim in the case, why the deuce can't he speak? What has he got to be afraid of?"

"That is what we didn't know—not yet!" Lee said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But our hideous old patriarch over here ought to



Nipper gave a shout of amazement as he saw the two figures struggling desperately in the corner of the yard. In the light of the torch he saw that one was the mysterious chink. "So you've got him, gov'nor!" cried the youngster.

bitterness. "Telling us he was Wilson of the C.I.D.!"

"It seems so."

"But, surely, Lee," Harker protested, "this fool Chink had a tongue in his head. He wasn't likely to stand still and hear Kent get scot-free with a parcel of lies and bluff?"

"He might have tried to talk," Lee said—"and couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Would you feel disposed to talk and chatter with your arm on the rack, Harker?"

Nelson Lee's remark recalled rather vividly the Chinaman's apparent anxiety to speak at this stage of his capture. Nipper remembered how several times Wu Ling had endeavoured to burst forth into a torrent of

be able to enlighten us a little. Have you got your notebook, Harker?"

The Yard man produced his notebook once again, and Lee peered over to where the old Chinaman was crouching down beside the cradle which held the now deserted child of Wu Ling.

Lee stepped over and addressed him.

"Your name's Chang, I believe?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Chang what?"

"Chang Long."

"And how long have you known Wu Ling?"

The old man made a laborious calculation.

"Chang know Wu Ling nine month," he said.

"Where did you first meet him?"

"Chang meetee Wu Ling in Liverpool," the old man said. "We washed same tub laundry allee time five week."

"And what made you both come to London?" Lee asked.

"Wu Ling say him takee laundry myself," repeated the old man.

"Himself?" queried Lee.

"Yes," said Chang, with a hideous smile. "Himself, I mean."

Lee glanced at Harker, and Harker returned his glance in a significant manner, which said plainly:

"The old chap is speaking the truth so far. We have found out this much about Wu Ling for ourselves already."

"You say Wu Ling had plenty of money," Lee said. "Where did he get it from?"

"He save it," replied Chang, not realising he had said nothing definite about Wu Ling's prosperity. "Him velly careful. Mrs. Wu velly careful. Save plenty much dollar."

Nelson Lee suspected this of being a half-lie, but he had no means of disproving it.

"How long has Wu Ling been married to Mrs. Wu?" he asked presently.

Chang shook his head, and then hazarded a guess.

"One—two—three years," he said. "Mrs. Wu velly nice gal. Wu Ling velly fond of his wife; she plenty fond of him. They both velly fond of that leetle boy"—he pointed to the cradle. "This velly bad job, sir—plenty bad job!"

"Do you say that Wu and his wife were happy together?" Lee asked.

"Yes, sir—plenty good friend, allee time. Wu Ling like little dog after her, but she plenty fond of Wu, too!"

Chang was an old man who had lived in English-speaking countries for most of his long life, and his knowledge of the Chinese language was as limited as his knowledge of English. He could speak only a wretched jumble of each, and it was rather tedious for Lee, trying to spot the vital information from his pidgin English.

Wu Ling, it seemed, was no ordinary Chinaman, being of the mandarin class, whose father had been exiled from Northern China. But in adversity and in a strange land, Wu Ling had preserved the pride and dignity of his caste. He had saved a quantity of money—how, only himself knew. Above all, he had married a Chinese woman to whom he was devotedly attached, and he had a son—a triumph for any Chinaman, whose dearest wish is a son to carry on the family name.

It was Wu Ling's oft-repeated ambition that his son should be a gentleman—not only a gentleman, but one with Western culture and education.

"He want send him to university," Chang explained. "Cost plenty money, but Wu no mind a bit. Him say to me, 'Chang, my son, shall be rich man.'"

Harker smiled. However well Wu Ling did with his Chinese laundry, it was never likely to be sufficiently remunerative to cover the cost of his son's education at one of the

universities. There was evidently some other source of income. Apparently the chief had not been far out when he detailed them to keep an especial eye upon Wu Ling, late of San Francisco.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wu Ling were living very happily together," Lee said, half to himself and half to the old Chinaman, "and making enough money out of their laundry to contemplate sending our little friend in the cradle to Oxford or Cambridge when he is old enough. A very laudable ambition, Chang! It was most unfortunate when all this happened and spoilt it. Wu Ling had visitors to-night, Chang."

The old man nodded, suddenly terrified of what was coming next.

"Who were they?" asked Lee.

"I don't know!"

In his fear Chang became voluble. He swore by every English and Chinese oath that he knew nothing of the business which Wu Ling had with these strangers. He was stowed away in the shop and made to stay there.

"There were two strangers—two visitors, then?" Lee said.

"Yes, sir."

"Who were they?"

"Chang cannot tell."

"I know that, you yellow-faced owl!" Lee said impatiently. "What sort of men were they?"

"One lay here," Chang said, indicating the place on the kitchen floor where had lain the prostrate figure of Jim Ball. "The other him run away, Chang think. Him run through back door."

"Who was he?"

"Him the boss. Velly bad man. Him shoot Mrs. Wu!"

Questioned how he knew it was Kent—or Ball's companion—who had shot the Chinaman's wife, Chang admitted that it was merely a surmise on his part. He had heard Mrs. Wu scream, and he had heard three shots—as Lee as the others had done. And he was terrified.

Lee paused for a few moments in his questioning; then he said:

"Look here, Chang. Why was Mrs. Wu shot? What was the quarrel about?"

"Chang cannot tell," the old man said. And all the arguments and threats of Lee and Harker could get nothing further out of him.

Nelson Lee pursed his lips thoughtfully and passed over to the little cradle where the baby was sleeping.

"We shall have to find a reliable neighbour to take this little fellow in hand for a bit—unless he goes to the infirmary," Lee said. "Hallo, what's this piece of symbolism?"

Crumpled beside the cradle was a highly coloured print which many an Englishman would have been glad to hang up as a picture. Wu Ling had evidently relegated it to the amusement of the baby.

What now claimed Lee's attention was a water-colour sketch upon a piece of parchment, a rather weird-looking piece of art, admirably executed, but representing something, apparently, which was beyond Lee's ability to guess.

It seemed to be a rendering of some Eastern symbol. It seemed to be a picture of the sun, the moon and a bright star; and the sun was in the form of a huge, unshaped jewel like a ruby or a diamond, the brilliant light of which was reflected in the lesser planets.

Underneath the picture there was a neat inscription in Chinese, which Lee after patient study for some minutes, translated as "The Jewels of Wu Ling."

It seemed to the detective that Wu was either of a poetic or imaginative nature, or else he was superstitious to the last degree. Certainly he seemed to have a soul above laundry work.

Nelson Lee took the drawing from the wall, and, rolling it carefully, he put it in his pocket for further examination. He turned again to Harker, who, it seemed, had just succeeded in eliciting a little more information from Chang.

Perhaps the old man hoped that if he told everything he would not go to the lock-up himself. If such a hope ever warmed the wizened heart of the old Chinaman, it was soon dispelled when another policeman came, bringing with him a plain-clothes man.

The handcuffs which Wu Ling had slipped so adroitly were then clamped upon the wrists of Chang Long, and he was taken off, shivering, to the police-station. The two constables were left in charge of the house and to arrange for the baby to have temporary board and lodging with a middle-aged couple of Mongolians who thought a lot of Wu Ling, and who lived next door.

"I must get back to H.Q. at once and make my report," said Harker. And he added rather bitterly: "By the way, if that yellow-faced old devil is to be relied upon, this chap, Wu Ling, is rather an interesting customer."

"I think he is," Lee said.

"Chang says he is the son of a Chinese 'nob,'" Harker went on, "and that he had big ideas for this young son of his. Wu Ling, apparently, used to take him into his confidence now and then, and tell him of his hopes and ambitions. He used to talk, apparently, of his three jewels, and how they were everything in life to him."

Lee, remembering the inscription upon the drawing in his pocket, glanced over at Harker with a sudden interest.

"Three jewels?" he repeated. "What are the three, then?"

"That's what I don't know," Harker said, laughing.

He evidently did not take this sort of talk very seriously or practically.

"I suppose his wife was one jewel, and his child another. I don't think there is any doubt but that he was fond of them."

"No doubt at all," Lee said. "I'm inclined to agree with you, Harker, that they are two of the jewels. But what is the third?"

"That's what I give up," Harker said. "Even Chang couldn't tell. Perhaps it was Wu Ling himself."

Harker laughed at the conceit of the notion, and Lee smiled, too, but he was silent and thoughtful as they footed it westward along the Commercial Road—Nipper and Harker keeping their eyes skinned for a taxi. In the salubrious region of Stepney they were lucky enough to pick up a conveyance.

CHAPTER 5.

By Whose Hand?

SETTLING back in the cushions, the recollection of a chance word which he had overheard pass between Harker and Chang came back to Nelson Lee.

"Did I hear that old chap rambling on about a charm?" he asked.

"Yes," Harker said. "I had forgotten that for a moment—though I took a brief note of it."

He took his pocket-book from his pocket and turned over the pages, refreshing his memory.

"Most of these Chinks are superstitious, I suppose," he said presently, "but Wu Ling seems to have been especially so. He has a sacred charm, or something of the sort, which his father carried into exile."

"What sort of thing, do you know?"

"Yes; I asked Chang. It is ivory, and is the carved representation of an infant prophet. It was broken, so Chang believes, from the original idol in Canton during the Boxer Rebellion."

Nelson Lee nodded eagerly. These things had an abnormal interest for him.

"And why does Wu Ling treasure this?" he asked. "What properties has it as a charm—or what does he believe it to do?"

"From what Chang said, I should think that Wu Ling imagined that this charm could gratify any wish of his respecting the child, provided he pressed the charm into the baby's hand every night and muttered some heathen incantation. They are strange folk, these Orientals."

The three of them lapsed into silence, and presently the taxi turned up from the Embankment and pulled up in the narrow confines of the Yard. Harker bade them good-bye and left them. Nelson Lee and Nipper were then driven to the Gray's Inn Road, when, to Nipper's disappointment, the detective, instead of plunging into explanations and theories, sat poring over the strange picture he had taken from the wall of Wu Ling's room.

There was much about the affair that baffled Nipper. Two people had been shot without any evidence as to who had fired. Three bullets had actually been fired. One had struck Mrs. Wu. One had hit Jim Ball. The other had been found wedged in the

wall. Mrs. Wu's revolver had not been fired at all. Jim Ball's weapon had fired one bullet. That left two bullets unaccounted for altogether.

But Nelson Lee refused even to discuss the matter yet.

"In half an hour's time, Nipper," was all he said. "Phone up the hospital and find out how Mrs. Wu and Jim Ball are."

Then he turned once more to the strange diagram which he had found in that room at Limehouse, studying it carefully. He noticed above the sun that there was poised a beneficent cloud, which took the form of a half-clutched fat hand, like the hand of an infant.

"I suppose this must represent the Ivory Charm which Harker mentioned," he muttered to himself. "The Chink evidently sets some store by it."

His reverie was interrupted a little while later by the voice of Nipper on the 'phone. Nelson Lee listened as he got on to the house surgeon and questioned him.

"Have the bullets been extracted?" he queried.

"Yes; immediately on arrival. That in the man was extracted from the fatty tissue about the region of the heart. Another inch would have been certain death. But now we think he will recover. The woman, I am afraid, is too far gone. She has lost a lot of blood, and has no constitution. She might linger for a few hours—perhaps a day—but the issue is very doubtful indeed."

"What about the bullets you have extracted?" Nipper asked.

"They have been handed to an inspector from Scotland Yard about half an hour ago. He has taken them to headquarters, I believe."

Nipper glanced over at Nelson Lee and imparted the information. He thanked the surgeon and put up the receiver, taking it down again a minute later and getting into touch with the Yard.

After some little delay he was able to get Harker. This time Lee himself came over to speak.

"I hear you have those bullets, Harker," he said. "What's the news?"

"You don't waste much time," the Yard man said with a laugh. "We've only just finished the inspection. Haven't even told the chief yet."

"No matter; he can wait. Tell me about them."

"They're both the same," Harker said. "Identical."

"What?" cried Lee in amazement.

"Rather surprising, isn't it?" the Yard man said. "It's busted my theories for the time being. Both the bullet in Mrs. Wu and that in Ball were fired from a Browning automatic. They are identical in calibre, shape, weight, and markings. There's no shadow of doubt."

"Then they were both wounded by the same person, Harker."

"Without a doubt. The weapon we found on the floor by Ball was a Remington. Mrs.

Wu had an old pattern six-chamber Colt. You remember that?"

"Quite," said Lee. "This is interesting, Harker."

"It busts some of our theories," Harker said with conviction.

"I'm afraid it does," Lee agreed. "Good-bye."

Nelson Lee crossed again to his armchair and resumed his seat, his brows wrinkled, and his eyes turned half-inquiringly upon Nipper.

"To quote a popular phrase, young un," he said, "the mystery thickens."

"These bullets are the same, gov'nor?"

"Yes."

"Then Wu Ling did not shoot Jim Ball?"

"No. The same person shot Ball as shot Mrs. Wu."

"Roger Kent!" Nipper exclaimed.

"So it seems!"

Nipper stared before him thoughtfully. The whole affray seemed a strange jumble of motives.

"Surely Kent wouldn't shoot one of his own gang, gov'nor?"

"Kent would do anything when put to it," he said. "But why he should do so remains a mystery."

He spread the queer diagram of the sun jewel, shedding its light over the moon and star—weird in design and conception, but beautiful in execution—upon his knee. He stared at it for some time before he looked up and spoke again.

"It seems to me, Nipper," Lee said, "that there is only one person who can thoroughly clear up this mystery for us, and that's Wu Ling!"

Nipper smiled rather sceptically.

"I'm afraid that's a meagre hope, then, gov'nor," he replied. "To catch this Chink now will be like trying to catch an eel in a tank!"

"There's a bait for every fish," Lee said slowly. "And eels are not the most difficult, young 'un. As for this particular eel who calls himself Wu Ling, I have an idea that by this time to-morrow night I shall have him a prisoner in this room."

Nipper sprang up eagerly from his chair and stared down at the calm and calculating face of the detective. Nelson Lee never spoke in this way unless he had good reason.

"But how, gov'nor?" cried Nipper. "How will you catch him?"

"Wu Ling will want to reach his child every night to place the ivory charm in the infant's hand and mutter the incantation over it. Didn't you hear what Harker said about that charm? We know, therefore, where to lie in wait for Wu Ling. As for the method of capture—well, wait and see!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Call of the Charm!

THE Chinese in London have their own ways of finding out things, and it was easy enough for Wu Ling, in hiding from the police as he was, to discover that his neighbours were caring for his child,

and it was easy enough for him to go to Limehouse in the dead of night and break into the house of his friends, climbing on a sloping roof and clambering up to the window of the room where his child slept.

There was something absurd in breaking thus silently into the house of friends who would have extended a hearty welcome—especially since his mission was a pure and virtuous one. He had been more than half-persuaded to go quietly to the back door and ask admittance.

But Wu Ling was a good judge of character. He knew his neighbours to be of good heart, but he knew them also to be incorrigible chatterers. The woman especially was naturally garrulous. To trust her with a secret was like trusting a fox in a poultry yard. And if it were known that Wu Ling was revisiting his old haunts, his freedom would not last very long.

For this reason he had chosen the difficult course he had, and he felt glad now that he was in the room with his child that none knew he was there. Upon a little truckle bed in the corner his child lay, covered warmly with straw, and Wu Ling crossed silently and peered down at the child, his dark eyes burning.

"Of the jewels of Wu Ling," he muttered, "you are all that remains."

He bent and pressed the charm into its small palm, and began to murmur in a very low tone—a sing-song tone—a strange incantation in the mandarin language, and a half-smile came to the lips of the sleeping child.

The gentle droning of this incantation seemed to act as a lullaby.

For ten minutes Wu Ling knelt there by the bedside of his one remaining treasure, watching the tiny fingers which were gripped about the ivory charm.

Then he rose and forced the charm gently away, placing it again carefully in his pocket, emitting what seemed to be a deep sigh of intense relief.

For one more night, it appeared, the gods of his superstition were propitiated. Confucious now would smile upon the destiny of the child of Wu Ling, the exile.

He kissed the child again and moved to the window, creeping out on to the sill and closing it after him to the same extent as it had been closed before.

He groped for the rope, tested its stability, and then rose quickly, hand over hand, to the gutter. It was an obstacle not easy to negotiate, but he managed it swiftly and reached the shelter of the chimney-stack.

The rest was easy now, and he smiled. He untied the bowline and re-wound the rope quickly round his waist. He slithered down the roof, lowered himself rather perilously by the gutter, which was none too safe, and gripped the gutter pipe just in time to avoid removing a loose slate. One second, and he had slipped down and stood once more in the backyard of the house.

The mist seemed to be growing deeper now, which did not disappoint him; there were no

stars in sight. The whole of Limehouse seemed to be enshrouded, clothed in a silence which was broken only by the howl of some mongrel, to which the Chinese fraternity were very partial.

Wu Ling stepped silently through the yard, sprang on to a rickety bin, and vaulted nimbly into the wheelwright's yard. From here he picked his way carefully through the lumber, climbed the fence, and stepped down silently into the street.

He moved away, raising his hand swiftly with a muttered imprecation to thrust away something which, like a bat, had brushed his face as he walked. He started as he became conscious of something lying across his shoulders, and he made to dart away feverishly.

As he did so, something tightened like a tourniquet around his neck, throttling him and choking the very breath from his body. A hoarse gurgle of dismay broke from him, strangled almost to a whisper, and Wu Ling's spine ran cold with intense fear.

He had not been attacked; there seemed no one anywhere near; and yet something intangible, something devilish was clutching at his throat, slowly and surely throttling him.

Like a fiend himself he kicked and fought the air with his hands, and he sprang up the narrow street, running like a man possessed.

