THE PAPER FOR DETECTIVE-THRILLERS!

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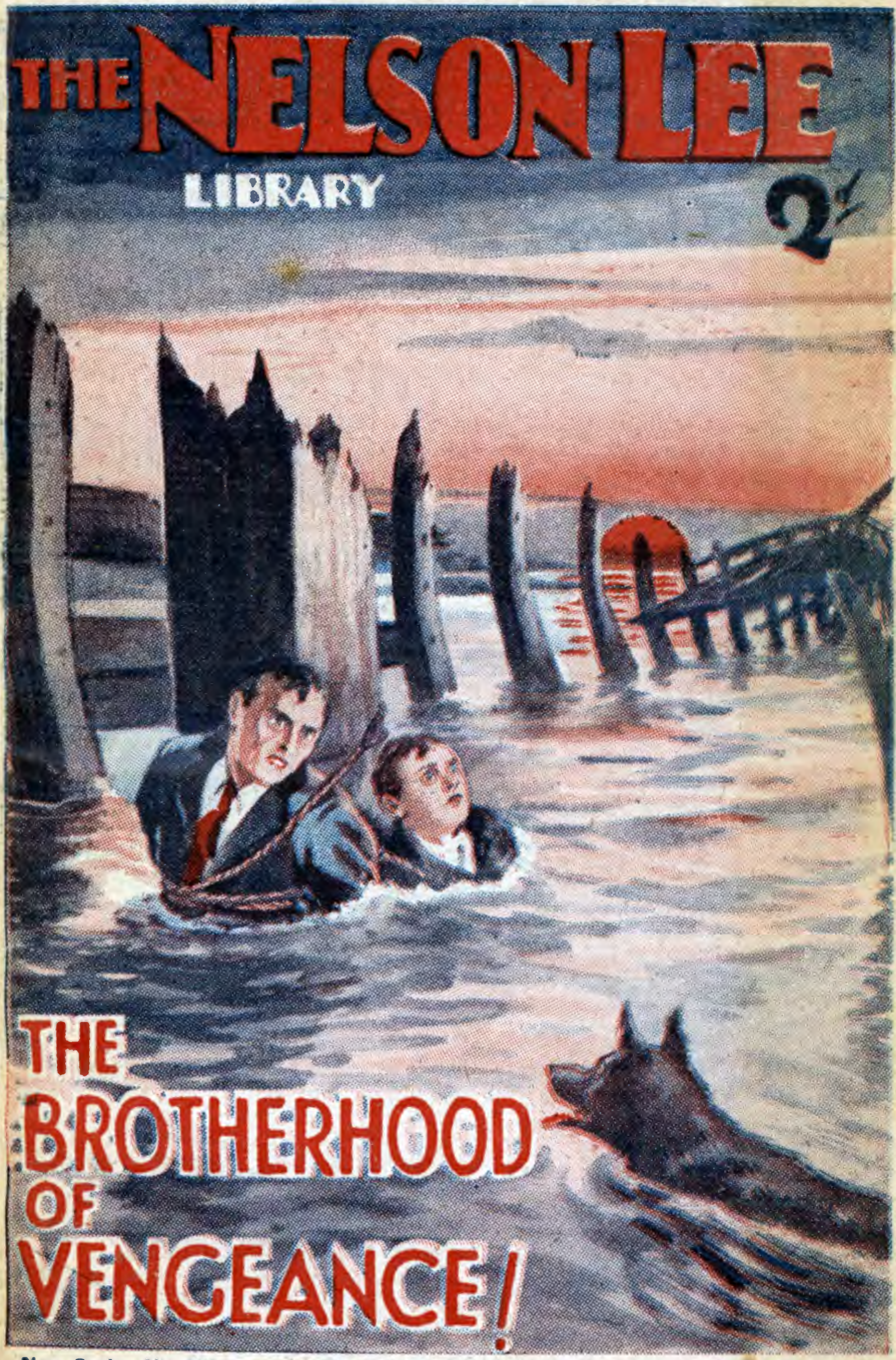


THE BROTHERHOOD OF VENGEANCE!

New Series No. 128. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. July 2nd, 1932

When East Meets West! A Thriller of Oriental Mystery . . .

THE BROTHERHOOD

CHAPTER 1.

Ben Silver Comes Home!

"BELSTROPE—Belstrope!"

A porter bawled the name as the train came to a halt beside the little platform. A seafaring man swung his kitbag and a suit-case from the rack, opened the carriage door, and stepped out on to the platform. He was the only passenger to alight, and he glanced along the station towards the entrance.

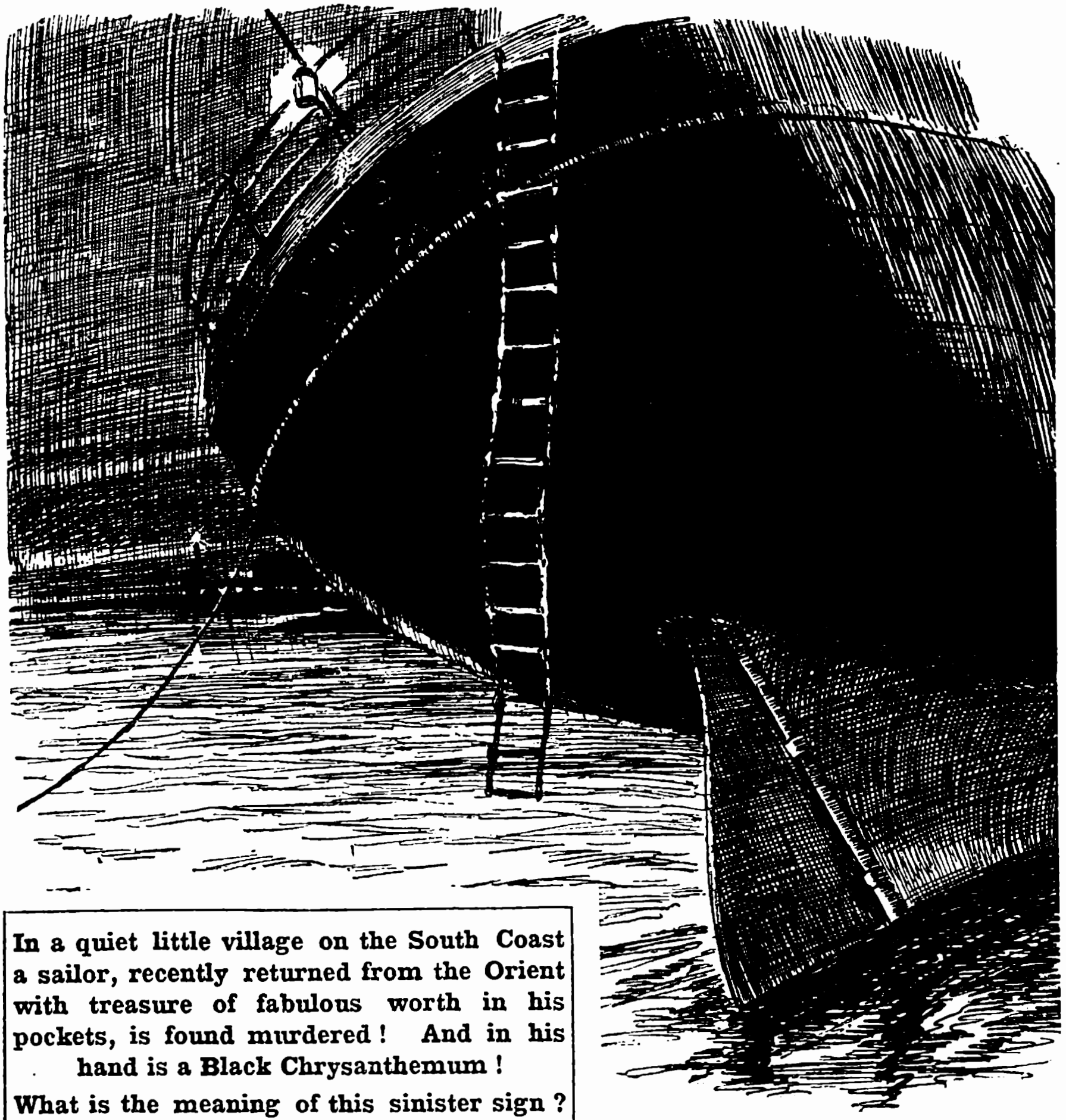
A porter had taken his stand at the narrow gate, and beside him stood a fragile figure of a woman in sober grey. Under the little bonnet, silver-white hair peeped, and the face was lined and worn. The big seaman strode towards her.

"Mother!"

A deep voice spoke the word, and just for a moment there was a slight pause. Then

. . . Starring Nelson Lee, and His Plucky Young Assistant, Nipper!

# of VENGEANCE!



In a quiet little village on the South Coast a sailor, recently returned from the Orient with treasure of fabulous worth in his pockets, is found murdered! And in his hand is a Black Chrysanthemum!

What is the meaning of this sinister sign? How did the seaman meet his death and why? Such are the baffling riddles that confront Nelson Lee, the famous detective, who is called in to solve the mystery.

a thin hand went out and rested on the strong arm.

"Is it— is it really you, Ben?"

The kit-bag and suit-case had been dropped, and the sailor came to a halt.

"And you don't know me then? Well, well! That's pretty hard luck on the lad who ran away on the fifteenth of November, eighteen years ago, because a rabbit came his way that ought to have known better!"

