

IN THE LAND OF PREHISTORIC ANIMALS—
DETECTIVE-EXPLORER'S AMAZING DISCOVERY!

THE NELSON LEE 2^d

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CHAPTER 1.

Fragment of Atlantis.

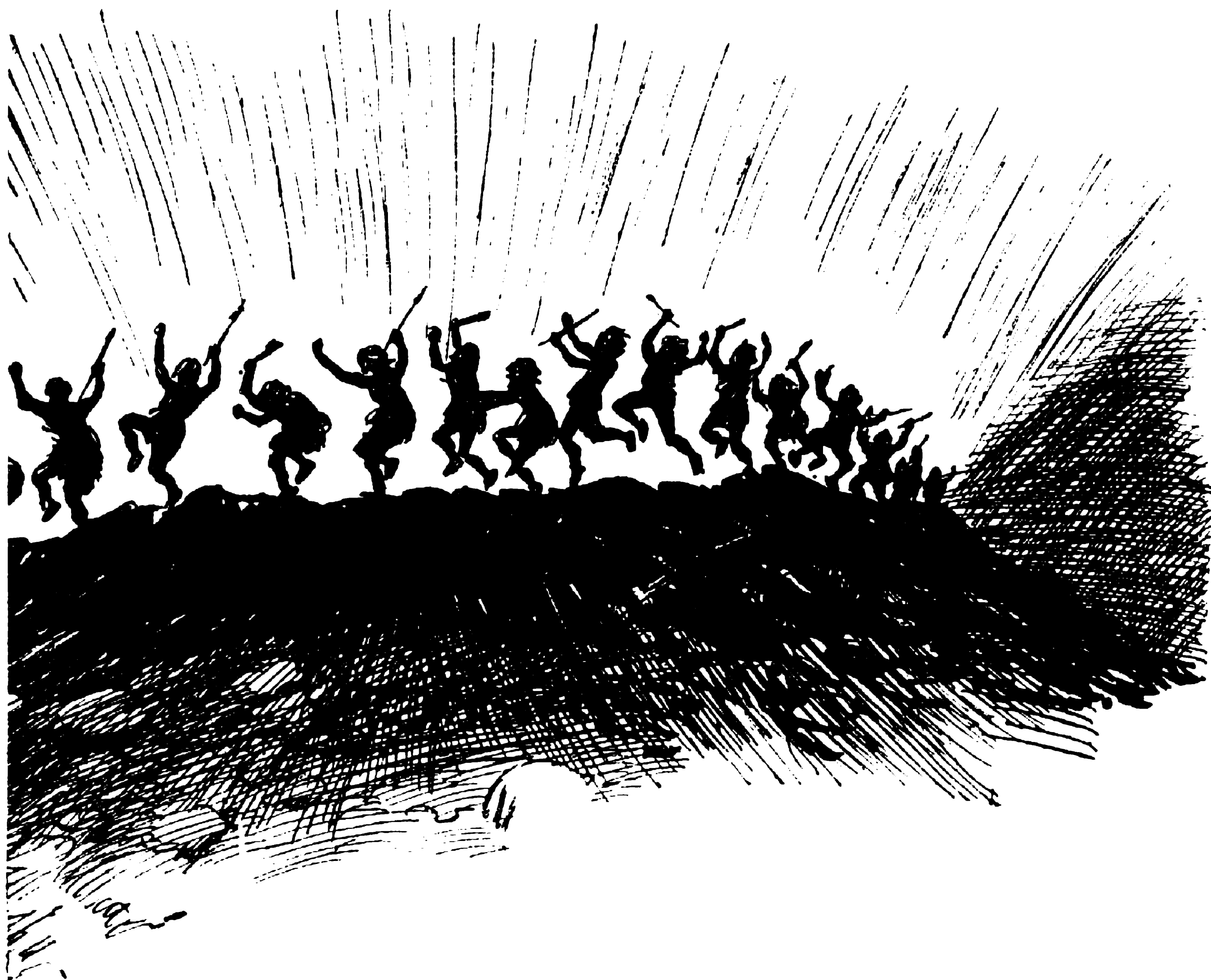
LORD DORRIMORE thrust out a lean, bronzed, sinewy hand.
"There she is!" he exclaimed exultantly.

His companions in the control cabin of the Sky Wanderer gazed eagerly through the

crystal windows. The great monoplane, her three engines purring so quietly that the sound was of no greater inconvenience than the throbbing of a liner's turbines, was cruising at a height of eight thousand feet through the clear atmosphere of the dawn.

She carried five people—although, at a pinch, she could accommodate twenty-five or thirty. Yet she was so heavily loaded that

—Will Grip You! Starring NELSON LEE and NIPPER!



The PLATEAU of PERIL!

Black Hawk, the pirate, rules in the Island above the Clouds with a rod of iron. Braggart, bully, as vicious as a snake, he is feared by all—feared, until the coming of five dauntless adventurers to his amazing kingdom. Then Black Hawk meets opponents worthy of his steel in Nelson Lee, and Co.!

it had been a matter of touch and go whether she would take off.

There were five people in that control-cabin; and they were there for the simple reason that the big saloon was cleared of its normal furniture and laden with special cargo. Those five people were Lord Dorrimore himself, the owner and pilot of the *Sky Wanderer*; Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective; Nipper; Edward Oswald Handforth, of the *Remove Form* at St. Frank's; and last, but by no means least, Umlosi, the King of Kutanaaland, and Dorrie's faithful companion of a hundred adventures.

"I can't see anything!" said Handforth breathlessly.

His rugged face was flushed with excitement; his honest eyes were ablaze.

"You're lookin' straight ahead young 'un—and that's the wrong direction," said the sporting peer, with a grin. "She lies on our starboard quarter—but I don't blame you for missin' her. She's very vague at the moment. Fifty miles away, if an inch."

Lord Dorrimore was thoroughly enjoying himself. He and the faithful Umlosi had been here before; but Nelson Lee, Nipper and Handforth were now about to catch their first glimpse of the Island Above the Clouds—that fragment of the lost continent of Atlantis which Dorrie had discovered a little over a week earlier.

Below the cruising monoplane, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but the sunlit upper surface of a vast, interminable cloud-bank. Not a glimpse of the sea could be seen; yet this machine was soaring across the Atlantic, hundreds of miles from the track of any ship.

And Lord Dorrimore knew from previous experience that the "cloud-bank" was, actually, the upper surface of a great Mist Zone—an everlasting mist which clung to the sea over an area of some hundreds of square miles.

It concealed the tangled, festering masses of weed which was known to mariners as the Sargasso Sea.

"Look, guv'nor!" muttered Nipper, his voice throbbing. "Dorrie's right! There it is—over there!"

Vague, illusory, ghostly, something shadowy, with perpendicular sides, was jutting up clear of the Mist Zone. For nearly a thousand feet it reared up, clear of the mist, bathed in the early morning sunshine. It was more like a mirage than a thing of solidity.

Yet the five adventurers were gazing upon the Lost Land—the Island Above the Clouds! A thousand feet it reared its smooth, rocky cliffs above the mist; two thousand feet it penetrated the mist, its base lost in the eternal vapours of the festering Sargasso.

LORD DORRIMORE had made the discovery during a valiant attempt to make a non-stop flight across the Atlantic from England to the West Indies. He had planned to overtake the liner, *Torania*, which carried Nelson Lee and Nipper and Handforth to Kingston. The case which had taken the detective to the West Indies, however, had collapsed, and he was free to participate in this great adventure.

The *Sky Wanderer*, caught in a cyclone of phenomenal violence, had been pitched for many hundreds of miles out of her course. The storm over, Dorrie, who was accompanied only by Umlosi, had found the great 'plane flying blindly through a mysterious, impenetrable mist.

Then it was that he had cautiously descended, to discover the heaving weed; then it was that he had nearly collided with the grim cliff of the unknown island. And, climbing out of the mist, he had made the most amazing discovery of modern times.

He had kept his secret. Nobody but Nelson Lee, Nipper and Handforth had been told of this wonder isle; and now Dorrie had come back, seeking adventures.

Nelson Lee had come because an extraordinary incident had occurred during the voyage of the *Torania*. She had been held up by a pirate—a dilapidated, rusty old cruiser actually flying the skull-and-crossbones flag. That cruiser, the old *Porto Marlo*, once belonging to the Parazilian Government, and abandoned at sea, was in the hands of a picturesque rascal who called himself the

Black Hawk. He and his motley crew were amazing creatures—giants of men with enormous beards, brawny arms and splay feet—feet which had never known shoe-leather. These astounding pirates had robbed the *Torania* of her food supplies—and her furniture. The vessel's valuables had been of no interest to the Black Hawk.

And Nelson Lee believed that these pirates came out of the Sargasso Sea—perhaps, indeed, from this very Island of the Clouds! For Lord Dorrimore, before leaving, had seen, faintly through the mist near the cliff-base, some great, flaring lights and crude landing-stages. He had seen so little, in fact, that he had been on the jump ever since to return and see more.

"**I**T'S—it's like a vision!" muttered Handforth breathlessly. "My only sainted aunt! I can't believe it, Nipper. That's not really an island. It's—it's something floating on the top of the clouds!"

"That's what it looks like—because the island juts right out of the clouds," explained Nipper, his own voice husky with the great excitement which gripped him. "We're getting nearer now, Handy. Look! The island is taking shape!"

The vague, misty appearance of the Lost Island was changing. It stood out now as something tangible—something solid and real. Even the green of the verdure could be detected. For on the great plateau, two thousand feet above the sea, there was dense vegetation—hills and valleys, streams, forests. Lord Dorrimore, on his brief earlier visit, had reckoned that the island was some twenty miles in length, by at least fifteen miles broad. In shape and size, in fact, it was not unlike the Isle of Wight.

Quite an extensive country—a fragment of that once great Atlantis, lost for countless centuries.

It was difficult to realise that the *Sky Wanderer* had taken off from the town of Hamilton in the Bermuda Islands, only a few hours previously—bound for "an unknown destination."

It had been an hectic week. Drastic alterations had been made in the great aircraft. Over half her enormous petrol tanks had been removed; her great saloon had been cleared. Every inch of available space was used for a very different kind of cargo. Her very passengers were compelled to travel in the control-cabin, since there was no other accommodation.

"I vote we make a complete circuit of the island," suggested Lord Dorrimore, who sat at the controls. "From this height we can make the circuit with our engines cut out. It's important that we should get a good bird's-eye view to kick off with."

It was almost impossible to get rid of that sense of unreality which gripped the adventurers. There, ahead of them and below them, lay the strange island, surrounded by its sea of cloud.

The perpendicular sides were of a smooth, brownish rock. They were absolutely sheer. Scarcely a crevice or an inequality could be seen. Stark precipices, unscalable, impregnable. There was not a foothold for any living creature. There was not a single spot in any part of that strange "coast-line" where the rock cliff deviated from the sheer verticle.

Not a drop or gully—just a glassy-faced pinnacle, rising out of the mist, with the plateau summit, green and uninviting-looking, bathed in sunshine.

"Wau!" came a rumbling voice from Umlosi. "We return, N'Kose, to the land of Monstrous Things. Not even in my own beloved Africa are there such mighty creatures as we saw here. I vow I am impatient for the hunt, and my great spear has grown blunt from misuse."

"Better forget your spear, old son," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "The monsters we saw in this land are of the prehistoric variety—an' your spear wouldn't inflict any more than a scratch."

The Sky Wanderer was now almost directly over the land, and Lord Dorrimore switched off the engines. The great propellers still whirled, but they were now idling. The sunshine glanced off the blue wings of the great aircraft as she slowly banked, to commence a graceful, gliding dive towards the island. Lord Dorrimore was so manœuvring that in the course of that dive he would make an almost complete circuit of the coast-line.

And a fascinating experience it was.

Things were taking shape now. Nipper and Handforth, at one of the windows, were speechless with wonder. Any kind of talk, indeed, would have been wicked just now—for in talking they would have distracted their attention from some of the sights.

Even Nelson Lee was silent. He was enthralled. The landscape below was familiar enough at a casual glance—long stretches of forest land, smooth, grassy valleys; twisting, winding streams; gently rising hills and undulating valleys.

But as the Sky Wanderer dropped lower and lower, it was seen that these forests were, in fact, fantastic. They were not composed of ordinary trees—but they were enormous clusters of gigantic fungus. Toadstool-like monstrosities, growing in great profusion, and growing, too, to the height of normal forest trees. The "grasslands" was of a pale, transparent green, so delicate that it seemed unreal. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi knew that there was no grass at all—but a kind of spongy, mossy growth.

Towards the northern end of the island the scenery was rougher—craggy, rocky hills jutting up, with deep gullies. To the south, however, and towards the centre of the island, the countryside was fair.

"Look!" ejaculated Dorrie, pointing suddenly. "I told you, Lee, didn't I? That's a village, or I'm cross-eyed! This island is inhabited—by humans."

Nelson Lee had binoculars to his eyes, and he was staring down intently. There, in one of the wide valleys, stood a cluster of queer-looking huts or dwellings. And even as Lee adjusted the focus, he saw numbers of enormous, hairy creatures running about amongst the huts, and they were pointing up into the sky and showing every indication of panic.

"By James!" muttered Lee.

On swept the great 'plane. There were other such settlements or villages. Not many of them—one or two dotted here, and one or two dotted there. Lee was prepared to believe that the "forests" themselves contained many of these villages, but the great stretches of fungoid growth concealed them from view.

Not an animal of any kind could be seen—and this fact in itself was significant. Lord Dorrimore had told of gigantic Iguanodon, and Lee had no reason to doubt his lordship's word. These creatures, so enormous in size, would certainly have been recognisable if they were abroad. But no; during the daylight hours they remained concealed in their lairs.

It was no chance that the Sky Wanderer had reached its objective in the early hours of the morning. The great detective wanted the whole day before him—so that he could plan out and build the expedition's base camp. For night-time in this queer land was unquestionably a time of mystery and danger.

CHAPTER 2.

The Base Camp.

"WHAT'S that—over, there?" asked Nipper abruptly.

The Sky Wanderer, gliding lower and lower, was now no more than a thousand feet above the land. And Nipper was indicating an enormous, crater-like opening, half hidden by a range of low, undulating hills.

"It looks uncommonly like a pit of some kind," said Lord Dorrimore. "I noticed it on the earlier visit. Probably the deep crater of an extinct volcano."

He steered the 'plane nearer, so that she cruised over the mysterious gash in the island. The explorers found themselves looking down into a black, abyssmal void. That crater, evidently, was of tremendous depth. It must have been a mile across, from lip to lip.

Then the machine glided on, and there were fresh sights to see.

"There is the spot for our camp, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee decisively.

The great detective, with characteristic swiftness, had unhesitatingly made his decision. And the chosen spot was almost in the centre of the island, where the country was inclined to be slightly higher than the remainder.

Obediently, Lord Dorrimore altered the direction of the Sky Wanderer. And he

uttered an ejaculation of approval—he saw the stretch of land which Nelson Lee had pointed out.

It was a natural bluff, with great strategical advantages.

The first thing to be considered was the safety of the Sky Wanderer—and it was necessary to have the means to take to the air in the event of an emergency at a moment's notice. For the adventurers to make their camp too near the "trees" would have been a fatal mistake.

Lee was remembering, too, those monstrous animals, and the hairy humans. These latter might prove to be friendly, or they might prove otherwise. It was impossible to say—yet. The only safe course was to assume that they would be hostile.

So the base camp must be situated where the explorers would have an advantage.

Nelson Lee had selected an ideal place. It was a rising hillock, jutting up steeply, on three sides, from the surrounding valley. The top of it was quite flat, and appeared to be grassy. And on the fourth side there was a gentle, smooth slope—and at the bottom of this slope a stream, which trickled into a rocky gorge.

"Do you think you could take off from that hillock?" asked Lee keenly. "I mean, if we find it necessary to leave hurriedly, could you get into the air straight away?"

"Easy," replied his lordship, nodding. "It's the very spot. There's quite a level stretch, an' if we had to make a sudden bolt for it we should necessarily be light."

"Then I suggest that you land in the valley on this side," said Lee. "Perhaps you'll be able to taxi the machine up that slope, to the flat top of the hillock. Let's hope so, anyway. For once we're up there we shall have a commanding view of practically the whole island. And that's important, Dorrie."

"Thou art as wise as ever, O Umtagati," said Umlosi, with approval. "'Tis a wondrous good plan. For he who sees the enemy approaching from afar has victory within his grasp."

It was a thrilling moment for them all when the Sky Wanderer, dropping gently downwards, touched the ground. Under Lord Dorrimore's skilful hand, she landed as lightly as a feather. The ground was smooth, and even as the wheels touched, Dorrie switched on and the great motors sprang to life. Before the craft lost way, Dorrie was taxiing her onwards. With rare judgment, he sent her curving round so that she wheeled up the rising slope of the hillock. It would have been a mistake to stop, since the ground was soft. Up she went, rising easily, and towards the top Dorrie found it necessary to open out the engines to their fullest power. They roared triumphantly, and the Sky Wanderer, struggling up the steepest part of the slope, reached the level.

Dorrie now throttled down, and he brought the great 'plane to rest in the very centre of the hill-top.

"Bravo!" said Lee approvingly. "That was well done, Dorrie."

"Plenty of space here to take off," said his lordship, as he looked keenly round. "I've come a few yards too far."

"No; I think it is better for us to be in the centre," said Lee. "There is really more space than I first thought. This will do wonderfully, old man."

"By George! I want to get out!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Think of it, Nipper! We're on the lost continent of Atlantis! It's—it's almost like a giddy fairy-tale!"

The burly schoolboy was bubbling with excitement. Even now he could scarcely believe in his good fortune. He had gone aboard the liner, Torania, practically as a stowaway, and Nelson Lee had goodnaturedly telegraphed to St. Frank's and to his parents, promising to look after him. Handforth had not dared to hope that he would be brought on this great adventure. He had to thank Lord Dorrimore, really.

A door was opened, and soon the adventurers were standing on the soft, mossy ground. They were surprised by the heat. The temperature was well-nigh tropical, and the sun beat down with great power. Overhead the sky was a clear, crystal blue.

"And just beyond that landscape, Handy, there are the sheer cliffs stretching down to the everlasting mist," said Nipper impressively. "It's hard to believe, isn't it? And down below, there is the tangled weed of the Sargasso. We're cut off completely from the rest of the world. We're on a lost scrap of Mother Earth which had been forgotten for endless centuries."

"Plenty of time to indulge in that kind of talk this evening, Nipper," said Lee crisply. "There's work for us to do now—hard, gruelling work. Take your jackets off, and your shirts, too. Our first task must be to protect ourselves—to make this camp a miniature fortress."

"Wise words, Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi. "Thou art truly a great general."

Lord Dorrimore grinned. He would have cheerfully gone off on an exploration tour into one of the neighbouring "forests" armed only with an automatic pistol. Yet, at the same time, he realised that Lee's policy was good. Precautions would cost nothing—at least, nothing more than some hours of hard toil.

Nelson Lee realised that better than any of the others, perhaps—that their only hope of getting back to the great world was to protect the Sky Wanderer. She was their link. And Nelson Lee had made certain to choose a spot where the 'plane could quickly get into the air.

The situation, in fact, presented some problems. One cannot land a giant aeroplane and forget it. Such a craft must be well looked after—particularly when that craft is of such vital importance.

The adventurous five had already partaken of a good meal—just after dawn, before the



Two thousand feet down the great rock funnel Handforth and Dorrimore swung at the end of the rope. Above, the cave men danced their wild Dance of Death. Below, many hundreds of feet, the great cavern stretched—the secret lair of Black Hawk, the pirate!

island had been sighted. And now, without any loss of time, Lee superintended the unloading of the great cabin.

A queer cargo was carried forth into the sunlight.

Lee himself worked as hard as the others. Soon they were carrying numbers of long, gleaming steel girders, and, under Lee's direction, these girders were being placed all round the Sky Wanderer, at a distance of some seventy feet.

It was hard work. The air, in spite of its clarity, was humid, and soon the toilers had stripped themselves to the waste.

The most remarkable thing about those steel girders was their excessive lightness. Yet they were of enormous strength. They were honeycombed with holes, and there were girders of all sizes. Lee himself carried two sacks of bolts and nuts.

"Brainy idea of yours, this, Lee, old man," said Dorrie, as he took a breather. "We couldn't have found better materials for the job. An' it was going at junk price, too."

"I think it will make an ideal palisade, Dorrie," agreed Lee cheerfully.

Those steel girders, as a matter of fact, had been, not so many weeks before, part of the framework of a big rigid airship. It had been an experimental craft, built by the United States Government. It had undertaken a flight to the Bermudas, but it had met with disaster in a sudden squall. Crashing into a hilltop, it had become an almost total wreck—although, mercifully, no members of the crew had been killed or injured.

Utterly beyond repair, the airship had been broken up, and Lee had been fortunate enough to buy large numbers of these standardised girders for next to nothing.

Very soon the palisade itself was being erected. The girders were driven into the ground, so many feet apart. Cross girders were bolted into position—and this work was easy enough, for the holes were drilled in readiness, and the bolts themselves were easy enough to fix.

Each girder was provided with a stay, and these, too, were strengthened by cross sections. Slowly but surely the palisade spread round—a growing fence, completely encircling the Sky Wanderer. It was a spidery-looking contrivance, yet, as it grew, it gained strength.