But he ran no more than a yard. His head was jerked back in a way which would have broken any neck except the gutta-percha apparatus of a Chinese. He was jerked off his feet and he fell heavily—though he did not feel the pain.

Instinctively, as he lay there, his clawing hands went up to his throat, and then Wu Ling knew that it was a rope—something very tangible in hemp—which encircled his neck and choked him slowly.

He tore at it feverishly, his nails sinking into his own flesh, and he succeeded in loosening the thong sufficiently to draw a half-strangled breath of air into his lungs. He exhaled with a hoarse cry; and then he became aware of another noose tightening round his arms and body, pinning him helplessly.

With lightning-like rapidity his ankles were fettered; the noose was loosened around his neck, and instead a gag, hardly less choking, was clapped over his mouth.

It had all been done with such startling rapidity and with such completeness that even the alert brain of the Celestial was in a whirl.

He knew that there were two of his opponents, though they had spoken no word. He felt their swift hands about him. When his bonds were complete he was dragged quickly to the pavement, and a low whistle issued from the lips of one of his assailants.

Almost immediately there came towards them the purr of a car, which approached without headlights, pausing at the kerb beside them. Wu Ling lay trembling on

the pavement, wondering what was to happen next.

"In with him, Nipper!" a gruff voice said near to his ear.

Two hands slipped down under his shoulders, his ankles were gripped. He felt himself hoisted up and dropped on to the fur skin rug at the bottom of a powerful car, which moved forward slowly at first, but with speed gradually increasing.

CHAPTER 7.

An Interview with Wu Ling!

NELSON LEE stood in his consulting-room, revolver in hand. The door was locked; Nipper stood by the window; Wu Ling stood facing the detective defiantly, the cords now removed from his limbs.

"Before I accept the hospitality of an Englishman," he said, "I should like to know who and what he is. The Mandarins are proud people."

"You don't know who I am?" queried Lee.

"I do not!"

"Whom do you think I am?"

"You are not one of the police?"

"No!"

"Then what do you want with me here? What business you bring me here?"

"My name is Nelson Lee. I am a private detective," Lee explained, hardly knowing why he was making the explanations, unless it was that he might not otherwise induce Wu Ling to give him any information.

The Chinaman looked sharply at Lee.

"A private detective?"

"Yes!!"

"Your profession is that of prying into the affairs of others. You are a professional curiosity-monger!"

"Put it that way if you like," Lee returned, though he flushed with annoyance. "I would like you to give me a little information concerning the shooting affray at your house last night."

"I have no information to give," Wu Ling said quietly.

"I think you will reconsider that decision."

"I shall not!"

"It will pay you to do so!"

Wu Ling smiled, showing a perfect set of small teeth, made hideous by the constant chewing of betel nut.

"I have said I shall not speak," he said.

Nelson Lee stepped over and took up the telephone. His automatic lay on the table beside him.

"It's no use wasting words, young 'un," he said, glancing across at Nipper. "We had better call the police. Are you there?"

"Stay a moment!"

The Chinaman spoke curtly, and Lee put up the receiver again, glancing over at him. It seemed that there was a certain fear, after all, behind his bravado.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Supposing I am found guilty of being concerned in the murder?" said Wu Ling.

"Supposing I am convicted as a—what is it you call it?—an accessory, it may mean a long term of imprisonment?"

"A long term. Yes."

"Exactly. But you forget I am a Chinaman. I am educated. I have as good a knowledge of your language and literature, I think, as you have."

"Maybe," Lee admitted—and the fact rather amazed him. "But what difference will that make?"

"My father was a wealthy man of pure ancestry, and one of the most influential mandarins in the North of China," he said proudly. "He was educated at Harrow and at Clare College, Cambridge, and became a Master of your Arts before he returned to China. He was my tutor—until his banishment."

"Banishment?" Lee said, and he could not conceal his interest.

"Yes. It was he who laid the first stones in the Chinese Republic. He was the leader of advanced thought in China, and he was looked up to until the emperor of that day began to suspect him and to fear him. Then he had to fly for his life. He fled to America, and died there, and I was left destitute. Since then I have lived the life of a yellow mendicant—a despised Chink! What I have been through would have killed a dozen Englishmen!"

The man was fascinating in his talk, and yet Lee realised that it had no particular bearing on the point in question.

"What has this to do with the case in point?" he asked.

"It has this much," Wu Ling said slowly. "I have lived the life of a mandarin's son in China—a life of dignity and opulence—I have lived the life of a wealthy English gentleman, and I have enjoyed most of your own luxuries and your amenities. But," he added grimly, "I have also lived the life of an outcast, a man despised—a worm, and not a man at all. I have worked my hands and fingers to the bone, and bent my back. You find me now slaving in a Chinese laundry and living upon a handful of rice."

"Even in this I have existed, and I have contrived to be happier than ever before. Do you think, after that, that life in an English convict prison has any terrors for me? Do you think I am afraid of penal servitude?"

"A Chinaman of my descent," continued Wu Ling, with pride, "is no more afraid of death than you are of a chill. You can take my life—it is all you can possibly take. It is the limit of your power, and it is all I have to give. What do I care? You merely give me a passport to a happier life—a life where I shall meet someone who was dearer to me than life could ever be. I have means of finding out things, and I know that the surgeon at the hospital despairs of my wife's life!"

A strange, burning look came into the eyes of the man. He glared at Lee with an almost insane fierceness.

"You threaten me with death. Then I tell you that the threat is futile. It is no threat at all!"

As he spoke Nelson Lee was watching him closely, missing nothing.

There was a certain stoop in the shoulders of the Chinaman which he tried, it seemed, to correct, but without success—a stoop which Lee had seen many times before and classified.

When Wu Ling had spoken of toil enough to kill a dozen Englishmen, he had raised his yellow and grimed paws in evidence of what he said. And Lee's trained eye had detected the hard corns upon the palms and the bluish nature of the grime with which they were so ingrained that no soap and water could ever get them clean.

NELSON LEE noticed all these points, and now he had reviewed them swiftly in his mind, reviewed them in conjunction with something else. That was this superstitious drawing which he had brought from the laundry at Limehouse, this quaint Eastern allegory of Wu Ling's, depicting the sun in the form of a sparkling jewel, shedding a brilliant light, which was reflected by the moon, on one side and a bright star on the other.

Lee had deciphered the Chinese characters under the drawing, which, translated, read: "The Jewels of Wu Ling."

Lee had studied this quaint chart, and he had brought to bear upon it the knowledge he had of Eastern symbolism, and he interpreted the moon and the star of Wu Ling's allegory to represent his wife and child. They were two of his jewels!

But why a sparkling gem should have been substituted for the figure of the sun was a matter of interest and for conjecture. Why the wife and child should draw their light from a precious stone was a fact which interested him a good deal.

It interested him more particularly because of the bearing which other facts had upon it. He turned suddenly in his pacing and went to a small escritoire, from which he took the rolled-up drawing which had been hanging in Wu Ling's kitchen.

"I have here," Lee said to the Chinaman, "something which I believe you value. If you will not tell me anything else, I wonder if you will explain to me what are these jewels by which you set so much store?"

As he spoke he opened the drawing, and held it up for Wu Ling to see. With a cry the man sprang at him, and Lee side-stepped bringing his shooting arm up.

"Kindly keep your distance!" he said sharply.

The man hung back, glaring at him.

"That is mine," he cried, pointing to the drawing.

"Not for the time being," Lee said. "Not till you've told me its meaning."

"It concerns me alone. I shall tell you nothing," Wu Ling snarled.

"Very well!" Nelson Lee rolled it up again and stuffed it into his pocket. "As you please, Wu Ling. But I would like to tell you that I know considerably more about you than you give me credit for. For instance, I don't want to go into all the little episodes and transactions which passed when you were in the compounds on the Rand Diamond Mines!"

"Who told you this?" cried Wu Ling hoarsely.

"I say," Lee pursued firmly, ignoring him, "that I do not wish to go into everything which passed when you were one of the yellow labourers in the diamond mines of South Africa. I am concerned only with this large diamond—this very valuable gem—which you stole and smuggled out of the mine and out of the country!"

It was a game of wits, of astute and almost uncanny induction, combined with bluff and confidence. And it deceived the Chinaman because it struck home to the vital point. He peered at Nelson Lee, and in his burning eyes Lee read

the confirmation of his theory. It was sufficient for him to continue.

"This is the jewel which was to purchase for you and for your wife, Wu Ling, a fortune and freedom to return to your own country. This is the gem whose value in hard cash shall pay for your son's education at a university!"

This was a secret as dear and sweet to the heart of Wu Ling as was the possession of this stolen treasure. He had mentioned his ambition to no one except Chang, whom he regarded as an old fool, bordering on senility, who would not realise what was said to him.

Wu Ling left Chang out of his considerations now. Consequently, he was completely at a loss to know how Lee knew all these things.

He stared at him, his face working and his eyes glowing, with something which was almost superstitious fear. It seemed to him that Lee was superhuman—that he had the power to read the mind. How else would he know these things?

The detective saw his advantage, and was not slow to follow it up.

"You see how much I know, Wu Ling," he said. "I know as much about you as I know about your friend and visitor, Roger Kent—"

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See Page 43.

A sudden, hoarse cry broke from the Chinaman. His eyes were starting as he stared at Lee.

"You know him? You know the devil-man?"

"Quite well, unfortunately," Lee said, and he was smiling provokingly now. The tables were turned!

CHAPTER 8.

Wu Ling Tells the Truth.

THE Chinaman had risen from the chair and stood now facing the detective, an expression on his yellow face which seemed to combine a partial fear and partial resentment.

But at the mention of the name of Kent the fear had been intensified though not so intensified as the look of utter hatred and fierce loathing which transformed his not too attractive face into an expression which was demoniacal.

His dark eyes glittered in their sockets, his breath came quickly, and the long fingers of his hands worked like yellow claws, as though they felt the throat of this man between them.

Nelson Lee was about to ask a direct question, but he thought by so doing that he would betray to the Chinaman a certain curiosity and ignorance which Wu Ling might refuse to gratify.

The safest plan was to pretend to know and bluff a confirmation out of him.

"I can sympathise with you, Wu, in your hatred of the man," he said. "Why did he shoot Mrs. Wu?"

Once again the face of the Chinaman was suffused by such a passion that he could not speak. It was some minutes before he said:

"He shot her because he was afraid she would shoot him. If only I had had that revolver instead of her! May the great sun-god burn and wither him——" He broke down and, Nelson Lee stepped forward frankly, he put out his hand. The Chinaman took it, half-pleased, half-amazed, that an Englishman should grasp the hand of a yellow man.

"Wu Ling," said Lee, "you have my deepest sympathy in what has happened. Hatred is not a Christian principle, and vengeance, according to the doctrines of our country, is not for man. But I can understand the score you have against this man. I can sympathise with your desire to be quits with him. As a matter of fact, I have a score or two myself which I am waiting and contriving to wipe off. With this common aim in view, I think I might help you. I feel sure that you could help me!"

Wu Ling looked at Lee, and he was half-convinced. There was something compelling in the manner of the detective; above all, there was in Lee's manner now an assumption of racial equality which did a great deal towards melting the proud heart of the Oriental.

"How long have you known Kent, Wu Ling?" Lee asked suddenly.

"Not many years, curse him! But they are a thousand years too many! I met him first in San Francisco."

"After you left South Africa?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps if you gave me a short sketch of your career it might help matters."

Wu Ling then began speaking quickly, but always enunciating perfectly, always imparting that distinctive intonation which was sufficient confirmation of his claim to education.

"I have told you that my father was a wealthy mandarin, and that he had to fly from China. Had he remained he would, without a doubt, have lost his head. He had to flee so precipitately that he took practically nothing with him. All his money and estates in Northern China were confiscated.

When he and I—for my mother was dead, and I was the only son—arrived in San Francisco—he was a poor man—as poor as the lowest caste of Mongolian in the city.

"In those days he employed all his time in educating me—in teaching me the English language. He taught me to read English books and to love them. And then he died!"

There came a look of pain into the face of the Oriental. It was obvious that he loved and revered his father in a way which a Westerner cannot understand. After a short pause he went on:

"I was left alone and penniless, and because I was a despised yellow man, I drifted into the lowest haunts of the city, and bore spurns and insults for the equivalent of slow starvation.

"At the end of a year I worked my passage to Durban, and from there I joined a Boer team which was trekking to the interior. I was whipped from Durban to Johannesburg—there was a bitter note in the man's voice—and when I reached the Rand there was nothing for me but the compound and the mine.

"Here we were treated worse than animals. You speak to me of your English convict prisons. The life of a convict is that of a wealthy man compared with what I went through there for three long years—the period of my hire. Yet, somehow, I preferred to be in the mine; it savoured of being buried alive. I love the darkness. It enabled me more readily to hide my head—to hide the shame which had come upon the son of a great gentleman. I lived the life of a rat. But I was more artful than a rat!"

He looked up at Lee with a cunning light in his eyes.

"They treated me like the rest of them," he said. "They made no distinction; they were too ignorant themselves to know that distinctions could exist in yellow races. They had never heard of a Chinaman with brains. So I kept my brains to myself, and for two and a half years I silently outwitted them."

"You smuggled diamonds?" Lee suggested.

"Yes—in all manner of ways. I had nothing to lose—only my life. I had nothing



In the corner of the cab sat an old man. As the Chinaman entered the car he saw in the man's hand, pointing straight at him, an ugly revolver! The master-crook was taking no chances!

to fear—only the sjambok—and my back had become inured to pain and to the whip. Small stones I smuggled every week, and there was an I.D.B. who bought them from me. I had plenty money hidden on the veldt in a box—plenty of money.

“And then, in the last month of my term in the mine I found my jewel—one of the finest stones ever taken from the mines. It was large nearly as a walnut, and it was round. I picked it out of the earth and concealed it in my clothes. I will not tell you how I smuggled it out of the mine. I employed a hundred and one ways of fooling the guards. Suffice it to say that I managed to get away from the compound and conceal the stone where my money was hidden. It was too big to sell out there. I could afford to wait. And I did wait. I waited and took it with me when I sailed again from Durban—as a passenger who had paid his fare—vowing never again to set foot in the accursed country again.

“I went back to 'Frisco to see my father's grave and to have a headstone made for him. But here I had to live in the Chinese quarter, and it was not safe to let them know that you had any money. Your life would not have

been worth a moment's purchase. I hid my money and my diamond, and went to work at a laundry. I met there the Chinese girl who became my wife.

“I was anxious to get rid of the stone,” Wu Ling continued. “Yet I was determined that I would have my price. I then could get out of 'Frisco and bank my money in safety, instead of hoarding it in constant fear. I made a few discreet inquiries, and one of these inquiries brought a man to see me—or, rather, a fiend in the guise of a man. That was Roger Kent!

“He knew I had this stone, but he did not know where. Naturally, I would not let him know, for I did not trust him from the moment I first saw him. He offered me three—five thousand dollars. I would not take it. He pestered me constantly and threatened. I found out—or my wife did—that his agents had me under observation, and I became alarmed. I tricked him, and slipped out of 'Frisco one night, crossing to Japan. From Bagasaki I came by a Nippon boat to Liverpool, and my wife and I worked there for some time in a laundry, and my son was born.

“That was my third jewel.”

Nelson Lee nodded, and the sympathy of his face was not assumed.

"Then you came to London?"

"Yes. I took the laundry, as you know, and we were quite happy—until one night he came again."

"Kent?"

"Yes. How he traced me, I cannot tell. The man is fiendish in his cunning. He came to me and spoke as if he were still only a few miles from 'Frisco, and as if our business relations had always been as friendly as possible."

"'Wu Ling,' he said, 'I am a persistent customer. I mean to have that stone.'

"You shall have it," I told him, "if you will give me a fair price."

"'What do you want with the money?' he asked.

"I want it for my wife and son," I said. "The diamond is worth twenty-five thousand pounds in English money. I will take fifteen thousand pounds!"

"'What,' he cried, 'fifteen thousand pounds for a cursed Chinaman who pinched the goldurned sparkler! Don't put that stuff over on me, Wu Ling.'

"If you don't like to pay it you can do the other thing," I said.

"He haggled and cursed at me, and then at last he agreed to pay twelve thousand pounds in cash, and he said he would come on this night—the night you know. He came, with the other member of his gang, this man Ball, and he gave me in exchange for the diamond about two hundred pounds in notes.

"What is this?" I asked him. "You know my price.

"'I know yours,' he said, smiling like a fiend. 'Now you know mine, Wu Ling.'

"I was helpless. I did not know what to do. I dared not call in the police, or even assistance from outside, and he knew it. I was duped. And then my wife whipped a revolver from under her shawl. She knew what sort of man he was, and she had taken this precaution.

"'Give back that stone,' she said, 'before I shoot you!'

"Kent was taken aback, and seemed frightened for a moment. But he was merely thinking what to do. Before we knew what had happened he had whipped out an automatic and fired from the hip—straight at my wife.

"When I saw her fell I became like a man possessed. I leapt at Kent's throat, and by that time Ball, too, had whipped out a gun. He fired at me, but he did not hit me, and I leapt over the table at Kent. He threw a chair over as he sprang for the back door and turned and fired at me just as I stumbled on the chair.

"It was a fall," Wu Ling said laconically, "which saved my life. The bullet whistled over my head, and, hearing a groan from Ball, I knew that it had struck him in mistake."

A whistle broke from the lips of Nipper, who had listened enraptured to the dramatic narrative of the Chinaman.

"Then Kent shot Ball by accident?" Lee queried.

"Yes. He didn't reckon on doing that. I followed him through the garden and over into the yard beyond, but here he was too clever for me. He waited for me, unsuspected, and he had an arm-break on me before I was aware he had waited there. It was then that he tricked your assistant, and the policeman gave me in charge with all the cool assurance in the world. The man is a fiend—he is not mortal!