Into the faded face there leapt a sudden light, and the doubt in the eyes faded.

"My boy—my Ben!" the mother-voice whispered, holding out her arms.

The sailor lowered his head, and the thin lips pressed a kiss on his cheek. His eyes were hidden from view, and the ghost of a smile that flickered across his lips had vanished when he raised his head again.

"So there you are, Ben Silver?" a hearty voice said. "Bless my heart, I'd never have known you."

The sailor turned round. A black-bearded man, wearing the uniform of stationmaster, came forward, holding out his hand.

"It is—it is Mr. Taylor?"

The black-bearded man gave a shout of delight.

"Now, who'd have believed that?" he cried. "Fancy remembering me after all these years! I wouldn't have recognised you, Ben. Your hair is the same colour, and so are your eyes, but you don't seem to have grown much. I always thought you'd have been a six-footer at least."

The returned sailor shrugged his shoulders.

"The sea keeps us small, mister," he returned. "We broaden out a bit instead."

He handed his ticket to the porter and lifted his kit-bag.

"I'll send a man along with suit-case," the stationmaster put in.

Arm in arm, mother and son left the station, and turned through the little town. It was about a mile to the little cottage on the edge of the woods. They had followed a winding road that led them past the estuary. The tide was just beginning to turn, and the long, flat stretches of muddy sand were glimmering beneath the rays of the setting sun.

A flat-bottomed boat put out from a little creek, and the longshoreman paddled slowly into mid-stream.

"Do you remember old Saul?" the mother asked. "He still looks after his lobster pots." She laughed tremulously. "You were a great friend of his in the old days, Ben, weren't you?"

"Yes."

The sailor shifted his kit-bag, and they turned into the little garden towards the rose-clad cottage. Above the porch a latticed window stood open, and the faint breeze had wafted a strip of curtain out through the window.

"I suppose I'll have my old room, mother—above the porch?"

"It's all ready for you, Ben."

The sailor laughed.

"I used to get out by way of the porch," he said, "drop down into the garden when you were fast asleep."

"Ay, you were a wild boy in those days, my son," came the meek response. "But I always loved 'ee, Ben, and the day have been sore and long since you left me."

Moved by a sudden sympathy, the man put his arm round the fragile form and gave it a warm pressure. It was perhaps the kindliest deed he had done that long day, and may have been recorded in his favour.

"Well, I'm back, now, mother; and all's well, as they say at sea."

The table was laid for supper; and, after the man had washed and changed into a lighter jacket, he came down into the little kitchen and seated himself at the table. A heap of scones, freshly baked, a pot of honey, and a roll of golden butter, made his hungry eyes brighten.

"I made them specially for you, dear," said the fragile woman. "You used to say that no one could make scones like me."

The stranger tackled the heaped plate with a healthy appetite. It was only when the plate was almost empty that he noted the fact the woman opposite him, watching his every movement with faded, loving eyes, had not eaten anything.

"Aren't you hungry, mother?"

She came back from her dreams with a little start.

"No, Ben. I—I made them all for you."

She nodded towards the plate.

"A great healthy man like you can eat them all," she added.

"But you must have something."

To please him she broke off a corner of one of the scones and nibbled at it. His eyes travelled round the kitchen, and he noted that the place was very bare. There were marks on the shelves where crockery had stood, but now the shelves were empty. The fire was out, and a sense of poverty hung over the kitchen—an atmosphere of want that could not escape him.

He leaned back in his chair suddenly.

"How much money have you got, mother?"

The question seemed to frighten the old lady.

"Oh, I'm all right, Ben!"

"How much money have you got, mother?"

The words were repeated slowly, and into the wrinkled face there came a look of distress.

"It's been a very bad winter, Ben, and I was unlucky. I had to sell the field and the pigs. But it'll all come right in time, Ben, and you needn't worry."

The man pointed to the table.

"Honey, butter, jam, scones," he said, in a low tone. "All for me. Have you had anything to eat to-day, at all?"

He leaned forward in his chair, and his eyes were fixed on the faded face. It twitched for a moment, then the tears came into the eyes.

"I've been trying to save the rent, Ben," said the woman. "I'm six months behind, and—well, you know the sort of man Jake Sanders is. He—he got an order from the court, and—he was here to-day." She began to sob quietly. "They're coming to-morrow to—to turn me out, Ben," she whispered. "Out of my old home, after forty years!"

The man, listening to her, clenched his fists, and again the small spark of chivalry in a turbulent, selfish nature, leaped into life.

"How much is it, mother?"

"Eight pounds, son!"

The heavy brows were knit in thought.

"Jake Sanders lives farther up the road, doesn't he? Is his daughter, Ruth, still with him?"

The mother looked across at her son.

"Yes, she's still there, Ben. And she's done all she could for me—bless her sweet heart. But Jake always hated me, and you know why. I wouldn't marry him, and he never forgave your father and me."

The man opposite laughed shortly.

"Yes; I know that, mother; and I'll attend to Mr. Jake Sanders. His rent will be paid this very night."

"Oh, Ben!"

The woman leaned forward eagerly, and the man arose to his feet.

"I'm a rich man, mother," he said, a note of triumph in his hard voice. "And in a few days I'll prove that to you. But I've got enough money now to pay off that old shark. We won't leave this cottage."

It was as though the sun had suddenly broken through a storm cloud. To prove his ability to do what he said, the man reached for his cap.

"He's got a big building yard now, Ben," the woman added. "He had prospered in the world; his sort always do."

With that to guide him it was not difficult for the man to locate Jake Sanders. He passed the big yard with its heaps of stacked timber and bricks. Beside the yard was a half-finished house, with its scaffolding and ladders. A hundred yards up the road stood a white-painted house with a big garden and a garage.

"That's it, I suppose," the man muttered to himself, as he came to a halt at the gate.

He seemed to hesitate longer than was necessary, and his brows were drawn together as though he was making an effort of memory. At last, having evidently satisfied himself, he moved up the gravelled path and rang the bell. A trim maid-servant answered the summons, and the sailor asked for Mr. Sanders.

"What name, sir?" the servant asked.

"Ben Silver," was the reply.

He was led into a garishly-furnished study, redolent of varnish and paint. The sailor stopped with his peaked cap in his hand, waiting; and when the door opened behind him, he turned round.

A thin, gaunt-faced man stood there watching him. The eyes were black, small and keen, and the nose was thin and hooked. There was something of the hawk in the man's face and his expression was by no means a friendly one.

"You mean to tell me that you're Benjamin Silver?"

"That's right!"

The builder flung back his head and laughed.

"Don't believe you," he grated. "I've good cause to remember that young hound—and you're not him. The eyes maybe, and the hair, are all right—but Ben was a long, thin lad—and—and——"

"I didn't come here to be identified," the sailor rapped out. "There are others who are in a better position to judge. I can settle my business with you in about two minutes." He thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a worn note-case. "There's eight pounds due to you, rent for my mother's cottage," he added. "Just write out the receipt now."

A look of rage leaped into the black eyes.

"You—you have come here to pay Mrs. Silver's rent, have ye?" snapped the landlord. "And your trying to make out you're her son. But you can't deceive me, you rogue."

"That's nothing to do with it," retorted the sailor. "There's the rent for the cottage—eight pounds. If you don't care to give me a receipt I can settle it in another way. I know enough about the law to put me right in this little case. You want your rent—here it is. And it doesn't matter a tinker's curse who gives it to you, either."

He was in the right, and the listener knew it. The rage in the hawk face deepened into a cloud.

"I want that cottage," he grated, "and I don't care about the rent. Eight pounds is nothing to me, but the cottage is a great deal. Why should you interfere? Take your mother away, if you are Ben Silver, and let me have the cottage."

This sudden payment of the rent had upset some grim plan of his own, and he was annoyed. But the sailor simply shrugged his shoulders and took a pace back from the desk.

"You'll never get that cottage this side of the grave," was the sturdy response. "I've come back here, and here I mean to stay. And I've got more money—or at least, money's worth, than you or anyone else is likely to get."

There was an arrogant, fighting note in his voice, and his eyes lit up. Jake Sanders dropped into the chair behind the desk.

"You say that you're Ben Silver," he began again. "Have you any proofs?"

His attitude had altered now, a fact that his listener was quickly conscious of, having changed from the open doubt to hesitancy.

"Oh, I can prove it to you soon enough," came the reply, "and as you are the first to ask for proofs, you might as well see them. I mean to settle here, and I'll save a lot of trouble. Just glance at these papers."

He drew a heap of papers from his pocket-book. They were discharge papers from various shipping lines, many of them from strange ports all over the world. In themselves they were eloquent testimony of the turbulent, adventurous spirit of their owner. There were, also, one or two letters, addressed to Ben Silver, and a birth certificate and passport, made out some years ago. Finally, there was a receipt from the shipping company at Cape Town, proving that Benjamin Silver had taken a passage in their liner.

Every one of the documents was closely scanned by the landlord, and he handed them back at last, with a grunt. The sailor folded them and returned them to his pocket.

"Now, I'll thank you for that receipt, and we'll call this little visit ended," came the calm remark.

There was nothing left for Jake Sanders to do but comply with the request. His dream of revenge and avarice was vanishing. He had had plans about that cottage. It stood in one of the best positions outside the town, and a wealthy syndicate had hinted that a hotel and golf links might easily be erected there, if the cottage and its six acres could be bought. But the lease had over thirty years to run, yet, and it was only sheer poverty that could drive Susan Silver out of her home. And it was annoying, just as it seemed that she would have to go, her ne'er-do-well son should come home rolling in money. But legally, there was no way out of it.