It was ten feet in height, and one section of it was made so that it could be instantly collapsed. This was a precautionary measure, in case the aeroplane should need to take off quickly. Nelson Lee thought of everything.

Tents and such equipment were quite unnecessary—for the cabin of the Sky Wanderer would make an ideal temporary home. There had been sufficient room for a few folding chairs, and a table could be easily improvised. There were blankets, too—mattresses which could be spread on the floor. Bedsteads were a needless luxury. A fair quantity of food supplies had been brought—

for there had been no means of knowing whether the island itself would provide any adequate foodstuff.

AND so, throughout that long, sunny day, they toiled.

It was towards evening that the palisade was completed—and now the Sky Wanderer was encircled by this fence. During all these hours nothing untoward had happened. No animal had been seen—no living thing.

"I don't quite see what good this palisade will be if a pre-historic monster charges it," said Handforth dubiously. "I mean, a couple of giddy mastodons could sweep clean through it."

"Wait until the gov'nor's finished," said Nipper. "He's full of brainy ideas."

This was a true enough statement. Handforth realised it, too, when he saw the nature of the work which was undertaken next. Giant rockets and other special fireworks were fixed all round the palisade—scores of them. And they were fixed in definite groups, each group being wired together. Nelson Lee had had these fireworks made and wired in Hamilton. It was only necessary, now, to fix them up.

All the wires were connected to a central switchboard, and this switchboard, in turn, was joined up with the Sky Wanderer's great batteries. It was a clever scheme.

"You see, boys, we can't hope to stop any of these monstrous animals if they take it into their heads to charge us," explained Nelson Lee. "We can't stop them, I mean, by gunfire. That's the reason for these fireworks."

"But fireworks can't kill them, sir," said Handforth.

"No; but it can scare them," replied Lee. "And that will serve our purpose far better. You see all these switches? If I pull this one, for example, half a dozen rockets in one section of the palisade will instantly be ignited, and they will shoot out horizontally, sending hissing masses of coloured fire across the ground. These switches are numbered to correspond with the groups of fireworks. So, no matter where the charge occurs, we can be ready for it."

"It's a great stunt, gov'nor," said Nipper admiringly.

The defence-work being completed, the last remaining steel girders were bolted together. These were formed into four little platforms—north, south, east and west. Each platform was level with the top of the palisade. Machine-guns were mounted here. And beside each machine-gun a searchlight.

The twilight was deepening as the searchlights at length were fixed into position and connected up. The sun had sunk below the level of the great plateau. The sky had turned to a rich, deep purple; stars were beginning to twinkle.

And the adventurers, well-nigh exhausted, thirsty and ravenously hungry, were satisfied.

They had made their landing, and they had spent the day in ceaseless toil. Now they were protected, and they could face with calmness the coming of the night.

CHAPTER 3.

The Noises in the Night!

A HEARTY meal and a welcome rest worked wonders.

The adventurers were all greatly refreshed, and nobody thought of turning in. Darkness had fallen by now—a complete and absolute darkness, which enveloped the entire landscape in impenetrable gloom. Overhead the stars twinkled in a cloudless sky. But, curiously enough, the starlight seemed to have no power. Beyond the palisade the island was inky black.

The searchlights were tested, and they proved to be remarkably effective. At the touch of a switch they all blazed out, and for miles the land was thrown into bold, sharp relief. Every fungoid tree could be seen; every touch of vegetation; every stream.

"I've got to hand it to you, Lee, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "It has been a day well spent. I feel ridiculously safe. So safe, in fact, that there's not much thrill."

"It's all very well to talk like that, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We're in a queer country. We can't afford to take risks. Now, I want everybody to be sensible. I am going to suggest that we turn in—and sleep like decent Christians. Sleep until to-morrow—and in the hours of daylight we can do our exploring. We've had a hard day, and we deserve rest."

"Will it be safe for us all to sleep, sir?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

"We must not all sleep at once," replied Lee smilingly. "No; we shall institute a system of watches. But you youngsters will be excused for to-night."

"Nothing doing, sir," said Handforth firmly. "Not likely! We're going to do our share, like everybody else."

"You bet we are!" said Nipper.

In the end Nelson Lee agreed to the boys taking half-watches. Lee and Nipper were to take the first spell. Four-hour watches were agreed upon, but after two hours Handforth would relieve Nipper. After another two hours Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi would come on. And so on, throughout the night.

That, at least, was the plan.

Nelson Lee and Nipper patrolled the stockade, talking occasionally in low voices. Neither of them admitted it, but they were both listening and straining their eyes into the surrounding darkness. They were expecting something—but they knew not what. They only knew that there were savage creatures in this strange land; and now that night had come, these creatures were likely to grow inquisitive, and become venturesome.

Furthermore, Nipper fancied that he had heard a strange sound throbbing across the

still air. Lee had heard it, too. But neither referred to it.

But soon that sound could no longer be ignored.

"Guv'nor, I'm not scared, but that wail gives me the creeps!" murmured Nipper, standing motionless. "What on earth can it be?"

"Hush!" said Lee.

They stood there, their ears straining. Ever since they had first heard it the sound was increasing in volume. A low, moaning wail, throbbing across the still air, rising and falling. Sometimes it petered completely out—only to come again, like the wail of some dread banshee.

Instinctively Nipper felt at his waist, and made sure that his automatic pistol was ready.

"By jingo, sir, I'm glad we took these protective measures!" he whispered. "That sound must be caused by some horrible monster."

"Nay, O Manzie!" came a soft, rumbling voice from the darkness. "That is no living creature, but the wind itself."

Umlosi had joined them—and Lord Dorrimore, too.

"What's the good of kidding ourselves?" grumbled his lordship. "Umlosi an' I can't sleep. We don't want to sleep. There's a fascination about this place which keeps us very wide awake. By glory, I'd give something to know what that wailin' sound means."

"'Tis the wind, my father," said Umlosi.

"I hate to disagree, old friend, but I think you must be wrong," said Dorrie. "There's not a breath of wind stirring."

"Yet methinks there is wind somewhere," said the great Kutana chief. "I know not how it is caused, but the moaning is of the wind. What sayest thou, N'Kose, if we venture forth, you and I?"

"No," said Lee sharply.

"Yes!" growled Dorrie. "An' you can't stop us, either. You an' Nipper are on watch an' Umlosi and I can do as we please. Come on, coalbox! Let's slip out, and do a bit of explorin'! Gad, my feet are itchin' to be off."

Nelson Lee knew that it would be useless to argue.

Before leaving, his lordship ran back into the Sky Wanderer's cabin and procured a very long coil of thin rope. This he handed to Umlosi, who hung it across his massive shoulders.

"What's that for?" asked Lee.

"You sound peevish, old man," grinned Dorrie. "I know what the trouble is. Jealousy! Like to come with us, wouldn't you?"

Nelson Lee laughed ruefully.

"Get off with you!" he growled. "But, for goodness sake, Dorrie, do go easy. You know this strange land even better than I do. But don't forget that you are the pilot of the 'plane——"

"Rats!" said Dorrie. "You can pilot her just as well as I can—so don't talk out of

the back of your neck. If anythin' happens to me, you an' the rest will still be O.K."

In addition to the rope—which Dorrie took merely in case of emergencies, and not for any definite purpose—the pair provided themselves with rifles and powerful electric torches. As an after-thought, Dorrie stuffed a few fireworks into his pocket.

"Just a minute!" came a murmur from Nipper. "Are my eyes deceiving me, or is there a queer kind of glow over there?"

The others could just follow the direction of his pointing finger, and they concentrated their attention into the black darkness. Umlosi was the first to speak.

"Thou art well named, O Manzie!" he rumbled. "Have I not always said that thy eye was nimble? In truth there is a glow amid the great darkness."

"I can't see it," grumbled Lord Dorrimore.

"By James, they're right!" said Lee suddenly. "This way, Dorrie—just beyond that rising hill. The glow is very illusory."

"I see it now!" said his lordship. "By the Lord Harry, what on earth can it be?"

The glow was so faint that it seemed to vanish if the watchers transferred their attention elsewhere for a moment. It was ruddy, lurid, mysterious. And it seemed to emanate from that part of the island whence came the uncanny moaning.

"Come on, Umlosi," said Dorrie eagerly. "We're goin' to look into this."

They were off at once—leaving Nelson Lee and Nipper restless and anxious.

LORD DORRIMORE and Umlosi, walking cautiously forward across the dark valley, soon passed beyond range of the camp. Dorrie was quite comfortable. Umlosi was a masterly tracker, and there wasn't a chance in a thousand that he would lose direction. He would be able to lead the way back to camp with unerring skill.

Skirting a dense forest of fungoid growth, the pair descended a dip and then climbed a steep rise. Lord Dorrimore was equally keen upon penetrating these forests, to examine the strange fungus, and to see what manner of animal life lurked within. But that could come later. Now that he and Umlosi were nearer, the uncanny glow was clearly perceptible; and with it came that queer, drooning wail, rising and falling throbbingly on the still air.

"See, N'Kose!" whispered Umlosi, laying a detaining hand upon Dorrie's arm.

"Eh? See what?" whispered the other. "I can see nothing."

But Umlosi was pointing upwards; and Lord Dorrimore started. Far above, hovering 'twixt earth and sky, were some uncouth, enormous shapes. They circled and swooped in absolute silence.

"Good gad!" breathed Dorrie.

The creatures were not unlike bats—but they were of incredible size. Acting on impulse, Dorrie snapped his torch on and sent the beam flashing upwards. But it failed

to penetrate, although the flying creatures circled away and rose higher.

"'Tis well," muttered Umlosi. "Methought, perchance, that the creatures, like moths, would be attracted by the light."

"That's possible," agreed Dorrie grimly.

He whisked out one of his special fireworks—a patent type of starshell. Pulling a small release-catch, he jammed the pointed end of the thing in the ground and stood back. Almost instantly, with a "swoosh," the miniature shell soared high into the air. Far above there was a dazzling burst of white fire. The star hovered there, illuminating the atmosphere and the whole landscape for nearly a mile around.

And that light revealed a new world of living marvels.

"By glory!" ejaculated Dorrie, aghast.

He and Umlosi saw, far overhead, a number of incredibly large flying creatures, which were undoubtedly of the Pterodactyl type—half reptile, half bird. They had leathery wings, which were between twenty and thirty feet long, and Dorrie even caught a glimpse of vicious, pointed teeth in the jaws of the monstrosities. They went flapping away, to vanish into the blackness of the night.

And on the ground, in a hollow, near a stream, other things were visible. Suddenly the earth quivered and thundered as those creatures, caught by surprise whilst drinking, stampeded.

"Wau! They come this way, my father!" rumbled Umlosi. "Thou art rash, indeed."

But Lord Dorrimore was far too fascinated by the sight to think of danger. Two of the extraordinary monsters were fantastic in aspect—they looked like weird lizards, and they were over thirty feet long. All along their backs, extending right down their tails, were great protuberances, shaped not unlike enormous leaves.

"Stegosauri or I'm a caterpillar!" ejaculated Dorrie excitedly. "Look, Umlosi! Ye gods! Look at those other things—those with the great horns. Triceratops! Why the deuce didn't I bring a camera?"

Even as he spoke, the gleaming star overhead dwindled and died. Umlosi seized his companion, and with one tremendous heave flung him down into a deep hollow of the ground, near some rocks. They rolled back into a narrow crevice.

Overhead, the ground shook as though by an earthquake. Only in the nick of time had Umlosi acted. Many of those gigantic animals thundered right over the crouching pair.

"Wau! Methinks Umtagati, the Wise One, was of good sense when he thought to hinder our departure," muttered Umlosi reproachfully. "For indeed, N'Kose, thou art, as thou wouldst say, asking for trouble."

"Sorry, old man," said Dorrie softly. "But how was I to know that the fool animals would come this way? They've gone now, haven't they?"

They crawled out, and everything was silent, except for the mysterious moaning wail, throbbing in the distance.

"Well, anyway, we've had a good look at the beauties," said Dorrie cheerfully. "Perhaps the others were lucky, too. Those animals were stampeding straight towards the camp, and— There you are!"

Back across the island lights were gleaming. Dorrie and Umlosi knew the truth. Nelson Lee had switched on the searchlights, and no doubt Lee and Nipper and Handforth were obtaining a first-class view of the stampede.

"Will not Umtagati fear for our safety, N'Kose?" murmured Umlosi.

"No, old friend; I had a few words with him before we left," said Dorrie. "I told him not to be alarmed if I fired off a star-shell or two. I added that if we were in any grave danger, I would send up a red fire signal. Umtagati will not worry—although I won't say that he won't do a bit of honest, healthy cussing."

They were walking onwards now, and after they had progressed for some distance, an idea suddenly came to Lord Dorrimore.

"I tell you what, Umlosi," he said keenly. "I believe that glow is coming from the great crater we saw earlier. You remember? We flew over it before landing."

"I believe thou hast hit upon the truth, my father," replied Umlosi. "The same thought had come to me also. And 'tis unlikely that we should both be in error."

As they advanced they saw no further sign of animal life, and Lord Dorrimore concluded that the phenomenon of the great crater served after the fashion of a scarecrow and kept the creatures away.

This was all to the good.

Dorrie also realised, with a sense of surprise, that Umlosi had been right about the source of the moaning sound. It was undoubtedly of an atmospheric nature; it was caused by the moving air in the great crater. Yet there was not a breath of wind. There could be only one possibility—air was rising upwards through the crater, and the mysterious glow was now much more apparent.

"Is it possible that this is really a volcano—and that it is alive?" murmured Dorrie. "I can hardly believe it. We saw no sign of smoke during the day, and when we flew right over the crater we saw nothing but a black, apparently bottomless hole."

"Perchance the mystery will soon be unravelled, my father," said Umlosi. "We draw near. And I would urge you to exercise much caution, for the going is treacherous."

The ground had, indeed, become very rough. For some time Dorrie and Umlosi had been climbing, and they had left the verdure well behind. Underfoot, now, there was nothing but bare rock. They were climbing the steep side of a craggy hill, and care was necessary. For a false step or a sudden slip might mean a plunge downwards upon the crags.

And above them, and over the brow of this precipitous hill, there was the crater itself. Lord Dorrimore was eager.

"Take care, my father—take care!" said Umlosi urgently.

He was in advance, and his voice contained such a throb of alarm that Dorrie experienced a thrill. Seldom was it that the imperturbable Umlosi spoke in such a tone.

Reaching the giant Kutana's side, Umlosi now found that they had reached the summit. There was a flat expanse of smooth rock just ahead—and beyond that, the mysterious glow, now quite tangible. And all about their ears crooned and hooted the mystic moaning sound. Yet at close quarters it seemed a great deal more pleasant to the ear.

"In Heaven's name, Umlosi, what lies beyond?" asked Dorrie breathlessly.

"I know not, my father—but it is strange and perilous," replied Umlosi. "See! There is but a great chasm, and it would be ill to approach rashly."

They fell upon their knees, and then upon their stomachs. They wormed their way forwards inch by inch—until their heads were overhanging the crater. Dorrie could feel the upward rush of air whistling past his ears—and it was curiously warm.

Yet he thought nothing of this—for, far, far below he saw something which filled him with stupefied amazement.

CHAPTER 4.

The Secret of the Crater.

LORD DORRIMORE'S chief sensation was bewilderment.

He found it almost impossible to believe the thing which was now before his eyes. And he heard Umlosi draw his breath in sharply, muttering some startled words in his own language.

Neither of them could say what they had expected to see in that strange crater. A deep hole certainly—a vast pit, with, perhaps, a molten pool of some kind, far below, to account for the glow and the air current.

What they actually saw bereft them of speech for minutes on end. They could only lie there, flat on their stomachs, their heads overhanging the abyss, staring downwards—staring incredulously.

They were not looking down into a volcanic pit—but into a vast cavern. The floor of this caravan was one thousand feet below them, and Dorrie judged, roughly, that the cavern itself was many miles in extent—perhaps eight miles across. The view from above was wonderful. The entire floor of that extraordinary cavern was spread out below, and Lord Dorrimore had the sensation that he was in an aeroplane, and that he was looking out of the cabin window, down upon a wide landscape.

But the truth came to him with a thunder-clap-like shock.

The floor of the cavern was actually at sea level, and the cavern itself extended from the base to the summit of the great pinnacle.

At sea level the cavern was between eight and ten miles from side to side; the rock walls tapered inwards as they arose, like a gigantic funnel. Thus, at the summit, they had narrowed down until they were less than a mile across. This, then, was the supposed crater! It was really the chimney-like opening of the cavern.

And Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, lying on the edge of the rock, staring downwards, were thus able to obtain a bird's-eye view of the entire floor. It was the most astounding experience which Dorrie had ever known.

"Good gad!" he muttered thickly. "Good gad! Can you see what I can see, Umlosi? Or am I dreamin'?"

"Wau! We dream not, my father," came Umlosi's reply. "Yet 'tis indeed more like a dream than reality. Methinks no mortal man has beheld such a sight as this."

One of the most startling features of the affair was the soft, yellow light which bathed the entire view. Almost as far as the eye could see, there were myriads of yellow spots of light, flickering, glimmering, quivering.

And the two watchers could feel the almost suffocating warmth of the air currents as they came upwards through the "chimney" to join the upper air. The pair could detect fumes, too—not particularly noxious, but pungent and somewhat reminiscent of oil.

"Good glory! You were right about the sound being caused by the wind, Umlosi," said Dorrie, turning his head. "Don't you understand?"

"Nay, N'Kose. My mind is like that of a man who has received a great blow."

"But it's easy!" said his lordship eagerly. "Do you see all those points of light, far down there? I don't know what they are, but they're caused by fire. They're great flares—hundreds of them. An' that means—heat."

"So far, my father, I can follow what thou sayest."

"An' heat rises, Umlosi," continued Dorrie. "Just look at the formation of this cavern. The heat waves, risin' ever upwards, concentrate into this narrow, funnel-like opening. These currents of air are caused by the heat, an' the manufactured wind, passin' out of the rocky opening, makes that dreary moanin' noise. Curiously enough, we can't hear much of it now. It is one of those sounds which are more apparent at a distance. But we can feel the hot air rising up and shootin' past our faces."

"Ay, it is even as thou sayest, N'Kose," muttered Umlosi.

"And the glow in the sky is explained, too," went on Lord Dorrimore. "The glow is caused by all those points of light far down. But what are they, Umlosi? What is it that we are actually gazin' upon? We have solved one riddle—two riddles, in fact

—but the sight now before our eyes is the greatest riddle of all."

Yet, even as Lord Dorrimore was speaking, he knew that it was no riddle at all. The solution of it came to him on the instant. And it was a stupefying thought.

For this was no natural phenomenon; those flares on the cavern floor were not volcanic in origin. They were man-made flares! And man-made flares meant—men.

"Why didn't I bring glasses with me?" asked Dorrie, in exasperation. "A pair of binoculars would have been pretty useful now, Umlosi. Gad! There's a kind of lake down there, isn't there?"

"Be thou cautious, N'Kose," said Umlosi, with sudden alarm. "Wau! In thy eagerness thou art like to topple into the void."

Lord Dorrimore was, indeed, leaning far over, and he laughed softly as Umlosi placed a detaining hand upon his back.

"I shan't tumble, old friend," said his lordship. "But, by Jove, I'm excited! Let's be calm, though; let's make a survey of this incredible landscape. Do you see the lake, Umlosi? Yes, an' there's a deep channel of water runnin' right into the cavern side. Ships, too——"

"Wait, N'Kose," interrupted Umlosi. "This water we are gazing down upon must be at the sea level."

"Of course!"

"The lake, then, is no lake at all—but actually the sea," went on Umlosi. "Thus it follows that there must be a great rock channel through the island, joining this cavern sea with the outer sea."

"Your reasonin' powers, old fellow, are astoundin'!" said Dorrie dryly.

"Thou art pleased to be mocking," said Umlosi, with some reproach. "But I only seek the truth, N'Kose. I am not versed in these matters even as thou. And I will confess that I am greatly bewildered. For, see! As we well know, the Great Mist encircles this strange land on all sides. And that mist is thick, impenetrable. Yet within the cavern at the same level there is no mist! Behold, the air is clear! What make you of that, my father?"

"Umlosi, old horse, you have said somethin'!" exclaimed Dorrie, in a wondering voice. "It's a funny thing, but that queer paradox never occurred to me. Dense mist outside—an' clear air within. Gad, that's funny!"

Then the explanation came to him.

"No, it isn't," he went on quickly. "Don't you see, Umlosi?"

"Nay, N'Kose. I am asking thou."

"Well, it's the flares," explained Dorrie. "They are everywhere, an' the effect of them is to dry the atmosphere? Don't you see? The fog cannot even enter the cavern, for by the time it has entered it is no longer fog. The dryness of the atmosphere dissipates it. By the Lord Harry! All those people down below are livin' in clear, dry air. That's how they have survived throughout the centuries. They are not fog-bound,

as we believed. They live in crystal-clear atmosphere—but with a false daylight. All this is so amazing that my mind is in a whirl. I can't grasp it all at once, Umlosi. I'm dizzy."

But the first excitement was leaving him now. The first shock was over. Lord Dorrimore was able to control his thoughts—and to reason things out.