"What happened after that you know as well as I do," Wu Ling went on. "But what you will never know are my feelings towards this man who has brought black ruin and misery into my life. You cannot know a Chinaman's capacity for hatred, Mr. Lee. You cannot know a Chinaman's thirst for revenge on those who have ill-used him, and there was never one of my race who had such a score as I!"

THERE was something terrible in the man's earnestness.

"You have that plan of mine there." He pointed to the roll which Lee still held in his hand. "It was a fancy of mine, but you can keep it now. Three jewels there were which the gods gave me, and they have taken two. What they have left me is a legacy of bitterness. This gem which I brought with—so much suffering from the mines at Johannesburg was to have realised my life's ambition. Now that ambition is lost for ever."

He paused in his narrative, and Lee looked over at him, nodding.

"It is most unfortunate, Wu Ling. Kent has every reason to suffer at your hands. But, as regards this stone—well"—he shrugged his shoulders slightly—"had it been honestly come by, Wu Ling, you might have been able to keep it. We have a saying, you know, that 'thieves never prosper.'"

"Bah!" The Chinaman waved his yellow hands scornfully. "I do not see things as you see them. I was an outcast, against the world—the world against me. I had a right to do what I could get, and to keep it if I had the power to do so."

"You have failed, then, I am afraid."

"Yes—failed!" said Wu Ling. "But I shall not fail in exacting vengeance on Roger Kent."

Lee read the meaning of the words in the man's face.

"I am afraid you intend to murder Roger Kent," he said, "and for that reason you are a dangerous person to have your liberty. It is my duty to ring up the police and have you taken into custody."

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference will that make? They may put me in prison for a little while. After that I shall commence my search."

"If I tell the police what are your intentions they will keep you under supervision when you are released."

And once again the Chink smiled.

"They will find it too difficult. It will make no difference."

"Supposing they extradite you as a dangerous alien?"

"Then I shall come back. Or maybe it would not be necessary. Kent is not always in England."

There was no difficulty which Lee could conjure up which diverted Wu Ling a hair's-breadth from his purpose. It seemed to the detective that nothing material would be achieved by handing the man up in a proper manner. It would merely delay matters, and it would be doing Roger Kent a good turn. That was the last thing in the world Lee wanted to do. He paused, thoughtfully tapping the table with his fingers.

"Wu Ling," he said presently, "if I let you go, I want you to promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"If you find Kent, you will let me know?"

The yellow man demurred, but only for a moment. He nodded eagerly.

"Yes, I will let you know," he said. "I will give you all the information."

Nelson Lee nodded and unlocked the door of the room.

"I suppose you will not be seen in Limehouse for some time," Lee said, and the Chinaman looked up craftily.

"I am not a fool; I do not ask for trouble!"

"You mean the police are hot on your track?"

"Of course."

"H'm," Lee muttered. "I shall be having a word with Harker about this. It will not be so dangerous for you now, maybe."

"What do you mean?"

A sudden light of hope had sprung into the Oriental's face.

"If you wish to see your baby——"

"Yes?"

"You can do so, I think, without great risk. But you must go only at night, and let as few people as possible see you, or know you have been there. The police may be blind in one eye, Wu Ling, but you must keep out of the sight of the other!"

The Chinaman looked over at Lee, and the drift of the detective's words seemed to sink slowly in. He smiled, and Lee pointed to the door.

"Do not forget," he said.

The next moment the strange figure of Wu Ling had disappeared from the room, and Lee had moved over to the 'phone and called for Harker of the Yard.

showed evidence of soft clay, as if he had been lying in a ditch—a fact which rather puzzled Lee, for the lad had not, to his knowledge, been out of London.

"You're rather late, young 'un," he said, smiling a greeting. "I was beginning to wonder——"

"Where I was?" Nipper said with a smile.

"Yes."

"If you will wait for me to change, guv'nor, and also to pinch myself, I might be able to remember where I've been."

"Is it like that?" Lee said, looking over with interest. "If so, get a move on, young 'un. I'm impatient."

Nipper smiled, and, bending for a moment to stroke Wolf, he disappeared in the direction of the bath-room. Nipper was an expert in the art of quick change and smart ablution.

He reappeared fresh and comfortable inside ten minutes, his eyes lighting up at the repast which the housekeeper had quickly laid in his absence.

The detective pointed to the table.

"Have some food. You can eat and talk!"

"I will," Nipper said, taking his seat readily. "I'm hungry. If you don't mind me speaking with my mouth full. I've picked up Wu Ling's trail, guv'nor—you knew that?"

"Of course. You told me last night. You found that he was lodging in a small room over a Japanese hairdresser's in Shadwell."

"That's right. It was the deuce of a trail to keep up. But it was a sound notion of yours, guv'nor—a real bright!"

"What do you mean?"

"Your notion of letting Wu Ling go, and trusting to his cunning and determination to get on the track of Roger Kent. Then, by playing second watch, as I have been, and shadowing Wu Ling, it was possible that we might learn something. But it was a vague chance—a remote possibility, rather."

"Very remote," Lee agreed.

"I did not expect to find somebody else tracking Wu Ling besides myself," Nipper went on.

"Someone else?"

"Yes. Roger Kent has two men working for him as a rule. One is Jim Ball, now in hospital. The other is O'Connor. This chap I saw was floating round dressed as a foreign seaman. He followed Wu Ling into a basement café, and I went in myself, and smoked like a fire engine, and pretended to be half sozzled. I saw this chap go up to Wu Ling and speak to him. They were talking for a long time, and the Chink didn't look overpleased. Once I thought he was going to strangle the other chap, but the fellow got up and walked out. I didn't see him again, and I wondered, then, who the dickens he was. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered his face. You showed me O'Connor's photo only the other day, guv'nor. He had a scar on his cheek—I am sure of him. It was O'Connor. Kent's assistant."

CHAPTER 9.

Nipper Makes a Report!

A CHEERING fire blazed in the consulting-room of Nelson Lee, and the detective's slippered feet were extended gratefully towards it as he leaned back and wallowed in the comfort of the easy chair. Then Nipper came in. His face was eager, though rather besmirched. His clothes

"That means," said Lee, frowning, "that Kent is still communicating with Wu Ling. But what then?"

"Wu Ling stayed on for a bit," Nipper went on. "I saw him take a piece of paper from his pocket and study it. And then he jumped up quickly and went out, as if he'd made up his mind. I followed him, and I had as tiring a steepchase as I wanted. I followed him up through the City and along the Embankment to Victoria."

"Some walk!" murmured Lee.

"I was dog-tired," Nipper said, "but I kept him in view. He did not seem to know what fatigue was. I followed him to a street off the Edgware Road—one of those broad, drab streets; and here he seemed to display a particular interest. He walked slowly along, and then he seemed to fix his attention on one house—an old-fashioned, semi-detached place, next to a chapel. Wu Ling eyed the place up and down as if he were going to burgle it. I watched him as he hopped over into the chapel grounds and quizzed at the back.

"There's something or someone in this granite-faced block of stone misery," I said to myself, "which is attracting Mr. Wu's attention, and it's myself as is going to find out who and what it is!"

Lee nodded and smiled.

"I thought perhaps Wu Ling was going to burgle the place, or that he was waiting for someone to come out or go in," Nipper said. "But there was no sign of life in the building. No one left, and there were no visitors. At the end of an hour, in which he had a pretty complete quiz, Wu Ling tracks again, and I made tracks after him. He headed eastward again when we left the Edgware Road, and I began to feel fed-up.

"Oh, lor'," I muttered to myself, "have I got to pad the hoof after this yellow devil all the way to Limehouse again?"

I wasn't sure that he was going to Limehouse—or Shadwell, rather—and I didn't want to miss anything for the sake of a pair of tired feet, so I just slid on, trying to forget the distance.

"But along by Oxford Circus he hopped on a bus going to Poplar, and, after a race of a quarter of a mile, which reduced me to a pulp I managed to hop on after him. I got on top just as the conductor was taking his ticket, and I heard him ask for Jubilee Street. I knew then that it was a thousand to one that he was going home, and so I went down the steps again, jumped off and came back here."

Lee looked over at him, and smiled.

"And that was three nights ago, eh?"

"Yes. You remember when I was so tired and had some sea-salt in a warm bath?"

"Yes. And what has been happening since?"

"Several things," Nipper said. "But nothing exciting until to-night."

"H'm! Carry on where you left off."

"First thing, then," Nipper said briskly, putting one finger across his left hand.

"I made some discreet inquiries in the neighbourhood of this street. The name is Renfrew Park, and the number is forty-three. From a house agent I was referred to another, who referred me in turn to yet another. From the last one I heard that the house and the furniture is the property of a colonel in the Indian Army, named Bewlay.

"He has been abroad some time, and the house has been empty, and he would not let by reason of the exorbitant figure he wanted for it, furnished. Apparently, he was an eccentric merchant when he lived in it. He was afraid of servants' followers and burglars, and people entering by the back entrance. So he had the back door bricked up—the only entrance being by the front door, for servants and everyone. However, within the last month he has let the place at a heavy figure to an American!"

"Ah-h!" muttered Lee.

"The man's name is Keble—Ralph Keble, not that a name means much these days. All the agents knew, apparently, was that this chap Keble was a gentleman—a graduate of Harvard, a connection of millionaires, and with plenty of money. He paid three months' rent down in cash."

"Just about the time when Kent might have followed Wu Ling from 'Frisco," mused Lee.

"We're coming to that, gov'nor," said Nipper. "The same night—that is, two nights ago—I went again to Shadwell, and once again I trailed Wu Ling back on the same course to Renfrew Street. That street and that house had a sort of magnetic attraction for him, apparently.

"ON this night I saw an old man come along the street and hobble up the front steps to the house. I saw Wu Ling dart out from the gateway he was hiding in, and I thought there was going to be murder. But for some reason he checked himself, and stepped back into the shade. It was tiring after that—just wait—wait—wait and watch—watch—watch. Then Wu Ling went home."

"That was all?"

"That was all. But I was quite satisfied. 'Something will happen very soon,' I muttered. 'Wu Ling will get tired before me.' So last night I was on duty again in Shadwell, and had the pleasure once more of following Wu Ling westwards. This time, however, I decided I wouldn't walk. He probably did it to save a few coppers and to avoid being recognised on a vehicle. I jumped on the Underground and waited for Wu Ling on the corner of Renfrew Street, and, sure enough, forty minutes afterwards he came shuffling along.

"Nothing at all happened last night, and I came home wondering. 'Wu Ling seemed to have a job for life watching that house,' I said to myself, 'and I've got a job for life watching him. And it's a rather tiring occupation!'"

"To-night, however," Nipper went on, "I decided to cut out the trip eastward. I went straight on from here to Renfrew Street, and made myself comfortable under a clay bank in the grounds of the chapel. Hence my immaculate condition when I came in."

Lee smiled.

"You are a sticker, certainly," he said. "And was Wu Ling faithful to his vigil?"

"Faithful as any Chinik could ever be to the cause of hatred," Nipper said grimly. "And that's pretty unswerving. He came shuffling along, and my heart beat a bit when I saw him vault nimbly over the fence of the chapel as I had done, and creep forward, taking a survey of the house.

"He nearly trod on me once, and I'd almost made up my mind to grab him and tell him to lay low, because there were two night watchmen in this act. He could not have helped seeing me if he had had eyes for anything else but that house; but he hadn't. He took a good, long survey, and then he settled down in the lee of the chapel wall to watch the street.

"For an hour and a half by my wrist-watch he waited," Nipper groaned—"and so did I. I could feel the uric acid racing round my veins, and I was prepared to lay any odds that I had bitten off a large-sized portion of rheumatic fever."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I reckon it was pretty rotten. But you were a good 'un to stick it."

"Thanks!" said the lad humorously. "A little praise goes a long way. I just lay and watched. A policeman came along the road, and he seemed to shine his torch straight at Wu Ling, but luckily, he didn't see him. Then a taxi drove up to number forty-three, and an old man got out.

"You can guess I was all eyes, but I had to bob my head down the next instant, for Wu Ling was creeping round towards me, watching intently. I heard him cursing in Chinese quite distinctly. It was uncanny, I can tell you!"

"And did this old man enter the house?"

"Yes, but in a way which fairly made me gasp. He did not ascend the front steps. He came round the back way. I wondered what was going to happen, for I had been told by the house agent that the back entrance was bricked up. So I watched closely, and I saw the old man straighten up and cease to hobble as he got well into the side-way."

"Straightened up, did he?" Lee muttered.

"Yes," said Nipper. "He seemed to throw off a disguise—to grow suddenly erect and youthful. I knew then whom I was watching!"

"Exactly. What then?"

"Then happened the most amazing thing of all," the lad said, peering over at the detective. "Kent—for I am sure it was he—paused at the back of the house, and I saw him grope in his pocket and thrust his hand into the ivy, as if he were concealing something. He removed his hand and bent down—and then he disappeared!"

"Disappeared?"

"Like magic!—just as if he were spirited away!" Nipper said.

Nelson Lee stared hard at the lad for some moments. He struck a match and lit his pipe, puffing steadily.

"Concealed entrance!" he jerked out suddenly. "Carry on!"

Lee's remark was so laconic that the lad was almost disappointed. But it brought him from a world of melodrama back suddenly to earth. They were material things—facts, of which he was speaking—not magic or illusion or fiction.

"That's the conclusion I came to, guv'nor, when I had time to think," Nipper said. "But it took my breath away for the moment."

"And what about Wu Ling? Did he regard it as something uncanny or devilish?" Lee asked. "I take it he was as surprised as you were?"

"He didn't seem to be," Nipper said. "There are times when it is impossible to excite a Chinaman—or surprise. He just waited there for a few minutes, groping in his loose pockets as if he were looking for something. Presently he seemed to find it, and he vaulted over into the sideway of the house. I saw him peer into the ivy, and then thrust his hand into it as the other man had done. He was there for a full quarter of an hour. Then he disappeared also!"

"More magic!" Lee said, smiling rather grimly.

"Yes," said Nipper, "and I wanted to see how it worked. Also, I was glad to get out of my hole and stretch my legs. I climbed over into the garden of Number 43 and inspected the ivy myself. I was not surprised to find a wooden door there in the wall, a door about four feet by two. There was a keyhole in the side of it, though it was locked, and the ivy was so artfully arranged that it apparently opened inwards without disturbing the green creeper which so effectively camouflaged its existence!

I TRIED the door, as you can guess," Nipper went on, his face and manner showing a certain naturally boyish excitement, "but it would not give. I had no skeleton key, as Wu Ling must have had—not even a piece of wire to try to pick the lock. It would have been risky, too. I did not know at any instant that someone might not come down and discover me!"

"So you waited?"

Nipper nodded, his frank, youthful eyes fixed upon the keen, astute face of the detective.

"I waited," he said. "I vaulted back over the wall into the chapel ground again and watched. And I began to wonder what I was waiting for, guv'nor! I began to get a bit apprehensive!"

He paused as if sorting out the ideas and definite phrases.

"At the end of twenty minutes," he went on, "Wu Ling appeared again—by the same

door as that which he and Kent had used to enter. I watched him, and there was a strange look upon his face, which made my heart go cold for a moment.

"He has done it!" I murmured to myself, and then I noticed that the hilt of the knife which he carried in his waistband was not there now. This confirmed it to me, and I decided to tackle him with it.

"I waited until he had vaulted the fence, noticing the terror-stricken glances which he threw to right and left—the glances, it seemed to me, of a guilty man. I sprang forward and caught his arm, quickly, and a terrified sort of howl broke from his lips.

"Hullo, Wu Ling!" I said. "I'm not the only one on the prowl round here apparently.

"He stared at me, and recognised me, I'm sure, and when he saw who it was I've never seen a man look more terrified. He was shaking and quivering like a man with the palsy. He tried to speak, but only succeeded in mouthing.

"I laughed in his face to reassure him," Nipper went on. "Come, Wu," I said coaxingly. "Pull yourself together. What's your little game? What have you been up to?"

"He stared at me stupidly, and said he had been doing nothing, and I took his manner for that of a man stupefied by the crime he had just committed.

"It strikes me you've been up to mischief," I said. "Have you murdered Roger Kent?"

"He started and tried to drag his arm away.

"No, no!" he said. "I have not touched him—I have not touched him at all!"

"He seemed particularly anxious to assure me of this, though why the deuce only knows. He seemed diabolically proud the other day of his murderous intentions.

"Kent lives in there," I said, pointing to the house. "You have been to see him. What has happened?"

"No, I haven't!" he cried. "He does not live there. I—I do not know where he lives! Go away! Go away!"

"I am going," I said. "But I want you to come with me, Wu!"

"But that seemed to scare the soul from him. His eyes started from his head and he began to gibber. He dragged his arm away, leaving some cloth in my hand, and then he fled like the wind. I had no chance to overtake him—to catch him. He vaulted like an ape over the fence, and, running like a hare, disappeared into the darkness."

"It sounds bad, Nipper," Lee said slowly, "and it sounds good. I fancy that he has wiped off his score, and your sudden appearance scared him horribly. But I think, whatever the heathen morals of it, he has done the world a service. I fancy this is the end of Roger Kent!"

There was a note of intense satisfaction in Lee's voice. But the glitter in his eyes faded

quickly when Nipper shook his head vehemently.

"That's just what puzzles me, gov'nor," he said. "Wu Ling told me the truth. He hasn't touched Kent. The man is unharmed."

"What? How do you know?"

"Because he came out soon after Wu Ling had gone. He came out and peered about him, walking round the house. I will swear it was Kent. I should know him anywhere, when he isn't in disguise—and he wasn't, then. And he was humming a tune when he went inside again!"

The detective stared wonderingly at Nipper;



As the inspector strode towards the master-crook, the out!" For a trap in the floor beneath the crook'

his eyes were incredulous, his forehead was puckered in a strange frown.

Nipper stared into the fire, and leaning forward spoke as if he were addressing the glowing embers.