Jake signed the receipt, but did not hand it over.

"You've made your fortune, eh?" he continued, with a sneer. "And what sort of figure might we put to your fortune—the fortune of a man who has been a rolling stone apparently?"

The hard eyes of the man in front of him suddenly lit up.

"If you were to say thirty thousand pounds you wouldn't be far wrong!"

There was a world of grim triumph in the words, and they brought Jake Sanders to his feet.

"Thirty thousand pounds!" he gasped. "I don't believe it!"

A loud laugh rang through the room.

"No one is asking you to do that, Mr. Sanders," came the retort. "You asked me a question and you got your reply. Now, hand over the receipt, and we'll put an end to this waste of time."

He held out his hand, and the landlord slipped the piece of paper into the extended fingers. The sailor folded the receipt and put it carefully into his pocket-book, then turned to leave the room. But at that moment a knock sounded on the door, and a woman entered.

Although she was in the thirties, there was no denying the beauty of Ruth Sanders. Tall and as straight as a dart, with a wealth of nut-brown hair, and large, tender eyes, there was something about her face that gave it a touch of pathos that was infinitely attractive.

"Oh, I'm sorry, dad! I thought that——"

Jake Sanders arose to his feet, and jerked a finger towards his visitor.

"Don't you recognise Ben Silver, Ruth?" he grated. "You and he were very friendly in the old days."

The woman turned with a little, stifled cry, and stared into the bronzed face of the stranger. The tan had died from the cheeks, and, for the first time, there was unmistakable fear in the blue eyes.

"Ben—Ben Silver?"

"I see that you have forgotten me, Ruth."

He spoke in a strained, hushed voice, and held out his hand. The lovely woman backed away against the door.

"Won't you even shake hands?"

Jake's harsh voice sounded again.

"It's Ben right enough, Ruth," he said, "and he's come back with a fortune. Why don't you be friendly? Shake hands, girl!"

A cold, little palm was extended, and the sailor's fingers closed round it. He pressed the hand, and it seemed to respond.

"I must be going now," he said. "Mother is waiting for me. But no doubt I'll see more of you later on. Good-night!"

The woman had never taken her eyes from his face, and as he passed through the doorway they exchanged one swift glance.

When he was outside in the scented night again, the man removed his peaked cap and mopped the sweat from his brow. He had come through the fiercest ordeal of all, and was not quite sure how he had fared. But as he walked on towards the cottage, a change came over him. The vision of Ruth Sanders returned to his eyes, and he visualised the curve of the soft cheek, and the fall of the long, heavy eyelashes.

And a great temptation took him by the throat—a temptation so great that his half-savage nature could not fight with it. He came to a halt in the darkness, and he laughed suddenly.

"Why not?" he muttered. "I am Ben Silver—by the papers and the birth-certificate. And all that belongs to Ben Silver also belongs to me!"

He had made a solemn promise a few weeks before— a promise that he had meant to fulfil, but now temptation stepped in, and calmly and deliberately he had made up his mind to go back on his word.

He went on and entered the cottage. The mother was waiting for him with a steaming cup of coffee ready, and after he had told her of the success of his mission and had handed her the receipt for the rent, the faded face lit up with joy. Then she remembered.

"There's a letter for ye, Ben," she said. "It came by the nine o'clock post. I forgot all about it."

The sailor leaped to his feet as she handed him the large envelope.

"A letter for me?" he breathed, his lips twitching.

He went upstairs into his room, and halted as soon as he had closed the door. There was a candle flickering on the little dressing-table—such luxuries as gas and electricity not yet having come out to the cottage from the town. He carried the letter to the light and glanced at it. The address was written in a crabbed scrawl.

"Ben Silver, The Cottage, Mott's Cove, Belsthrope."

The man gazed at the envelope for a long moment. He noted that the postmark was Saltport, and the letter had only been posted that morning. In other words, within a few hours of his leaving Southampton.

Crouched in the shadow of the trees, Nipper watched with bated breath the figure in the clearing. It was a girl, and she was digging—with desperate haste—a hole in the ground.

It was with an effort that he roused himself and tore open the flap of the envelope. A plain piece of paper was withdrawn, and folded inside it was a crumpled flower.

Very slowly the man spread out the flower beneath the light, and looked at it. It was a black chrysanthemum, its long petals still fresh and moist.

A hoarse groan broke from his lips, and he reeled away from the dressing-table, to drop in a nerveless heap on the edge of his bed. One hand was pressed tight over his heart, and his lips were ashen.

A rustling in the wainscoting made him leap to his feet with a cry of terror. Reaching out, he extinguished the light, and stood in the darkness, listening, every nerve aquiver. Only the heavy beating of his heart broke the stillness, and down his face the cold sweat of terror rolled in an icy stream.

CHAPTER 2.

A Curious Discovery!

RUTH SANDERS was standing on the edge of the woods looking down the narrow pathway that ran through the field to the cottage occupied by Mrs. Silver. The sun had set, and the stars were glimmering in the blue vault of the heavens. Ruth seemed to be suffering from some tense excitement, for she was constantly turning her head, peering first to the right, then behind her where the shadowy woods lay.

Suddenly, a movement at the far end of the field caught her eye, and she caught sight of a slim figure climbing over the gate. The boy came on, and Ruth recognised him. It was young Sam, a son of one of her father's employees, whom she had sent with the letter to the cottage.

Sam came on along the path, and halted in front of Ruth, tugging at the peak of his shabby cap.

"You delivered the letter, Sam?" Ruth said, with a smile.

"Yes, Miss Ruth."

The boy hesitated for a moment.

"I gave it to Mr. Silver, Miss Ruth, and he—he read it. He said there was no answer, except that he was busy and wouldn't be able to come out to-night."

A pained look crossed the fair cheeks of the woman, and she drew herself erect beneath the blow. Sam's watchful eyes were on her and with an effort she succeeded in hiding her feelings.

"Oh, very well, Sam," she said. "It'll do another time."

Sam shot off into the woods, and Ruth followed him at a quieter pace. As she walked onward there gradually arose in her breast a surge of indignation. It was bad enough for him to refuse to come and see her, but to give such a message to a boy! He might have written her a note! It hurt her more than she was prepared to admit.

After all, Ruth Sanders had every right to demand an interview with Ben Silver.

"What does it mean?" she thought, a pain at her heart. "Has he altered after all these years? Were his letters simply—oh, no, I cannot—I will not— believe it!"

Then, glancing back over her shoulder she thought she saw him emerge from the cottage. Her first impulse was to go to him, then her pride made her obstinate, and she turned, and fled madly into heart of the wood until she tripped over a root, and fell so heavily that she lay there stunned for some time, while the night grew on apace.

How long she lay there she never knew, but when she recovered consciousness she found blood on her temple. She headed for home, making up a glib story of an accident to account for her injury.

But there was no need for fabrication. Her father was out, which was remarkable. Jake Sanders was as regular as the clock itself, and ten p.m. usually found him in his bed.

The medicine chest, from which Ruth wanted to get iodine and lint, was in Jake's bed-room. When she entered the room she saw that the bed had not yet been disturbed.

"I wonder what has happened to him?" the girl thought, pausing timidly on the threshold.

The medicine chest stood on the shelf above the fireplace, and having taken the things she needed, she went back to her own room, and after washing her wounds, dressed and bandaged them as best she could. She had just completed her task, when she heard the stairs creak. A heavy footfall sounded, and Ruth, crossing to the gas, extinguished it, standing silent in the darkness, listening.

It was dark in the passage, and she waited until the stumbling figure passed by her door and went on. Ruth slipped out into the passage and was just in time to see her father open the door of his bed-room and step across the threshold. The light in the room shone full on his face, and the expression on it brought a thrill of dread into the heart of the woman.

It was ashen, and the lips were drawn and white. He was hatless and begrimed, and his eyes were staring out of his head. He caught at the door to steady himself for a moment, one lean hand pressed tightly against his heaving chest. His whole aspect was that of a man who had come through some frightful ordeal, and was almost at the end of his strength.

For a moment he stood thus, then a staggering rush saw him into his room. As he passed from her sight, Ruth noted some soft object drop from his hand on to the slip mat outside the door. Then the door closed, and she was in darkness again.

What could have happened to Jake Sanders? Where had he been, and what had he done?

She moved along the passage slowly, and halted outside the closed door to listen. There came to her ears the quick, heavy breathing of the old man inside the room. She heard him stumble against some piece of furniture, and she stretched out her hand to open the door. Then the bed creaked heavily, and she knew that he had flung himself upon it.

Ruth was trembling now with a fear that she could not define. She dared not enter the room, and she had to summon all her strength to turn away and start back for her own room. As she did so her foot touched some round, soft object lying on the mat. She stooped and picked it up.

It was soft and silky to the touch of her fingers, and she went back into her room, and reaching her bed, struck a match and lit the gas. She found that it was a square of silk that she had picked up. It had been twisted into a tight rope, and she unwound it slowly. The silk was white, but, as it unfolded, Ruth noted that there was a pattern woven in the centre of the square.

She leaned nearer the gas, and smoothed out the soft folds, examining the pattern. It was a hand, fashioned out of red thread, and in the closed finger was a flower, in black silk—a chrysanthemum!