"Umlosi, we've made a big discovery," he said tensely. "Umtagati will be mightily pleased when we tell him. For we are lookin'

He recalled how the rusty-sided old Parazilian cruiser, Porto Marlo, once abandoned as derelict, and believed lost, had trained her guns on the Torania, and had compelled her infuriated skipper to heave-to.

Lord Dorrimore had thrilled as he had heard that amazing story. The pirates, great, hairy men, speaking quaint English and unlike any other men on earth, had crowded aboard the liner. They had robbed her of food and furniture, but had taken no interest in the passengers' valuables, or the



The pirate chief leaned forward and glared ferociously at the two prisoners. "How came you here?" he asked suspiciously. "You followed me, eh? Bones and blood! Any man who attempts to interfere with my rule in this land shall find his head on the chopping block!"

down upon the kingdom of the Black Hawk!"

"I know not thy meaning, my father."

"Yet I speak clearly," said Dorrie. "The Black Hawk—the modern pirate who held up the liner, Torania! This is his lair, Umlosi—this is where he and his people live! An' Umtagati came with us so that he might track down that thievin' rascal. An hour since we did not know how we should reach the headquarters of the Black Hawk. But now we need puzzle our heads no longer."

THE other members of the party—Nelson Lee, Nipper and Handforth—had seen the amazing Black Hawk and his henchmen. Lord Dorrimore had yet to make the acquaintance of the modern pirates.

contents of the strong-room. And in triumph the Porto Marlo had steamed away, black smoke rolling from her funnels, her hull listed grotesquely to starboard. A rusty hulk, her machinery creaking and protesting, manned by brawny, uncouth pirates, who seemed to have come to life from a by-gone age!

As soon as Nelson Lee had heard Lord Dorrimore's story of the Island Above the Clouds, the detective had jumped to the truth. The Black Hawk and his men had come from this Lost Land; they did not live on the island itself, but in the caves, far below, on the sea level, amid the eternal mists.

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YET Nelson Lee was wrong—as Lord Dorrimore was now able to prove. The pirates did not live amid the mist, but in this extraordinary cavern. It was a little land to itself—a miniature country.

Gazing down, Dorrie and Umlosi could see the inland lake, the wide channel, and there were large tracts of land, too—showing greenish in the quivering heat-haze.

"We mustn't get a wrong impression, Umlosi," said Dorrie. "Don't forget that we're lookin' down through all the heat fumes. On the actual floor level I dare say the temperature is quite normal, and the light is steady an' a fair substitute for sunlight."

"What make you, N'Kose, of the torch-lights?" asked Umlosi. "Think you that these strange men replenish them constantly, so that they never fail?"

"From this height it's difficult to see the actual nature of the torches," replied Dorrie. "But they are so numerous, and so brilliant, that I suspect they are natural flares. No doubt there is a permanent supply of inflammable gas. These people discovered that ages ago, perhaps. They lit the gas, found that the cavern could thus be made light, an' since then the flares have always blazed. But this is mere conjecture. We shall have to get a closer look before we can say anything for certain."

There was so much to see that Dorrie was reluctant to talk. Floating on that lake was a boat—indeed, a number of boats. At this height they looked like mere dinghies. Yet Dorrie was convinced that the biggest of them was actually the old Porto Marlo herself. The other craft were schooners, tramp steamers, and similar vessels—ships which had drifted into the clutches of the Sargasso, and which had been rescued by the Black Hawk and his men.

All round the cavern, comparatively near to the great floor, there were deep rock galleries, and Dorrie was certain that he could see crudely constructed huts and shelters. He fancied, too, that he saw figures moving about—tiny spots like ants. Yet he could not be certain, for the heat caused such a quiver that only the larger objects could be named with any degree of certainty. Those tiny specks, perhaps, were optical illusions.

"If only there was a way down!" muttered Dorrie, frowning. "If I could drop four or five hundred feet, I should be able to get a clearer view. But the rock walls slope inwards, and they are as smooth as the inside of a chimney. There's not a crevice or—"

He broke off abruptly, and the face he turned to Umlosi was flushed. His eyes were glowing.

"The rope!" he ejaculated triumphantly.

"What sayest thou, N'Kose?" asked Umlosi.

"You have the rope!" almost shouted Dorrie. "Gad! Why didn't I think of it

before? It's a stout rope—quite strong enough to hold me. And you are strong enough, Umlosi, to hold the rope. Where is it?"

"If thou art suggesting that I should lower thee into the void, then, N'Kose, I must protest against such incredible rashness," said Umlosi in alarm. "Wau! Is time so limited, then? Wait, my father, I beseech thee!"

"Rats! Why should I wait?" demanded Dorrie. "We've got the rope—three or four hundred feet of it. Come along! We'll make a kind of cradle, an' I'll sit in it, an' then you can lower me."

"But it is madness, N'Kose!" said Umlosi. "Do you think well! Let us leave this place of wonder, and return to the camp. Think of Umtagati and Manzie, and he of the clumsy limbs! By now they will be concerned for our safety. Let us be sensible, my father. In daylight we may return, and we can bring much more rope and the strange glasses which bring distant things near. To venture upon this descent now would be ill-omened."

But Lord Dorrimore, thoroughly excited, was not in the mood to listen to reason.

"No, Umlosi; I'll make a preliminary survey at once," he said. "Why not? It won't take long—and I want to give Umtagati a clear account of what we have seen. Don't you understand? By only dropping two or three hundred feet I shall get out of this narrow rock funnel, an' I shall be able to see with much greater clarity. The rope, old friend."

"Nay, N'Kose, I cannot aid thee," said Umlosi firmly. "For am I not thy friend? Have you overlooked the dangers? We are alone, thou and I. And if I am hampered by the rope, with thou dangling at its end—"

"Away with your objections!" broke in Dorrie impatiently. "What has come over you, Umlosi? You grow over-cautious in your old age, it seems! It is your pleasure to call me 'master,' and yet you refuse to serve me when I am in need of your aid. What manner of conduct is that, Umlosi? The rope! It is my wish."

Umlosi growled deep in his throat.

"And thy wish, N'Kose, is a command," he rumbled. "I will lower thee—and yet, in doing so, I protest against the folly of it. I have spoken."

Dorrie knew that his faithful old friend was offended; and at any other time Dorrie would have relented. But just now he was hardly himself. He was bubbling with excitement and eagerness to essay this descent. Before he returned to Nelson Lee he wanted to have a clearer story on his lips.

Thus, without a word, the pair stood upright, and backed away from the edge of the terrible chasm. With deft fingers Umlosi quickly fashioned a rough cradle, and into this Lord Dorrimore settled himself.

"Good man!" he said approvingly. "I knew that you would be sensible, Umlosi."

"Nay, my father. Far from being sensible, I am as foolish as a half-wit," replied the

giant Kutana. "But thou hast commanded, and I obey."

"Well, we won't argue," chuckled Dorrie. "Lower me as far as the rope will allow. When you've done that, hang on for a few minutes, an' then haul me up again. That will give me time to get a good look."

And without any further ado, Dorrie approached the edge of the abyss, and cautiously lowered himself over the edge. He selected a place where the rock was smooth, so that there would be little or no fear of the rope chafing.

And Umlosi, his mighty muscles rippling, held on to the rope, and gradually paid it out.

Lord Dorrimore fell lower and lower—down into that mystery cavern.

CHAPTER 5.

The Devil Dance of Death!

EVEN the comparatively short drop of two hundred feet made a great deal of difference. The heat-quiver was less apparent and Lord Dorrimore found that he could distinguish the objects far below with much greater ease.

"But this is the most staggering thing imaginable!" he muttered. "A whole community—livin' in this rock world! Ships, houses, even fields and gardens! I'm a fish-eyed lizard if those patches far off to the nor'-nor'-west aren't cultivated fields! And why not? These people have to grow their own food."

Even as Dorrie was descending he tried to figure it out. No doubt, throughout the course of centuries, these people had made use of the weed, converting it into a kind of soil. Anyhow, those green squares and oblongs on the floor of the cavern could only be areas of cultivation. And Dorrie knew that wonderful things were being done in the gardening line by artificial light and heat. These people, in their own primitive way, were keeping pace with the modern world!

There were hundreds in this community, no doubt—men, women, and children. The very thought of it thrilled Lord Dorrimore through and through. And the Black Hawk? What part did he play? Was he an outcast, or did he rule these people? Would they be friendly or otherwise?

Thinking in this way, Dorrie became aware, suddenly, that he was no longer being lowered. The rope, in fact, had jerked. And now, to his surprise, he found himself being hauled rapidly upwards.

"No, no, Umlosi!" he called urgently. "Not yet, old friend! I haven't had time——"

"N'Kose! Danger!" came a gasping cry from above. "It is even as I feared! Wau! They come in swarms, like great rats."

A sudden, overwhelming sense of guilt swept over Dorrie. Umlosi had warned him

—and he had laughed! Fool! Now that it was too late, he realised that his eagerness had led him into a sickle act of folly. A raw schoolboy would have had more sense.

"See to yourself, Umlosi!" he called sharply. "If there is danger——"

The rope oscillated violently, and he clung to it in a fever of helplessness. He could not even climb up, for he was fixed in that roughly-contrived cradle. And his ignorance of what was actually taking place almost frenzied him.

But for the continual crooning of the hot air, as it passed out of the cavern, Umlosi would have heard the approach of the enemy. But he knew nothing until they were upon him.

The first he knew was when he saw them—for not a sound had come to his ears. He saw, in the dim, faint reflection from the crater, a number of great, uncouth figures circling round the rock mouth. With an exclamation, Umlosi spun round—and there, approaching him from the other direction, were more of those figures. Then it was that Umlosi had shouted his warning.

He made a great attempt to pull Dorrie up before the creatures pounced. He knew them to be human beings. Yet in their crouching attitude, their hairy forms gave them the appearance, in the dimness, of monstrous, gorilla-like animals.

They appeared to wear no clothing, for the thick hair which covered them was like a fur. Even their faces were hairy—not merely on the chin, but on their cheeks and foreheads. And suddenly, as they drew near, they broke out into a loud, deep-voiced, staccato chuckling. They came up with loping springs. And these wild, primitive men were so huge in size that the great Umlosi looked almost puny by comparison.

And never had the Kutana chief been at such a disadvantage.

One hand he was enabled to free—holding on to the rope, with Dorrie at the end of it, with the other. But that free hand of Umlosi's carried no weapon. He had, indeed, brought his great spear with him, but it was beyond his reach—and he could not obtain it without sacrificing his beloved "N'Kose."

"Back, thou vermin!" thundered Umlosi. "Wau! Thinkest thou to lay hands upon the King of the Kutanas, thou rats of the night?"

His voice, at first, checked the advance of the primitive men. But only for a moment. Still chattering noisily, their voices rising higher and higher, the creatures came on. Umlosi fought with the strength of half a dozen men. With that one hand he did enormous damage, thrusting here, thrusting there, swinging round and delivering deadly blows.

But sheer weight of numbers overwhelmed him. There was a sudden rush, he was swept off his feet, and he knew not whether Lord Dorrimore had been saved or ser-

hurtling to destruction. He only knew that the rope had been torn from his grasp.

He himself, fighting desperately, was dragged away, dozens of those primitives swarming round him. They held him to the ground, and long creepers, as tough as steel wire, were wrapped round and round him.

"It is even as I feared," muttered Umlosi disconsolately. "For did not my snake tell me that there was peril abroad? Wau! 'Twas an ill impulse which led N'Kose to seek this adventure. For I, who am a warrior, had been left weaponless, with not one arm available!"

He had been flung against some projecting rocks, and he expected every moment to be battered to death or stabbed to the heart. But the savages, having tied him up with creepers, left him alone. He could see them gathering round the edge of the great crater, and the effect was weird in the extreme.

The night was pitchy, and thus the great glow from the crater outlined those hairy, monstrous figures, and they moved about like creatures of a nightmare.

They were, indeed, not unlike monkeys in their antics. Having grabbed that rope from Umlosi, they were filled with an overwhelming curiosity to find what was on the end of it. And, peering over, they saw Lord Dorrimore swinging helplessly below. They pulled on the rope, their chatter rising and falling uncannily.

Dorrie quite openly confessed to himself that his heart was in his mouth. Never before had he been in such a blue funk. He knew that something must have happened to Umlosi—and the blame was his. Furthermore, as he was hauled nearer and nearer to the top of the abyss, he could see those wild, grotesque faces—and they looked all the more terrible owing to the faintness of the light. He could see their eyes glowing and smouldering—like the eyes of animals.

Dorrie was a brave man; but the bravest of men are acquainted with stark fear. As Dorrie was hauled over the lip and found himself in the grip of those creatures, his skin contracted.

He felt the great gorilla-like hands of the primitives clutching him, their fingernails digging into his flesh. He was aware of a horrid, fetid odour, which well-nigh made him physically sick. And his ears were filled with the sounds of heavy, hoarse breathing and the queer chuckling of his captors.

He made one attempt to struggle, but he was quickly subdued. Flung headlong, face downward, his forehead crashed against the rocks, and he was momentarily stunned. Awakening, he found that his enemies were tying him up with the rope—no, it wasn't the rope, but a form of tough creeper. It was not enough that his hands were tied and his ankles secured; the creepers were passed round and round him, like the linen wrappings of an Egyptian mummy. Dorrie was festooned with the stuff until he could not move a leg or an arm, or even a finger. He was trussed up so tightly that he was

stiff. And then he was half carried, half dragged to the spot where Umlosi lay. He was dumped down, and the hairy creatures, now screaming with a kind of fanatical excitement, danced away.

Others were coming—scores of them. It seemed to Dorrie that there were hundreds. He watched them in bewilderment. Blood was streaming from a gash in his forehead and running into his eyes, half blinding him. His head throbbed agonisingly, and through the mist he saw the weird figures crouching and dancing all round the lip of the crater. It was a terrifying spectacle.

"May the spirits of my fathers be praised, N'Kose!" came a low voice near him. "Thou art, then, still alive! And is it not a saying in thy great language that whilst there is life there is hope?"

"Umlosi!" whispered Dorrie chokingly.

"Nay, my father, speak not in that tone."

"Have you got a leg free?" asked Dorrie bitterly. "If so, old friend, kick me! Kick me hard—until I'm black and blue! Ye gods! What a fool I was! What a crass, feather-brained, thoughtless fool! Not only did I bring disaster upon myself, but upon you."

With a great effort he managed to shift his head slightly, so that he could just catch a glimpse of Umlosi, who lay beside him.

"These people are even as animals, N'Kose, but they have nimble hands, and they do their work thoroughly," said Umlosi. "There is no escape for us."

Dorrie groaned.

"And Lee does not even know which direction we took," he muttered. "When I think of it, Umlosi, I am breathless—bewildered by my own foolhardiness. The job essayed should have been left until daylight——"

"'Tis idle, my father, to speak thus—now," interrupted Umlosi. "See! The enemy dances the devil-dance: Are they men or devils, indeed? They grow frenzied!"

"What a sight!" muttered Dorrie, aghast.

There was some excuse for Umlosi's inquiry. For, by now, the primitives had worked themselves up into a state of wild abandon which was terrifying to witness. Having made their prisoners, the savages were apparently forgetful of them. They were indulging in an amazing orgy of fantastic dancing.

There were, indeed, hundreds of them now. They were stretched out all round the edge of the crater, and as they danced they yelled, screamed, shrieked, their voices rising on the air like some vile and loathsome death-wail.

Dorrie had seen savages in all parts of the world working themselves into a frenzy by dancing. As a rule they became so emotional that they were quite unbalanced. But never had Dorrie seen anything so dreadful as this.

The most extraordinary feature of the whole affair was the savages' abandonment of their prisoners. Having made the cap-

ture, they were now giving themselves up to this devil-dance.

Lord Dorrimore wondered if this was merely a preliminary. Perhaps some terrible torture would follow—some diabolical measure of revenge. For Dorrie suspected that these primitives resented the presence of the explorers on the Island Plateau.

The irony of the situation was galling. For if Dorrie and Umlosi had not been so tightly bound, they could have escaped with ease. In the darkness they could have slipped away and their captors would have been none the wiser. But, as Dorrie grimly realised, the savages had made quite certain that the pair could not move, let alone escape.

"By heaven, I can't stand much more of this!" said Dorrie suddenly. "Why can't the demons get it over, and deal with us?"

"Nay, N'Kose, the longer they dance, the better," replied Umlosi shrewdly. "When such creatures as these go into a fanatical frenzy, there is no telling when they will stop. We are forgotten. But methinks this great noise will reach the ears of Umtagati."

"By the Lord Harry," ejaculated Dorrie, "you're right, old son! I'd overlooked that!"

"And perchance the great Umtagati will venture forth, fearing that some ill had befallen us," continued Umlosi. "It is but a chance, and it would be folly for us to raise our hopes."

Until now, Dorrie had scarcely realised the meaning of this mad dancing. Now he thought he understood.

A theory had come to him—and it was a plausible one. In any other part of the island, perhaps, the natives would not have acted in this way. But it struck Dorrie that this great crater was a sort of "holy" spot. The real meaning of the great mile-wide gap had never sifted into the primitive minds of the savages. They only knew that it was here, and that far, far below there were everlasting fires.

No doubt they regarded the spot as sacred. Down below the Earth God resided, and any man who set foot on the lip of the crater courted death. Unwittingly, Dorrie and Umlosi had ventured upon sacred ground. It was even possible that these uncouth savages would have been friendly if they had been approached by daylight and with caution. But they would never be friendly now.

The two prisoners fell silent, and their ears were filled with the terrifying screams and cries of the savages. Dorrie managed to turn his head, and he was sickened afresh by that sight.

Umlosi, stolid and unemotional as usual, just waited. He knew that all this was mere preliminary—that something fresh, something terrible, would develop.

Something touched his bound hand, and he wondered. An insect, perhaps, or some noxious reptile. Were the savages to be cheated, after all?

There was another touch near Umlosi's shoulder, and by thrusting his head he could just see—and what he saw made him blink. A human hand—not hairy, or gnarled, but showing faintly pink in the dim light—a white hand with well-manicured nails.

"Wau!" breathed Umlosi.

"Don't move!" came a soft, throbbing voice. "I've got my jack-knife here, and I think it's going to be useful."

The voice was the voice of Edward Oswald Handforth!

CHAPTER 6.

The Human Sacrifice.

HANDFORTH had been enjoying himself—up to a point.

The fact that he had more or less disobeyed orders really added to his enjoyment. For there is, after all, a certain sweetness in forbidden fruit. The burly St. Frank's schoolboy had known, from the first, that if he had asked to accompany Dorrie and Umlosi, he would have been met by a flat refusal. Not from Dorrie himself, perhaps—for Dorrie was "soft" enough for anything—but certainly from Nelson Lee. Thus, when Handforth was supposed to be taking his sleep, preparatory to coming on watch, he had actually stolen out of the camp after Dorrie and Umlosi.

He had taken a particular delight in trailing them. Handforth regarded himself as an expert tracker. After all, wasn't he a good Boy Scout? Wasn't he the leader of the Tiger Patrol? He had found it easy enough to keep his quarry in sight. And the soft, mossy character of the ground deadened his footfalls.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, on duty at the base camp, had known nothing of his departure. They believed, indeed, that he was soundly sleeping.

Handforth had had to run for it when those great monsters had stampeded. And when Dorrie and Umlosi had halted at the edge of the crater he had lurked amidst the rocks, watching, but not daring to approach. For on this hard ground his footfalls would certainly have been detected by Umlosi's trained ears. Moreover, there was no necessity to advance—although Handforth was wildly curious to know what lay down in that strange, luminous chasm.

And then, whilst he had crouched there, wondering just what he should do, he had seen the approach of the grim, hairy figures. It had been his intention to shout out a warning, but just as he had been on the point of doing so the primitives had made their rush.

So Handforth had pressed himself closer into a crevice, his heart thudding like a sledge-hammer. Some of those vile creatures had swarmed past within a yard of him. Indeed, he had once felt the hairy fur, and he had stood transfixed with horror.

Since then he had seen all that had occurred. Now his opportunity had come—and he was glowing inwardly. This was not mere luck. His presence here, at such a time, was providential.

"What miracle is this, my young master?" whispered Umlosi. "How camest thou here amid these perils?"

"I've been with you all the time—pretty nearly with you, anyhow!" breathed Handforth, as he expertly used his jack-knife. "By George! These creepers are as tough as leather!"

"Who's that talkin'?" came from Dorrie. "Umlosi, what's the matter with you? Are you whisperin' to yourself?"

"Nay, N'Kose."

"Then what——"

"It's all right, Dorrie—only me!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Great jumpin' jackasses!" ejaculated Dorrie. "What in the name of—— Is—is that you, Handy?"

"You bet it is!"

"But how in the name of wonder——"

"Dry up, sir—those devils might hear us!" interrupted Handforth. "I've got my knife here, and I'm cutting Umlosi free. It's your chance! While the blighters are performing that crazy dance, we can all slide away, and get back to camp."

Lord Dorrimore nearly choked.

"Well, it's more than I deserved," he muttered. "Gad, you're a useful fellow, Handy!"

"It's a jolly good thing I trailed you, anyway, agreed Handforth.

At last he had cut through every one of Umlosi's bonds, and with a great sigh of relief the mighty Kutana chief rose to his feet. And with unerring direction he crawled some yards away and found his spear.

"Now, N'Kose, I am once again a man!" he breathed serenely.