"It's a mysterious business, gov'nor—a mysterious business. Why Wu Ling should go in with his knife and come out without it—utterly terrified—and leaving Kent unscathed, I cannot tell. But there is one way in which I fancy we can find out."

"Are you thinking of the same thing as I am?" asked Lee.

"I suggest, gov'nor, making a discreet visit to Renfrew Street, gov'nor. There's a hornets' nest there that wants smoking out!"

"Exactly!" agreed Nelson Lee grimly.

CHAPTER 10.

More Mystery.

IT was not along Renfrew Street that Nelson Lee and Nipper turned after dark the next evening. They swung round the preceding turning, and moving silently in rubber-soled shoes, passed without noise along by the flats.

A minute later they lay in the concealment of the chapel shadows, having chosen a spot which commanded a perfect view of the street, and the entrance to Number 43.

There was something about the structure



There was a sudden shout from Nelson Lee. "Look at his feet suddenly opened, and Kent dropped through."

and appearance of the house which was particularly morose and uninviting. There was no light showing from the heavily curtained windows. The place looked so forbidding and uninhabited that Lee came to the conclusion that Roger Kent was not at home. All the better if he were not. Lee had his plans cut and dried. He might see the arch-crook arrive, and that would give him their opportunity of getting Kent in person—quickly and silently—as he was entering or approaching the house, and then, having made sure of him, to let the police surround the place and make sure of the others—or of such, at any rate, who were inside.

And fortune favoured this plan. Less than an hour had passed when Lee and Nipper

were galvanised into alertness by the sound of a latch clicking.

A sharp pressure came from Nipper on the detective's hand as they observed suddenly a figure emerge from the ivy at the back of the house. The figure came silently along the sideway, walking briskly until it reached the small garden in front.

Then it became suddenly transformed, and from the gate of Number 43 there emerged an old man, bent rather, and hobbling with quick steps, a thick stick coming with a tap on the pavement at every step.

Nipper's pulses leapt ahead, and Lee drew in a deep breath to steady his own. As the old man tapped his way past the chapel, Lee moved forward silently as a shadow, vaulting the fence without noise, Nipper immediately behind.

Keeping close to the fence, he darted forward swiftly and sprang, dodging his head just in time to avoid a swift and murderous blow from the stick, brought over instantly and cleverly.

He grappled his man viciously, and the next instant Nipper closed also, throwing him to the ground and holding him helpless, though he struggled frantically.

"The rope—quick!" Lee hissed. And then, as he spoke, something seemed to come through the very air, hurling itself upon him. He felt something at his throat, like some huge and evil bird, with fearful talons.

With a hoarse cry he had to release his prisoner, and, tearing the claws from his throat, he sprang back, gasping.

He saw before him for a fleeting second the yellow face of a Chinaman, and it was the face of a fiend—a maniac. Throwing himself instinctively into an attitude of defence, he leapt and sprang, driving his fist straight at the yellow apparition before him.

His fist struck the air, he stumbled, and fell heavily on the pavement. Even as he fell he heard a cry of pain and horror break from Nipper.

He spun round in time to see the dishevelled figure of their first quarry snatch himself frenziedly from Nipper's feverish clutches and roll over and over into the gutter.

The next instant he had sprung to his feet, and, racing like a madman, fled down the street. The detective sprang after him like a hound unleashed, springing from all fours—a sprinting start.

But as his weight came upon his ankle it twisted painfully, and, with a groan, he fell again.

In that instant he knew that they had failed. He knew that they had lost their man. Both he and Nipper had had their clutches on Roger Kent; for a moment the arch-criminal had lain helpless under them.

And now he had escaped. They had failed, they had been cheated by some yellow atrocity of a Celestial! Who could it be? It could not possibly be Wu Ling—the man on whose behalf they were working.

These thoughts flashed through the mind of the detective in the moment of falling. But he did not waste an instant. On his feet again, he saw Nipper on the ground, clinging tenaciously to the ankle of the yellow man. He saw the Chink kick Nipper's arm viciously, so that he released his hold with a yelp of agony.

That cry acted like an electric current on the rather dazed brain of the detective. As the Chinaman stumbled back he saw him draw a knife quickly from his belt—and in that instant Lee sprang.

This time, when his fist shot out like a piston it did not miss. It came fair and square with a sickening squelch into the yellow visage, jerking the head back so that it nearly broke the rubber neck.

Lee split the knuckles of his left with that hammer blow, but he laid a wound open in his right the following moment, when he brought it round under the yellow jaw with such terrific force that he lifted his opponent half over the intervening fence.

The Celestial went back with a crash, and then fell, a huddled, unconscious form, on the pavement at Lee's feet. The detective's breath was coming in quick gasps; he could feel the warm blood running over his knuckles and over the back of his hand and wrist.

He snatched out a handkerchief and bound it round his hand. Nipper had got to his feet, nursing his injured arm painfully. Lee glanced down the street and then up it. It was deserted except for a light which moved slowly towards them, shining first this way, then that. It was the torch of a policeman on his beat.

"Quick, young 'un," whispered Lee. "We don't want the police in this—yet! Back the way you came, and fetch the car!"

Nipper darted back, running through the chapel grounds. He clenched his teeth as he vaulted the wall, for his arm was painful.

To run along the side way of the block of flats into the next street was the work of an instant. A closed-in car was waiting by the kerb, and he leapt inside.

"Round to Renfrew Street—slowly," he called, through the tube.

Meanwhile, Lee had dragged the unconscious form of the Chinaman into the shelter of a small garden, and he crouched there, waiting for the policeman to pass. The searching torch missed him by a foot, and he breathed again. Five minutes later a car came purring slowly along.

He stood in the gate, making a signal to Nipper, who came inside. Silently they bundled the figure of the Celestial into the car—closing the door after them. The car leapt forward.

It was pitch dark inside, and neither could see the other except by the glimmer of a street lamp, now and again. They could feel the prostrate figure on the floor between them.

Nelson Lee groped for a box of matches, and Nipper shook a box under his nose. The detective groped for them, and struck

one, holding the yellow flare down so that it played fleetingly on the upturned yellow face beneath them.

"Great heavens!" cried Nelson Leo suddenly—and the cry was echoed in a hoarse exclamation from Nipper.

It was Wu Ling!

CHAPTER 11.

The Explanation!

THE administration of a damp sponge and a little sal volatile had slowly brought Wu Ling from a fairly blissful oblivion to the knowledge of an aching, half-broken jaw, and that he was no longer in Renfrew Street.

He was propped up on a settee, and facing him, with an automatic within reach, was the detective, Nelson Lee, and his young assistant.

From his narrow, slant eyes, the Mongolian gazed at them, collecting the scattered remnants of thought and memory. When his faculty of observation was sufficiently restored he became aware of a dangerous look in Lee's eyes.

"So this is the way you repay my kindness, you yellow, two-faced reptile!" Lee said slowly. "You are in league with Kent. You have been all the time!"

"You lie! I am not!" the Chinaman hissed.

"Be more polite," Lee rapped out, "or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

There was a dangerous glitter in the eyes of the detective—a glitter which even Nipper had not often seen there.

But his own feelings towards this slant-eyed high-cheeked son of infamy were as black as the detective's.

"If you are not in league with Kent, why did you prevent us catching him to-night?"

"I could not help it!"

Lee and Nipper gazed at the man incredulously. His manner was as inexplicable as his actions.

"Could not help it, couldn't you?" Lee said. "We will see about that. I have got you again, Wu Ling, and this time you don't slip through my fingers. When you tell a court of law what you tell me you will see what view——"

"You are not going to keep me?" Wu Ling blurted the words out as if in sudden fear, and Lee's lips curled.

"Certainly not! The prison authorities will do that," he said.

A sudden change came over the yellow face, the eyes looked startled; there was a haunted expression about him which it was hard to explain.

"Please, please!" he implored. "I know I have treated you badly. I—I could not help myself. By all that I hold holy, I could not help myself. Please let me go! I must go!"

"As a reward for all your kindness and gratitude, I suppose," Lee said bitterly, though in his heart he was puzzled.

"I dare not stay here! I must not be given to the police! Oh, please, let me go! I have—there is someone I must—I—oh, for the love of mercy——" He broke off into a perfect gibberish, and Lee glanced over questioningly at Nipper.

Was the man quite sane? What was the meaning of this new attitude?

Lee peered over at the yellow face before him as if he would fain read the answer to the riddle in the glittering depths of the beadlike eyes.

The telephone rang, and he walked over mechanically, lifting the receiver. It was Inspector Harker, of the Yard.

"Thought you would be interested, Lee," he said. "About this Limehouse business—rather a curious coincidence."

"Yes. What's that?"

"They've had an old Chinese couple at the station complaining of the loss of a child which they had adopted, or something. It was too young to stray away—quite a baby. Disappeared completely, and no trace at all. They have seen searching for some days, but without success. The superintendent asked me to pop down to-day, and I made an interesting discovery—something the old couple had kept dark till now. This child belong to Wu Ling—you know, the Chink who got clear of us!"

A strange expression came over the detective's face.

"Is that so?" he queried.

"Yes. By the way, his wife is not dead. You knew that?"

"She isn't?" Lee's voice was amazed.

"No. Made an eleventh hour recovery, and is now well on the road towards convalescence. Very worried about her husband and child. I don't think this Chink knows she is alive."

"He doesn't," Lee said quickly.

"How do you know?" Harker asked.

"I know!" said Lee firmly.

"Oh, very well," Harker laughed. "I suppose you'll let me in when the job's finished. But, about this little Chink. It is pretty clear that he has been kidnapped. But I think it's pretty certain now that Wu Ling has fetched him away. The kid is with his father. But perhaps you know he is?"

"I don't," Lee said. "I—er——" He paused. "I know he is not, Harker."

"You do? That's devilishly strange! Who has got him, then?"

"I—don't—know," Lee said slowly. "Er—come round when you have an hour to spare one day, Harker."

He put up the receiver thoughtfully and began to pace the room, his eye fixed upon the carpet pattern. Harker's message had opened up a strange new line of possibility.

Wu Ling's infant kidnapped mysteriously. Could it be that this was the reason for the Chinaman's changed manner?

Was this the power which Kent had secured over Wu Ling? He had no sooner asked himself this question than he answered it in the affirmative. It was the solution. It explained everything. Wu Ling's terror—his treachery—his pitiable anxiety.

Moreover, it was an act of strategy which had figured before in the campaign of Roger Kent. It was a favourite method of his to hold such sentimental weapons over the heads of those who were a danger to him.

The detective ceased his pacing, and pausing before Wu Ling, looked down upon the dejected Eastern figure.

"So you are afraid, Wu Ling," he said slowly, "that unless you do as you're told Kent will be revenged upon your baby?"

Wu Ling sprang up like a man struck; his eyes were fixed strangely on the detective's face, and his lips moved, though he did not utter a sound for several moments.

"How—how did you know?" he managed to say at last hoarsely.

"I have means of finding out these things. Kent has stolen your child, hasn't he?"

The man nodded—like a broken and beaten man.

"When did you learn this first?" asked Lee.

"I knew it first from Kent himself," said Wu Ling.

"On the night you went to him?"

"Yes."

"You followed him to the house and managed to gain entrance. You confronted him, intending to murder him. Is that so?"

"Yes. I meant to have his life, and I told him so. I had him at my mercy. It was the revenge I had watched and waited for. It was then that he turned the tables on me. He told me—of—of what he had done."

"He had kidnapped your child?"

"That very day—yes!"

"Why?" Lee asked.

"Because he knew that I was after him. In some way he got to know that I meant to have his blood—and he was afraid of me. So he laid this plan. I met a man in Shadwell who told me that he had worked with Kent. He said Kent had played him dirty, and that he was only waiting to have his own back. He told me where Kent was living. That is how I knew. But I was a fool to believe this man. It was a trap—just a deliberate trap."

"He wanted you to come there?"

"Yes. He wanted to get me quietly, so that he could tell me what he had done—and threaten."

"What did he threaten?" Lee asked.

A mixed expression of fear and hatred suffused the pallid features. His voice quivered as he spoke.

"He says he has my baby in safe custody in some room, some building; where, I do not know, I cannot find out. He tells me it will be quite safe so long as I behave myself. It is in the charge of a girl who is deaf and dumb. She cannot speak to anybody. And this is what Kent has done. The baby sleeps in a small cupboard, and in this cupboard there is a small clock and a gas jet. No one knows it is there except Kent himself. The girl does not understand it, and has been dared to touch it. When the hand on the clock reaches ten it works a small appliance which slowly opens the gas jet. Unless this

appliance is disconnected, the gas escapes fully in ten minutes. In a quarter of an hour the child is dead—asphyxiated.”

Nelson Lee gazed incredulously at the yellow earnest, scared face of Wu Ling—hardly able to believe his own ears. The whole thing was so devilish, it seemed hardly possible. Yet he could see the terror which the knowledge of this infernal appliance had struck into the heart of the Oriental.

“He goes every night to do it,” Wu Ling said. “And that is where he has me by the hip. If anything should happen to him—if by any chance he does not go—then my baby is doomed. Only he knows this device. The slightest hitch—if he is only late—then it would be too late!”

The Chinaman shuddered.

“Now, you know why I am afraid,” he cried hoarsely. “Now, you know why I fought for his freedom last night. He was going there then. I was fighting for the life of my child!”

CHAPTER 12.

Lee's Proposition!

NELSON LEE nodded slowly, seeing what a masterly hold Kent had secured over his enemy. In this way he had found himself a protector and a bodyguard.

Wu Ling was more solicitous for the freedom of the arch-crook than he was for his own. Yet there were still loopholes through which he might have escaped. It was not impossible, even then, to get the better of Kent.

“If he went every night to stop this infernal mechanism,” Lee said, “surely you could have shadowed him. When once you found out where your baby is concealed it would have been simple to rescue him.”

“Yes, yes,” Wu Ling cried. “Once—once I tried to; but he caught me; and then I had to pray, to implore him to spare me. He laughed and turned to go home. ‘Very well,’ he said. ‘If this is your game then the clock shall take its course.’ And I had



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almost to drag him back—to go on my knees imploring him. After that I dared not go back on him. He would have known—he gets to know everything. He is a fiend, not a man. That was why I used to come every night to see him go. It haunted me. I feared that he would be late—that he would forget—that someone might try to prevent him.”

“As we did,” Lee put in.

“Yes. I tell you I was driven to attack you. I was fighting for my child.”

There was a pause. Presently, Lee looked over.

“If Kent had secured this hold over you—if you were powerless—other people were not. Why did you not come to me?”

“I was afraid to—I dared not. He would know and suspect. Besides, I have to be ready to go to him, to do anything he says—at short-notice. To-morrow night I was supposed to meet him. He had something special for me, he said. That is why I implore you to let me go. I dare not fail him!”

“You are supposed to meet him to-morrow night. Where?”

“I dare not tell you. He would follow!”

“H’m! Why does he want to see you?”

“I do not know. But he has ordered me to come—without fail!”

“And supposing I do not let you go?” Lee said.

“Then that will be the end—the end of my child—of everything. I shall take my own life,” the Chinaman said.

He spoke with a despairing resignation which was only too genuine. Lee gazed into the fire thoughtfully.

“If I promise to exercise the very strictest precautions,” he said, “will you tell me where this appointment is?”

But the Chinaman shook his head in a scared way. He was obviously terrified of Kent; he dared take no risks. Lee drummed on the table with his knuckles, wincing afterwards, for he had forgotten that he had injured them on Wu Ling’s battered face.

“You have made up your mind; so have I,” he said. “I will give you the alternatives. If you will not tell me, then I shall keep you here a prisoner. That means probably death to your child and yourself. It is a bad bargain. On the other hand, if you tell me, you will be at liberty to go—and there will be only a risk to contend with. The other seems a certainty.”

Wu Ling gazed at Lee, weighing the matter in his mind. He began to see that Lee had him either way. After some while he spoke.

“I will tell you,” he said. “But mind you, if you try to take him prisoner—to attack him—I shall fight for him as I did to-night. I warn you that I am to meet him at eight o’clock on the corner of Rupert Street, behind the Lyric Theatre. He will come in a taxi, and will stop beside me at the kerb. He will sneeze; that is the signal. Now, I have told you.”

Lee nodded thoughtfully.

“Thanks,” he muttered. “I thought you would prefer to act sensibly.”

He moved over towards the mantel and took down his small pipe, filling it with care and applying the lighted match as if the function were a sacred one.

Wu Ling sat forward on the settee, his chin propped in his hands, his eyes fixed upon the floor, a strange figure of dejection. Nipper was gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

For some time Lee continued his pacing, until, of a sudden, he swung round quickly.

“Wu Ling,” he said, “supposing I go to meet Kent instead of you?”

“What!” The Chinaman had become suddenly electrified—the old startled look had come back into his glittering eyes. “No, no! You have promised! I implore—”

“Listen!” Lee said sharply. “I have a plan!”

He drew a chair up quickly and spoke earnestly for some time—his obvious eagerness holding the other spellbound. As he spoke there came into the face of the Chinaman a new and sudden hope; his eyes sparkled, his thin, claw-like hands clutched and opened spasmodically—evidence of the torrent of feeling inside him.

But when Lee had finished—when he had ceased speaking and the spell of his persuasion was broken—the Chinaman faltered again. The old fear recurred—fighting for dominance. He shook his head.

“It is too risky!” he murmured. “If it should fail—”

“Listen to reason,” Lee said quickly.

“What is your position now? You are being terror-stricken—blackmailed. Where is it going to end? It means misery interminable. You cannot go on like this, nor can Kent. But do you think he will give up this child to you? Do you think he will give away, relinquish this lever he has over you? He knows your hatred for him; in this new infamy he has blackened your heart against him still more. Do you think he would trust you now—let you free to exact your vengeance at your leisure and opportunity?”

Wu Ling stared in a dazed way before shaking his head.