As she looked down at it she noted that one corner was folded back. She smoothed it out—and a red stain dyed her fingers. A thrill of horror ran through her, and she dropped the scrap of silk. It was blood that was on the edge of the handkerchief!

A sudden feeling of alarm came to her, and she stooped and lifted the square of silk again. A brooding menace seemed to come to her, and she felt as though she was standing on the threshold of some grisly adventure. Her father's exhaustion and the terror on his face hinted that something out of the ordinary had happened. She felt afraid, and the primitive instinct came to her. She must hide that silken handkerchief!

Ruth unscrewed the round, wooden knob above the bedpost, and twisting the handkerchief into a tight ball, she thrust it down into the hollow interior, then the knob was replaced, and tightened into position again.

Her sleep that night was uneasy, and not until morning did she sleep at all soundly, and then it was only to be aroused by the servant banging on her door.

"Miss Ruth! Miss Ruth!"

Ruth slipped from her bed and fastened her dressing-gown round her white shoulders.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Something terrible has happened, miss," came the voice of the maid. "Mrs. Silver has just sent a message down to say that Ben—Ben is dead!"

The room swung round in front of Ruth for a moment, then she reached the door and flung it open.

"Dead in his room, Miss Ruth," the frightened servant went on. "It was Tom Wilson who brought the news. He's gone on to tell the police and get a doctor, but he thought that you wouldn't mind going up to see poor Mrs. Silver. She be in a terrible state."

Ben Silver dead! That burly, broad-shouldered man who had faced her father so defiantly—dead! A pulse beat in the woman's throat for a moment and a dry sob broke from her lips.

"All right, Ann, I'll go up to Mrs. Silver as soon as I'm dressed."

Ten minutes later Ruth was hurrying along the road to the little cottage beside the wood. She entered the kitchen to find the grey-haired old lady bowed and helpless in her chair. When the faded eyes alighted on the slender, upright figure of Ruth, a wailing cry broke from the aged lips.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" sobbed the heart-broken mother.

Ruth sped across the kitchen and dropped on her knees beside the thin, huddled heap in the chair.

"It can't be true," she broke out. "Oh, it's impossible! He looked so fit and well."

Mrs. Silver clung to her for a moment.

"He's up there," she moaned. "I went to waken him this morning and—and saw him. I haven't touched him, dear. I—I couldn't. But I know he's dead—I know he's dead!"

Ruth drew away and rose to her feet.

"I'll go and look," she said, hurrying across towards the stairs.

The door of the room above the porch was wide open, and as she crossed the threshold Ruth caught sight of its occupant. Ben Silver's body was lying beneath the opened window, face downwards. The limp hands were outstretched, and the legs drawn up in an attitude that was unmistakable.

"Ben!"

The low whisper came from Ruth's lips, and she moved across the room.

"Ben—oh, Ben!"

She sank beside the body, and lifted the heavy hand. It was cold to her touch, and the slender woman shivered. One limp arm lay by her side, and she lifted it. The shirt sleeve fell back, revealing the brown, powerful forearm.

For a moment Ruth looked down at the arm, then suddenly her eyes seemed to light up. She bent her head and lifted the arm, gazing at it for a long moment. And across her face there flashed a look of wonder and amazement—tinged with a great relief.

She looked at the motionless figure again, and noted how death had come to it while it was twisted into a mask of agony and fear. There was no mistaking the expression. The death that had come to the broad-shouldered man had been evidently expected. For the terror of its coming had left its stamp on the ashen face.

The woman lowered the head softly and drew herself erect. She saw that the window was right in front of her, and the body was lying immediately beneath it. Thrusting up from the outside were the supports and rungs of a long ladder, and the lower half of the window was wide open.

Ruth leaned forward and glanced at the ladder. On the side of one of the supports, standing out clearly against the dull grain of the wood, was a painted sign—J. Sanders, Builder.

The lips of the woman went white as she stared at the letters, and the meaning of them dawned upon her. It was one of her father's ladders that stood there against the opened window—a mute witness to the method in which the occupant of the room had met his death. A mute witness that might——

The terror on the face of the dead was reflected on the white, lovely countenance of the living!

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee's New Case!

NELSON LEE, the famous detective, Nipper, and Wolf, the Alsatian, arrived at Belsthrope, although they knew nothing whatever of the crime that had been committed in the cottage down by the wood. In actual fact, Nelson Lee's visit was more in the nature of obliging an old friend, and he thought that the trip would be a change for Nipper. Apart from making a few inquiries and drawing up a report, the detective did not anticipate that he would do much work in that part of the world.

The fates, however, decreed otherwise. Nelson Lee wanted to find out all there was to know about a certain man in Belsthrope, and he went straight to the police station, where he met Inspector Freeman, an old acquaintance. Freeman had once been a constable in London, and had come up against the detective, and had helped him in a difficult case. Owing to bad health, Freeman had managed to be transferred to Belsthrope, and now his eyes lit up with genuine pleasure at the sight of the detective, and he was only too willing to help.

"I'll do anything I can for you, Mr Lee," he said. "Although I'm a busy man just now, having a murder on my hands."

"Well, I shan't detain you long," replied Nelson Lee. "I'm here to make inquiries concerning a man of the name of Benjamin Silver. Do you know him?"

Freeman staggered back a pace and stared at Lee.

"How on earth did you get hold of that name?" he gasped, eyeing Lee as though he were a wizard.

"What's the matter with the name?"

"Why, it's Benjamin Silver who has been murdered, sir, and it's his case that's worrying me, just now! It's uncanny, Mr. Lee. I was just thinking I wanted a man

like you to help me, and then you walk in and ask after the murdered man! How on earth did you get to know about it?"

"I know nothing about it," replied Lee. "I came down here to oblige Van Thol, one of the richest and most famous art dealers in the world. This Benjamin Silver sent him a large ruby in an antique casket, asking him to make an offer for the ruby, and saying that he had plenty more precious stones to sell, if Van Thol was open to bargain for them. Now, Van Thol sees at once that the ruby is worth a considerable sum of money, but that the casket, which Ben Silver does not seem to value, is worth many times more. In fact, the old casket is practically priceless, being extremely old, and probably the only one of its kind in the world. Van Thol is willing to buy the casket and all the jewels, but he wants to be perfectly sure that Silver came by all this treasure honestly. To find that out is a delicate matter, and he came to me. Partly to oblige the baron, and partly to give Nipper a few days by the sea, we came down to see this man Silver, who apparently lives in a cottage with jewels to the value of fifty thousand pounds!"

"Jewels—worth fifty thousand pounds!" groaned the inspector. "Oh, lor', that's worse and worse. I thought it was only a murder—and bad enough at that—but now it seems to be robbery as well!" He drew a deep breath. "Fifty thousand pounds!" he repeated, "and this is the first I've heard of it! Where on earth could he have put them, and what's become of them now?"

"Then you've made a search of his belongings?"

"I went through his sea kitbag and his suit-case with his mother, poor old soul," said the inspector. "We found about fifteen pounds in notes, and that was all, nothing worth talking about."

"You'd better come along to the hotel and have dinner with us," said Nelson Lee. "For it strikes me that your case and my case have similar interests. Baron Van Thol commissioned me to find out where that old casket came from, and now I'll have to find out where the jewels have gone to, before I can satisfy my client."

The inspector rubbed his hands together.

"Then, that's a good piece of good luck for me," he said. "I want all the help I can get on a case like this. I'm fair puzzled over it!"

The landlord of the hotel had exerted himself to provide a good meal, and he certainly had succeeded. Nipper was waiting when Nelson Lee entered, and Wolf, had his wide, brown eyes fixed on the loaded table in a manner that suggested a healthy hunger. The meal began, and Nipper and Nelson Lee listened to the police-official's report of the crime at the cottage.

He had visited the place in the morning, and had found the doctor there. The body had been removed to the little court, but, apart from that the room had been left undisturbed.

Freeman admitted that he had made only a casual examination of the room, for he had to attend the court that day on one or two minor cases at Saltport, and had only arrived back at Belsthrope about six o'clock.

"I just run through his kit with his mother," he said, "but there was nothing there to help me. Silver only came home last Wednesday, four days ago. There was a rumour that he had made a fortune, but there was no hint of it in his kit, so I reckon it just gossip."

Nelson Lee produced the ruby and held it out.

"That stone is worth a good bit," he said, "and from his letter to Van Thol he seemed to have a lot more of them."

"Then goodness only knows where he's hidden them," said the inspector, "for they certainly were not in his kit."

Nelson Lee rested his arm on the table.

"And yet the parcel of jewels cannot be very far away," he pointed out," for Silver wrote to the baron last night, asking him to come down here. The letter was posted in the afternoon, and reached London this morning. If Silver was able to enclose one ruby in the parcel, it suggests that he had the rest of the treasure handy. Then, again, he must have expected the baron to call, and would have to have the stones ready to exhibit."

Freeman nodded.

"That's so," he admitted, "and it makes it all the more mysterious. On the face of it, now, it appears as though there was an object in the crime—robbery."

"You say that he was murdered. How did he meet his death?"

Freeman put his hand to his head.

"A thump on the skull," he explained, shortly. "There is a big bruise on the temple, and the doctor decided that he was killed by a blow from some blunt weapon." He leaned back in his chair. "It's a lonely cottage," he added, "and Mrs. Silver is the only other occupant. She did not hear anything in the night; but then, she's an old woman, and rather deaf."