Yet that move of his was fatal. For one of the primitives saw him in the gloom, and immediately raised a great outcry. The other men-monsters near him ceased from their frenzied leaping and ran up.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth "They're on us!"

Thud!

It was a strangely significant sound, and it was followed by a groan, and the sound of a crashing fall. Umlosi's spear had sped true. And now the King of the Kutanas was fighting desperately, his back to his companions. Yet such was the force of the rush, that three or four of the primitives got past him. Handforth, in the act of cutting Dorrie's bonds, was seized from behind and held as though in a vice.

Not twenty seconds earlier the situation had seemed promising. Now it was as bad as ever again.

But not quite, perhaps.

"Umlosi!" shouted Dorrie, his voice charged with agony. "Do not fight, old friend! They are too many for you."

"Nay, my master!" thundered Umlosi.

"Have I not my spear?" Thud! "'Tis child's play to exterminate these rats!" Thud! "They are but animals at best, and——"

"No matter!" shouted Dorrie. "Sooner or later they will overpower you. But you are a fleet runner, an' can outdistance them. Go, Umlosi. I command you! Speed to Umtagati, inform him of our plight, an' tell him to come with the stuttering gun."

"Since thou command, my father, I obey!" replied Umlosi unhesitatingly.

But it was not so easy to go. He was fighting a grim, desperate battle—for by now the savages were swarming all round him. Dorrie and Handforth were held. They could only watch in agony—and with fascinated wonder. It seemed impossible that Umlosi could win clear.

Yet Dorrie's suggestion was sound. If only the Kutana chief could get away and report to Lee, there was no doubt that Lee would hasten up with a machine-gun. And that would make short work of the hairy brutes.

"He'll never do it, Dorrie—it's impossible!" muttered Handforth. "Oh, my goodness, what a mess I've made of it!"

"Nonsense!" said Dorrie sharply. "You've done wonders, laddie! I'm proud of you—an', by the same token, I'm utterly ashamed of myself. Gad, if only I had a handful of fireworks! There are some in my pocket, but I can't get at them! They'd put a scare into these beauties!"

"Look!" gasped Handforth. "He's doing it, Dorrie! He's through!"

The din was terrific. Screaming and hooting, the savages were becoming more frenzied than ever. But Umlosi, once free of the press of hairy humanity, backed away between two craggy hillocks. And, suddenly taking to his heels, he ran. Some of the primitives dashed at him, trying to intercept him; but he dodged as adroitly as a Rugger international. He was through—he was away.

"N'Kose, I go!" came his voice from afar. "I bring the great Umtagati with the gun that stutters."

Fiendish shouts now arose. They sounded from a distance; they were echoed and re-echoed by the other primitives nearer at hand. It almost seemed that the creatures understood Umlosi's errand. They came swarming round the prisoners, chattering, shouting, screaming. The devil-dance was forgotten. There were still two prisoners—and it mattered little that both of them were now of white skin. Handforth had acted for the best, and he had done splendidly. It was rough, indeed, that he should have sacrificed himself.

"They're going to finish us off, aren't they?" he panted.

"Heaven alone knows!" groaned Dorrie. "It's horrible! It was bad enough for Umlosi to be my companion in misfortune, but you——" He broke off, half choking. "I led you into this, young 'un!"

"Rats!" retorted Handforth. "I stole out of camp without orders—so whatever happens to me is my own giddy fault!"

Further conversation was extremely difficult, for the two prisoners were now treated with such roughness that they scarcely found time for breathing. More of the tough creeper was used, and Dorrie and Handforth, face to face, were strung together. The creeper was festooned around them. And so tightly were they tied that Handforth's face was resting on Dorrie's shoulder, and vice-versa. They were bound up as one.

"My only sainted aunt!" panted Handforth. "Talk about sardines! What the dickens are they going to do with us? We can still talk, anyway."

Lord Dorrimore did not feel like talking. He marvelled at the youngster's spirit. It was unquenchable. Even at this time of peril, the one and only Handforth spoke steadily.

"You're a good lad!" muttered Dorrie, his voice husky.

They believed that they were to be flung into the void. It seemed the only possible ending to this adventure. Unquestionably the crater, with its night glare, was used by this primitive people as a worshipping place—just as other savage tribes, in different parts of the world have their sacred volcanoes and sacred mountains. These things are worshipped, and sacrifices are made to them—

Sacrifices!

That was it! Lord Dorrimore caught his breath in between his teeth. What was more probable than that the primitives used the crater as a medium for making sacrifices? Innocent victims were flung down—down to the Earth God!

Dorrie wondered. He had seen an amazing amount of the tough creeper, which was like a rough, thin rope. There were coils and coils of it round about the rocks at the edge of the void. And why so much of that rudely fashioned rope?

He was soon to know. For he and Handforth were suddenly swung clear over the edge of the abyss. They thought that it was their last moment. They fell, turning over and over—

Twang!

With a sickening jolt they were brought to a full stop; they heard the creeper-rope twang and sing like catgut. And there they were suspended, swaying to and fro, oscillating, twirling.

And they were in agony, too, for that abrupt jerk had caused the rope to bite into them. And now they felt themselves being lowered—rapidly.

"Well, it's something to be still alive!" said Dorrie. "Ye gods! They're actually lowerin' us, old son! They're not droppin' us all at once."

"I expect their wheeze is to prolong the agony," said Handforth. "It's a kind of torture, eh? They're going to lower us for some hundreds of feet, then let us dangle

whilst they indulge in another of those giddy devil-dances! I've heard that primitive people of this sort don't let their victims go very easily."

Hope sprang into Lord Dorrimore's breast.

"If you are right, Handy, then there may be a chance for us," he muttered. "The longer they delay, the better. How long is it since Umlosi went? I'm all bewildered—I don't know whether five minutes have passed, or fifty! Perhaps Umlosi has got to the camp by now—perhaps Mr. Lee is returnin'—"

"Woa!" gasped Handforth. "This looks like the finish!"

They were fairly shooting downwards now—yet they were not falling. They knew that the rope was being released at great speed, so that they made a rapid descent. And all the time they were whirling, twisting, backwards and forwards until they were dizzy.

It was a startling experience.

Gazing upwards, they could see the great funnel-like sides of the rock cavern—tapering inwards, and terminating in that almost circular gap. Far overhead, twinkling dazlingly, were the stars.

And all around them, blackness, with the cavern walls receding mysteriously. Below—the points of flaring light, now showing bigger.

Stretched out beneath them, far and wide, was an amazing vista. This was what Lord Dorrimore had attempted to see for himself. Now he was seeing—but in very different circumstances!

Presently the descent ceased abruptly, and Dorrie and Handy felt their hearts leap into their mouths as the creeper jerked. They rose up and down weirdly as the stuff stretched—just like elastic. At any moment they expected it to break, and to send them hurtling down to certain death. But it did not break. It was incredibly tough. And now they hung motionless, having been lowered seven or eight hundred feet.

And on the the rim of the crater the devil-dance had recommenced. The primitives were careering round, screaming, shouting, working themselves into a terrible frenzy.

The sounds of that orgy came down to the captives, and they listened with bated breath. Gazing upwards, they thought they could see, now and again, the shapes of the dancers.

"It's enough to make your flesh creep," muttered Dorrie. "They're at it again! But I'm hanged if I can understand what the game is? Why have they lowered us like this?"

"Perhaps they don't know that it's safe down here," replied Handforth. "Perhaps they think we're being roasted alive or something. They're only savages."

"I believe you've hit it, lad!" said Dorrie eagerly.

"I don't even know where I am," replied Handforth. "What is this funny place? What are all those flares?"

"Unless I'm mistaken, we are hovering over the kingdom of the Black Hawk!" replied Dorrie grimly. "You saw that gentleman, didn't you?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "You—you mean that pirate? But I don't understand——"

"Far below us there is a great lake, an' there are ships on the lake," replied Dorrie. "There are houses—fields of vegetation. There is a great community here—men, women an' children! But the savages, possibly, do not even suspect that. They may not have had the courage to ever descend—or perhaps it is against their pagan religion to descend. We can't tell."

Swish!

Something went hurtling down past them, and as it went, a wailing scream sounded. Handforth shuddered. He knew what it meant. One of the savages, in his frenzy, had toppled over the edge.

"Oh!" muttered Handforth huskily.

With his head actually over Lord Dorrimore's shoulder, it was possible for him to stare directly downwards. He caught a vague glimpse of a black, shapeless object falling. It dwindled until Handforth lost sight of it. Then——

Splash!

From far below a mighty cascade of water arose, the white foam showing clearly for a second or two.

"Think it killed him?" muttered Handforth.

"Like a stone," replied Dorrimore. "Poor devil! Fallin' from such a height, the water would be like solid concrete. Mercifully, he knew nothin' of his end."

"And—and if we suddenly fall?" asked Handforth huskily. "We're a lot lower, aren't we? I mean——"

"We're not so low there could be any hope for us," broke in Dorrie quietly. "Well, I wanted to have a closer look at the floor of this cavern—and now, I suppose, I ought to be satisfied. But I'm not."

"Look out!" gasped Handforth suddenly. "Here we go! Crumbs!"

They felt themselves descending rapidly, and the creeper rope, owing to its great length, was now stretching just like toughened elastic. And as the pair dropped, they oscillated, and the sensation was bewildering.

CHAPTER 7.

The Kingdom of the Black Hawk!

"**I** WISH they'd get it over and done with!" said Handforth hoarsely. "This suspense is horrible!"

Dorrie had been feeling the same. Minute after minute he and Handforth, bound tightly together, had been dropped lower and lower into the vast cavern.

They were both convinced that the savages intended, sooner or later, to cut that creeper. And every minute seemed like an hour.

Already, the unfortunate pair were numbed by the very tightness of their bonds. They had little or no feeling in their limbs. The pain had gone now.

"I can't understand the length of this rope," said Dorrimore. "By gad, we must have been lowered well over two thousand feet!"

"Then—then, if we cut now——"

"We shall drop to certain death," interrupted Dorrie quickly. "We're five or six hundred feet up—an' that's a tidy fall."

They could only assume that these primitives, with their undeveloped minds, had used the cavern for generations—for this purpose of sacrifice. It was even possible that the victims were lowered right to the very bottom. It was this hope which was constantly in the minds of Dorrie and Handforth; yet they hardly dared voice it.

They were both enthralled by the astonishing landscape which was now spread out beneath them. They were enabled to get a perfect birdseye view.

For they had descended so far that objects were no longer distorted by the heat-waves. Amazing as the island itself was, this great cavern was doubly amazing.

No longer was Dorrie in any doubt regarding the inhabitants of the cavern. There were many figures below, moving about on the lake shore, and elsewhere. They were human figures, not hairy savages, like those above, but people attired in rough but serviceable clothing. All were barefooted, and all had long, shaggy hair. But it was clear enough that they were more or less civilised.

There were so many other things to see, too.

Down at this level the source of the great flares was apparent. And Dorrie and Handforth were filled with new wonder. As the sporting peer had suspected from the first, the flares were natural. That is to say, they were gas flares, and the gas, obviously, came from the earth itself.

At closer quarters the flares were seen to be of enormous power. Great, flaming jets which shot out from the rock walls, fully two hundred feet above the floor level. This accounted for the cavern being habitable—for the greater part of the heat rose upwards, thus leaving the floor fresh, with perpetual currents of pure air.

"Look at those flares, young 'un," said Lord Dorrimore admiringly. "Do you realise that you're lookin' at the work of centuries? The gas itself may be natural, but the 'burners' are the result of man's labour."

Each burner was a kind of concrete structure crudely built on to the rock face. No doubt this concrete had been made from powdered rock and other substances. The burners were shaped like pointed cones, with a circular hole at the end, through which the flame roared. No doubt there were fissures all round the cavern, from which the gas had originally escaped.

And the ancestors of the present community had realised the possibilities. That gas had been harnessed, and to-day the work had been brought up to something like perfection. The jets in their hundreds were burning steadily, providing the cavern with perpetual light and heat.

Handforth scarcely gave the jets a glance. He was far too interested in the people themselves. He stared down with dull interest.

There, almost below him, was that rusty-sided, listing old battleship, the *Porto Marlo*. Handforth had seen her before—for he had been aboard the liner *Torania* when she had been held up by the pirates. And even though Handforth now looked upon the pirate vessel from a totally different angle, he recognised her.

So this was her home port! This amazing cavern in the heart of the rock pinnacle! There were other vessels, too—some big, some small. Most of them were brigs or schooners—old sailing ships, mastless, and with their decks roofed over. They were moored at the water's edge, with great gangways communicating with the shore. Doubtless they were homes.

And now crowds of people were standing about gesticulating, pointing upwards and shouting. They were all concentrating their attention upon the dangling figures of Dorrimore and Handforth.

It was, indeed, a strange sight. The two unfortunates were so festooned with creepers that they were scarcely recognisable as human beings. And the great creeper rope, bristling with frayed fibres, rose upwards into the mystic darkness of the cavern roof.

"Quite an interestin' spectacle, eh, young 'un?" asked Lord Dorrimore suddenly.

"By George, yes, sir!" said Handforth. "It's—it's bewildering."

"Just our luck that we should be in this tangle," went on Dorrie. "Yet that's hardly true. It's my infernal fault."

"You said that before, sir—about five hundred and sixty times!" growled Handforth. "And I don't agree with you. Dash it, it wasn't your fault! I say!" he went on, changing the subject, "there's quite a city here, you know!"

"It's not a city; at least a good-sized village," agreed Dorrie. "There must be many hundreds of people in this community. By glory, what a discovery! You realise, of course, Handy, that we are the first moderns to set eyes on this queer settlement? Look at those houses built against the rock walls of the cavern. Some of them are quite picturesque."

Handforth had already seen them. From the edge of the lake to the cliff-like wall of the cavern on one side there was nearly half a mile of land. There was a long, straight street leading from the lake to the cliff. And on either side of this street there were dwellings—some big, some small. All of them were mainly composed of wood, and there was little doubt that the wood had

been obtained from derelict ships. Dorrie believed that some of those buildings were shops, and he was quite certain that he saw an inn-sign.

This spot, then, was the chief town of the little kingdom. The kingdom of the Black Hawk! The houses extended right up to the cliff face. And here, in the cliff itself, there were dark openings.

"It's funny, when you come to think of it," said Dorrie soberly. "Here are all these people, descendants of supposedly drowned sailors and emigrants and pilgrims, and they live in the false light of this cavern. An' up above there is the glorious sunshine and the open air. Sunshine which they never see!"

"You're forgetting something, Dorrie, aren't you?" asked Handforth.

"Am I?"

"Well, it's night-time now—and, of course, everything's dark up above," continued Handforth. "But what about that crater? It's a mile across if it's an inch, and there must be a time of the day when the sunshine streams straight down into this cavern, shedding sunlight over the entire floor. And even when the sun isn't directly overhead, there must be a good deal of daylight here."

"What a fool I am!" ejaculated Dorrie. "Of course! I'd forgotten that it was night-time. You're right, Handy! That accounts for the greenness of the fields here. Look at them! I'll bet a penny to a pound we're lookin' down on a field of cabbages; an' if they're not potatoes over there I'm a Hottentot! Durin' the daylight hours the sun must stream in with considerable power."

By this time the main street was crowded. People were flocking along the lake-shore. A good deal of shouting was going on.

"Listen, sir," said Handforth. "I hadn't noticed it, but we're a good deal lower, and I believe we can distinguish some of the words."

"Let's try," said Dorrie.

All the while, a great hope was surging within him. They were suddenly getting lower. And with that hope of his, there was a secret fear. If they didn't, indeed, escape with their lives, would it not be like falling from the frying-pan into the fire? Would these people be friendly—or would they be otherwise?

Still, it was not a matter for much worry. Anything was better than being in the hands of those primitive savages.

Dorrie listened intently, straining his ears. At first, he could only hear a confused sound of shouting. But when he concentrated, he detected certain words and phrases.

"Another of the Beast Men—six months since the last—why don't they drop him?—he might even be alive this time—first one ever to come down alive."

These scraps of words enlightened Dorrie a good deal. It seemed, then, that the "Beast Men"—as the primitives were doubtless called—indulged in their orgies at periodic intervals. It was equally clear that

some of them came hurtling down to death. Others must have been lowered, too—lowered on the creepers, and then cut free, to fall to destruction.

But so seldom did the primitives indulge in the antics that when they did so, it was an occasion for the entire community to come out and watch. Dorrie and Handforth could not help noticing that practically all the people below were men. The womenfolk and the children, no doubt, were not permitted to see the dreadful spectacle. They kept within doors.

"Why doesn't something happen?" muttered Dorrie, as though to himself. He was staring upwards now—but he could see nothing except the faint twinkling of the stars, far, far overhead. The actual rim of the roof opening had merged into the darkness. None of those weird, leaping figures could be seen. Now and again the creeper-rope would jerk, it would descend for some distance, and then come to another full stop.

"See! Oddswound!" came a clear-voiced shout from below. "There are two of the Beast Men on that rope! And their faces look wondrous pale."

Handforth could not contain himself.

"Hey!" he bellowed at the top of his voice.

"Good gad!" gasped Dorrie. "Mind my ear, young 'un."

"Sorry, sir," panted Handforth. "But—but these people ought to know the truth about us."

A confused shouting was rising up from below.

"Listen!" shouted Handforth. "We're not Beast Men."

"They didn't hear you—there was too much noise," said Dorrie.

But even as he spoke, the shouting died away, and there was a strange, breathless silence. It was apparent that the people below were now listening intently.

"We are not Beast Men!" shouted Handforth. "We're English! We came here to explore—and these Beast Men captured us."

"By my sinews! He speaks the English language!" came a great shout. "There is something mightily strange in this, my brothers!"

Wild excitement prevailed amongst the people. Until now they had been animated, but nothing more. It was impossible to distinguish any further words, for everybody was shouting and talking at once. And now Dorrie and Handforth could see other figures emerging from the houses—women of all ages, children, too. They had heard the startling news, and they could not contain their excitement and curiosity.

It seemed to the dangling captives that hundreds of people were running down to the shores of the lake. And then, at length, a voice came up to Handforth which he recognised. It boomed out above all the other voices, so raucous, so thunderous, that the words were clearly audible.

"May my bones rattle and rot!" it thundered. "These are people from the

Outer World! How came they here? Stab my vitals! If they fall alive, I vow I will make short work of them!"

"That's cheerful!" muttered Dorrie.

"It's the Black Hawk himself!" panted Handforth. "I know his voice, Dorrie! He was the brute who led those pirates!"

"He seems to be lord of all he surveys," commented Dorrie. "Well, perhaps his bark



Crouched in a crevice in the rocks, Dorrie and Handforth watched the stampede of terrifying prehistoric monster

is worse than his bite. Not that it will make much difference to us."

U MLOSI pointed with his spear.

"See, Umtagati!" he murmured.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, crouching against some fungoid growths, stared towards the rising, rocky hill where the strange glow was tinting the night. And outlined against that glow they could see the weird, dancing figures of the savages. A wild, demoniac tumult arose upon the air.

"It looks good, guv'nor," said Nipper eagerly.

"What do you mean?" asked Nelson Lee.

"How can there be anything good in such a heathen spectacle?"

"I—I mean they're still at it," explained Nipper. "Doesn't that mean that they haven't done their worst with Dorrie and Handforth? I believe we're in time."

"Let us pray that we are," said Lee fervently.

They crept on, and Umlosi, whose eyes



is companion waited with fast-beating hearts as the thundered past within a few inches of them.

were capable of penetrating the deepest gloom, declared that there were none of the savages near at hand. All of them had given themselves up to the devil dance round the rim of the "crater." They had apparently abandoned Umlosi. Having two prisoners, they were satisfied.

Nearer and nearer crept the rescuers.

"Here, Umtagati, is a good spot," whispered Umlosi. "There are rocks near us, and thus we have cover. Do thou make the strange gun stutter. Wau. Rather, could I go forward with my spear; but with such numbers 'tis better to kill many."

But Nelson Lee hesitated.

"You talk glibly of killing, Umlosi," he said softly. "But we have no real quarrel with these poor, primitive people. Let us, first, try less desperate methods."

"But N'Kose, my father, is in peril!" said Umlosi. "And he of the unruly limbs——"

"I know," interrupted Lee. "But you must not forget, Umlosi, that you and N'Kose ventured to this so-called crater, and there is little doubt that it is sacred ground in the eyes of the primitive people. The fault was yours. And before dealing death amongst them, and thus earning their everlasting enmity, we will try the great fireworks—which are terrifying in aspect, but harmless in effect. Perchance they will strike terror amongst the savages, and we shall prevail without bloodshed."

Even as Nelson Lee was speaking he was preparing a number of the fireworks. Rockets mostly. They were not of the ordinary type; it was not necessary to light matches and ignite the fuses. They all had patent fuses, and the touching of a spring set them off.

With deft fingers, Lee wedged three of the rocket-sticks firmly into the rocks. Then he pulled the catches, and he warned his companions to stand well back.

Zzzzzzzh! Zzzzzzzh! Zzzzzzzh!

They went off almost simultaneously. To begin with they emitted a loud, violent hissing, and then they shot off almost horizontally—straight for the dancing figures round the crater. Golden sparks were flying in myriads, and at the first sight of them the savages ceased their wild devil dance, and there was immediate confusion.

Boom—boom—boom!