“Besides,” Lee continued, “now you are completely in Kent’s power, there is no end for which he could not use you. He will make you his tool in every enterprise; you will have to do all his dirty work. The end will be, perhaps, the rope for you—the same end, after all, and that is death. If you don’t take a risk you may never be free from him. Nothing venture, nothing have!”

It was sheer horse-sense that Lee was driving into the brain of the man, but his whole brain and sense was paralysed by this fear of what might happen to his child. He was still mortally afraid. Lee paused for a few minutes, then he played his trump card.

“There were three jewels you had, Wu Ling, were there not?”

“Yes.”

"One of them is not yours' by law. You have no right to it. But the others are sacred to you, and I respect your love for them. Supposing I said that the two dearest of these jewels may yet be yours?"

"What do you mean?" The man glanced at Lee quickly. "Do you mean the diamond? Can you get——"

"No; not the diamond."

"Then there is only my baby. I dare not—I simply dare not——"

"Then there is your wife, Wu Ling," Lee said quietly.

"My wife?" The man spoke with sudden hoarseness. His eyes started. "Why do you mock me? Why do——"

"I am not mocking you."

"My wife is dead!"

"Supposing I tell you that she is not?"

In a moment the man had sprung from the couch, his yellow face was close to Lee, his hands were outstretched imploringly.

"Not—not dead?" he breathed.

"No. She has recovered, after all. She will, perhaps, be out of the hospital in a month's time. With her and with your child you still have something to live for, Wu Ling."

There was a look of unspeakable joy distorting the yellow face which Nelson Lee had so sadly battered with his fist. He tried to speak, but could not.

"If they are both as dear to you as that, Wu Ling," the detective said, "then they are worth fighting for, worth risking for. I am running a great risk myself, but I feel confident I shall succeed. In any case," he added darkly, "yours is Hobson's choice, my friend. I am so determined that I shall keep your appointment if I have to hold you here in irons!"

There may not have been much virtue in the choice of Wu Ling when he at last assented. He had no alternative. But before he went to sleep in the small, locked room that night in the Gray's Inn Road apartments there was that in the deep-set eyes which spoke of the light of a new hope in the Celestial's heart.

CHAPTER 13.

The Manacles of Doom!

STANDING in the shadows a few yards from the stage door of the Lyric Theatre there waited the muffled figure of a man. His shoulders were slightly bent, and when he moved forward it was with a slouching, shuffling step.

Below the heavy, long overcoat there showed a pair of dark, cotton trousers, tightening almost to ankle width, and the rather pigeon-toed feet were encased in rather strange slippers of a carpet pattern.

In the darkness it would have taken a keen eye to notice these details. But above the turned-up collar and beneath the drawn-down peak of the shapeless cap, one or two curious

observers caught a glimpse of a keen, yellow face—of dark eyes.

The figure of the Chinaman moved up as far as the corner of Rupert Street, and had turned to retrace his steps when a closed car swung up to the kerb. From inside there came a rather petulant——

"Ah-tish-oo!"

The muffled Oriental turned and, without pausing, stepped up and threw open the door of the taxi, disappearing inside. The car was not lighted, but by the light of the theatre lamps he saw a man—an old man—seated in the corner. In the old man's hand, pointing straight at him, was an ugly automatic.

The newcomer spoke quickly as he closed the door after him, using a refined accent with only a slight sing-song intonation to indicate his nationality. There was an intense nervousness in the voice.

"There—there is no need for that, Roger Kent. Surely you can trust me now!"

"Not so glib with my name," snarled the other, and the voice was not that of an old man. "Keep it between your two rows of dirty teeth. I have told you often I never trust a stink-ape."

"Not even after last night?"

"Not after last night, Wu, my friend. It was good of you, and I shan't forget it! But you weren't fighting for me!" He laughed.

"It was not for my sake, Wu Ling. By Gehenna, no! You managed to get clear yourself, you yellow snake! Eh?"

"I should not be here if I had not!"

"No, I suppose not. Anyway, I'm glad you came. I've a little job for you which I think you might gladly undertake after your adventure of last night."

The car had lurched forward now and was purring down Shaftesbury Avenue. The Oriental fidgeted nervously.

"I'm not out for any foul play, Kent." He paused. "I don't want——"

"It isn't what you want, curse you!" snarled the other. "It is what I demand. And don't bandy words with me, else—— Well, you know. This man, Nelson Lee, and his hireling youth, are becoming an infernal nuisance. Too many affairs like the one last night is not good for my nerves or liver. He has got to be put out of it!"

"You can do it yourself," the Chinaman said, with an obvious attempt at defiance.

"I prefer not, not while I've got you here to do it for me. I'm giving you instructions, remember. I didn't come out here to drive round all night persuading you. Besides, if I do I might be late!"

There was a world of significance in his last remark. He glanced at a watch on his wrist.

"I've got to be back by ten, Wu Ling," he said. "You would not deny me that!"

"You fiend!" the Oriental gasped, exasperated.

"Thank you. But don't argue. I'm giving you instructions, and you've got to carry them out!"

"You want me to murder Nelson Lee?"

"I want him to die quickly and completely. He is becoming too dangerous."

The whole figure of the Oriental was shivering with sheer fright; he could hardly keep still, and a sinister smile came to the lips of Roger Kent.

"H-how d-do you expect me to d-d-do this?" Wu Ling stammered presently.

"Any way you like. You know how. I can't teach a Chinaman anything about homicide or sudden death. Get a knife and trust to instinct." He laughed. "I may be more kind to you when you have— What are you fiddling down there for? Come up, curse you! What are you shivering like a pig for?"

He seized the Oriental by the scruff and dragged his head up, for he had bent down, reaching down with his arms as if he were trying to keep his knees from knocking.

Something went snap suddenly, and at the same time Kent began to kick viciously with his left leg, cursing luridly.

"What in thunder has happened here?" he cried. "You yellow dog, what is this contraption round my leg, eh? What is it?"

Something clanked like a chain when he kicked. He suspected treachery at once, and jammed his revolver into the yellow face.

"What's the game—eh?" he hissed. "Speak, else I'll blow your dirty brains out—right now!"

There was no terror now in the yellow face, despite the murderous proximity of the automatic. The thin lips were smiling.

"Don't shoot for a moment, Kent," he said quietly.

"Then what is this over my ankle?"

"A manacle. It is over mine as well." The Oriental spoke with such placidity, such cool assurance, that Kent, for the moment, was dumbfounded.

"A leg iron," the Celestial said with a crafty smile. "To coin a new word, Kent—"

"Don't call me by name, curse you! How many more times—"

"I was saying, Kent," the Chink repeated slowly and defiantly, "to coin a new word—an ankle-cuff." He laughed mirthlessly.

"We're joined together now, Kent, in bonds of most unholy matrimony. We're closer knit than the Siamese twins!"

The suddenness of this development had startled Kent out of his customary coolness; the swiftly changed attitude of the Oriental puzzled and confused him. He had grown so used to his pitiable terror, his abject subservience, that now—

He did a thing which was most unusual in the arch-crook—he lost his temper. He kicked frantically, injuring his own ankle painfully in the spasm.

"Undo this! Take it off, you yellow scum!" he cried hoarsely. "Bound together, are we? Tied up, do you say? By all your heathen gods, unless you unlatch that gadget inside two seconds—"

"Hitched!" breathed the Oriental, and Kent had not time or desire to wonder how

he came to acquire such familiarity with English slang. "Joined up, my friend. For better or for worse, till death do us part!"

He laughed again in a way which incensed the arch-crook.

"There you have it, you Yang-tse polecat!" Kent said between his teeth. "You've just quoted it—'till death do us part.' Unless you unhitch this thing about my ankle, death is going to part us inside the next sixty seconds. Get busy!"

He jammed his automatic once more perilously into the yellow face. But the Oriental made no attempt to move.

"That's just where I've got you thinking, Kent," he said with aggravating coolness. "Death won't part us. That's what makes it so awkward for you. If you shoot me you still have me—fastened to your leg. It's checkmate!"

With an oath Kent lowered the revolver. He had been defied and beaten, and he knew it. He had realised he dared not shoot.

"Spit it out!" he hissed. "What's the game? What's your pretty scheme?"

"A very simple one," said the Chinaman. "You must admit I thought it out well. I knew I'd got to meet you and that you might want me for some little enterprise, and I shouldn't be keen on it. If I refused I knew that there was a reasonable possibility of your doing something violent. That's why I brought this chain and these two leg irons round my waist. I clamped them over the two of us, not because I like your society, but because there is safety in attachment. You can shoot me, you can strangle me—you can do what you like—but you can't leave me or get rid of me!"

A dry laugh broke from his thin lips—a laugh of triumph.

"You could shoot me now, in this taxi, if you like, but a revolver makes a noise. It wouldn't be long before you'd have a crowd round, and one or two policemen. And then you'd find it very awkward to be chained to a corpse, Mr. Kent, especially if you had murdered the man yourself!"

Kent saw his powerlessness, and by this time his temper had become more equable.

Utterly unscrupulous as he was, vindictive and cruel as he could be to any other man who was not white of skin, he was a man of brains and resource, and of remarkable ingenuity in the prosecution of crime.

For this reason, and because he had a certain humour and imagination in his make-up, he admired resource and ingenuity in others. He hated a fool and he loathed weakness and incompetence.

But he had a strange streak of magnanimity in his perverted soul which admired efficiency and genius even in an enemy.

Had his opponent now not have been a yellow-skin, he might have admitted himself outwitted, and offered his congratulations. He had done such things before.

When he spoke again it was with the old suavity, which was most characteristic.

"It's quite an ingenious idea of yours, Wu Ling," he said. "But I don't know, I'm sure, why you should have been at such pains to protect yourself. I could have taken your life before had I wished to do so."

"But you didn't wish—eh?"

"Not particularly—no. Not more than any other Chinaman. But if I promise you that I haven't any intentions of violence towards you personally, then it seems to me that the use of these leg irons comes to an end. They impede you as much as they do me."

"Not altogether," said the Oriental thoughtfully.

"We can't leave this car unless you undo them. Look here, Wu Ling, I'll give you my bona fides. Take this as evidence of my good faith."

He handed the Chinaman his revolver, and the Oriental took it.

Kent smiled. He realised that this was a game of wits—a game of mental chess. To each move there was a counter-move, it seemed. The best man would obtain the checkmate.

CHAPTER 14.

The Hour of Doom!

"**N**OW the position is reversed," said Kent, as his companion handled the weapon. "You can shoot me, if you like, but if you do you'll be chained up in the same way as you said I should."

"Not necessarily," Wu Ling said. "Supposing I have the key to undo the fetters?"

"If you have, then undo them now," Kent said. "You have nothing to fear."

Even as he spoke he remembered something. A thought flashed upon him, a thought that he had made a false move upon the board.

If Wu Ling had the key upon his person then that key was accessible. Providing the car was in a fairly lonely spot he could have shot the Chink and searched for the key in his pocket to release himself. It would have meant delay; it would have been risky. But—

The thought was dispelled the next instant by what the Oriental said.

"You don't think I should be fool enough to bring the key, do you?" he said. "When those irons clicked over our legs I knew that I couldn't undo them again!"

"What?" Kent began to get really apprehensive. "Who the dickens has got the key, then?"

"Someone else—someone who knows us both," the Chink said significantly.

For some minutes there was silence. Kent was baffled. There remained only to him now the trump card to play with which he had been so successful all along—the threat to Wu Ling's child.

Kent realised that it was a smaller trump now than it had been. Wu Ling apparently

had been driven to despair in which the torture and worry had become insupportable.

Death provided a door through which he could pass and lose all worry, even for his child.

He knew, too, that once his life had been taken, once he ceased to exist, Kent would have no interest in the life or death of the little yellow baby he had kidnapped. He would lose his power.

Kent's faculty of quick reasoning told him this in an instant. But there was still some virtue in the card, and he decided to play it.

"You've got the cunning of your race, Wu Ling," he said slowly, "but like all the rest of you it is only cunning. It isn't brains. That is why it doesn't carry you very far."

"No?" said the Chinaman lightly.

"With this manacle business, for instance, you're in a blind alley, Wu Ling. It's awkward for me, but it's just as durned awkward for you. If you hadn't chucked away the key it would have been a slick stunt. But—"

"It's not so awkward for me," Wu Ling said. "You keep forgetting Roger Kent, that I have nothing to lose. You have. Life is a misery to me. I might be glad to lose it. You have a good many things to live for, and the notion of death to you isn't very pleasant."

"It isn't," Kent admitted. "But what are you driving at? What do you propose to do? Get out and shout?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea."

"I don't know so much. I might be arrested. But so would you. Penal servitude isn't a holiday."

"That's just what it is," said the Oriental with a laugh. "You see, I have had to work for my living. I've known what slaving is, and hardship which would have killed weaklings like you. An English prison is about ten times more comfortable than a Chinese hotel. What would be comfort to me would be the worst kind of purgatory to you, Roger Kent. There is the difference."

"Yes, perhaps it might. But that is reckoning that I got put away. But they can't put me away without getting a conviction, and they couldn't get a conviction without a proof. They've got to find proofs against me, my friend, and that won't be easy, I assure you. I don't run a crime syndicate with half a million capital without a reserve fund, my yellow mogul. And I don't control the finance without laying out a fair sum in the safety department. Besides," he added, "all this is dependent on your getting out and shouting. Suppose you decide that it wouldn't be good policy—what then? We just drive round?"

"Maybe."

"Till we run out of petrol, eh, and the car stops? Where does that lead you?"

The Oriental shrugged his shoulders, and smiled in a manner which ruffled Kent exceedingly; but he kept his temper in check. Obviously, Wu Ling was keeping back his

cards. Kent went on again after a short pause.

"Look here," he said, "this man at the wheel had got orders to drive about aimlessly until I tell him to stop or give him a destination. I hired this car in order to have a short chat with you. He'll probably have enough petrol in his tank to last three or four hours."

He glanced once more at his watch.

"The time now," he said, "is nine o'clock. We've been shooting the bull at one another for over an hour, and this car will probably keep running till twelve. I've got an appointment at ten!"

He threw a world of significance into the last sentence, and glanced searchingly at the yellow face at the same time. But, to his amazement, he saw no sign of the original terror.

The thin lips parted in a smile; the two rows of dirty teeth were once again revealed inscrutably.

"Supposing you can't keep that appointment," the Chink said calmly.

"This is the first checkmate, Kent," he said, "and it is a mate which appeals to me. But there is another which appeals still more. Do you see this?"

He took from his pocket a small round clock such as is used in motor-cars and carriages. In the silence, as Kent gazed at it, the clear ticking could be heard above the gentle purr of the car.

"This is what they call an infernal machine," the Chinaman said quietly, "and its mechanism is more ingenious and safer than the one you have rigged up for the benefit of an innocent child. It came from Russia—where they know how to make these things."

Kent stared with glazed eyes at the clock in Wu Ling's hand, as if he hardly realised what the man had been saying.

"You—you are bluffing me!" he said hoarsely. "Let me—"

"No, you don't! Get off!"

The butt of the automatic smashed into Kent's face as he made a frantic grab at the clock. The Chinaman had only just eluded

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"You know what, then," the arch crook hissed. "On the stroke of ten that piece of mechanism of mine starts to work. By a quarter past that yellow brat of yours has breathed his last, and his body will be weighted and slung in the river."

"It will be a merciful end for him!" The Chinaman spoke without emotion. "We shall meet again the sooner!"

A strange look of hatred and perplexity came into the face of Roger Kent. He was baffled—thwarted and baffled, and he knew it. The ground was cut cleanly from under him.

The other man began to laugh quietly.

"You're checkmated, Roger Kent," he said, with sudden feeling. "You're checkmated in two ways. My wife is dead; my child dies in an hour. I have lost this diamond which was to have brought me comfort and prosperity. What reason have I to live—eh?"

Kent did not reply. His face had gone very pale.

The Oriental went on slowly:

him. Kent was sitting back again, nursing his wounded face with his two hands.

"Don't try those games with me, Kent," the Chink said quietly, "and don't interrupt. This little apparatus here is time for half-past nine. When that time comes it fires a fuse which ignites enough tri-nitro-toluol to blow both of us, with the car and the driver, into eternity. I'm sorry for the chauffeur. Perhaps we can manage to send him on a short errand before then."

Kent gazed first at the innocent-looking clock, and then at the Oriental. There was a grey terror in his drawn cheeks.

"Nothing can stop this acting, Kent, unless I shift over this little lever at the back. Then it's harmless. And there is one condition on which I'll shift it over."

"What's that?" asked Kent, in a hard, metallic voice.

"That you drive me now—right now," said the Oriental, "to the house where you've got my child. What do you say?"

Kent paused for a moment, his thin lips working strangely.

"I will," he said suddenly. "You shall have the brat. We'll cry quits!"

"How long will it take?"

Kent peered out of the window of the car, picking up the vague contour of a familiar building. They were still in the West End.

"It will take half an hour," he said hoarsely.

Wu Ling pointed to the small clock.

"It is now seven minutes past! It gives you twenty minutes! Look slick!"

Kent snatched up the tube and called an address to the chauffeur.

"For Heaven's sake, let her out!" he cried hoarsely. "Drive like a madman!"

CHAPTER 15.

Kent Gets a Shock!

THERE must have been something in the agonised voice of Kent which inspired the chauffeur to transgress all the laws of safety and ignore the speed limits.

Choosing the more unfrequented streets, the car flew perilously eastward, missing disaster again and again by the measure of a hair's breadth.

The Embankment offered a clear mile with an open throttle, and the loud bellow of a policeman followed them in vain as they flashed across the Blackfriars crossing, and hardly slackening, fled up Queen Victoria Street.

Cannon Street offered little impediment at that hour, though people in Fenchurch Street turned and waved indignantly as it swerved dangerously onwards.

All the time in the swaying taxi the Chinaman leaned back in the corner, indifferent, it seemed, and unperturbed.