When the meal was over he rose to his feet and looked at Lee.

"I thought you might like to have a look at the body," he said. "I've got the keys of the place."

It wasn't a very pleasant task to undertake, but Nelson Lee fell in with suggestion. Nipper shook his head when asked to join them.

"I don't feel up to mortuaries to-night, guv'nor," the lad said, with a plaintive sigh. "I think I'll take Wolf out for a stroll along that river that we came over into the station."

"It's the estuary," said the inspector. "And there's a nice walk along it. Just follow the footpath, and you can't go wrong."

He and Nelson Lee left the hotel and went across to the dark, little building where the dead body lay. The inspector entered the chamber first, and lit the gas above the slab, then withdrew the sheet that covered the

inanimate figure. Nelson Lee bent over and looked at the dead man. The expression on the face could not have been mistaken. The marks of fear were too plainly stamped on the rigid countenance.

"He met his death, and knew it was coming," the detective murmured aloud. "His face tells you that."

"That is so," said the inspector, in a low tone.

He watched the detective at work. Nelson Lee lifted the head and examined the bruise above the broad temple, spending a long moment over it. Eventually he stood up and was silent for a few moments before he spoke.

"Is the doctor satisfied that it was a blow that killed this man?"

Freeman leaned forward.

"He examined the body, and could find no trace of any other injury," he pointed out. "There was nothing else to really indicate how he was killed."

"I see."

It was a non-committal remark, and Nelson Lee turned away from the table. A heap of clothes were lying on a side bench.

"He was only half undressed," the inspector went on, "and the bed had not been used."

Nelson Lee went up to the heap, and turned them over—trousers, shirt, and undervest, and a pair of thin, cotton socks. They proved nothing except that the murdered man had been abroad.

"I asked his mother a few questions," said the inspector, "but she knew very little about him. He hadn't spoken very much about himself. Indeed, he had acted rather strangely, for he scarcely stirred out of the cottage during the whole time he was there. That's what makes it so difficult," he added, "for he made neither friend nor enemy when he was here."

Nelson Lee turned away from the clothes, and walked quietly towards the door.

"It certainly does make it more mysterious, and much more interesting," he said. "For it suggests that his murderer must have known more about him than anyone in Belsthrope could have done, in the short time he was living at the cottage."

They left the building together, and the inspector glanced at Nelson Lee.

"The night is still young, sir," he said slyly, "and it's only a couple of miles to the cottage. If you'd like to have a look at the room——"

"Wait a bit," said Nelson Lee, scribbling a message on a page of his notebook. "Send one of your men to the post office with this telegram for Van Thol. Thanks. Now, I don't mind strolling up as far as the cottage, but I don't think we ought to disturb the old lady to-night. I'd rather make my examination in the morning—in daylight."

He was silent for a moment.

"I want to see the ladder and the yard that it was brought from," he added. "You say that it is some distance away, and I'm curious to find out how the ladder was carried to the cottage without anyone noticing it."

"Not a soul knew anything about it," said Freeman. "The foreman came down to the station this afternoon, and made his statement. The ladder was lashed to the scaffolding on the building on Saturday, when they knocked off work. And the foreman swears that no human being could have climbed up to the stage to loosen it; but it's plain that someone did do so, and what's more, carried the ladder half a mile to the cottage."

They reached the cottage and Lee stepped into the garden and glanced at the ladder. It had been moved away from the window now, and was lying along the path. It was a stout, well-made article, and Nelson Lee lifted one end and tried the weight of it.

"No one individual could have carried that ladder so far unaided," he remarked, "so we have made one certainty. There must have been more than one man mixed up in the crime. Where is the place from which the ladder came? I want to go there next."

Twenty minutes brought them to the structure, and as they reached it a man stepped out from behind a heap of bricks and touched his cap to the inspector.

"This is Stubbs, the foreman," said Inspector Freeman. "Joe, here is a gentleman who's come down to have a look into this terrible affair."

"It's fair upset me, sir," Joe admitted. "I can't get over them taking my ladder. We lashed it up on the staging for the week-end and took the small ladder back to the yard. If we didn't do that we'd have all the kids in the town swarming up the ladder. Look here—I'll show you, sir."

He led the way through the heaps of bricks and mortar, and stopped in front of the scaffolding. The platform was, as he said, a good twenty feet above the ground, and the scaffolding itself was attached to the solid base of the building.

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"It ain't as though we left any ropes or spars about," the foreman went on. "There was nothing for a man to cling to, much less climb." He indicated the exact position where the ladder had been tied to the platform above. "They had loosened the ropes instead of cutting them," he went on. "Maybe they didn't like to waste good, stout manilla."

Nelson Lee had walked below the high platform and was examining the brick-work beneath. There was an open frame for a window, and a solid ledge of concrete above it. Freeman saw the detective climb on to the open window space and reach up to the ledge.

Nelson Lee dropped down again with something between his fingers. As he came towards the inspector, Freeman looked at the little tuft between the finger and thumb.

"What is it, sir?" he asked.

Nelson Lee flattened out his palm, and laid the tuft on it. It was hair of a mousy colour, rather thick, and about two inches long.

"Something climbed to that ledge and left a piece of its covering behind," he said. "And quite recently, too. What do you make of it, inspector?"

Freeman glanced closer at the tuft.

"Looks like a billy-goat, sir," he said, with a smile.

Nelson Lee stooped, and sniffed at the bunch of hair.

"Something more active than a goat, even," he said quietly. "That's a monkey, old chap. There's no mistaking the smell."

Joe Stubbs drew a breath of enlightenment.

"You think that a monkey went up to the platform?" he put in.

Nelson Lee pointed out the probabilities of the suggestion. The agile animal could easily leap on the window, thence to the ledge; another huge bound would have seen it grip the bottom of the platform.

"But, dang it, sir, you don't think that a monkey could have carried away a thirty-foot ladder?"

The police official and the detective laughed.

"Hardly," said Nelson Lee, "but it might have carried a rope up, and dropped it over that beam so that its master could pull up a stouter cord and climb up."

Freeman rubbed his hands together.

"I'll bet anything that's just what did happen," he cried. "But where the deuce did the monkey come from? There isn't such a thing in all Belsthrope."

"If you find the monkey you find the man," said Nelson Lee.

He continued his search, but could not find any further traces of the mysterious visitors, and at last he and Freeman went back to the town together. When he reached the hotel, Lee found that Nipper had not returned yet, although it was now close on eleven o'clock.

It was arranged that Nelson Lee and the inspector should go to Mrs. Silver's cottage about nine o'clock the next morning. The coroner's inquest would not start until eleven, and that would give them ample time to make a careful search in the bed-room.

When Inspector Freeman had gone, Lee went into the sitting-room and made himself comfortable in the easy chair. His pipe was on, and he leaned back with half-closed eyes. To an ordinary observer it might have seemed that he was half asleep, but the brain was very busy behind the motionless countenance.

CHAPTER 4.

In the Woods!

IF Nipper had kept the footpath, as Inspector Freeman had suggested, he could never have lost himself, but he allowed Wolf to chase imaginary and real rabbits, and generally enjoy himself. In the end, when the shades of night fell and blotted out the landmarks, Nipper found himself deep in the woods, with only a very hazy notion of the direction in which he ought to return to Belsthrope.

After a time, however, they struck a path that took them down to the stream, and ran between the lapping wavelets and the dense undergrowth on the edge of the wood. It was rough and uneven, and they had to move slowly, for it was pitch dark beneath the overhanging trees, and to trip over a root or stump might mean a header into the cold stream on the left.

"Better be careful than sorry," said Nipper, to himself, as he negotiated a very narrow part of the rambling path.

Wolf had no such fears, and went on ahead. Nipper suddenly found the huge dog standing motionless on the path, its head turned towards the woods, the long thick body stiff.

"What is it, old man?" the youngster whispered.

He moved a pace forward, and there came to him the glimmer of a light from the heart of the thicket ahead. It was the warm glare of an oil lamp, and Nipper went forward slowly. Then he heard, quite distinctly, the bite of a spade into the soft earth, followed by the rustle of loose earth as it was cast aside.

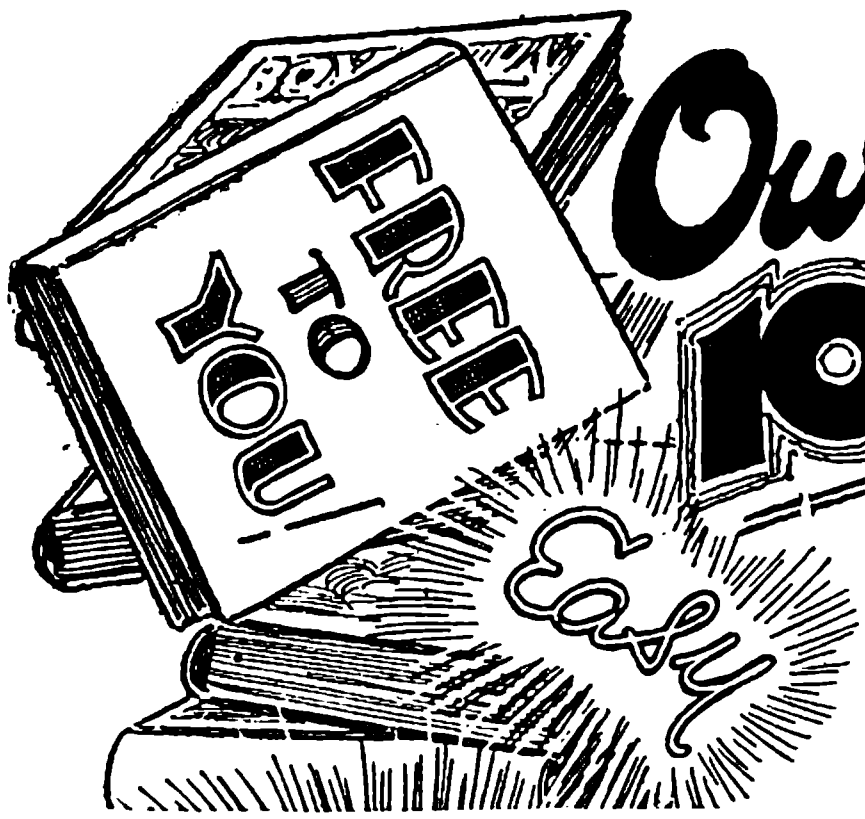
Someone was digging in the thicket, and the lamp was lighting up the ground in front of the digger, whoever he was. It was highly mysterious. Why should anyone take the trouble to dig a hole in the heart of useless brushwood, and after dark, too!