The rockets—two of them—burst like bombs, causing terrific explosions, and sending coloured fire in great streamers in every direction. And to the untutored minds of the savages, the spectacle was indescribably terrifying.

Screaming madly, the Beast Men scattered. They ran, helter-skelter, in all directions.

"Guv'nor, it's done the trick!" panted Nipper exultantly.

"Not yet," said Lee. "There are still a number of the savages at the rim of the pit."

Booom!

The third rocket, shooting clear across the "crater," burst as it plunged downwards. Showers of sparks were sent into the air—and many of them fell into the vast void.

The other savages suddenly ran.

Crack, crack, crack, crack, crack!

Lee loosed off a full magazine of cartridges, and his automatic pistol grew hot. The fumes, belching out, blackened and scorched his hand. His wrist was numb from the rapidly repeated recoil.

He had fired low, striving only to inflict leg wounds. Screams rent the air. The primitives bolted; they could be seen loping across the rocks, and vanishing into the distance, like strange, uncouth animals.

Umlosi was running—running madly. For his keen eyes had detected the significant

swishing movements of the great coils of creeper which were gathered near the lip of the abyss. Umlosi grabbed, he held on to the creeper, and he felt a tremendous jerk, as though from far, far below.

"Umtagati!" he shouted hoarsely.

Lee was at his side—and Nipper, too. They seized the creeper. They could feel it quivering.

"Hold it tightly," panted Lee. "By heaven, I believe that Dorrie and Handy are strung at the end of this crude rope! Umlosi has saved them!"

Umlosi had done more than that—quite unwittingly. For the captives at the end of the rope had fallen sheer, and they had, indeed, believed that it was the end.

Shouts arose from the Black Hawk and his men as they saw the bound pair falling. Down they came, hurtling to what would be sudden death.

And then, unexpectedly, there came a great jerk. The creeper, still stretching like elastic—and stretching more now, because of its great length—twanged and hummed. Dorrie, breathless, saw that he and Handforth were now no more than two hundred feet above the water's surface.

"Gad!" muttered his lordship. "Will there never be an end to this nightmare?"

He stared upwards. He and Handforth had heard the booming, and they had been puzzled. Owing to the echoing of the cavern, they had not recognised the sounds as the explosions of fireworks. It sounded far more like thunder, echoing and rolling. But now, as Dorrie gazed upwards, he saw, high above, the flashing of fire. It was a most curious effect. It seemed to Dorrie that the creeper itself, for a great distance, was blazing like tinder.

And this, indeed, was the truth.

That third rocket, exploding right over the void, had sent numbers of flaming stars shooting down. One of these, at least, had fouled the creeper, and had set fire to the dried fibres which sprouted from it. And in a moment, the flames were leaping upwards. Three or four hundred feet of the creeper blazed up. The flames leapt upwards, consuming the creeper at an incredible speed. In its dried condition, it was evidently as inflammable, almost, as celluloid.

It could only be a matter of seconds before the creeper burnt right through—and then, indeed, those two hapless prisoners would be released.

But they were still high above the water, and the fall could be nothing else but fatal.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Hands of the Pirate.

NELSON LEE grasped the situation in a flash.

The sight which met his gaze was a bewildering one. He had not seen this great cavern before—and the spectacle

alone caused his heart to thud feverishly. But he saw something else. He saw the amazing creeper, descending for nearly three thousand feet! So far distant were Dorrie and Handforth that Nelson Lee could hardly distinguish them below.

But Lee gathered quickly enough that they were still a fair distance from the cavern floor. And the creeper was burning quite upwards like lightning to the "crater" rim.

"Quick—quick!" shouted Lee. "Pay out the line!"

"But, gov'nor," gasped Nipper, "aren't we going to haul them up?"

"There is no time—the creeper is burning—set alight, no doubt, by the rockets!" retorted Lee. "If we attempt to haul them up, they will be doomed. The only chance is to lower them."

"Great Scott!" gurgled Nipper.

For even in that exciting moment he knew what this would mean. The lives of Dorrie and Handforth might be saved, but they would not be out of danger. For none could tell what lay at the bottom of this great cavern. Nipper, indeed, at that moment, had half an idea that it was of volcanic origin, and that there were deadly fires below.

Nelson Lee allowed the creeper to slide rapidly through his hands; and even as he did so the flames leapt upwards, licking over the edge of the abyss.

"Faster—faster!" panted Lee.

Fifty feet—a hundred feet. The creeper rushed through the hands of the rescuers until their palms blistered. Then—twang!

It was all over. The creeper had burnt through, and had parted.

"We did our best," muttered Lee, the perspiration streaming from him. "But we do not know whether they are alive or dead."

Flinging themselves down, with the rest of the creeper making a great conflagration near at hand, they peered over the edge of the chasm. The sight made Nipper dizzy. At such a height as this, it was impossible to distinguish anything definite—for the glare of the flares and the quivering of the heat waves obscured the details. It was only possible to gather a rough picture of the wide-spread panorama.

IT was Nelson Lee's presence of mind which had saved the lives of Dorrie and Handforth.

Like a stone, Dorrie and Handforth, bound tightly together, festooned by that creeper, fell.

They struck the water with a terrific splash, and so great was the force of the impact that both of them were stunned. Mercifully, they had fallen feet first, otherwise they might have died then and there.

Plunging beneath the surface they vanished amid the great smother of foam. And on the top of them came hurtling down, coil upon coil, the great creeper. It spread itself over the disturbed waters, slapping down with a great noise. It seemed that the end

of it, which was blazing, would never come.

But at last it arrived, and with a hissing splash it plunged in. And now, on the surface, floated the sinister shapes of the victims, surrounded by the masses of creeper. But not a movement came from the pair. So tightly were they bound that any kind of movement was impossible. And, in any case, they were unconscious.

"Pull them out!" went up a great cry.

"Ay, they may still live!"

"Bcats—boats!"

Dorrie and Handforth had fallen a full quarter of a mile from the shore, but the spot was comparatively near to the old Porto Marlo. There were men aboard, and already two boats were putting off from the rusty sides of the ancient cruiser. And from the shore itself, the Black Hawk and a number of his men were setting out in another boat. Crowds of people lined the edges of the great rock pool. The shouting and the excitement was tumultuous.

A boat, skimming across the water, arrived at the spot. In that false light, the water looked as black as ink itself—yet the foam which hissed from the boat's gunwale was very white. The men in the boat were brawny, bearded giants of uncouth appearance. Two of them, leaning over the little craft's side, dragged the luckless pair closer. Not a sound came from them. Blood was streaming from Lord Dorrimore's ears and nostrils. A red foam came from Handforth's mouth.

"By the saints, they are dead!" said one of the men.

"Did ye expect aught else, Simon?" asked one of the others. "But see! Their skin is as fair as a child's! They are beardless, too! Did ye ever see such men?"

"Ay, and many of them—on that great steamship from whence we obtained the food," said one of the other men. "But we talk idly. Mayhap there is life in these wretches yet."

"You were one of the lucky ones," said a third man. "For 'twas your privilege to go out beyond the weed, into the open sea and sunshine. Mayhap my chance will come later."

Talking thus—and it was clear that the Black Hawk's recent exploit was the chief topic of conversation nowadays—the men hauled Lord Dorrimore and Handforth into the boat. Great clasp-knives were produced, and the tightly bound creepers were slashed through. The pair had only just been freed when the other boats came up with a great splashing of oars. Standing in the foremost one was a man of enormous size. His face was half-concealed by a great black beard; his features were rugged, and his eyes fierce and bold. There was something about this man which commanded attention. He was a veritable giant amongst men—a being of vitality and tremendous power.

"This man was none other than the Black Hawk himself—the daring pirate who had commanded the Porto Marlo when she had sacked the Torania.

"What now?" he demanded in a great voice. "Do the white-faced chickens live?"

"Nay, Sir Chief; they are as dead as the rotting timbers of a derelict," replied one of the other men.

"Make way!" commanded the Black Hawk. "Let me see!"

He stepped from one boat to the other—nimble for a man of such great size.

"Split my windpipe!" he roared suddenly. "Ye are but fools! These men live. They breathe lustily, and I can feel no broken bones. Take them ashore, and carry them into my own great cave."

"Aye, aye, Sir Chief!" chorused the men hurriedly.

There was no doubt that the Black Hawk was in full command here. He was the recognised leader—and, what was more, the men held him in great fear. It was a conceit of his, no doubt, to be addressed as "Sir Chief." It was a quaint enough address.

But everything about this community was quaint. They spoke English of a seventeenth century flavour, and their very dress was reminiscent of Elizabethan times. Great crowds were waiting when the boats came to the shore. Excited inquiries were shouted; but everybody made way at once for the Black Hawk. The people pressed back with every sign of fear. And the Black Hawk himself, having landed, strode off with a mighty swagger. A great sword jangled at his belt, and this, in conjunction with his bare feet, seemed grotesquely incongruous.

Behind him came a number of men, carrying the unconscious Dorrie and Handforth. And from many of the women came murmurs of sympathy. They were women of all ages—some bent and aged, others young and fair to look upon. Like their menfolk, they were dressed quaintly, with long, flowing skirts and laced bodices. And the material from which their clothing was made seemed to be coarse, but serviceable for all that. No doubt it was spun and weaved by the hands of the women themselves.

Before long there was a great procession up the street of the town. The Black Hawk led the way, many of his men following. And, in the rear, crowds of other men and women—yes, and children, too. The excitement grew greater.

The road was of rock, worn as smooth as glass by countless bare feet throughout the centuries. On either side there were the roughly constructed houses. They were timbered dwellings for the most part, with a kind of stucco effect—the actual timber frames being reinforced with a mortar-like substance, made, no doubt, from powdered rock. Every roof was just a mere covering, without slates or tiles. For here, of course, weatherproof roofs were more or less unnecessary.

As the Black Hawk walked he half turned, raising a great hand.

"Let Dr. Otto be sent!" he commanded. "See that he is here, in my cave, within

five minutes. And may his marrows rot if he is late!"

Two of the men left the crowd of people and raced away. The Black Hawk had but to command to be obeyed.

AND high above, leaning over the rim of the roof opening, Nelson Lee was holding his binoculars steady. Near him, crouching low, were Nipper and Umlosi. They could see little—in fact, nothing at all of the procession, far, far below. But Lee, through the glasses, was just able to distinguish, through the quivering heat-waves, the nature of the movements.

"I think they live!" he said abruptly.

"Oh, thank goodness!" murmured Nipper.

"Thou sayest good words, Umtagati!" exclaimed Umlosi. "But why art thou of this mind? Have ye seen N'Kose, my father?"

"I have seen N'Kose, and I have seen Handforth," replied Lee. "It is likely they

are badly injured—perhaps, even, dead; yet the signs lead me to believe otherwise. They have been taken from the water, and are now being carried, amid a great press of people."

"People!" echoed Nipper wonderingly. "My only sainted aunt! Then it's all true! Down there in the cavern the Black Hawk lives with his people. It's—it's like a fairy-tale, guv'nor! I've never heard of anything so amazing in all my life!"

"This whole island is amazing," replied Lee sharply.

He was worried. Clearly Handforth and Dorrie had been picked up by the pirates. It was impossible to say what their condition was now. It was equally impossible to guess what the Black Hawk would do with them. There was so much uncertainty in the situation that Lee was justified in being gravely worried.

Yet the very fact that Dorrie and Handforth had been taken out of the lake and carried ashore was significant. It was a

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hopeful sign. And already Nelson Lee had made up his mind as to the course he should pursue.

AT last the procession reached the sheer wall of the cavern—which arose in a vast rock cliff, practically perpendicular, with smooth sides. Here and there, however, dark openings showed. They were cave entrances, some large, some small.

And, far above, fully two hundred feet above ground level, the great flares burned with a steady, smokeless flame. They were very quiet, too, hardly emitting a sound, except for a low, purring hiss. And these flares were to be found at irregular intervals all round the great cavern. They twinkled away into the distance, and the general effect of them was to illuminate the cavern with a soft, yellow radiance.

The atmosphere was crystal clear, and very dry. The temperature was fairly high, but not oppressively hot.

Running parallel with the rock wall there was a wide roadway, and at a certain point stood some massive gates, guarded by two men. The Black Hawk passed through the gates, which were quickly opened at his approach. Behind him came the bearers. But the other people halted at the gates, and stood there in a great throng, chattering excitedly. This guarded zone, no doubt, was the Black Hawk's own private territory.

Some distance farther along there was a great opening in the cavern wall—a tunnel, apparently, a hundred feet wide by eighty or ninety feet in height. Through it flowed a channel of water, and the water, here, showed signs of the dreaded Sargasso weed.

There was another curious phenomenon, too. For the whole black tunnel was filled with billowing masses of dense fog. It rolled, unceasingly pressing into the cavern, but forever being hurled back. It was as though the fog was vainly attempting to force a way in; but some curious air current kept it in check.

This great tunnel, obviously enough, communicated with the outer cliffs of the island. And out there the mist was eternal. It came through the tunnel thus far, and could not enter the cavern. Perhaps it was the warm, dry air of the cavern which kept the fog out. Whatever the cause, the effect was striking in the extreme.

The bearers, with the Black Hawk at their head, turned from the roadway into an imposing cave entrance. This, too, was barred by a gate, with two men standing on duty.

All passed through, and plunged, for a time, into dense gloom. It was a low-roofed tunnel, but at the end there was a glow of light. Another gate barred the way at the inner end of the tunnel, and this gate, too, was flung wide.

Now they all stood within a great cave, with a roof so high that the summit of it was lost in the blackness. Half-way up one of the walls a stone-like object protruded, and from it came one of those flaming flares.

The entire floor of the cave was brightly illuminated.

It was a quaint enough spot.

In fact, in many ways, it was sunny. On the rock floor were spread numbers of soft carpets, and in every part of the cave stood soft easy-chairs, lounges, tables and so forth. And all of them were ultra modern in design and workmanship. There were even beds and silken hangings. And intermingled with these fineries there were such incongruous objects as great weather-stained hogsheads and rudely made benches fashioned out of blackened ship's timbers.

Surely, in all the world, there could be no quainter cavern than this!

The explanation was simple. Every bit of this modern furniture had reposed, not two weeks since, in the lounges and state-rooms of the liner Torania! The Black Hawk had not only raided the vessel's food stores, but he had seized a great deal of furniture. He had brought it, then, for his own benefit—to be used in his own kingly cave! There was something primeval and even majestic in this novel pirate.

"Lay them on yonder carpet!" commanded the Black Hawk, pointing. "By my bones, where is that doctor? He comes within the minute, or, rot my skin, I'll have his ears off!"

The unconscious Dorrie and Handy were laid upon the carpet, and the bearers stood back, looking on uncertainly.

"See, Sir Chief!" shouted one of the men. "The taller of the two moves! He recovers!"

"It is as well!" growled the Black Hawk. "I would have a talk with these white-faced rabbits! Think they that they can come here with impunity? They must reckon with me. I rule here, and those who dare to oppose me, die!"

Even while he was speaking there sounded a scurry of feet. A man appeared from the tunnel—a skinny, scraggy individual with his clothes hanging loosely upon him. His face was wrinkled like a dried apple, and the hair upon his chin was patchy and snowy white.

"Ye come overlate, Dr. Otto!" thundered the Black Hawk. "What say ye if I have your leathery ears sliced off?"

"Nay, nay, Sir Chief!" panted the scraggy old man, as he ran forward in obvious terror. "I come as quickly as my legs would carry me. I knew nought of what was astir, for I sleep soundly."

"Ye had best be wide awake now, then!" growled the Black Hawk. "Look ye to these baby-faced prisoners of mine. See what ails them, and if there is aught ye can do, do it. Stab my vitals, what stare ye at?"

Dr. Otto started violently. He was, indeed, staring at the captives—and he was filled with bewilderment. But he pulled himself together—for he, like all else in this community, trembled at the very sound of the Black Hawk's voice.

It was not so much that the pirate chief was a bully and a loud-mouthed ruffian.

There was something irresistibly magnetic in his very personality. He was a born dictator—a leader. The strongest of men cringed before him and obeyed his will without question.

"By my living soul," muttered the doctor, as he knelt beside Lord Dorrimore, "but this is a man the like of whom I have never before seen! And the boy, too! Whence came they?"

"From the roof itself!" said one of the other men. "Did ye not see? They came down on the ropes—and at first we believed they were Beast Men. But nay; they are men from the Outer World, it seems. Men such as Sir Chief and his companions saw when they went forth on their adventurous ship across the open seas."

The doctor was making a quick and skilful examination.

"'Tis well!" he muttered. "Not a bone broken. They are both sound enough."

"What of the blood from their noses and ears?"

"'Tis trivial—the mere shock of the fall into the water," replied the doctor. "See, one opens his eyes even as I speak."

It was, indeed, a coincidence that both Lord Dorrimore and Handforth should open their eyes at the same time. And before they could speak, or even look about them, Dr. Otto commanded men to grasp the captives. Their heads were held back, and medicine of sorts was flung into their mouths.

It was of some pungent character, for they both coughed and spluttered, and tears ran from their eyes. But the stuff was effective, nevertheless; for as soon as these preliminaries were over, Dorrie and Handy looked about them with complete intelligence.

CHAPTER 9.

The Pirate Maid!

"MY only Sunday topper!" ejaculated Handforth dazedly.

The doctor and the other men glanced at one another significantly.

"So!" murmured the doctor. "They speak a strange, uncouth language!"

Handforth heard the words, and they helped his recovery. He looked round, wincing as the movement caused him pain.

"What's that?" he asked. "Who speaks an uncouth language? Don't you understand English?"

"By my soul," exclaimed the doctor, "I thought, at first—"

"But—but I don't understand," went on Handforth, without waiting for the wrinkled old man to reply. "Where are we? Where's — Oh, there you are, Dorrie! I nearly had a fit for a minute!"

"Better to have a fit than be dead," said Lord Dorrimore, who had been gathering his wits together. "Amazin' as it seems, young 'un, we've escaped. I remember fallin' into

that infernal lake, but it must have knocked us unconscious. By the look of things, we've been carried into the local furniture depository."

Handforth extended the range of his vision. "Great Scott!" he yelled. "Most of this stuff was pinched from the Torania! I recognise it!"

There was a shuffling sound, and men moved hastily aside. Glancing up, Dorrie and Handforth saw the massive, imposing figure of the Black Hawk as he strode up.

"By my sinews, they have awakened, then!" he exclaimed. "Set them on their feet, and bring them to my table!"

He strode off again, and the prisoners were seized and brought roughly to their feet. It was an agonising experience. They ached in every joint and limb. Even now the circulation of their blood had only just begun to recover. Their heads were throbbing, and they were so dizzy that they nearly fell.

"Steady, my friends," whispered Dr. Otto, not unkindly. "'Twere best to pull yourselves together quickly. The Black Hawk is contemptuous of weakness."

Dorrie had already recovered his irrepressible spirits.

"How about another shot of that tonic?" he asked. "The flavour is still rolling round my mouth—and it tastes good. Crude, perhaps, but there's a mighty kick in it!"

The doctor frowned slightly, for he only partially understood. However, he handed Lord Dorrimore a bottle, and his lordship took a long swig. Having done so, he gulped, spluttered and gurgled.

"Ye gods!" he gasped. "Rum, by the taste of it—but a smoky, tarry kind of rum! But what a kick!"

He gave Handforth a swig, and the raw, fiery spirit worked wonders in both of them. It was just what they needed in their present condition—for it was, indeed, medicine.

"May my bones rattle and rot!" roared the Black Hawk. "Why this delay? Bring the smooth-faced rabbits hither!"

"Don't bother!" said Dorrie. "We can both walk now. Come on, Handy, old son. This is where we make our bow before his Majesty."

They walked forward with some steadiness, and their bearing had a good effect upon the Black Hawk's followers. The rough, bearded men gazed at the pair with some admiration.

"Many thanks, my good friend, for fishing us so neatly out of your private lake," said Dorrie warmly. "We should certainly have drowned—for we were both unconscious. Will you permit me to admire your taste? You have a nice eye when it comes to the selection of furniture."

The Black Hawk glowered.

"Enough!" he growled. "Who are ye—and whence came ye?"

"Well, that's an easy one," replied Dorrie. "Let me introduce my young friend, Handforth. My own name is Dorrimore. We both hail from England. I dare say you've heard of England. You talk English, and

your ancestors must have been English. No doubt you have records, somewhere, of the Old Country."

"This boy I know!" said the Black Hawk, ignoring Dorrie's words. "Stab my vitals, I saw him on the great passenger carrying ship only last week! How came you here?" he added suspiciously. "You followed me, yes? Bones and blood! Any man who attempts to interfere with my rule in this land shall find his head on the chopping-block!"

"But you don't understand," said Handforth eagerly. "We didn't come here to quarrel with anybody. We're exploring! We really came to explore the top part of the island, but—but things happened. It's—it's all so bewildering! We don't mean any harm. You're not going to keep us prisoners, are you?"

"Prisoners!" echoed Dorrie. "What a thought! We are here as harmless visitors, and I am sure that the gentleman immediately facin' us will grant us the freedom of the city, and treat us as honoured guests."

The Black Hawk was more suspicious than ever.