At last, swinging off into the meaner and darker neighbourhood of the river, the car pulled up and the driver bent round to ask a question.

Kent shouted a frenzied explanation, the coolness, the assurance of the man was for once absolutely broken. The car lurched forward again.

"Twenty-five minutes!"

It was the first word which the Oriental had spoken since the race with death began.

"We're nearly there! Another minute or two! Quicker, man!"

The car darted forward, swung round a corner, side-slipped, raced on again. Suddenly, there was a jamming of the brakes; it slowed down.

Kent sprang for the door, throwing it open, and the next minute he pitched headlong. He had forgotten the manacles. He tried to pick himself up, cursing luridly.

The Chink got out with difficulty.

"Keep your head! You have still two minutes."

He bent and helped Kent to his feet.

"Now," he said, "you've been in a three-legged race before possibly. You've got to do the two-step with me—steadily—unless you

want to waste precious time. Is this the place?"

"This is the place—yes."

He glanced up at a tall, narrow building, ramshackle and squalid. It had once been a warehouse, it seemed, backing on the river.

Since the house shortage in that part of the world, it had been let out in squalid tenements—without the sanction of the authorities. But they had not interfered—realising the necessity for a roof.

The two men, standing in the darkness on the narrow, uneven pavement, manacled together, formed a strange picture.

"You have the key! Get forward! Now, left foot first! That's it!"

The driver of the taxi stared at them wonderingly—not sure, nor knowing whether he had been dreaming. An old man—for Kent was still in his disguise of an elderly, respectable gentleman—arm in arm with a man who looked like a Chinaman, one-stepping across the pavement.

He heard the clank of a chain, and was so lost in confused speculation that he had no eyes but for the two figures which entered the door of the building.

He did not see a head peer round from the back of his own car. He did not hear another car come purring silently down the narrow street behind him.

A torch shone out from the hand of the Oriental as the door closed to, shutting them into a narrow passage, the uneven boards of which were innocent of any cover except a thick carpet of dust and filth.

"I think we had better hurry, my friend. It is a matter of seconds now."

The Celestial directed the bright ray of the torch upon the dial of the small clock he carried, and, as he held the arm of his companion, he felt a slight shudder run through him.

"Step more quickly! It is the top floor!"

The ticking of that clock was getting on Kent's nerves. To ordinary ears it would hardly have been distinguishable in the clank of the chain manacle and in the creaking of the crazy staircase.

To Roger Kent it was as the deep-throated boom of a funeral knell. He moved up the steps more quickly, jerking the Chinaman after him.

They climbed to the second rickety floor of the building, which ought long ago to have been condemned for all habitation except rats.

The torch flashed ahead, revealing the warped and rickety stair case which led to the third, and last floor. One or two of the stairs had rotted away, leaving a gaping and perilous hole. The crazy balusters had collapsed and fallen here and there.

They moved up the creaking stairs, the white eye of the torch dancing ahead of them.

As they rounded the corner a strange and hideous face peered down at them, and as the narrow beam of the torch fell upon it the effect was startling, repulsive. It was a

face of terror seemingly detached from a body.

The sudden fleeting vision had startled the Chinaman, and for a moment his pulses quickened, but an instant later the shutting of a door, and the noise of a key grating in a lock gave the strange illusion a material basis.

"The fool! The fool! She's locked it!"

The words fell hoarsely from Kent's parted lips. He struggled on cursing luridly, until he reached the landing, and then, in a frenzy, threw his weight against the door. It groaned and bent. Once more he thrust his shoulder into it, and his companion added his own weight also.

The door flew open immediately; that rusty, useless lock would not have withstood the vigorous onslaught of a child.

The two men burst into the room, and the first sweeping glance of the yellow man revealed it a small garret, filthy and unfit for habitation, bare of all furniture except a small table in the centre and a truckle bed in a corner of the room.

Crouching by the bed was the figure of a girl, a strange-featured tatterdemalion, whose clustering unkempt hair fell wildly over her white and startled face.

She shrank back, gazing at the newcomers, her hands half raised as if to ward off an unexpected blow.

"Phoebe, you fool!" Kent broke off and shook his fist at her, realising that to talk was useless.

He pointed to a corner of the room where was a battered clothes' basket, half filled with new straw.

"There!" he cried. "There is the child!"

For the first time the smooth indifference, the comparative apathy of the Oriental disappeared.

Clutching Kent by the arm tightly, he dragged him over to the basket and bent to look at the small occupant, whose small, queer face was just discernible by the light of the feeble candle which served to illuminate the squalid garret.

The Chinese infant was sleeping peacefully, apparently in good health, showing no signs of distress—comfortable, warm in the primitive, but effective, bed of straw—blissfully oblivious of the peril from which it had just been rescued.

The yellow man bent down and peered at the child with one swift searching glance; but he gave no sign of particular joy or emotion.

A light of satisfaction in his eyes was the only clue to what he felt. He peered round and about, looking for a gas jet and a clock—the infernal machine which Kent had so diabolically installed.

"And where is this little apparatus, Kent?" he asked.

"Quick! Quick! The time is past! Put a stop to that infernal thing of yours!" His eyes were wild as he glanced at the clock in the yellow hand. "I have kept my part of the contract. For Heaven's sake——"

"Don't get alarmed," the Oriental said calmly. "There is no reason to be feverish. The fuse starts burning at the half hour. It may be some minutes before—— But where is this clock of yours you were at such pains to describe to me?"

"There isn't one!" The shadow of a smile came to Kent's lips. "There never was one. It was a fable!"

"You lie!"

"I don't! You are at liberty to search the place from top to bottom. Gas!" he laughed. "If they had gas in this inter-barn it would be burnt out in less than a week!"

"It was a lie, then! My child's life was never in danger?"

"I wouldn't like to say that," Kent replied quickly, still looking anxiously at the clock. "But it was never in danger of asphyxiation. It was a fairy story I invented for your benefit. I know how impressionable you Chinese are in matters of that sort."

THE lip of the Oriental curled, and his breath came quickly as he shot a quick glance of contempt and hatred at the man beside him.

"It was a pretty scheme," he muttered. "But you gave me an idea, and I must thank you for it."

He held up the clock with something of a devilish glitter in his eyes.

"Stop the thing!" cried Kent. "You promised if I brought you here in time——"

"What are the promises of a Chinaman?"

"You don't mean——" The face of Kent had gone livid with terror.

He could hardly get the words out.

"Ask me rather what use is my life to me!" the Chinaman said slowly, and his eyes never left the face of the arch criminal.

"But—you have your child now, you——"

"But have I his mother? Have I my wife, you snake?" The Chinaman's voice had gone strangely hoarse in a sudden access of terrible passion. "Do you think you can murder my wife—rob me of what I value most in this world and the next—and then expect mercy at my hands? Do you expect me—a 'yellow stink-ape'—to keep my word when you have no vow so sacred that you would not break it out of mere amusement?"

An almost demoniacal laugh broke from the lips of the yellow man. He raised the clock in his hand.

"I throw this down," he cried, "and it will be the end. That terrifies you, doesn't it, you craven? You are white-livered, as I thought you were. It is the end I should have wished most for you!"

His eyes blazed. He took one maniacal glance at the infernal machine in his hand. He raised it above his head.

Crash! The clock came down upon the wooden floor. A sharp scream broke from the white lips of Roger Kent. He threw himself down, almost dragging the Chinaman on top of him. He covered his face.

From the clock there came a low humming, which grew into a buzzing which was almost

shrill in its intensity. A spasm shook the body of the arch-crook—

And then a low chuckle came from the lips of the Oriental. He was standing and looking down calmly, self-possessed, an expression of infinite contempt on his yellow face.

He bent, and clutching at Kent by the collar, dragged him to his feet.

"Stand up, you craven!" he said contemptuously. "The mainspring has gone—that is all. The effect was better than I had planned. Two can play at your game, you know! What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. There is no danger of your poor carcass being blown to bits just yet—not unless there is more in an ordinary carriage clock than the makers ever put in it!"

Kent gazed at the Oriental, and there were expressions of shame, of hatred, and of exasperation on his face.

The Chinaman went on with a slow smile.

"You are fond of theatricals, Kent. So am I. You are as successful an actor as you are a liar. You are not the only one who can act a lie convincingly."

Roger Kent gazed at the man before him incredulously. He knew that he had been hoaxed, deceived into sheer terror. He never knew before that a Mongolian was capable of such subtle craft.

He opened his mouth to speak, but he changed his mind and remained silent. His manner became sullen and morose. Presently, he glanced down at the chain which manacled him and kicked his foot impatiently.

"What are you going to do, now? Can't you take off this infernal iron?"

"When my friend comes here with the key."

"Here?" said Kent in surprise.

"Yes. You will be rather shocked to see him."

"Because you know him well. His name is Wu Ling!"

"Wu Ling!" Kent said quickly. "What the—"

And then a strange look came into his face; he drew in a quick, sharp breath. His companion had thrown off the heavy overcoat, and with his shapeless cap he had removed a false crown and pigtail, revealing the slightly bald head and iron-grey hair of—

"Nelson Lee!" Kent gasped.

"The same, Kent. We have met before. Never, I think, under such interesting circumstances."

CHAPTER 16.

The Last Account!

NELSON LEE put the knuckle of his finger into his mouth and emitted a low, clear whistle, and he was removing the yellowish pigment from his face with a handkerchief as the door opened and three men came in.

The first, entering with a feverish eagerness, was the Chinaman, Wu Ling. The next was Nipper. Bringing up the rear came the stalwart figure of Harker, of the C.I.D.

"We have our capture, gentlemen," Lee said as they entered. "Wu Ling, if you will kindly unlock—"

But the Chinaman did not hear. He was already in the corner of the room, crooning in ecstasy over the form of his offspring. There was a look of dazed delight in his dark, slant eyes when eventually he turned in answer to Lee's summons. There was no malevolence in his eyes even when he looked at the scowling face of the arch-crook.

"I gave you the key, Wu Ling. Kindly unlock these fetters. There is danger of contamination with such close company."

The Chinaman produced a small key from his pocket and went on his knees at the feet of Nelson Lee and Kent. There was a click a moment later, and he stood erect again, holding the fetters in his hand.

Nelson Lee stepped aside and Kent took a pace back—a free man again, so far as his feet were concerned. But such freedom was meant to be brief.

Inspector Harker advanced with two pairs of cuffs.

"Roger Kent," he said, "It is my duty to arrest you, primarily for the kidnapping of Han Chow Ling, the infant child of Wu Ling. Also for masquerading in disguise for a felonious purpose. Your hands, please."

Kent regained his self-possession to some extent, but he still looked baffled—non-plussed. He extended his hands nervously, but backed away to the table, which slid across the floor as he retreated reluctantly.

"Come on! Don't be shy!" Harker said, smiling, as he followed him. "Holy wars! What the—where the—"

Kent had disappeared through the floor like a demon king in a pantomime! In the place where he had stood a moment before there was a gaping hole like a cellar-trap. In a moment Nelson Lee was on his knees on the edge of the aperture, peering down. It was pitch dark there, and he could see nothing.

"Listen!"

Everyone held his breath. Lee strained his ears. He heard a noise as of a man scrambling about among a heap of debris. He snatched his torch from his pocket and directed the white ray through the trap to the floor beneath. He saw there, immediately underneath, the skeleton of a bed, from the midst of which a man had just scrambled and was making for the door.

"Downstairs, Harker, for your life!" Lee cried hoarsely.

Leaving Wu Ling in charge of the room and the deaf and dumb girl, they rushed down the stairs to the street, where they arrived on the pavement to see the rear light of the car careering away up the street. But at the corner a heavy lorry came suddenly into view. There was hoarse shout—a crash—and silence.

And when they arrived on the scene of the accident, Roger Kent, at the wheel of the borrowed car, was strangely twisted—dead!

(Continued on page 44.)

A Plot to Throw the Headmaster Out of St. Frank's!

THE CUNNING OF MR. PYCRAFT!



Fighting James Kingswood, the new headmaster of St. Frank's, is a sportsman. That is the opinion of the juniors, for hasn't he just offered them a boxing belt to be fought for by the Lower School?

But in the opinion of Mr. Pycraft, Housemaster, Kingswood is an outsider, a man who hides a dark secret. Mr. Pycraft decides that it is his duty to unearth this secret and turn the new Head out of St. Frank's!

The Spy!

MR. PYCRAFT'S opportunity came on a hot, sultry afternoon when a Junior cricket match was in progress.

St. Frank's sweltered sleepily, hardly a soul being visible in and about the sun-bathed buildings.

Mr. Pycraft had made a practice, of late, of climbing up the stairs to the top of the great clock tower. People who had seen him going up, or coming down, were informed casually by Mr. Pycraft that the air on the top balcony was delightful—"one of the coolest places in the school, I can assure you," said Mr. Pycraft—and they thought no more of it. But in cold truth, Mr. Pycraft was using the clock tower as a spying station.

From that balcony he could not only see the headmaster emerging from his House, no matter whether he used the front or the back door, but he could see just where Mr. Kingswood went.

On this particular afternoon the Head, in hiking costume—indicating another of those mysterious jaunts—set off across the Half Mile Meadow in the sunshine, to finally disappear behind a clump of distant trees.

"At last!" muttered Mr. Pycraft breathlessly.

He had his plan all cut and dried. At this time of the year—and on such a warm day—it was any odds that the Head's front door would be standing wide open. Mr. Pycraft, paying a visit, wasn't expected to know that

the Head would be out. So Mr. Pycraft would walk boldly to the Head's study, and enter. With luck, he ought to get inside, without attracting any attention from the domestics.

He felt that he was perfectly justified in taking this course. For, by now, he had definitely come to the conclusion that Mr. Kingswood was a dangerous character. His schoolmastering was a mere pose; actually, he was an associate of tramps and bruisers and crooks. Once Mr. Pycraft let his imagination go, he was nearly as melodramatic as Handforth himself.

If only he could get something definite—some concrete fact detrimental to Mr. Kingswood's character, which he could place before the Governors!

Here, perhaps, was a chance. Mr. Pycraft, satisfied that the Head was safely out of the way, crossed Inner Court, and boldly entered the Head's opened doorway.

He went to the study, tapped, and waited. There was no answer. No sound came from the other parts of the House; Mr. Pycraft heard nothing but the droning of a big bumblebee which had accidentally strayed indoors.

With quick decision, Mr. Pycraft gripped the handle of the study door, turned it, and entered.

The Adventures of Mr. Pycraft!

MR. PYCRAFT experienced a sense of tremendous guilt. For a moment, indeed, he was almost seized by panic, and he was on the point of hastening out of the study.

What if somebody should suddenly enter and find him here? If he were caught spying—

"This is foolish!" muttered Mr. Pycraft, forcing himself to be calm. "What I am doing is perfectly honourable. This man is a danger to the school, and he must be exposed. Fate has singled me out as the instrument of justice, and I must do my duty."

Having thus soothed his conscience, he nipped round to the other side of the desk, and pulled at the top drawer. As he had half expected, the drawer was locked. So were all the other drawers.

Mr. Pycraft took a number of little desk keys from his pocket. They were tied together on a string, and there were all sorts, and all sizes. The Form-master's gaze was really furtive as he turned towards the window. It was wide open, but the curtains, fortunately, made an effective screen. Moreover, there were some high bushes just outside.

Nobody would think anything if they came in and found Mr. Pycraft merely standing within the study; but if they caught him tinkering with the drawers of the desk—The very thought made Mr. Pycraft's mouth go dry. He realised the need for hurry.

With trembling fingers, with unsteady fumbling motions, he tried key after key. It seemed to him that twenty or thirty minutes

must have elapsed—whereas, actually, he felt one of those keys turn in the lock after three minutes.

"Ah!" he breathed exultantly.

He pulled the drawer open—only to experience bitter disappointment. There was no ormolu tray; there was nothing in the drawer, in fact, except a few staid and schoolmasterly-looking papers. He did not dare to touch them, but closed the door, and relocked it.

It was a blow. Mr. Pycraft did not disguise from himself the fact that it was a serious setback. He had counted so much on that drawer.

"Well, it proves, beyond doubt, that Kingswood is afraid!" he muttered. "He knew that I had seen him thrusting the tray into this drawer. But there are other drawers. And these keys—"

He suddenly stood frozen with abject fear. For out in the hall, distinctly he heard voices—the voices of Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's valet, and the Head! Unless the floor opened up and swallowed him, Mr. Pycraft was done!

"Why, yes, Phipps—come in!" came the Head's cheerful voice. "I've been waiting to have a little private chat with you."

"Thank you, sir," came Phipps' quiet reply.

Mr. Pycraft leapt. To get out by the door without revealing his presence was impossible. For some extraordinary reason Mr. Kingswood had returned—at least, Mr. Pycraft felt that the reason must be extraordinary. And to be found like this, alone in the study—

Mr. Pycraft's thoughts boggled at the possible consequences. And it had come to him, with a sudden shock of hope, that there was the window.

Mr. Pycraft was not celebrated for his athletic prowess; but he leapt through that open window like a trained hurdler. Full credit must be given him for that superb jump.

He landed in the flower bed just as the door opened—and Mr. Kingswood, entering, saw nothing to excite his suspicions. The room was empty, and it looked as though it had been empty for a long time. The window curtains were agitated, but the breeze, caused by the opening door, accounted for that.

"Come in, Phipps—sit down," invited Mr. Kingswood in his genial way. "No need to be stiff and formal with me, you know."

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps, sitting on the extreme edge of the hardest chair he could find.

Outside, Mr. Pycraft was a victim of a fresh horror. He had escaped from the study, it was true, and he had expected that it would be easy enough to stroll out from beyond the bushes, and walk unconcernedly away. But as soon as he started pushing the bushes aside he saw a group of white-flannelled seniors in the very middle of Inner Court, chatting animatedly. If Mr. Pycraft emerged now he would be seen by those seniors—and, not unnaturally, they would wonder why a presumably respectable Form-master should act in such an extraordinary way.