There was no need to caution Wolf. The dog never made a sound as he and Nipper stepped forward noiselessly. The youngster gained a tree from which he could get a clear view of the space lit up by the lamp. And then he had his first surprise, for the figure wielding the spade was a woman!

He saw the slender shape as it bent over the spade, and caught a glimpse of a white,

(*Continued on page* 14.)

This is the Final Week of—



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The Brotherhood of Vengeance!

(*Continued from page* 12.)

intent face. He watched for a few moments, then the spade was thrown aside, and the woman knelt down at the little cavity and drew something from her pocket, glanced about her, then dropped it into the little gap and began to shovel the earth back into the hole with feverish haste.

A minute served to accomplish this part of her task, and she finished up by replacing a huge root of fern on top of the hidden cavity, smoothing the earth over it carefully, and examining the ground before lifting the lamp from the ground where she had placed it.

Nipper watched the woman as she crossed the little clearing and threaded her way amongst the trees, the light swaying and flickering in front of her. He had carefully marked the spot where the woman had been at work, and he headed for it, now. Nipper had his own electric pocket torch, and it came in handy.

He located the bunch of fern fronds and knelt down. A tug saw the roots come up, and wedging the torch in a cross branch of the thorn bush, Nipper set to work with nature's digging implements—his hands.

Suddenly, Wolf, who had been watching all this with the keenest interest, decided that it was part of a game, and took a hand in it. He wedged himself beside the kneeling youngster and getting both paws into the loosened earth, set to work with a will. His powerful paws clawed up the earth in lumps, and Nipper had to stop him at last.

"Steady on, old man," he said, with a chuckle. "I think we've gone deep enough, now."

He searched the hole, and presently found a small paper parcel, which he opened. A folded silk handkerchief was revealed, and the lad stared at it for a moment.

"Is this the treasure?" he muttered.

Another search proved that there was nothing else in the hole. He picked up the scrap of silk once more and unfolded it. He noted that it was very soft and heavy, and he guessed that it had been used as a muffler rather than a handkerchief. Then the design in the centre of it attracted his attention—a red hand, holding a black flower—a chrysanthemum!

"Hallo—what's this?"

He had lifted one corner, and a dark stain on the white edge caught his eye. He held the silk closer and examined the patch of deeper colour. A quick indrawn breath came from his lips.

"Blood!" he said, aloud.

His whole outlook on the affair changed then. He had treated it as a joke, but that tell-tale stain hinted at deeper things.

"Wonder who she was?" Nipper muttered to himself. "It seems to me that I was a mug to let her go off like that. There's more in this than meets the eye."

He straightened up and thought for a moment, then his eye rested on Wolf, and a quick smile crossed his face. He lifted the torch and slipped it back into his pocket, then reached out and patted Wolf on the head.

"Find the lady, old man!" he said. "You understand? Seek!"

He held the handkerchief and scrap of paper beneath the quivering nostrils for a moment.

"Seek, old man!" said Nipper.

Wolf gave a low whimper, and in a moment he was moving off with his head down close to the moist earth. Nipper slipped the leash that he always carried on to the collar, and the big dog began to hunt.

The scent was fresh enough and the task was easy for Wolf. They emerged suddenly into a wide roadway, dropping down over a high bank. The drop was so unexpected that Nipper very nearly measured his length on the hard surface of the road, and the leash slipped from his fingers, with the result that Wolf, now hot on the scent, and straining forward, suddenly found himself free. He darted across the road and vanished through the hedge on the opposite side, before Nipper could stop him.

The lad made a rush forward and scrambled over the hedge into the field beyond.

"Wolf—Wolf!" he whispered.

He heard a rustling on the left and whipped round to follow. He was in a cornfield, nearly waist deep in the tall growth, and progress was difficult. He pushed on, and just cleared the corn when there came to his ears a shout, followed by a deep bark. Wolf had evidently found something, and there was trouble ahead.

"Confound the idiot!" Nipper muttered, breaking into a run. "What's he got up to, now?"

He reached a white-painted fence, and saw a house beyond it. There was an open gate close to him, and he rushed towards it. There was a subdued crash from in front of him, and as he leaped through the gate a dark huddle of moving shapes came rolling out from a high laurel hedge.

A man's voice, hoarse with rage, came to him and the deep snuffling breathing that Nipper knew so well. Darting towards the struggling heap, Nipper flung himself bodily into the fray. His fingers groped about, and finally found a hold on the stout collar of the dog.

Wolf was lying flat across the chest of a writhing, struggling form, which kicked and struck at him in a fury that was more of fear than anything else.

"All right, sir—all right—I've got him," Nipper cried, dragging the dog away from the gasping man.

A smothered oath sounded, and the prostrate figure gathered itself up into a sitting position.

"What the dickens does this mean?" a thin, savage voice snapped out. "Is this your dog?"

"Yes, I'm very sorry——"

The man was on his feet now, and he was fairly trembling with rage.

"You're sorry, are you, hang you!" came the growled response. "You'll be danged sorrier before you're through. That dog made a savage attack on me, and I'll make you pay for it."

He leaned forward and caught at Nipper's arm. From Wolf's deep throat there came a low, warning note.

"I shouldn't do that, if I were you," said the lad quietly, tightening his hold on the collar. "If you've been hurt you'll be compensated—but don't try any violence. I've never known Wolf to attack anyone before, and he has certainly never bitten anyone in his life."

He looked at Jake Sanders—for that was the man—as he spoke. There were no traces of injury on the man, as far as could be seen in the light that streamed into the night from one of the windows of the house.

"I didn't say that he bit me," the builder snapped. "But he's a ferocious animal, all the same. I tried to stop him and he charged at me, knocking me down."

A light came into Nipper's mind at once.

"I understand now, sir," he said. "And I think I can explain. Wolf is—that is to say, I've trained him to track people, and he was tracking someone—a woman whom I wanted to find."

Jake Sanders blinked nervously and gaped at the youngster.

"And why did you want to track the—the woman?"

Nipper hesitated. There was suspicion and dismay on the hard face in front of him. Under other circumstances Nipper might have told the whole truth, but a subtle instinct warned him now that that might be dangerous. His quick brain made up a story which he reeled off readily enough.

"It was just a foolish idea on my part, sir," he said. "I saw a woman come out of the woods beside the road as I was walking along. I thought that it might be a good opportunity of testing Wolf, and I put him on the scent. I didn't mean to let him go too far, but he broke away from the leash, and was off like a shot before I could stop him."

It was Nipper's youth that really settled the affair. The foolish explanation was just what a youngster might do. Jake's lean features relaxed slightly, but the fear was still lurking in his eyes.

"You have no right to allow a dog to do that," he grated out. "You might have frightened my daughter——" He changed the subject quickly, realising he was making a mistake. "You don't belong to Belsthrope, do you?" he asked.

"No, sir. I only came here this afternoon."

"Are you staying here long?"

"I go back to-morrow," said Nipper, and in this statement he thought he was telling the truth.

Jake thought for a moment, his brows ruffled across his small eyes.

"All right," he said, at last, "you can go. I'll take your word for it; but you'd better keep a tighter hold of your dog in future, or you'll get yourself and it into trouble. Now clear off, and think yourself lucky!"

An advice which Nipper speedily obeyed, hurrying down the gravelled path and emerging on to the road. Jake followed him to the gate and pointed down the dark highway.

"That's the way to Belsthrope," he grunted.

He stood at the gate watching the slim figure and the squat one by its side until it had vanished. When he turned to pace up the pathway again, he found Ruth by his side. They returned to the house, going into the garishly furnished study. Jake came to a halt and faced his daughter.

"I've told you already that you're frightening yourself without—without cause," he said. "But you would insist on doing—doing what you did."

"But you don't seem to understand," said Ruth. "To-morrow at the inquest—they may find out."

The hard-faced builder had recovered his nerve now, and he laughed shortly.

"They'll find out nothing," he observed. "And even if they did, what can they prove?"

His eyes lit up with a slumbering fire.

"Listen to me, daughter," he said. "I don't know what is in your mind, and I don't care. But right is right, and justice is justice. I've been a fool, and may have to pay for my folly; but there is no blood on my head. Understand that!"