"I like not your tone," he said grimly. "Think ye that I am deceived? You came hence in a great machine which flies. I've lived my life in this mist-surrounded land, but I know much of what is taking place in the outer world. You came, then, in a great flying machine. Think ye that I did not hear the engines? You came to rob me of my power. I am a pirate, and I have broken your laws. So! You are my prisoners, and I am thinking it were better to have let you sink to the bottom of the lake. Yet the block is just as effective!"

Lord Dorrimore knew that the man was in earnest. He was no primitive ignoramus, this Black Hawk. The very fact that he and his men could man and operate a modern battleship with steam turbines proved that they were up-to-date.

"Why talk of the block?" asked his lordship, with a shrug. "What harm can we do to you? There are but three more of us on the island—my good friend, Mr. Nelson Lee; another boy named Nipper; and a black friend of mine, Umlosi. Five of us! Would it not be better to be friendly? I am wonderin' how we can get in touch with our friends—"

"Then ye can cease wondering without further delay," broke in Black Hawk. "You will not see your friends again. There is no way of reaching the cliff-tops. The cliffs are sheer for many hundreds of feet, and my fathers and my grandfathers strove in vain to climb them."

"Is there no way up from within the great cavern?"

"None—for the cavern roof slopes inwards, and it is, as you know, of immeasurable height," replied the Black Hawk impatiently.

"We know that the Beast Men live up yonder, but they neither interfere with us, nor we with them. But, by my bones, why do I waste time in talking thus?"

"Well, if we can't get up—our friends can get down," argued Dorrie. "Don't you see? If they can get hold of a lot of that creeper, an' lower it, we can all climb up it. That's a way of escape, isn't it?"

"And you think that I would allow it?" growled the other. "Nay, ye shall not return into the other world and tell stories of what ye have seen here." He rapped on his table. "Take them away, chain them up—and have food brought to them. You shall be kept prisoners," he continued, glaring at Dorrie and Handforth. "Then, my friends, I shall take steps to entrap your companions. Thus I shall make a clean sweep of you all, and your flying craft shall be left to rot and decay."

He rose to his feet and waved his hand. Men moved forward, and Lord Dorrimore and Handforth were seized. Each of them knew just what was passing in the Black Hawk's mind. He was not going to let any of them get away; for he believed, not unnaturally, that they had come here as his enemies.

"Cheer up, young 'un!" murmured Dorrie, just before he and Handforth were dragged apart. "We're still alive—an' that's one thing! Trust Mr. Lee!"

"Rather!" replied Handforth, his eyes glowing. "We're not finished yet—not by a long chalk!"

They were separated, and having been marched out of the strange cave, they were taken down the tunnels, pushed into another, smaller cave, and secured by great chains to the wall.

This cave was shallow, and it had no light of its own—only a reflection of the light from the outer cavern. And it was of uneven shape, with many corners and angles.

Handforth was bitterly disappointed when he found that he was chained to a wall, round a narrow angle, far removed from the spot where Lord Dorrimore was tethered. They were so far apart, in fact, that any kind of conversation was impossible.

Handforth's feelings were bitter. He did not blame Lord Dorrimore in any way for what had happened. It was just luck. And Handforth, being an optimist, was still hopeful that everything would turn out all right in the end. He did not forget that Nelson Lee was free—and Nelson Lee was a man of infinite resource.

Handforth was amazed at the brutal character of these people. As far as he could see, they were all tarred with the same brush—they were all rough, coarse, murderous ruffians.

"My only aunt! What people!" muttered Handforth disgustedly. "It's a pity they weren't all wiped out centuries ago! They're worse than savages! They talk English, but they're more uncivilised than Borneo cannibals!"

He had been left entirely alone, and he was not exactly comfortable, for the floor was hard, and the rock wall was hard. The iron manacles were cumbersome.

"Dorrie!" called Handforth.

But the formation of the cave threw his own voice back to him, and he instinctively knew that Lord Dorrimore could not hear. If he shouted at the top of his voice he might get a response but what was the good?

After a period of wild exhilaration immediately following his recovery, Handforth was now cast down into despair. His physical condition had something to do with this. He had had no sleep, and he was racked with pain, too, from head to foot. Yet, when he tried to sleep, he could not even close his eyes. His brain was far too active.

Nelson Lee was a man of resource, yes, but he wasn't a magician. How could he help? Handforth was appalled at the thought. The only possible way down into the cavern was by means of a rope. And if Nelson Lee came, he would inevitably be captured. This Black Hawk was a murderous ruffian, the lord of all he surveyed. And his "subjects" were just the same.

Handforth glowered round into the gloom as he heard a soft footstep. His gore rose within him. The Black Hawk, no doubt—and he had come to taunt! Handforth was just in the mood to let fly.

"You—you loud-mouthed pirate!" he burst out passionately. "You're nothing but a thief and a murderer——"

"Nay, but I bring you food!" came a gentle voice.

Handforth started so violently that his manacles rattled and jarred his wrists. It wasn't a coarse male voice at all—but a soft, sweet, feminine voice.

"I—I say!" he gasped. "I didn't know! I—I mean——"

He saw the slim figure come round the angle of the rock. This woman, no doubt, was one of the Black Hawk's slaves, and for all her soft voice, she was no better than the men.

And then he saw something else. The figure, kneeling on the floor, had placed a rough plate on the rock, and it contained, as Handforth saw, some bread and meat. But he scarcely gave the plate a glance. For he suddenly found himself confronting a slim, sweet-faced girl who could have been no older than sixteen.

"I have brought you food," she repeated in a whisper. "And I am glad that I was ordered to bring it—for I am able to talk with you, and perchance we shall not be disturbed for some minutes."

Handforth was tongue-tied. He had always been very susceptible to feminine charm—and the sudden sight of this girl at such a moment had an extraordinary effect upon him. All his despair left him; he knew, moreover, that his estimate of the cavern people was wrong. If they were all such brutes, there could be no such girl as this!

He had seen her face clearly in the dim-

"GOLLY! Where's my HOLIDAY ANNUAL?"

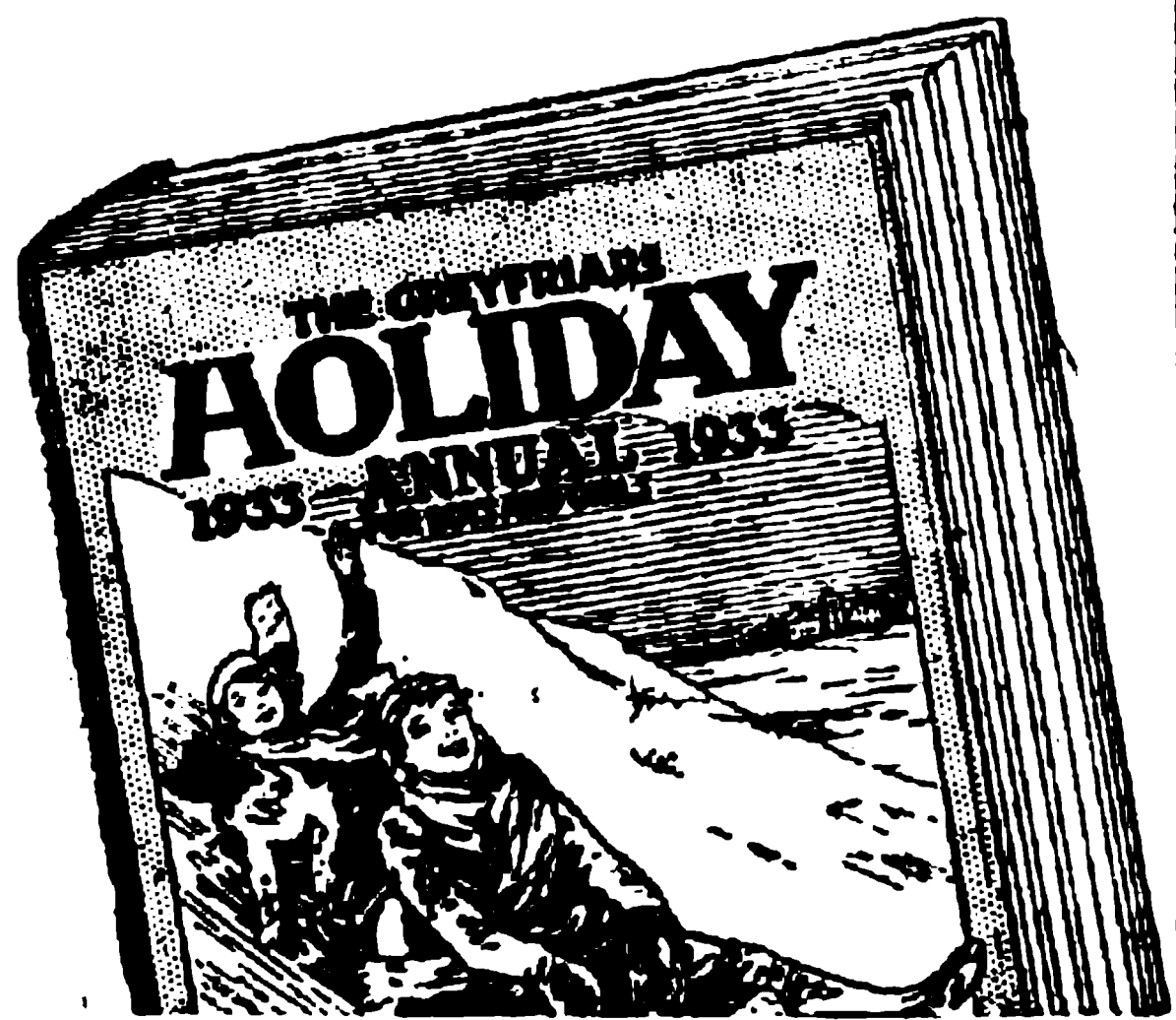


Bunter is distinctly perturbed. Somebody's "pinched" his HOLIDAY ANNUAL—and that's no joke! You'd hate to lose yours, wouldn't you?

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reflected light. It was a singularly pretty face—gentle, finely chiselled, with a small nose, a mouth that naturally smiled, and two rows of impossibly even teeth. And her eyes! From beneath long, dark lashes they glowed with a warmth and kindness which caused Handforth's heart to thump against his ribs.

She was dressed in a simple frock, open at the neck, and her long hair fell across her shoulders in fascinating waves. At that particular moment Handforth felt that he had never seen such a pretty girl in all his life.

"I—I say!" he burst out. "I'm awfully sorry—I—I mean——"

"Nay, it is I who should express my sorrow," whispered the girl. "I fear I startled you. I should have been more careful. You will take your food?"

"How can I think of food—now?" gasped Handforth, never taking his eyes from her. "I didn't know there was anybody here like you. You've knocked me all of a heap, you know! You're not a bit like the others."

She was silent—and she continued to regard him in that same gentle, compassionate way. It was apparent that Handforth was a martyr in her eyes. And the fairness of his skin, so different from the men of this community, no doubt held her attention, too. Handforth was something different—a boy from the Great Beyond.

"Think you that we are all like the Black Hawk?" she asked suddenly, her eyes flashing.

"Well, you see, I didn't know——"

"He is a brute, a beast, a rogue!" she said, bending nearer, and taking hold of Handforth's arm. "Oh, I must tell you, my friend!"

She was so near to him now that he felt dizzy. And at such close quarters he could tell, better than ever, the rare beauty of her features. And Handforth, who at St. Frank's made a habit of falling head over heels in love at first sight, suffered from the same complaint now. In that one minute he became this girl's slave.

"I—I say!" he breathed helplessly.

Fortunately she moved back a little, so the situation was not so perilous. Moreover, Handforth could see her even better now, for she had moved into such a position that the light fell across her face. She sat on her heels on the floor, and the very expression in her eyes sent the blood rushing to Handforth's head.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered. "I was just telling myself that everybody here was rough and uncouth. And—and then you come along! I can't believe it! I'm not dreaming, am I?"

"You mean that I am—not rough?" she asked, flushing.

"Why, you're marvellous!" replied Handforth stoutly. "The prettiest girl I've ever—— I—I mean—— But I do mean it!" he added daringly. "And you're not an enemy, are you?"

"The Black Hawk has taken you prisoner—and therefore you are my friend," she whispered. "Was not my own father killed by that brutal ruffian? I hate him—I hate him!"

"You mean that he murdered your father?"

"It happened five years ago, when I was but a little girl," she said. "But I remember it as though it were but yesterday. My father was—was beheaded! And that dreadful brute compelled everybody, including my mother and myself, to witness the execution. It—it killed my mother within three months!" she added in a broken whisper.

"Oh, I say!" muttered Handforth wretchedly. "No wonder you hate him. If ever I get free from this, I'll—I'll——"

"Nay, you must be cautious," she warned. "Those who oppose the Black Hawk meet with death. He is the master of all. Since he has ruled during these five years he has killed many, many men. Aye, and women, too! He is ruthless—he takes life as other men take food."

Handforth could understand her bitterness. So her father and mother had been killed by this murderous pirate!

"If I could help you, I would," she went on eagerly. "But I have not the means to break your irons. And even so, where could you go?"

"Do you mind telling me your name?" asked Handforth, still looking at her with wonder and admiration.

"My name is Amanda," she replied.

"And mine is Edward—although people who know me well call me Handy," replied the schoolboy. "That's my name, you see—Edward Oswald Handforth. Handy for short. You have another name, I suppose?"

"Yes; my full name is Amanda Peterson."

"By George, it's—it's just like being somewhere in England!" murmured Handforth. "Names, and everything! I suppose this rotter, the Black Hawk, has a name, too?"

"It pleases him to call himself the Black Hawk, and all our people must say 'Sir Chief' when they address him," replied Amanda bitterly. "But he is a rough sailor, really. His name is Simon Harke. He has made himself king over us, and so ruthless is his rule that no man has dared to oppose him."

"Why was your father—executed?"

"For no reason at all—merely because my father was the ruler," she said. "A kindly man, gentle and loving. People came to him with their troubles, and in those days there was peace and love amongst us. I believe there had been some trouble with Simon Harke and his rough men for some years, but they had never broken out into open rebellion. Then it came—and it was like a nightmare. Men and women were killed; blood flowed dreadfully. And my father, Jonas Peterson, who had ruled so kindly, was executed. My grandfather ruled before him—yes, and my great-great-grandfather. I am

only an ignorant girl, but I know that for centuries my people have been the rulers."

"By George, I knew there was something different about you!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Strictly speaking, then, you are a princess! A king's daughter!"

"I think you talk foolishly," she said, flushing.

"But it's true!" declared Handforth. "If your people have been the rulers for so many centuries, you're a real princess. Haven't you a brother?"

"Nay, I was the only child," she replied. "I am an orphan."

"Then that means that if the Black Hawk is dethroned, you become queen of—of the whole island!" said Handforth eagerly. "I say, that's something for us to do, eh? Wipe up the Black Hawk and his gang, and set you on the throne—where you really belong."

She was looking at him wonderingly.

"You are a strange boy!" she whispered. "You are but a boy, are you not? You talk so boldly—and yet, I must confess, your words send my blood arushing. I am your friend—Handy. And soon, perhaps, you will be free. Now I must go."

"Yes, but wait a minute. I say," ejaculated Handforth, in dismay, "you needn't go yet, need you?"

She had already risen noiselessly to her feet, and Handforth saw, with a thrill, that, unlike the others, she was wearing dainty sandals; and her feet were neat and white and shapely. They twinkled beneath the hem of her skirt.

"Good-bye!" she whispered. "Oh, I am so glad I came with the food!"

And the next moment she had gone. Edward Oswald Handforth sank back against the wall, his manacles clanking. He cared not a jot for the food. His head was in a whirl.

Never had he believed it possible that such a girl could be here, amongst these people. He wasn't thinking of any possible escape; he wasn't thinking of Dorrie, or Nelson Lee, or Nipper, or Umlosi. They meant nothing to him now.

He was only thinking that that girl was really a princess, and it was an absolute fact that he was already head over heels in love with her.

CHAPTER 10.

Disaster!

SO near and yet so far!

Nipper had that thought in his mind as he lay flat on his stomach, with his head overhanging the great void. He was staring down into the cavern. He and Nelson Lee and Umlosi were just three thousand feet away from Dorrie and Handy—a distance capable of being covered in a few minutes on the level.

Unfortunately, the distance was vertical, and that made all the difference.

"What are we going to do, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, almost desperately. "If we can get a rope long enough to reach down, what's the good of going? If the Black Hawk and his people have captured Dorrie and Handy, they're capture us, too! What can we do?"

"At the moment—nothing," replied Nelson Lee, and his voice was grim.

"You mean—leave them down there?"

"We have delayed long enough already," replied the detective. "Come, Umlosi! To your feet, Nipper! We must get back to the base camp with all haste."

"But—but that seems like deserting——"

"Be sensible, Nipper," interrupted Lee, his voice now almost harsh. "What good can we do here? Dorrie and Handforth were carried into one of the caves, and we must believe, for our own peace of mind, that they are alive. We have no means of descending, even if we wanted to descend. We can do nothing by darkness. But for Dorrie's incredible rashness we should not be here now. And by that I mean we should not have left the camp to look after itself."

Nipper started.

"But—but you don't think anything might have happened there, guv'nor?" he asked huskily.

"I don't know—but we have been away too long," replied Lee. "Yet we had to come. For there was a chance of saving those two, and it was only by the greatest of ill-fortune that we failed. Now, I tell you, we must get back."

The great detective was right. His sound common sense was needed here. At all costs, the Sky Wanderer, and the base camp in general, must be protected.

"Thou art wise, as ever, Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi. "Let us be gone."

He spoke with mechanical articulation, for his heart was filled with sadness. He had been separated from his beloved N'Kose. Much rather would he have gone down into that danger with Dorrie. But now—— The fates had decided that Handforth should be Dorrie's companion.

And perhaps it was as well; for Umlosi was of much greater use here, by Nelson Lee's side.

As they hurried down the rocky hill they kept a sharp look-out. The gloom, during the last few minutes, had vaguely changed. There was a greyness in the air—and Nelson Lee knew that the dawn was near at hand. The valley, ahead, was a well of blackness, inky, mysterious, a place of hidden dread.

Ever since the fireworks had been loosed off the Beast Men had vanished. Terrified, they had fled to another part of the island. But Lee knew well enough that they might be lurking in cover, waiting to pounce.

This was no time for taking chances.

Before venturing into that valley, Lee set the machine-gun down, and he sent up a dazzling star-shell, which burst and flooded the valley with cold, white light.

There were some clumps of fungus growths, and quite a few "bushes," but there was not a sign of any human being or living creature.

"Come!" urged Lee sharply.

They went on at the double, for the star-shell would hover in the sky for some little time, affording them welcome illumination. They ran on, descending into the valley, splashing through a shallow stream. Then up the hillside beyond, and the star-shell lasted almost until they had reached the summit.

Now the greyness in the sky had increased. The blackness was going.

"'Tis well the dawn comes, my master!" said Umlosi. "For, with the coming of daylight, the animal men will no longer trouble us; for they are, indeed, creatures of the darkness."

"I think the same applies to the animals," said Lee. "And that's all to the good, Umlosi. Once back in camp, we can make our plans."

Nelson Lee did not show it, but he was in a fever. Perhaps he had some premonition that all was not well at the camp. He strained his eyes as they ran on. For, by now, they had reached a point where they could see that rising little hill with the flat top on which the camp had been made.

"Wau!" came a sudden ejaculation from Umlosi.

"What is it, old friend?" asked Lee.

"Methinks there is evil afoot, Umtagati."

"I have felt it for some time," said Lee sharply. "But what do you see? Your eyes are keener than ours, Umlosi. Speak!"

"I see—but yet I think I must be dreaming," replied Umlosi. "I see monstrous forms collected round the steel walls of our camp—forms full eighty feet in length, and well-nigh fifty feet in height. They are monsters of horror!"

"But it's impossible!" gasped Nipper, straining his own eyes. "Even in prehistoric days there were no animals as big as that!"

"Come!" snapped Lee.

They ran like the wind, plunged into a shallow valley, climbed a hillock, and then raced on. Now they were in full, clear view of the camp. It was close at hand—and in the grey light they saw something which caused them to halt, horrified and aghast.

Near the steel palisades there were some towering monsters—so big that the palisades themselves looked like toy fences.

They were ungainly creatures with enormously long necks and thick, long tails to match. They lumbered heavily and slowly.

"It is incredible that that creature is a diplodocus," said Nelson Lee, with a catch in his breath. "We are gazing upon a herd of diplodoci. They are creatures of the dinosaur type, and in every other part of the world they have been extinct for countless centuries."

"What shall we do, Umtagati?" whispered Umlosi. "Wau! To attack such creatures would be futile. And should they stampede,

the fence of steel will crumple up like cardboard."

"Enormous though they are, it is possible that they are gentle and harmless," replied Lee. "Perhaps they are even timid. But, like other creatures of the wild, they are curious, and they have collected round the palisades to gaze upon the Sky Wanderer—which must be a strange object in their eyes. It may be as well to wait—and let them drift away. For if we move, and they take fright——"

"Guv'nor," broke in Nipper suddenly, "look!"

There was a sharp, alarmed note in his voice—and he was pointing well away to the left, where none of the diplodoci were in view. But other forms were there—a number of them, creeping along stealthily.

"By Heaven," muttered Lee, "you are right, Nipper! They are human beings!"

It seemed incredible. But there was no doubt. The Beast Men were not only at close quarters with the monsters, but it was perfectly clear that the monsters had been driven there—driven like cattle.