In a word, Mr. Pycraft was trapped.

He could neither advance nor retreat. Until those seniors went he must remain hidden—and he felt terrible.

Indeed, his position was precarious in the extreme. If the Head should happen to come to the window, and glance out, he could not fail to see the crouching figure just below. And Mr. Pycraft knew that there would be no explanation. He would be scuttled—captured—sunk!

Mercifully, Mr. Kingswood showed no indication, at the moment, of coming to the window. Neither did those infernal seniors show any indication of moving on. It was a wonder they did not get sunstroke.

"Congratulate you, Phipps," came the Head's voice, floating clearly through the open window. "You worked our little dodge very cleverly."

"Williams deserves most of the credit, sir, I fancy," said Phipps modestly.

They were discussing the incident when Kid Williams had first come to the school. Mr. Pycraft found himself listening with breathless interest. He almost forgot the precariousness of his position. He learned how this remarkable headmaster had "plotted" with Phipps to inveigle Archie Glenthorne into employing Kid Williams as his trainer. Indeed, without the Head's scheming, Archie would never have taken up boxing; and Kid Williams would not have been employed in the school.

"It is a case of the end justifying the means, Phipps," the Head was saying. "Young Glenthorne is a changed boy. He stands a good chance, too, of winning the belt."

"I am inclined to agree with you, sir," said Phipps. "My young master is a very surprising young gentleman."

"But he didn't surprise you, eh?" chuckled Mr. Kingswood. "You knew what he could do, Phipps, didn't you? Well, it's all good for the school."

"There is an extraordinary difference, sir, in the Junior Forms since you came," said Phipps.

"Yes, I fancy the Remove and the Fourth are thoroughly awakened," agreed Mr. Kingswood. "It was the Fourth which needed the jolt. You remember that incident which started the trouble, Phipps?"

"You mean, sir, when the Remove boys painted insulting legends on the study doors of the East House and the Modern House?"

"Yes."

"That was clever, sir," said Phipps. "Even now the Remove boys do not know who played that trick."

"I'll tell you," came Mr. Kingswood's chuckling voice. "I played it, Phipps."

"You, sir!"

"Alone I did it!" laughed the Head. "I stole into those two houses in the dead of night, armed with a pot of paint and a paintbrush, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I was very certain that the Fourth Form would buck itself up and get a thorough understanding of its own slackness. In my

position of headmaster I could not put such an idea into any of the boys' heads; but there was nothing to prevent me playing the jape myself. Mind you, Phipps, this is in strict confidence. I know I can trust you."

He did not know, however, that Mr. Pycraft, outside, was greedily drinking in every word.

Spilling the Beans.

TO Mr. Pycraft's untold relief, the sunbathing seniors moved off towards the gate which led on to Big Side. And the Form-master was at last enabled to edge clear of the bushes and reveal himself in the open.

But he did so guiltily—with a horrible feeling that people were at all the windows, watching. When he plucked up enough courage to look round, however, he found that he was unobserved. With a rapidly beating heart he made off into the other direction—towards the gates which led on to Little Side. And by making this move he did not show himself within the region of the Head's study window.

He was breathing more freely by the time he reached Little Side. For some moments he stood watching the Junior cricket match, although he did not see the players. His mind was far too busy. At last he had something concrete to place before the governors!

Mr. Kingswood had plotted with Phipps, a mere valet, to introduce Kid Williams to the school; Kingswood had had the amazing nerve to play a jape on the Fourth Form! So that was the real explanation!

If the Governors got to know about this they would take immediate action—drastic action. No doubt Phipps would be blamed by Mr. Kingswood—for letting the cat out of the bag; but who was Phipps, anyway? Mr. Pycraft had never liked Phipps. Perhaps he would be sacked, too. All the better.

Thinking thus, the Form-master reached the Triangle, and as he was passing into the East House he found Grayson, of the Fifth, lounging there.

"I hope it was worth all the trouble, sir," said Grayson casually.

Mr. Pycraft halted.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I don't understand you, Grayson."

"Was it very uncomfortable, sir crouching beneath the headmaster's window?" asked Grayson, with a wide grin.

Mr. Pycraft jumped.

"Did—did you see me?" he gasped. "I mean, how dare you, Grayson? I have just come from Little Side—"

"Come off it, sir," said Grayson, with studied insolence. "I was in Big Arch, in the shade. I saw you take a header through Mr. Kingswood's window and land behind the bushes. And it was quite a while before you came out." His manner became contemptuous. "You're not fooling me," he went

on. "What's the idea of spying on the Head?"

"For Heaven's sake, Grayson, moderate your voice!" panted Mr. Pycraft. "Look here, come to my study. I can see that I shall have to take you into my confidence. But I assure you, Grayson, that I had done nothing—er—dishonourable. I am concerned only for the good of the school."

Grayson nearly murmured "Sez you!" but he courageously refrained. He followed Mr. Pycraft to the latter's study.

Mr. Pycraft could not have fallen into worse hands—or, perhaps, rather, into better hands; considering the circumstances. For Harold Grayson was the leader of everything unpleasant in the Fifth. He was a thoroughly detestable fellow, and he was capable of any amount of malicious mischief.

"Now, Grayson, you must not get any wrong ideas into your head," said Mr. Pycraft breathlessly. "Neither must you say a word to any living soul of what you have seen, or of what I am about to tell you. You will give me your word?"

"Cross my heart, sir," said Grayson, making solemn motions with his hands.

"This is no subject for joking!" said Mr. Pycraft, frowning. "Quite apart from the fact that Mr. Kingswood is engaged in a secret traffic—which I believe to be next

door to criminal—he has been plotting within the school itself."

And the Form-master, eager enough to have a fellow-conspirator—if the truth be told—gave Grayson an account of what he had overheard.

"Phew!" whistled Grayson at length. "So it was the Head who painted all the Junior study doors in our house? I say, what a sportsman!"

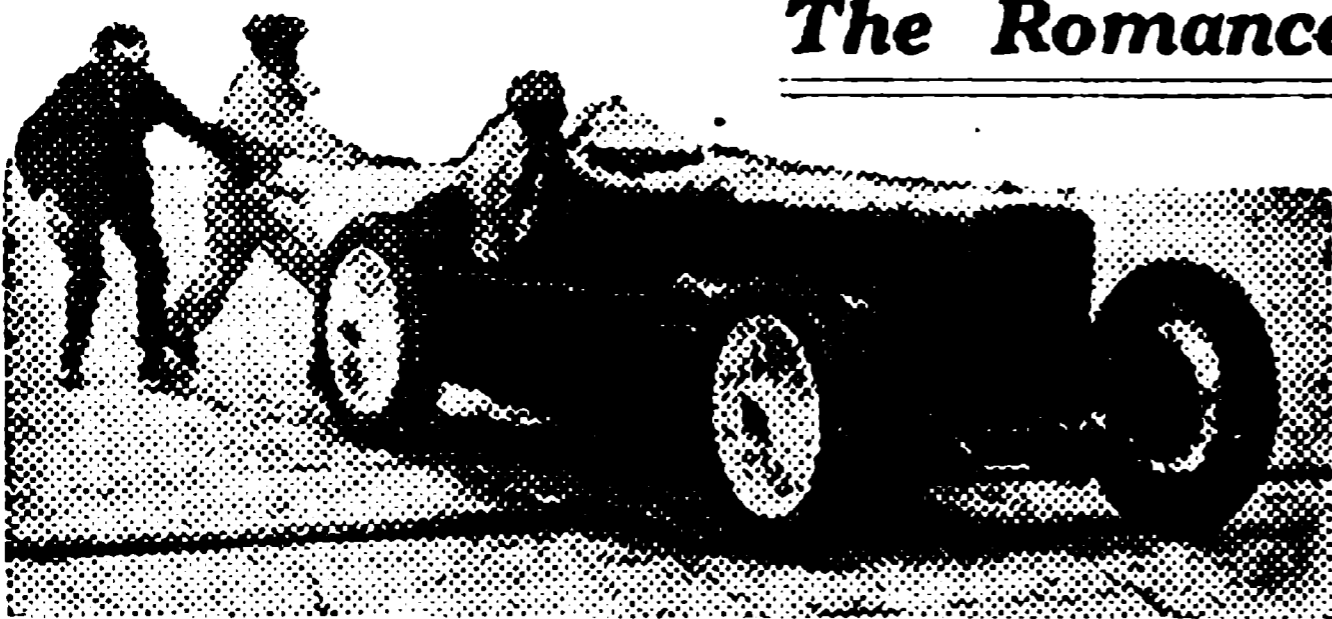
"What? What did you say?" barked Mr. Pycraft.

"Well, dash it, sir, he only did it to put some pep into those half-dead kids——"

"Are you defending the headmaster's outrageous conduct?"

"Talking about outrageous conduct, where do you think you stand?" said Grayson, with an unpleasant grin. "Still, we won't argue, sir. I agree with you that something ought to be done. The kids are kicking up too much fuss in the school. Nowadays, we can't move without coming across hordes of juniors in training. And they're japing one another every other day, too. Life is getting too hectic."

"It is all Kingswood's doing!" said Mr. Pycraft fiercely. "He has treated me abominably. We will talk of this again, Grayson. And remember—not a word in the meantime."



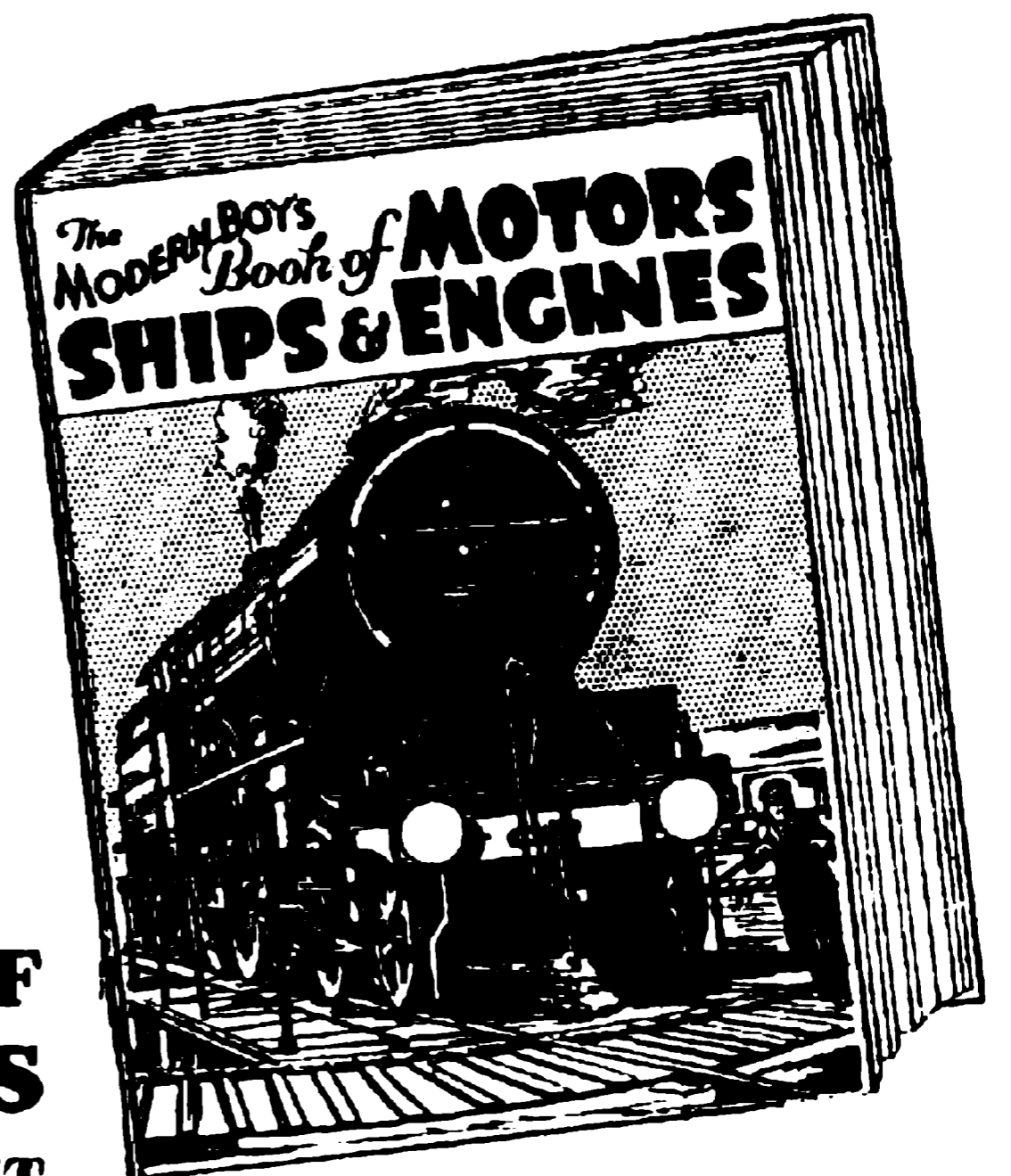
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Archie's K.O.!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE'S progress now was meteoric.

His bout with Reggie Pitt was as sensational as everything else connected with Archie's "latest."

The meeting took place amidst intense excitement. The West House fellows were confident of victory; the Ancient House fellows were now whole-heartedly and enthusiastically supporting Archie.

Owing to an important engagement the Head was not able to referee this particular bout; but Kid Williams was glad enough to take on the duties.

"On my left, A. W. D. Glenthorpe, Ancient House," he announced, with some pride. "On my right, R. Pitt, West House."

Archie was beaming upon his opponent, upon the seconds, and upon everybody in general. His very coolness, in fact, caused the West House contingent to feel doubtful. Then, when they looked at Reggie Pitt, they were confident again.

Reggie was the Remove skipper, and he couldn't lose.

"Seconds out of the ring!"

Archie heard the words distinctly. He was remembering the Kid's final instructions. Guard up. Easy now—not too high. Straight left—

"Time!" said the Kid.

The boxers left their corners, and the match started.

It ended so rapidly, that the West House boys were left gasping.

Pitt evidently meant to make short work of his elegant opponent. Boxing brilliantly, he opened with a rush, and Archie was rather startled, within a few seconds, to find himself against the ropes. He was blinking. Something hard had hit him fairly and squarely between the eyes—and as though from a great distance he heard the audience roaring.

His vision was not quite cleared, and he was still seeing through a sort of mist, when he noticed Reggie sparring up to him.

Archie left fly with a straight left, side-stepping at the same moment. Thud! The blow went home. Archie and Reggie were in the middle again, and Reggie was pressing hard.

Archie swung in a right. He did not mean it to be a knock-out, but even now Archie was unaware of his own strength—his own hitting power.

Crash!

Reggie Pitt was on the floor, and Reggie Pitt was seeing all sorts of coloured stars.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie, aghast. "I mean to say, old thing, why not get up?"

"One—two—three—four—"

The Kid was counting.

Archie's feelings were mixed. He was really awfully sorry for Reggie. He felt rather a brute. Then he was pleased to see that Reggie was making spasmodic efforts to rise. He actually got one knee, and one of

his gloved hands wandered feebly about, searching for a hold which was not there.

"Out!" said the referee, disappointed at the brevity of the bout, and triumphant at the success of his protégé.

Reggie was on his feet now, and his first act was to playfully punch Archie in the chest, then grabbed his gloved hand.

"What have you got in your fist, old man—a knuckle-duster?" he asked. "Great Scott! That punch of yours is dynamite!"

"Frightfully sorry, old lad—"

"Rats! I was careless—that's all," said Reggie disgustedly. "I thought you were easy meat—and I jolly well deserve to be licked. The only pity is that we didn't go two or three rounds, so as to give the chaps a show."

There was a great deal of cheering from the Ancient House fellows—and shouts of consternation from Reggie's own supporters. But, on the whole, the Remove was delighted. The one and only Archie was a miracle.

The Fourth-Formers were beginning to feel—and look—startled. Archie was a holy terror! Even the Fourth-Formers' confidence in Lawrence commenced to wobble.

"You're the good, Master Archie!" grinned the Kid happily. "Well, it's all set, now, for the big match!"

"Saturday!" said Handforth dreamily. "Oh, my only hat! It'll be ages before Saturday comes!"

And at that very moment, Mr. Horace Pycraft and Grayson, of the Fifth, were in the former's study—and Mr. Pycraft was carefully writing a long, descriptive letter—and that letter was addressed to Sir John Brent, the Chairman of the St. Frank's Board of Governors.

Other things, quite apart from boxing, were likely to happen at St. Frank's on or before Saturday!

The Fateful Saturday.

THE coming fight for the Kingswood Belt—Archie Glenthorpe versus Ernest Lawrence—was the sole topic of the Junior School during the remaining days of that exciting summer week.

Mr. Pycraft went about nervous and jumpy. Not that the Fourth noticed anything different in him—except, perhaps, that he was less ill-tempered. And the Fourth was duly relieved.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Pycraft was frightened. Having taken the plunge, he had virtually burned his boats. There could be no backing out.

He had written to Sir John Brent, protesting that Mr. James Kingswood was not the type of man to control a great school like St. Frank's. And Mr. Pycraft made certain definite charges against the Head—charges which, he stated, he was able to fully substantiate. If necessary, he would face Mr. Kingswood and defy him to deny those charges. Mr. Pycraft had also hinted at

other matters—as though they were too awful to put into plain words.

On the Friday morning he received a letter from Sir John, and he was looking so pale and shaken that Grayson, meeting him in the corridor, at once gathered that there was a fresh development.

"Well, sir?" asked Grayson, who had helped Mr. Pycraft to concoct that letter. "What's the latest?"

"Come into my study," muttered Mr. Pycraft; and once they were there, he went on: "I have been summoned to London, Grayson, where the Governors will hear the story from my own lips before taking any official action."