Ruth turned away without a word. Right or wrong, she knew that her father would stick to his stubborn silence, and she was afraid, terribly afraid. Jake refused to explain away that blood-stained, silken handkerchief!

Ruth had gone down, earlier that afternoon, to have a word with old Mrs. Silver, and had found the distressed woman laying out the kit of her dead son. And amongst the mournful heap were three squares of silk, which the old lady held out to Ruth, tearfully indicating the soft texture and wonderful workmanship of the designs in the centre of each square—designs that Ruth knew, almost before she glanced at them—a red hand and a black chrysanthemum!

It was then that Ruth decided to hide the other handkerchief, with its tell-tale stain—a stain which her father, to whom she had shown the crumpled piece of silk, and had told how it came into her possession, refused to explain.

But the handkerchief was safe enough now—so she thought—hidden away in the depths of the woods, deep down in the earth!

CHAPTER 5.

At the Cottage!

"THAT'S quite all right, old man," said Nelson Lee. "There's really no occasion for you to come up with me. I can find my way quite all right."

Inspector Freeman smiled.

"But I'd have liked to come with you," he put in, "only this danged inquest is going to take up all my time, it seems. Another witness has offered to come along, and, of course, I'll have to get him."

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, and Nelson Lee and Nipper had just finished breakfast when the inspector appeared, full of apologies. A few minutes later Lee and his assistant were on the road to the scene of the tragedy, and to judge from Lee's manner he was rather relieved than otherwise that the inspector had not been able to accompany them.

He was in a thoughtful mood that morning, and Nipper made no attempt to speak. The youngster knew that Nelson Lee was turning over various points in the case, and was better left alone.

They reached the cottage, and Lee entered the little garden, went up to the door and knocked. Mrs. Silver answered his summons, and a few words served to introduce him. The old lady opened the door wide, and bade him enter.

"I'll have a look at the room, first, then perhaps you would give me few moments," said Lee.

"I'll wait down here for you, sir," she breathed. "I—I feel as though I could never go into that room again."

Nelson Lee and Nipper crossed the kitchen and climbed the stairs. The door of the bed-room was facing them, and they entered it. Nipper came to a halt on the threshold, and his keen eyes followed the movements of the detective. Nelson Lee went first to the bed, then to the window, and finally made a tour of the room.

Against the wall on the left, close to the open window, stood a small, white-painted dressing-table. There were one or two odds and ends of toilet ware on it. A pair of hair brushes, a comb, a china candlestick, and one or two cheap glass bottles.

One of the bottles was lying on its side, with the upper part cracked across. It had evidently contained brilliantine, for there was a smear of the oily fluid on the white paint. Nelson Lee leaned forward, and Nipper heard him draw a quick breath.

The youngster came forward, and followed his master's glance. In the centre of the smear of oil was a round imprint. For a moment the curious mark baffled Nipper. It was something like a hand, and yet there was also the clear outline of a mis-shapen heel.

Like a flash Nipper solved the little problem.

"A monkey's foot, guv'nor," he whispered.

Nelson Lee turned and his teeth flashed in a quick, appreciative smile.

"Good," he returned. "You're right. And here is fresh proof."

He picked up the glass bottle, and held it out. On the jagged edge was a tuft of mouse-coloured hair.

"It evidently grabbed at the bottle and smashed it," said Lee, "and you can see where it leaped to afterwards."

On the carpet was an oily stain, about three feet away from the dressing-table. There was another mark nearer the window, and a third on the window-sill itself. There was no mistaking how the animal had made its retreat.

"It wasn't a very large one, guv'nor," said Nipper, eyeing the imprint, "not big enough to—to murder a man."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"No; it was a small type," he agreed. "Certainly not larger than about two feet."

He turned from the dressing-table and looked at the window, then crossing to it, he knelt down and examined the wall beneath and the floor. There were a few stains on the wallpaper, four or five in all, and not much bigger than a sixpence. There was also a little patch of red on the floor, about three or four inches across.

"They found the body lying beneath the window," said the detective slowly, "and the suggestion is that he met his death there. What do you think about it?"

Nipper looked at the stain on the floor and a few dark splashes on the wall.

"Don't see it, guv'nor," he said, following Lee's suggestion. "There would be more blood than that from the wound."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That point does not seem to have occurred to Freeman," he observed, "yet it seems to me it is a very significant one."

He looked round the room. The bed was unruffled, but there was an indentation in the side of it, where a man might have seated himself for a moment.

"It looks as though he sat there to undress," said Lee, slowly, "and his attention was suddenly drawn to something which made him get up again. For instance, if that monkey had come into his room, then——"

The door of the bed-room had been left open, but it swung forward now, and Nipper noted that a jacket was hanging on a peg in the centre of the door.

"He was in his shirt sleeves, guv'nor," the lad observed, "and perhaps he went across to hang up his——"

As he spoke he crossed towards the garment and reached up to lift it from the peg.

"Hallo!"

Nelson Lee saw Nipper lean forward and glance at the coat.

"What the dickens does this mean, guv'nor?" the lad cried.

Nelson Lee strode across to him, and Nipper pointed to the coat. Embedded in the blue material and the door behind it, was a needle-like black dart. It was about six inches long, and on the end of it was a tuft of black.

Lee tugged the dart out, and had to use considerable force to do so. He walked across to the window and examined it.

"It's a flower tied to the end," he said, examining the crumpled leaves. "A chrysanthemum—a black one."

He did not see the quick flush that crossed Nipper's face. For, as a matter of fact, the

youngster had kept his night's adventure to himself. He was afraid that Lee might have been annoyed at the episode.

"A black chrysanthemum, guv'nor?"

Lee was examining the flower intently. It had been a gorgeous bloom, and the leaves, although faded, were still soft and flexible to the touch.

might have sent it from a blow-pipe through the window, and into the suspended garment.

"It was probably a symbol—a hint that something that would be understood by the man for whom it was intended," said Lee, half to himself.

A symbol! Again Nipper's mind turned to the handkerchief, the handkerchief with the strange pattern woven in its centre. Was

With a wild shout Nipper dashed forward and dragged the snarling Alsatian off the kicking form of the man. "All right, Wolf—all right! Come off!" panted the young detective.

"We go out of our depths here, Nipper," said the keen-brained man slowly. "There is no doubt but this flower is a chrysanthemum—and of a very rare type. It could only be grown in a warm climate, or, possibly, a hot-house."

"Then how did it get here?" Nipper asked.

Nelson Lee turned from the window and glanced across the room. He saw that the door was directly opposite him. He glanced down into the garden and followed an imaginary line of flight that the dart might have taken. A man standing in the garden

it possible that there could be some connection between the two? Again, he hesitated with his confession on his lips.

Nelson Lee was moving round the room once more, but his interest seemed to have slackened, as though already the little room had revealed all he wished to know.

"I think we'll have a look at his kit now," said the detective. "I must not forget that Baron van Thol is also interested in this business. Silver was robbed of his jewels, but there is the ruby and the little gold box. That poor woman downstairs will benefit by them, anyhow. The baron valued the box

highly, and there may be a small fortune waiting for the poor creature, after all."

He led the way down the narrow stairs and into the kitchen again. Mrs. Silver was just in the act of putting on her black bonnet and cloak when he entered.

"It's time for me to go down to the inquest," she sighed, "and I'm just dreading it all." She looked up at Nelson Lee. "They won't take him away and—and bury him in a pauper's grave, sir, I hope?" she faltered. "I've got a few pounds—they were his, you know—and I'd like to bury him beside his father, and have his name on the stone."

"You need not be afraid, Mrs. Silver," said the detective, in a kindly voice. Although your son is dead, he did not leave you quite destitute."

He explained his meaning, and when Mrs. Silver heard of the ruby and the golden casket, her faded eyes opened wide.

"Three or four hundred pounds, sir?" she repeated, in awed bewilderment. "Oh, it don't seem possible."

"Yet, I can assure you it's true enough," the detective went on. "And what is more, your son hinted that he had a great many more jewels to dispose of. In his letter he valued them at £50,000."

The old lady dropped back in the chair and raised her thin hands.

"Oh, sir, you—you can't be telling the truth!" she breathed. "He—he did hint that he was likely to be a rich man, but he never mentioned that amount. And Mr. Freeman and I looked through his kit-bag and things, and there was no sign of jewels among the things."

"I'd like to see his kit," said Nelson Lee. "If you don't mind."

She rose to her feet and led the way to the sitting-room. The table had been cleared, and there was a heap of various articles of clothing on it, with the kit-bag and the emptied suit-case.

"It's all there, sir," she said, "just as Mr. Freeman and I left it."

She turned away, leaving Lee and Nipper alone. The detective began to examine the heaps of articles. They were for the most part the ordinary underwear that a seaman uses. There was a couple of suits of faded white drill, hinting that the man had served in the tropics.

A heap of miscellaneous articles caught Lee's eye, and he examined them. There was a tin tobacco-box, flint and tinder, a piece of lanyard, and a knife in a sheath. The knife was of a curious blunt shape, and the horn handle was smooth from much use. Nelson Lee lingered long over the knife.

"Not much use for cutting," he said slowly. "That is a pearlfisher's knife, and has had a great deal of use. It has been on the grindstone several times. Ben Silver came from somewhere under the Southern Cross, and the pearl fisheries have been his hunting-ground. The most expert pearl-divers, Nipper, are Japanese."

He looked at Nipper steadily, and the youngster caught the drift of the suggestion.