Nipper's first sensation was one of relief—but it rapidly changed to alarm. The Beast Men were up to mischief! The gigantic animals, tame as oxen, had been rounded up and driven up the slope on to the flat top of the hillock. And what could the object be? There was only one obvious answer.

And even as Lee and Nipper and Umlosi arrived at the answer, a sudden shrill shout went up, to be echoed and re-echoed. And at the same moment the diplodoci broke into lumbering activity. There were at least seven of them, and the leaders, breaking into a run, went charging straight towards the palisades.

"The cunning devils!" shouted Lee. "Don't you see? They've driven these creatures here—with the object of stampeding them and making them destroy the 'plane!'"

He ran on for some distance, dropped to his knees; then, in a moment, his finger was at the trigger of the machine-gun. He had released the safety-catch as he had run.

Zurrrrrrr—zurrrrr—thup-thup-thup-thup!

With a hacking and stackering the machine-gun burst into life. It stuttered with ever-growing vigour, and a hail of bullets went hissing across the ground—aimed at the legs of the monsters. Lee had little faith in those bullets. But the noise, itself, caused the diplodoci to veer round.

Screams arose from the Beast Men as they ran. They, too, had become aware of the danger, and they were fleeing. And well might they flee—for the damage was done!

Nelson Lee and Nipper and Umlosi stood aghast as they watched. Rapidly the light had increased. The dawn was at hand. And in that grey twilight the spectacle which the adventurers beheld was truly mortifying.

For the monsters, crashing and bursting through the palisades, ran full tilt into the

(Continued on page 44.)

COCK O'



This fine long school yarn, which features all the popular favourites at St. Frank's, deals with the stirring time when Edward Oswald Handforth made a bold bid for the captaincy of the Remove!

Handforth's Committee-Rooms.

"GENTLEMEN——"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "I stand upon this platform——"
 "Good!"

"I stand upon this platform—er—er——"
 "Hurrah!"

Edward Oswald Handforth paused, and glared balefully at Church and McClure. He wasn't standing upon a platform at all, but on the hearthrug of Study D. And his chums were sitting on the edge of the table, wearing expressions of resigned fortitude.

"Any more interruptions, my lads, and I'll kick you out of this study!" said Handforth grimly. "How the dickens can I make a speech if you keep butting in? I shan't warn you again!"

"I thought this was going to be a rehearsal?" asked Church.

"So it is!"

"Well, you'll have to be prepared for interruptions——"

"Any chap who dares to interrupt me when I'm speaking from the platform will suffer for it!" said Handforth curtly. "It won't take me two ticks to jump down and slaughter him. So you'd better go easy. I'm the Live Wire Candidate, and I'm going to make St. Frank's rock to its foundations!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church feelingly.

"Right on the mark!" murmured McClure, thoughtfully rubbing his left ear.

"Strength!" repeated Handforth firmly. "Elect me as your captain, and you will see the Remove—er—— You will see the Remove——"

"Like a battered and mangled army?" suggested Church.

"Yes!" roared Handforth. "Like a battered and—— No, you fathead! You will see the Remove forge ahead and set an example to every other public school in the kingdom! As your skipper, I will lead you with ability and strength. I will imbue you with my own force!"

"We can believe it, old man!" said Church, nodding.

Handforth grinned.

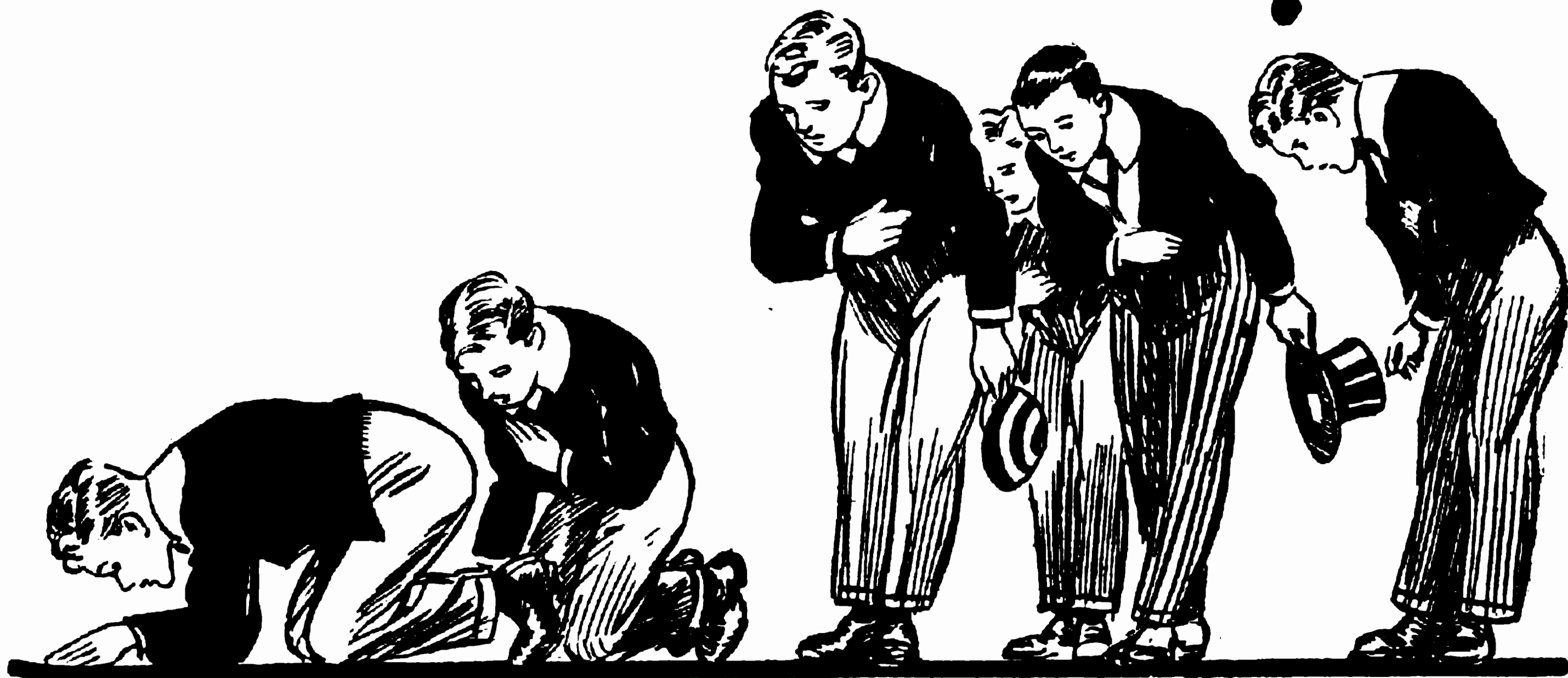
"Well, how's that?" he asked triumphantly. "A speech like that ought to do the trick, eh? I can see the Remove rising up and cheering me to the echo. Every chap will simply bubble over with enthusiasm——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted McClure. "You can't expect miracles, Handy. If that's your whole speech, it'll only take about two minutes, and the chaps won't be won over by a two-minute spout."

"You hopeless ass, that's only just an inkling of the line I shall take," said Handforth tartly. "When I get down to the real speech I shall work up to my big points and drive them home with a sledge-hammer. And by the time I've done I shall hold the whole Remove in the hollow of my hand. A pity we can't arrange this meeting for this afternoon instead of this evening."

—Starring the Famous Chums of St. Frank's!

THE WALK!



"You mustn't be too hasty," said Church, shaking his head. "You've got to make one or two preliminary speeches in the Triangle—and then you've got to go canvassing. At least, that's what you said."

"And that's what I mean," said Handforth grimly.

"Of course, it'll be a waste of time," added Church carelessly. "But that's your own funeral. If you will indulge in these dreams, Handy, you must expect to wake up some time."

"Dreams?" said Handforth. "What dreams?"

"Why, your expectation of being elected skipper."

"That's not a dream—that's a certainty!" retorted Handforth, with supreme confidence. "My dear idiots, there's no other possible result of this election. I've made up my mind to be Remove captain, and there's an end of it."

"An end of the Remove?" asked McClure. "Of course, that's possible——"

"No, an end of all arguments!" snapped Handforth. "Any more of your silly jokes, Arnold McClure, and I'll slaughter you!"

"Well, it's a dream—that's what I say," said Church gruffly. "What's the good of kidding yourself, Handy? You call Study D your Committee Room, you've got out election posters, you're making speeches and all the rest of it—but you haven't got one chance in a thousand. I don't like speaking bluntly, but what's the good of seeing a chap spoof himself up to the eyes? This is a case where it's a kindness to be cruel."

Handforth looked at his chums blankly.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated, aghast. "Do you mean to stand there and say that

I've got no chance? You! My own chums! Is that all the faith you've got in me? Is that all the trust——"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Church. "Facts are facts, Handy—and they're hard things to get over. Reggie Pitt and Fullwood are the only candidates in this election—and they're not issuing posters or making speeches. You wouldn't know there was an election on if it wasn't for your spectacular campaign. And the whole Remove is grinning at you. My dear chap, they take you as a joke—that's all. When the election comes off, you'll be hopelessly out of the running. So why not chuck it up now, and save yourself from a lot of chipping? Life won't be worth living if you keep up this tommy rot."

"Hear, hear!" agreed McClure heartily. "The captaincy is only a temporary job, anyhow. That's why these other chaps aren't taking the election seriously. Why the dickens don't you see the thing that's staring you in the face?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "Haven't I told you a hundred times that I've made up my mind to be skipper? Not temporary skipper, mark you—but permanent! When Nipper comes back and finds me in the position of Form captain, he'll have to abide by it. There'll probably be another election—and I shall win again. Don't you understand that this is my big chance?"

"But you're only fooling yourself!" said Church helplessly.

"That's what everybody thinks—but that's where everybody is wrong!" retorted Handforth. "After I've been elected, I shall prove myself to be such a marvellous skipper that the Remove wouldn't chuck me over-

board for a dozen Nippers! That's why we've got to push on this campaign with every ounce of energy. The fellows are spoofing me, eh? Huh! We'll see about that! They may be spoofing me now, but by the time I've finished they'll be solid in my support. This election is going to make history, my sons, and don't you forget it!"

Church and McClure gave it up as a bad job. They were well aware of the fact that Edward Oswald Handforth was simply living in a false paradise. But to tell him so was obviously impossible. He wouldn't listen. He had made up his mind, and there was an end of it. What could be done with a fellow like that?

"Oh, all right—go your own road!" said Church indignantly. "But don't blame Mao and me for not warning you! And don't say we didn't give you the straight tip. This election campaign of yours is a sheer waste of time!"

McClure nodded.

"One of the world's wonders!" said Handforth. "How much longer have I got to talk to you? How much longer must I drive sense into you? I'm not dotty enough to believe that I can win this election without a lot of campaigning: The chaps treat me as a joke, do they? Well, I believe it—I know it! They think it's a fine bit of fun, to have me putting up as a candidate for the captaincy!"

Church and McClure opened their eyes. This was the first hint they had received that Handforth appreciated the position.

"Oh, I'm not so jolly dense!" went on Edward Oswald grimly. "And I know that I've got to fight in order to win! And that's where we can get the better of these fatheads! While they're laughing and cackling, we're getting on with the job. And in the end I shall win!"

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "The whole thing reminds me of a genuine Parliamentary election. In a three-cornered fight, two of the candidates will conduct a half-hearted campaign, being certain of victory. But the third candidate, who's looked upon as an outsider, will conduct a lightning campaign, get the voters on his side, and head the poll. That's what comes of energy in opposition to apathy!"

"My hat!" said Church, staring.

"Well, this is a three-cornered campaign," continued Handforth. "I'm the outsider. At least, that's what the Remove thinks. My dear, deluded imbeciles! An outsider, am I? I'll show 'em! A lightning campaign, and I shall head the poll! And the more we can fight, the better! This is going to be a sweeping victory for Study D."

The Campaign Opens.

THERE was really no occasion for so much commotion in the Junior School. Not that there would have been any commotion, but for Handforth's "lightning campaign."

Nipper was the captain of the Remove, and that famous Form was in no need of a new skipper. Nipper hadn't resigned, and had no intention of resigning. It merely happened that he was away.

Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective, was still absent, and Nipper was with him.

So why elect a temporary Form captain? That was the way the Remove looked at it. Meanwhile, Reggie Pitt could easily hold the reins. Pitt was junior skipper in the West House already, and the duties of Form captain were well known to him—since he had held that post for some little time.

Left alone, the Remove would have been quite content. But Handforth insisted upon an election. In his opinion, a temporary skipper was absolutely essential. And, since it entailed too much loss of breath to argue with him, he was having his own way.

In the meantime, the usual life of St. Frank's went placidly on. In the Upper School, the fellows did not even know that an election was pending. Even the juniors of the Modern House and the East House were unaffected—for the Remove was about equally divided between these two Houses.

Football was the greatest attraction just now. The summer holidays were over, and the stern business of the autumn term was in full swing. The aforementioned stern business being, of course, football. Studies were a necessary evil, and had to be grappled with, anyhow.

So far there had been no big match, for the term had only just begun. To-day was Friday, and on the morrow the juniors were playing a Form game—Remove versus Fourth. This was always a keen match, for an intense rivalry existed between these Forms.

Reggie Pitt had already selected his team. He was standing in the old Triangle, near the fountain, discussing the prospects with Fullwood and De Valerie, of the Ancient House.

"I think we ought to win easily enough," he was saying. "Buster Boots is spouting about his dark horses, but the season's too young for any big surprises. By the way, I shall want you fellows to practise this evening."

"You won't need to tell us twice," said Fullwood, smiling.

"No fear!" agreed De Valerie. "Footer's going to be a big thing this term. I've heard a rumour that old Browne, of the Fifth, is suggesting the formation of a Rugger team in the Upper School. Is that true?"

"Goodness knows," replied Pitt. "Browne is capable of anything, if it comes to that. Not a bad idea, though. It's about time St. Frank's took up Rugger. Lots of big schools—Redcliffe and Helmford, and all those—would rather send us their Rugger fifteens than their Soccer elevens. Why shouldn't St. Frank's play both games?"

"Isn't it rather messing about?" asked Fullwood dubiously. "I mean, let's be a

Soccer school or a Rugger school—one or the other."

"I don't see that it matters," remarked Pitt. "There's no earthly reason why we shouldn't play both games—and then everybody will be pleased. Some of the chaps will be pretty hot in both Soccer and Rugger teams, perhaps. It would be a bit of a novelty. Not that we need discuss the subject—it's only a rumour, so far, and it may come to nothing."

"Nearly time for afternoon lessons, isn't it?" remarked De Valerie, glancing up at the clock tower. "Good! Nearly ten minutes

The three Removites found the little shop in possession of Oldfield & Co., of the Modern House. The Fourth-Formers greeted their rivals with suitable banter.

"Poor old Remove!" said Len Clapson sorrowfully. "How do you like being licked in the first real game of the season?"

"Licked?" said Reggie Pitt. "When?"

"To-morrow," said Clapson. "I'm a prophet. Three goals to nil is my prediction."

"Funny thing," said Pitt. "That's just what I was thinking—only you chaps will figure in 'nil' section."



Handy so lost himself in the eloquence of his fighting election speech that he did not see his audience disappearing swiftly in the distance, nor did he see Mr. Crowell come stalking up.

yet. Just in time to treat you fellows to an ice-cream in the school shop. Coming?"

"Ice-cream," grinned Pitt, "is my fatal weakness."

"And it's my secret vice!" chuckled Fullwood. "There's only one trouble about Mrs. Hake's ice-creams—she doesn't make 'em big enough."

"That's easily remedied," said De Valerie. "I'll order a double dose. Come on—we shall need something to cool us off for the afternoon."

They strolled towards the corner of the Triangle where the school shop was situated. Although September was well advanced, the weather was cloudless, and the day distinctly hot. Ice-creams were still in vogue, and would remain in vogue for as long as Mrs. Hake had a ready sale for them.

"Don't you believe it," declared Harry Oldfield firmly. "Old Handforth is so full of his election campaign that he'll be off colour, and he'll let the leather go past him without even trying to stop it."

"That's about the only way you chaps CAN win!" said Pitt blandly.

"You silly Remove ass—"

"Not that Handy will forget his duties in that way," went on Pitt. "He may be an ass, but when he's between the sticks he's in his element. You've got to admit—"

"Talk Of The Devil And He's Sure To Appear!" chuckled Billy Nation, who quoted proverbs on every possible occasion, as he glanced out through the open doorway. "Here comes Handy, with Church and McClure flanking him on either side with placards. Let's go out and rag him."

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "We came here for ice-cream. Three, Mrs. Hake—the biggest you can supply. And you Fourth chaps needn't look envious, either—nothing doing!"

Edward Oswald Handforth strode into the shop with a determined expression on his face. Church and McClure were just behind. They carried big placards, to say nothing of a high, three-legged stool.

"Hub!" ejaculated Handforth disparagingly. "Thought so! Wasting your time on ice-cream, eh? Well, I'm going to make a speech. You Fourth Form chaps needn't interfere, because you're not wanted!"

"Well, there's nothing like being perfectly frank," grinned Oldfield.

"I'm out for the Remove captaincy, and I'm going to win," said Handforth firmly. "I'm out for progress. I'm the candidate in favour of push and go. All the old stuff is dead—and I've no use for it. Vote for me and you vote for——"

"Chaos?" suggested Pitt, as Handforth paused.

"Well, there goes the bell for lessons, so that's that," grinned Fullwood. "I don't pretend to be a lover of the class-room, but lessons strike me as being the lesser of two evils. Let's escape!"

The juniors hurried away, chuckling, and Handforth breathed hard.

A Little Canvassing.

"LESSONS!" said Handforth fiercely. "It's a shame—that's what it is! There ought to be special rules for election time. How can we bother with lessons in the middle of a campaign like this? I'm going to make my speech—and blow the bell!"

"But you'll only get into a row," objected Church. "And what's the good of making a speech to the thin air? All the fellows are going in, and——"

"I can't help that," interrupted Handforth obstinately. "Where's that stool? I came out here to make a speech, and I'm going to make one. I'm not going to be dished by any bell!"

Against such reasoning as this there was no argument. Church and McClure stood by, fuming, while Handforth perched himself upon the stool, and spread out his hands towards the empty Triangle.

"Comrades!" roared Handforth. "No, that's wrong! That's what old Tucker would say, and I'm not one of his breed! Brothers! That's better——"

"A bit too much like Browne!" interrupted McClure.

"Gentlemen!" roared Handforth triumphantly. "Gentlemen of the Remove! Let me impress upon you the importance of this election. Away with apathy—away with sluggishness and indifference! I want your votes—I want you to elect me as your captain, and bring an era of joy to the Remove, such as the Remove has never seen. I'm out for big things!"

Church gave McClure a glance of significance, and McClure nodded. Handforth was well started, and there was positively no telling when he would stop. Unobtrusively, his chums slipped away, leaving their placards on the ground. In another three seconds they were streaking for the School House.

"Don't think for a moment that I am making idle boasts," continued Handforth, thumping one fist into his other palm. "Elect me, and you elect a winner! Place me at the head of the poll, and the Remove will be governed by a firm, kindly hand—a hand that will never falter in its unerring progress towards the ultimate goal of——"

"Handforth!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "Don't interrupt——"

"What is the meaning of this, Handforth?"

With an effort, Edward Oswald pulled himself together. He found Mr. Crowell standing immediately in front of him—and the master of the Remove was not looking particularly genial. The rest of the Triangle was empty.

"It's all right, sir," said Handforth. "I'm making a speech."

"There is no need for you to tell me the obvious, Handforth!" barked Mr. Crowell. "I am not in the least surprised to find you making a speech to the thin air, for you are the one boy in the school who would do such a thing. But are you aware of the fact that the bell has already sounded?"

"The bell? Which bell, sir?"

Mr. Crowell pursed his lips.

"I am loath to remind you that lessons are considered an essential factor in the life of St. Frank's," he said sarcastically. "It pains me to drag you from this—this improvised platform, Handforth. But I would remind you that unless you are in your place in the Form-room within one minute, I shall detain you for two hours this evening."

"But—but I'm making a speech, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly. "I'm the favourite for the Remove captaincy, sir!"

"I fully appreciate the paramount importance of this campaign," said Mr. Crowell. "At the same time, lessons must receive a slight amount of attention. I am sorry to inflict this nuisance upon you, Handforth, but my duty is clear. And these," he added, glancing at the discarded placards. "Upon my word! Are you responsible for these extraordinary announcements?"

The placards were made of newspaper sheets—several of them pasted together in order to make a thick, durable substance. Words were daubed upon the surface in black enamel, and stood out boldly:

"VOTE FOR HANDFORTH—THE RED-HOT HUSTLER!"

And the other placard bore this legend:

"HANDFORTH—THE CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED—VOTE FOR HIM!"

Mr. Crowell pointed to the latter effusion accusingly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "Are you suggesting, Handforth, that the Remove is suffering from oppression?"

"It's—it's just a slogan, sir——"

"You'll tear it up at once," said Mr. Crowell. "I am responsible for the Remove, and I will not have these innuendoes levelled at my head."

"These which, sir?" asked Handforth. "I haven't levelled anything at your head. I wouldn't dream of such a thing——"

"I am by no means surprised that you are ignorant of the word 'innuendo,' Handforth," interrupted Mr. Crowell tartly. "An innuendo is a suggestion—an insinuation. This—this disgraceful legend is a clear hint that the Remove is oppressed. Unless you can conduct your election campaign in a different way, I shall prohibit the whole thing."