"That's all right, sir," said Grayson. "No reason to look so scared."

"Really, Grayson! How dare you say that I am looking scared?"

"Well, I mean, sir, you've got the Head boxed up, and it's certain that he'll be dismissed," said the Fifth Form cad. "Good riddance to him, too—he's too energetic for my liking. Do you think I'd better come to London with you, sir?"

"No, Grayson—I should not like to admit that I took you into my confidence," replied Mr. Pycraft. "I had better go alone. But I really think it would have been far better if the Governors had come here. Then they could have demanded Kingswood's resignation on the spot."

Mr. Pycraft went to London in fear and trembling; he returned in triumph.

"They are coming, Grayson—to-morrow!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Sir John Brent, Lord Walberry and General Milton. They are the three Governors who appointed Kingswood, and they are coming to dismiss him."

"To-morrow, eh?" said Grayson, with a whistle. "The very day of the Kingswood Belt Contest. Do you think the Governors will forbid the match?"

"Assuredly they will," said Mr. Pycraft, his eyes gleaming happily. "That wretched boxing match will not take place."

"H'm! There'll be ructions, sir," said Grayson dubiously. "The kids are dotty with excitement already. If that match is banned there'll be a riot!"

"With the Governors in the school?" retorted Mr. Pycraft. "Don't be absurd, Grayson! To-morrow will mark the end of all this athletic tomfoolery—and it will also mark the end of James Kingswood's headmastership!"

"The Governors believed all you told them, then?"

"What do you mean, Grayson? I only told them the truth, didn't I?" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "How dare you say such things! I can assure you that the Governors took a very serious view of the whole matter. For a headmaster to demean himself by painting crude epithets on the doors of Junior studies is—well, unprecedented. Such things are not done. The Governors were horrified when I gave them the full details."

AND the Junior School, unconscious of the blow which was to fall, made active preparations for the big contest.

Mr. Kingswood, equally unconscious of the blow, assisted like the sportsman he was. He was delighted to see the fine spirit of comradeship which was abounding in the Remove and Fourth. These two Forms were keen rivals, but never had they been better friends.

Almost unconsciously, the boys had taken their example from the headmaster. And the interest in the coming boxing match was feverish. Archie Glenthorne's wonderful determination had earned him the whole school's admiration. And the Remove, at least, was now feeling confident. Kid Williams was going about in the most cheerful mood. He had seen Ernest Lawrence in action, and he knew Lawrence's record. But the Kid was happy, just the same.

"Lawrence is hot stuff," he admitted. "But wait until you see what my young boss can do! I tell you, that kid is electricity!"

The seniors were startled, and the juniors were overjoyed, when Mr. Kingswood announced that the contest would take place in Big Hall. A proper ring was rigged up, and seats were arranged all round. And although the seniors talked of the match in an airy sort of way, every member of the Fifth and Sixth had made up his mind to be present. For there were indications that this boxing exhibition would be something out of the common.

"Disgraceful!" commented Mr. Pycraft, when he heard. "Good heavens! What will the man do next? Turning Big Hall into a boxing booth!"

Some of the other masters were inclined to agree with him; and quite a few seniors felt that such a drastic step would have a bad effect upon the school. Not that anybody took any real notice of these moaners.

On the Saturday, Mr. Pycraft was like a cat on hot bricks. He did not know when the Governors were coming, but he expected them to during the early afternoon. Meanwhile, the Junior School celebrated. This was a kind of gala day. Some of the fellows were rather surprised that the Head had not announced a whole holiday.

There was a cricket match in the afternoon, for the day was fine, but nobody really took any interest in cricket. Boxing was the one thing which mattered. And this was quite remarkable—for at this season of the year, cricket, normally, would have outshone every other sport.

Of course, as soon as the Kingswood Belt Contest was over, cricket would come into its own again. But, temporarily, the king of games, much to its disgust, was obliged to take a back seat.

Tea-time came, and with it, rain. And for once rain did not cause a great deal of disappointment.

"Bother the cricket!" said Handforth impatiently. "Cricket can wait until next week. Let's go into the gym. and see Archie's final

work-out. I hope to goodness he hasn't gone stale."

"Not a chance of it—with the Kid watching him," said Church. "Archie is at the very peak of his form. Have you noticed how Lawrence has been training during these last two or three days? Those Fourth-Formers are getting the wind up."

"Wait until the end of about the fourth round!" said Handforth dreamily. "The Fourth will have the wind up vertical by then—when they see that their champion is getting groggy."

"Don't be too sure," warned Church. "This is going to be the match of the century."

And then, about an hour before the match was due to commence, a big limousine car rolled through the gateway. Handforth and Boots and quite a few other juniors caught sight of the car's occupants as it glided towards Big Arch.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, staring through the rain. "Did you spot 'em? Sir John Brent and Lord Walberry and General Milton! Three of the Governors!"

"Good old Head!" said Travers. "He's doing the thing in style, eh?"

And it soon got about that the Governors themselves had come to witness the Kingswood Belt Contest—and there was great satisfaction.

There would have been great dismay if the real meaning of the Governors' visit had been known!

Fighting Jim's Way!

MR. KINGSWOOD was puzzled as the three grave-faced Governors came into his study. The first glance assured him that the gentlemen had not come to St. Frank's to witness the boxing match. There was something far more serious on their minds.

The Head himself towered high above his companions. His six-foot-something of brawn and muscle overpowered them; his clean-shaven face, so rugged, so full of character, made them nervous. That strong chin of his, which jutted out like a rock, was enough in itself to make any ordinary man feel insignificant.

"I am honoured, gentlemen," he said in his deep, friendly voice. "You have arrived at a particularly happy hour—"

"We—er—we are afraid that there can be no happiness in this hour, Mr. Kingswood," interrupted Sir John, looking pained. "We have come, in fact, on a very grave mission."

Even while Sir John was speaking, he felt dwarfed. With Mr. Kingswood towering over him, the words he had so carefully prepared failed to come.

Sir John had experienced this once before—when Mr. Kingswood had been appointed to the headmastership. The chairman of the Governors suddenly felt weak and helpless in the presence of this human force. But with

an effort Sir John pulled himself together and took refuge in a burst of indignation.

"We will be brief, sir—and blunt," he said aggressively. "Certain irregularities in your conduct of the school have come to our knowledge, and it is necessary that we should hold this formal inquiry."

"I see," said Mr. Kingswood quietly. "Sit down, gentlemen."

They sat down, all looking thoroughly uncomfortable.

"May I inquire how this knowledge came into your possession?" asked the Head.

"That is neither here nor there, sir," put in General Milton. "Gad, I am grieved over this, Kingswood! I hoped for great things of you. It was I who recommended you for this post; it was I who brought you from Rydehouse."

"I wonder if I am indebted to Mr. Pycraft?" murmured the Head.

And the sudden glances which the Governors exchanged told him all that he wanted to know.

"Mr. Kingswood, you shall hear how this information came into our possession—later," said Sir John. "At the moment, all we want to know is the truth. Do you deny, or do you acknowledge, that you brought a prizefighter named Williams to this school, and that you conspired with a servant to have this man installed as a trainer for one of the junior boys?"

Fighting Jim smiled.

"It all depends how you look at these things," he replied easily. "I brought Kid Williams to the school, yes. But when you say that I conspired with a servant, I think you exaggerate. There is one junior boy in the Ancient House who employs a valet. That boy has been a great slacker, and I arranged with this valet to go through a little comedy. In brief, they staged a fake quarrel, and young Glenthorne, believing it to be real, attacked Williams with great ferocity. Williams then congratulated him, told him that he could become a first-class boxer, and encouraged him to go into training."

The Governors looked dubious.

"You admit, then, that you—er—engineered this most irregular proceeding?" asked Lord Walberry.

"I am not interested in its irregularity, sir," replied the Head. "I only know that the subterfuge was perfectly harmless. Glenthorne went into training, and he has become one of the finest junior boxers it has ever been my pleasure to see. This very evening he is challenging the junior champion of the school, and there is a distinct chance that he will win the fight."

"I'm not sure that we shall allow that fight to take place," said Sir John sternly. "All this is very serious, Mr. Kingswood. It is not in keeping with the dignity of a headmaster—"

"But I am not a great believer in dignity, sir," said the Head gently. "It is my policy to be friendly with the boys—to earn their respect and their comradeship."

"That is another point," went on Sir John with some haste. "Our informant has told us that this prizefighter, Williams, was in an intoxicated condition when you brought him to the school."

"A natural mistake for Mr. Pycraft to make," smiled Mr. Kingswood. "Williams, as a matter of fact, was suffering from a drug. He had taken part in a boxing match in Bannington that evening, and he had fallen into the hands of thieves—who drugged him. I came upon the man in the high road, and I brought him to the school—which was nothing more or less than a human act. I would have brought a dog home in similar circumstances. I will add that Williams is a teetotaler and a splendid fellow. Rough, uneducated, crude—but one of Nature's gentlemen."

"That may be so," growled Sir John. "But he is certainly not the type of man to be in constant close association with the boys. We are very astonished, Mr. Kingswood, that you should allow this professional boxer to actually live in the Ancient House."

"Mr. Wilkes, the Housemaster affected, raised no objections," said the Head. "Let me remind you, gentlemen, that we do not live in a snobbish age."

"We will not pursue the matter—you have told us all that we require to know," said Sir John. "Now, Mr. Kingswood, there is another question. We understand that you played a practical joke upon the boys of the Fourth Form—and, furthermore, you allowed the boys to believe that that practical joke had been played by a Remove boy."

"You mean, the painting of the study doors?" asked Mr. Kingswood, smiling. "Yes; I was rather proud of that."

"Proud of it, sir!" ejaculated Sir John, aghast. "You! The headmaster! Could you so forget your dignity—"

"But, you see, nobody knew that I did it," interrupted the Head. "My object was a sound one—to instil some life and vigour into the Fourth Form boys. I am glad to say that my plan succeeded. The Fourth Form is now virile, alive, spirited."

"In other words, there has been an unexampled amount of rowdiness this term," said Lord Walberry sourly. "We understand that the Fourth Form boys and the Remove boys have been fighting, almost rioting—"

"I am the headmaster of this school, and I am perfectly satisfied with the conduct of the junior boys," broke in the Head grimly. "The thing I did was harmless in itself; and it was done with a good object. That object was achieved. And I maintain, therefore, that I was thoroughly justified."

Sir John rose to his feet.

"And we maintain, Mr. Kingswood, that your conduct was most unethical," he said. "It is the duty of a headmaster to punish such irregularities—not encourage them by indulging in them himself. Upon my word, by your action, Mr. Kingswood, you positively incited the Fourth Form boys to acts of reprisal."

"Exactly," said the Head. "That was my precise object."

"Good gad," ejaculated the general, "you—you are actually admitting it?"

"The reprisals, as you call them, were harmless enough," said Mr. Kingswood. "I don't believe in repressing the natural spirits of healthy schoolboys. Let them have their fun—they work all the better. And my methods, startling as they may appear to you, have resulted in the reformation of the Fourth Form. I came to this school to wake it up—and, as I told you at the outset, I would do it in my own way. I do not regret one single action."

"What of your mysterious jaunts into the woods?" demanded Lord Walberry, with some heat. "We have been told, Mr. Kingswood, that you regularly consort with tramps—"

"One moment!" interrupted Mr. Kingswood dangerously.

And so aggressive was his attitude that the three Governors felt quite nervous.

"We are not dealing with my conduct of the school now," continued the Head, his eyes blazing. "Where I go after dark—in my own time—and what I do in the woods is no concern of Mr. Pycraft's. Neither, gentlemen, is it any concern of yours."

"I differ!" snapped Sir John. "If you are conducting yourself in a manner which will bring discredit upon the school—"

"I am amazed!" broke in Fighting Jim. "I am grieved, gentlemen, that you should take heed of the tittle-tattling of a mean-spirited under-master who has got his knife into me. Ever since I entered this school I have acted, I hope, as a gentleman should. But if you think I am going to defend myself against this added ridiculous charge, you are quite mistaken. Furthermore, if you consider that I have done anything dishonourable, or anything which is likely to harm the school, I will resign."

"That's all we wanted now," said General Milton, with a glare. "We demand your resignation at once, sir!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lord Walberry.

"It is with extreme regret that we must insist upon this," said Sir John.

They all looked at Mr. Kingswood nervously, as though they expected him to make a personal attack upon them. But Fighting Jim was laughing. The humour of the situation tickled him.

"I'll tell you what!" he said, with a chuckle in his voice. "We'll put it to the school!"

"No!" shouted Sir John. "Good heavens, Kingswood, I cannot allow—"

"But I can!" said Mr. Kingswood. "I am still the headmaster, and this shall be my last act. It is only fair that the boys should know just why I am leaving."

He moved towards the door, and without another word, the big man opened it and passed out.

(Don't miss the final dramatic chapters of this Grand School Story next week.)

All about Our Companion Papers' Grand Free Gifts!

My dear Chums,—
Next Saturday will be a red-letter day for many hundreds of boys and girls all over the world. For on that day our three companion papers, "Magnet," "Ranger," and "Modern Boy" appear with the first of their **WONDERFUL FREE GIFTS.**



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Don't forget. If you've got a birthday coming along and you are asked what present you would like—ask for an Annual, and see that it is one of those mentioned above. If you are giving a present—do the same. And if you are thinking of booking one for the Christmas stocking you can do so through the Christmas Clubs, particulars of which you can obtain from your newsagents.

A word in season about next week's programme. We have talked of treats so far in this chat. And now we come to another—one which is a very special treat for "NELSON LEE" readers only. A good many of you have asked for the return of a series of stories by E. S. Brooks of the unusual type like the School Ship series.

Next week you will have it. The story that appears in next Wednesday's issue is, in my opinion, *the greatest* story of amazing adventure ever written. It features Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Dorrimore, Handforth, and that great warrior, Umlosi.

In some astounding manner you have yet to find out, these five adventurers find themselves pitchforked head-first into a land, the like of which they have never in their wildest dreams thought existed; a land where mushrooms are trees, where moss is grass, where beetles are three-foot creatures of horror, where prehistoric animals roam, where cave-men prowl, where old-time pirates hide—in fact, a land of everything *amazing.*

Where this land is, how Nelson Lee & Co. got there, and what astounding adventures befall them will be told in truly vivid fashion in the series of long complete stories starting next week.

Now that is a treat of treats. I can imagine you all grabbing your hats and making for the newsagents without losing a second—that's the spirit. Safety first where it concerns your "NELSON LEE."

Reader's Prize Joke.

Facetious One: "Why so gloomy, old chap?"

"Well, you see, I have just heard my uncle has cut me out of his will. He's altered it five times in the last year."

"Ha, ha, ha! Evidently a fresh-heir fiend."

(F. Farbotton, 500a, Leeds Road, Bradford. A pocket wallet.)



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The Treasure of Wu Ling!

(Continued from page 34.)

He had gone to his last account—but not by the hand of Wu Ling!

IN a way, it was the best thing that could have happened, for the police, although stern enough on occasion, can soften when occasion demands sympathy and tact. The great diamond was found on Roger Kent, and was returned to the mine authorities from whom it had been stolen in the first place.

Jim Ball and O'Connor were arrested; the former as he left the hospital.

Chang, the old Chinaman, was released. Wu Ling and his wife were simply summoned for keeping firearms without a licence and fined, and that was the end of the matter. Wu Ling took a dislike to diamonds, and so did his wife. From the rings upon her fingers, they raised the sum of over a thousand pounds, and with this they sailed

for China, where the growing republic offered them something more honourable and ambitious than working a hand laundry in Limehouse. The police could have arrested Wu Ling and sent him to South Africa to stand his trial for diamond smuggling, but the crime was years old, the mines had lost but little. Wu Ling's code of morals in those bygone days had been different from the Western code: there was so much to be said in extenuation, so much need for sympathy, that the mine authorities cabled their willingness to let the matter drop.

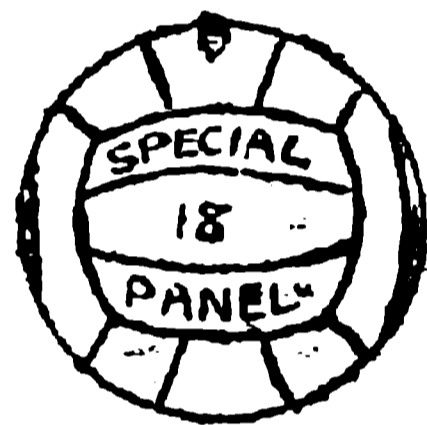
And so Wu Ling and his wife and child returned to far Cathay, while on the walls of the consulting-room there still hangs the drawing that played so important a part in the strange case of the Treasure of Wu Ling.

THE END.

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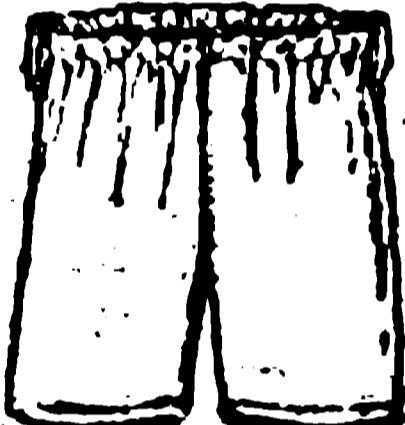
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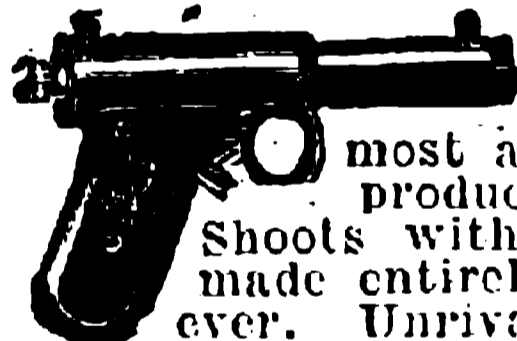
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