Handforth was staggered.

"But—but I'm the favourite, sir!" he gasped.

"You surprise me, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "If you are elected as temporary captain, you will surprise me still more. I am aware that the boys are foolish and irresponsible—but I rather thing there is a limit to their folly. However, the Form is awaiting us."

He marched off, and Handforth only just managed to escape detention by dodging in at the last possible second. He was bubbling with indignation. These lessons were an unwarrantable interruption. There was simply no other way to describe them. Just when he was getting warmed up to a really good speech this interruption comes along, and ruins everything!



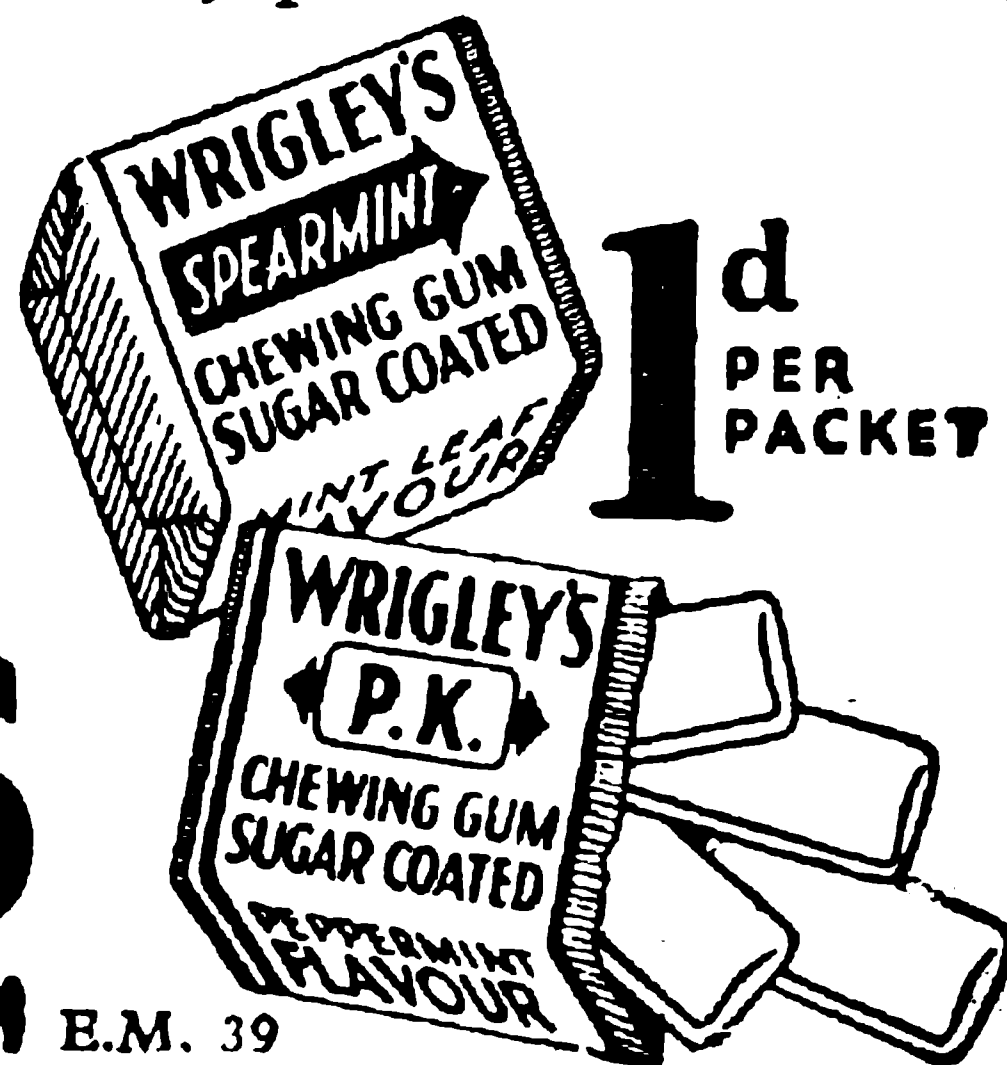
Goal!!!

The score's now even, 2 all . . . the whistle blown for half-time. Half-time for a brief rest and a refresher. That means Wrigley's . . . of course. Nothing like a piece of Wrigley's to refresh you during the game. It keeps the mouth fresh . . . makes you feel alert. Wrigley's helps the digestion, too, and cleanses the teeth. Use it "after every meal."

In two flavours—P.K., pure double-distilled peppermint flavour, and Spearmint, pure mint leaf flavour. Only 1d. a packet, worth many times more for the good it does you.

**MADE IN
GREAT BRITAIN.**

WRIGLEY'S
MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM



He only narrowly escaped detention as it was, for he was inattentive and restless during the afternoon. Fortunately—for Handforth—Mr. Crowell had a headache, and he refrained from starting any arguments. For once the Form-master left Handforth severely alone.

"Good!" said Edward Oswald, as soon as dismissal came. "Now we'll go round and do some canvassing, you chaps. We'll prepare everybody for the big speech. Polling's to-morrow, so we can't waste any time."

"And what about tea?" asked Church grimly.

"Tea?"

"You put it in a pot and pour boiling water over it," explained Church.

"You—you ass!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think I don't know what tea is?"

"Well, you seemed a bit uncertain!" growled Church. "Anyhow, it's tea-time—so we can leave the canvassing until afterwards."

Handforth frowned.

"We shall miss tea this evening," he said firmly. "My plan is to catch all the chaps in their studies. We'll do some vigorous canvassing, and get the electors on my side. There's something more important in this world than guzzling tea and filling ourselves with stodgy bread-and-butter and indigestible cakes! Come on! You're my lieutenants, and you've got to support me!"

"But tea is wonderfully stimulating!" urged McClure. "Once you've had a couple of cups of tea, Handy, you'll be full of vim and go. And nobody can expect to make good speeches on an empty stomach. Your best policy is to have a solid, hearty meal, and prepare yourself for the battle."

"Oh, well, perhaps——"

"Absolutely!" said Church quickly. "You'll never be a success unless you stoke yourself up, Handy. We've got sardines, and fish-paste, and corned beef, and jam, and lemon curd——"

"No!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "You can't tempt me with those things! We're going to do that canvassing now—and tea can wait! We'll start at the end of the corridor, and work upwards."

Church and McClure groaned.

"There's footer practice, too," said McClure. "We've got a game with the Fourth to-morrow, and Pitt's got your name on the list, Handy. You've got to turn out for practice directly after tea——"

"Eh, what's that?" interrupted Handforth. "Who said I've got to turn out for practice?"

"Reggie Pitt."

"And who the dickens is Reggie Pitt?"

"A chap in the West House——"

"I know who he is!" roared Handforth.

"Well, you asked——"

"Who's Pitt?" demanded Handforth curtly. "Who is he? A West House bounder! And he gives me orders, eh? Huh! He's an optimist if he thinks I'm going to obey 'em!"

McClure went red.

"You—you exasperating fathead!" he snapped. "Polling isn't until to-morrow evening—and there's this game on the list before then! Pitt's the skipper—whether you admit it or not! And if you don't turn out for practice, he'll probably cross your name off the list and put somebody else down as goalie."

Handforth laughed.

"Let him try it!" he said fiercely. "By George! Do you think we're going to let a West House idiot order us about? I'm the skipper—or I shall be to-morrow evening. And the team against the Fourth is going to be chosen by me. What's more, I'm going to do that canvassing now."

"Good!" said Church. "Do it!"

"And good luck to you!" added McClure coldly.

They linked arms and marched off.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Where are you chaps going?"

"Tea!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

Hardly a Success!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH took a very deep breath. This wasn't a very good indication for the future!

He—the captain-to-be—ignored and flouted by his own chums! It simply wasn't to be stood! Unless he nipped this sort of thing in the bud at once it might outgrow his powers of control.

He reached the door of Study D just as Church and McClure were entering.

"Just a minute!" he said, in a cold, steady voice. "Are you fellows coming on that canvassing stunt with me, or are you going to spend a week in the school sanny?"

"Neither," said Church. "We're going to have tea."

"You—you insubordinate fatheads!" gasped Handforth, his icy control vanishing. "You traitors! Aren't you my trusted lieutenants?"

"After tea we'll be your slaves!" said McClure generously.

"You'll be my slaves now!" hooted Handforth. "By George! Mutiny! Mutiny—even before I'm skipper! I'll give you one more chance, you—you rebellious lunatics! I'll give you——"

Quite calmly Church shut the door. It slammed in Handforth's face, and nearly caught him on the nose. He stared blankly at the panels as he heard the key turn in the lock.

"Hi!" he howled. "Open this door!"

"After tea!" came Church's voice.

"My only hat! Are you going to obey?"

"After tea!" replied McClure.

"You—you—you——"

"After tea!" said Church and McClure together.

Handforth stood there, clenching his fists, unclenching them, and clenching them again.

His rugged face worked spasmodically, and there was such a glare in his eyes that he looked demented.

"Trouble?" asked somebody sympathetically.

It was the last straw. Handforth turned, and found his minor close by. Willy was standing there with his hands in his pockets, eyeing the scene with approval. Edward Oswald nearly choked. For Willy to witness this tragedy was a sheer disaster.

"Clear off!" he said thickly.

"Five bob!" said Willy.

"Eh?"

"Five bob," repeated Willy calmly. "I just came along——"

Handforth positively mouthed at him.

"Do you expect me to give you five bob now?" he breathed hoarsely. "Unless you're out of this passage in three seconds I'll smash you up!"

"You bully!" said Willy severely. "That's no way to talk to your fragile, defenceless young brother! Just because Church and McClure defy you for once, you needn't threaten me. Good luck to 'em! It's these little explosions that makes life worth living for the poor chaps. They've got to let off the safety valve now and again."

"They've locked me out!" said Handforth fiercely.

"They know something," said Willy, nodding. "But if I was in their shoes, I'd think it was safer to lock you in. And a few lengths of rope wouldn't come in amiss, either. When a chap starts foaming at the mouth, it's time to tie him up!"

"You—you——"

"But don't let me interrupt the happy party," went on Willy. "Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon are waiting for tea—and I've come along to buy the provender. The sooner you whack out that five bob, the sooner you'll be rid of me. I wouldn't dream of making myself a nuisance to anybody."

"You won't get a cent out of me!" panted Handforth furiously.

"I don't want a cent," replied Willy. "I want five bob!"

"I tell you——"

"One dollar!" said Willy patiently.

"Don't insult English money by calling five bob a dollar!" roared Handforth.

"Well, you were talking about cents just now——"

"I don't care what I was talking about!" howled Handforth. "I'm not going to lend you a cent, or a dollar, or five bob, or anything. And there's an end of it. Understand?"

"Yes!"

"That's final!" added Handforth.

"Yes!"

"Absolutely final!" said Edward Oswald triumphantly.

"Good!" said Willy. "You've finished?"

"I have!"

"Then whack out that five bob, and we'll call it quits!" said Willy calmly.

Handforth swayed slightly.

"Quits?" he gasped faintly.

"Yes," said Willy. "We don't want to have any arguments, I suppose?"

His major feebly beat the air, clutched at the doorpost, and produced two half-crowns from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Take 'em!" he breathed. "Take 'em and go!"

"Then I win?" asked Willy, taking them. "Thanks!"

He strolled off, whistling, and Handforth swallowed something which had obstructed his throat. Whenever he tried to master his minor, the result was always the same. There was something absolutely uncanny about Willy. Without getting in the least excited, without exerting himself in the slightest, he invariably got his own way. It wasn't merely tact—it was a gift.

The door of Study D opened, and Handforth started.

"Tea," said Church invitingly. "Come on, Handy—all ready!"

Edward Oswald instinctively clenched his fists. This was better than he had hoped for! His chums had actually played into his hands—and now they were going to pay the full penalty for their insubordination!

He strode into the study and paused.

An intoxicating odour of hot tea assailed his nostrils—hot tea, buttered toast, to say nothing of frying kippers. Church and McClure had been busy during their leader's little argument with Willy!

"Ready?" asked McClure, turning away from the stove, frying-pan in hand. "Where's Handy's plate? Oh, here we are! Good! Come on, Handy—all hot—cooked to a turn. Your tea's poured out, too."

Handforth unclenched his fists, and staggered to a chair. He sat down heavily, and took a gulp of tea in order to steady himself. It tasted good. And the kipper certainly sent forth an appetising aroma.

He looked up. Church and McClure were busying themselves as though nothing had happened. They were cheerful and light-hearted—and even Handforth, with all his warlike nature, found it difficult to slaughter a couple of fellows who were obviously at peace with the world.

Besides, now that he came to think of it, he was jolly thirsty, and the good things on the table were appetising, too. He looked at the kipper, and the kipper gave a little crackle.

"Oh, well," said Handforth awkwardly. "I mean, tea—— After all, a chap can't afford to miss his meals, can he?"

"I hear that everybody's keen on the meeting to-night," said Church, with rare tact. "It looks as though the whole Remove will turn up. Pass the bread-and-butter, Mac."

"Good thing we had those kippers in," said McClure. "I spotted 'em this morning, when the fish wagon was taking a supply of stuff round to the back. You can always trust me to know a good kipper."

"Best we've had for weeks," said Handforth approvingly. "After all, why have a

lot of squabbling and bickering? Jolly good of you chaps to get tea ready so quickly. 'We can start on the canvassing stunt as soon as we've done.'

"That's just the idea," agreed Church, nodding.

And there was peace in Study D. Long association with Handforth had left Church and McClure with an uncanny gift of perception. Handforth fondly believed that he was their leader—but when it came to a pinch, they could make him eat out of their hands!

On the Job.

"**E**VERY election," said Handforth, a little later, "is won by persistency and doggedness. The fellow who takes things for granted, and who waits for the votes to come in, gets left behind. The fellow who goes out for victory, and fights every inch of the way, is the winner."

"Hear, hear!" said Church mechanically.

"I know—because my pater is an M.P.," went on Handforth. "He spent thousands of quids on his campaign, and spoofed the people into returning him to Parliament. He made all sorts of promises, and all he does now is to sit in the House of Commons and go to sleep."

McClure grinned.

"And I suppose you're going to adopt the same tactics?" he asked.

"Absolutely!" said Handforth firmly.

"You're going to spoof the Remove into electing you?"

"Eh?"

"And then you're going to sit still and go to sleep?"

"You silly ass, St. Frank's isn't the House of Commons!" snapped Handforth. "There'll be no chance of going to sleep when I'm captain. The whole Form will be alive from the first fellow to the last. I mean to make all sorts of changes. As soon as I'm skipper I'll drive some discipline into the lot of you! I'll have obedience, or there'll be trouble!"

"Wouldn't it be as well to get elected first?" suggested Church, as he pushed his tea-cup aside. "And what about that canvassing idea? I don't want to disturb you, old man, but time's getting on——"

"By George, yes!" interrupted Handforth, rising to his feet. "We'll start with Study A, and work upwards. Then we'll go along to the West House, and canvass the chaps there. My idea is to put a few quiet arguments forward, and then consolidate the position at the meeting, later."

"It's a good idea," said Church, "but the fellows are so pig-headed. You must be prepared for opposition, old man. And it's quite likely they'll treat you as a joke, too."

Handforth's chums would be heartily thankful when the election was over. It was an absolute certainty, in their opinion, that Reggie Pitt would be elected as temporary skipper. Handforth didn't stand a chance in a thousand, but he would never admit until he saw the actual result of the

poll with his own eyes. Church and McClure looked forward to another day of campaigning with many misgivings. This sort of thing had a wearing effect.

But to tell Handforth that he was exerting his energy for no purpose would have been fatal. The only thing was to let him run on, and discover the dreadful truth for himself. Experience was the only teacher which Handforth understood.

"Well, come on!" he said briskly.

Fortified by a hearty tea, Church and McClure were ready for the canvassing round. They arrived at Study A, and Handforth paused. He frowned.

"I'm not sure that I want the votes of these cads," he said dubiously.

"You can't afford to scorn anybody's vote," said Church. "Better try 'em."

Handforth grunted, and opened the door. Bernard Forrest, the cad of the Remove, hastily threw a cigarette into the fireplace, and Gulliver and Bell dived to the window.

"Smoking, eh?" said Handforth curtly, as he strode in. "You disgusting rotters!"

"Who told you to come in here?" demanded Forrest, with a glare. "Clear out, confound you! We don't need any rot from you, Handforth!"

"You won't get any rot—but you'll get a few biffs!" roared Handforth aggressively. "By George! Caught red-handed! Shut that door, Church! Get ready to fight! We're going to lick these worms to jelly!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" breathed Church.

"What?"

"Don't forget you came here to canvass for votes——"

"My hat, yes!" said Handforth, starting. "I'd forgotten that!"

"Votes, eh?" said Forrest, catching the words. "Oh, certainly! We'll give you two each, Handforth, old man! It'll be simply lovely to have you skipper. You can rely on us all along the line."

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver and Bell promptly.

Handforth regarded them suspiciously.

"You'll vote for me?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" retorted Forrest & Co.

Handforth unclenched his fists. After all, he couldn't very well smash up these chaps after they'd promised to vote for him. He turned to the door again and nodded.

"All right," he said. "Good! But as soon as I'm skipper I shall put down this smoking with a firm hand. That's understood!"

He went out, and a cackle followed him as he closed the door.

(Handy is determined to win the forthcoming election—although his way of canvassing support is certainly not tactful. You will find next week's chapters of this fine School Story packed with sensation and rollicking humour.)

The Editor Chats With His Pals!

My dear Chums,
—We haven't much space for ourselves this week, so I must get over the ground as quickly as possible. First of all, a word about our Companion Papers' Grand Free Gifts.

Of course, you know something about it. Why, all the world's talking about this record-breaking Free Gift Scheme. The papers participating in it are, the "Ranger," "Magnet," and "Modern Boy." Buy one or more of these this week and you will be pleasantly surprised.

* * *

Well, I think E. S. Brooks has surpassed himself with this new series of detective-thrillers. I bet you've never read anything quite so amazing, sensational and weird. Next week's story is a "snorter." From beginning to end it's packed with high-speed thrills and astounding adventures. It's entitled: "The Land of the Lost!"

There will also be further chapters of our new story of St. Frank's in next week's issue.

* * *

There are many annuals on the bookstalls and newsagents at the present moment. Now let me put you wise to those which I know are the best. The following annuals will suit boys and girls of all ages:

- "The HOLIDAY Annual," price 6/-;
- "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories," price 2/6;
- "The HOBBY Annual," price 6/-;
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These annuals are also obtainable through Christmas Clubs, particulars of which will be willingly given by your newsagent.

* * *

PEN PALS.

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Herbert M. Lewis, P.O. Box 174, Bloemfontein, South Africa, wants correspondents interested in aviation, navigation and wireless.

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D. O'Donoghue, John's Gate Street, Wexford, Ireland, wants correspondents in Wales, Canada and Johannesburg.

A. R. Acton, Windmill Lane, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, wants members for the Cosmopolitan Stamp Club.

Kenneth H. Walker, Langthorns, Little Canfield, Dunmow, Essex, wants to hear from readers who are keen on the old yarns.

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READERS' PRIZE JOKES.

Boss (to new employee): "Has the foreman told you what to do?"

New employee: "Yes; I've got to wake him up when the boss comes round."

(S. G. Wright, 3, Bedford Place, Terrell Street, Kingsdown, Bristol—a penknife.)

First Hunter: "Look, a lion's track."

Second Hunter: "You go and see where it went, and I'll see where it came from."

(D. Kervin, Creffield, Furze Hill Road, Bareham Wood. A penknife.)

Bill: "Say, Pat, is that the same car you had last spring?"

Pat: "The same, bedad, all except the engine, the body, and three new wheels."

(J. Coad, 39, Hoddle Street, Abbotsford N.9, Melbourne, Australia. A grand prize.)

The Plateau of Paril!

(Continued from page 34.)

Sky Wanderer, which stood so perfect, moored securely to the ground.

Crash crash crash!

The great monoplane rocked; she was veered bodily round.

Two of the diplodoci fell, lumbering over. One, in falling, smashed against the tail of the Sky Wanderer, and there followed a crumpling, splintering sound which was awful to listen to. Clumsily the diplodocus got to its feet and lumbered off. The others had gone, too.

The very ground shook as the monsters stampeded away—now terrorised. The Beast Men, too, were conspicuous by their absence.

"'Tis ill, evil work!" muttered Umlosi. They ran on; and even now Nelson Lee kept a sharp look-out.

"Guv'nor," choked Nipper, "they've done it! The camp's wrecked!"

They ran in, leaping over the crumpled and fallen steelwork.

The 'plane was lying sagging to starboard. Her landing carriage on that side had been swept away; an enormous rent showed in the side of her hull. Both wings were crumpled and half wrecked. The tail was sagging down, smashed nearly in twain.

"A wreck!" muttered Nelson Lee. "Our means of getting back to civilisation has gone. Like these creatures who have lived their lives on the Island Above the Clouds, we are doomed to remain."

THE END.

(Stranded on the Island Above the Clouds — what a terrible fate for Nelson Lee & Co. What is going to happen next? See next week's thrilling story: "The Land of the Lost!")



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