"You mean the black chrysanthemum, guv'nor," said Nipper, in a low tone. "The chrysanthemum is the flower of Japan."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"The conclusion is obvious, and yet it only adds to the difficulties in the case," he returned. "There is a link somewhere, and we have to find it."

In a piece of waterproof paper was a bundle of papers—old discharges from various ships—the very bundle that the dead man had shown to Jake Sanders. Nelson Lee ran through them carefully, noting the various dates.

"These only bring us up to April of the year before last," he pointed out, "and that makes a long gap. The question is, what did Ben Silver do between then and now? His last vessel apparently was the s.s. Templey Belle, from San Francisco to Yokohama. He was discharged at that port—as second engineer."

Nipper found a tin cylinder containing a number of charts, on which various reckonings had been worked out. There was also a small sextant and a compass in their leather cases. Again the great detective found a curious point, and mentioned it.

"Does it strike you that it is rather strange that an engineer, who has nothing to do with the sailing or steering of a ship, should carry charts with reckonings, and a sextant and compass?" he said to Nipper.

"It looks as though he was hankering after a mate's job, guv'nor," the shrewd lad observed.

Nelson Lee was examining the charts.

"They are all of islands south of the Great Barrier Reef of Australia," he went on, "and the reckonings were evidently made at regular intervals. It looks to me as though they represent the movements of the pearl-fishing boat that Silver must have served aboard. But it also proves that he must have been mate and not engineer. And yet all his discharge papers suggest that he had been an engineer on most of his other trips.

He was moving away from the table when a pile of small folded garments met his eyes. He lifted them, and presently raised up a square of white silk.

"He was evidently a good judge of silk stuff," said Lee. "This is an exquisite bit of stuff, and the embroidery is perfect."

Nipper had been replacing the charts in the receptacle, but he turned now, and found himself staring straight at a handkerchief that was an exact duplicate of the one in his pocket. The youngster fell back a pace with a gasp of amazement.

"Great Scott, guv'nor, where did you get that from?" he gasped.

Nelson Lee looked at the lad.

"Picked it up from the table," he returned, "and there are others here. But why should it give you such a shock?"

Nipper slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out the square of silk.

"That's why," he returned, spreading it out on the table in front of him.

Nelson Lee drew a quick breath.

"Where the deuce did you get this?" he asked.

Nipper made a clean breast of his adventure—the woman digging in the wood—and all that had happened after, including the uncomfortable interview with Jake Sanders.

"So the man let you go," said Lee, when he had finished. "Did you notice if there was a building yard close to the house?"

Nipper whistled softly.

"You've got it, guv'nor," he breathed. "There was a yard about a hundred paces lower down the road, and there was a half-finished building between."

Nelson Lee lifted the stained handkerchief, and, folding it, slipped it into his pocket. Then he took one of the other handkerchiefs, and also stowed it away.

A glance at his watch told him they had spent over an hour in their investigations. The inquest was due to start at eleven, and Nelson Lee wanted to be there.

"We'll get back, now," he observed, "and see what the inquest reveals. It strikes me that you have all, unconsciously, thrown a big light on this affair, Nipper, for the woman who hid this handkerchief must know something about its owner, and there is no mistaking who that was."

But nothing, beyond what was already known to Nelson Lee, came out at the inquest, except that old Saul, the longshoreman, testified that an hour after Ben Silver was supposed to have been murdered, Ben Silver was actually talking to him down on the shore of the estuary, the pair having been bosom pals in the days gone by.

Old Saul was regarded as something of an eccentric character, and few people paid much heed to his evidence. In any case, there was only one thing to be done and that was to give a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.

Neither Nelson Lee nor Nipper were called, much to the detective's relief. He had the inspector to thank for that, and later in the day Freeman called at the hotel and explained.

"I thought that it was best to keep you out of it, sir," he explained, "for I'm beginning to think that there is something mighty fishy about this case."

Nelson Lee looked at him.

"What makes you think that?" he asked in his quiet way.

Freeman hesitated.

"Well, sir, it's like this," he said, at last. "There was a carrier from Nolesworth in town this morning, and I had a chat with him. He says that he saw Mr. Sanders on Sunday evening. He was on the road to Nolesworth, and he passed Mrs. Silver's cottage about half-past eleven. Sanders was standing in the wood beside the road, and the light from the carrier's lorry picked him out. The carrier will swear to it, and yet Jake Sanders never mentioned that fact in his evidence, as I thought he would."

He looked at Lee for a moment.

"I haven't mentioned it to anyone else, sir," the inspector added. "I thought at first that Sanders would admit that he'd been round about the cottage at that hour, and I didn't trouble to get the carrier to give evidence. But although I gave Sanders the chance he didn't as much as mention it."

"That is true," said Nelson Lee.

Freeman was silent for a moment.

"And another thing," he went on. "Doesn't it strike you as being rather—rather strange that Sanders was the only man in Belsthrope who could put a figure to Ben Silver's fortune. We've all heard rumours about it, but Jake was the only man who could name the amount."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"There are many strange things connected with this case, old chap," he returned, "and Sanders' silence is only one of them."

YOUR LAST CHANCE

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CHAPTER 6.

Jake Sanders' Story!

ON the second day after the inquest, Nelson Lee decided to interview Jake Sanders the builder. He would have done so before, but he had been up to London to see Van Thol, leaving Nipper behind to watch over things.

Much had happened during the detective's absence from Belsthrope. While Nipper was out exercising Wolf, on the evening after the day of the inquest, a party of foreign seamen, in a char-a-banc, had come in from Saltport, and had put up at the hotel for light refreshments, staying in the town for a matter of an hour.

During that time both Nipper's and Nelson Lee's bed-rooms were ransacked, but none of their private property was missing. All that had been taken was the ruby Ben Silver had sent to Van Thol, and in its place the intruder had left a Black Chrysanthemum, as if to warn the detective against meddling in what didn't concern him.

That mysterious chrysanthemum decided Nelson Lee to talk to Jake Sanders about the silk handkerchief his daughter had buried in the wood.

Jake Sanders was seated in the little office that looked out over his building yard. There was a pile of books in front of him, and a pen was poised between his thin fingers. He had taken off his jacket, and his sleeves were rolled up over his lean arms. To an outward and casual observer, Jake Sanders might have seemed a busy man. But although he bent over his books he did not even see the columns of figures in front of him. His eyes were fixed and dreamy, and now and again the lips would twitch, and half murmured words came from them.

His view of the Yard was a wide one, and no one could enter or leave it through the wide gateway without being observed by the hawk eye of the master-builder. A hard man was Jake, and he saw to it that his workmen did their duty by him.

Suddenly he heard the sound of feet in the cobbled gateway, and voices as someone called to one of the workmen, asking the way to the office. Jake looked up, and was suddenly cold with fear. He recognised Inspector Freeman, at once, and with him were a keen-faced gentleman, a youth, and a big dog.

They came towards the office. He dared not refuse to see them. They were ushered into his room, and he fa[redacted] against hope that they w[redacted] terror in his eyes.

"I'm a busy man, in[redacted] quickly, "and haven't mu[redacted] If you have business with[redacted] to be sharp about it."

The bronzed face of [redacted] widened into a swift smile.

"We're all busy men," he returned grimly. "And our time is just as valuable as yours. This gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, a London detective," he added impressively, "and he's here on the Silver case."

Jake was in full control of himself now. He turned and cast a quick searching look at the quietly-dressed man. The clean-shaven face, and the steel-blue eyes that whispered of latent power, made their impression on the astute observer. Jake Sanders was no fool, and could value a man at a glance.

"And what might Mr. Nelson Lee want with me?" he asked.

Nelson Lee's stern lips tightened. He had always realised that there would be a fight if he had to tackle this keen-eyed man, and he had come prepared for it.

"I want the truth," he said slowly. "I want to know if you can explain why your ladder came to be at the cottage. But more particularly I want you to tell me if you know anything about this handkerchief?"

He shook out the folds and revealed the square with the red hand and flower. Jake's face went ashen for a moment, and he drew a thin breath.

"Why should I know anything about——"

His voice did not ring true, and the tremor of the lips told its own tale. Nelson Lee turned to the inspector.

"If he's going to be obstinate," he said, "the quickest way out would be to arrest him on a charge of murder."

Freeman stepped forward, but Jake, with a hoarse cry, recoiled against the wall. He was not to know that Nelson Lee was simply bluffing. The detective had taken the measure of the morose man, and realised that harsh methods would have to be adopted before Jake Sanders would be forced to speak.

"No, no!" Jake broke out. "You—you're making a mistake. I swear it!"

"We'll leave that for others to judge," said Lee quietly. "We have proofs that this handkerchief belonged to the dead man—and that you and your daughter were in possession of it. You recognise this lad, I suppose?"

Jake looked at Nipper with gleaming eyes.

"Yes, I recognise him right enough," he stammered. "But I didn't know he—he was a cursed spy!"

A black vein showed clearly on his temple for a moment, and he glared at the little group in front of him. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I suppose you think you've cornered me?" he said hoarsely.

He [redacted]gue over his dried lips and

[redacted]mighty clever," he went on, [redacted] keeping with his rage, "but [redacted]ver as you think. Lock me [redacted] I tell you I never murdered [redacted]f you prove it to be other- [redacted] innocent blood on your [redacted]

He crossed to his desk and dropped into his chair, placing his clenched fists in front of him, and glared at Nelson Lee.

"Now, Mr. Detective, I'm ready for you," he said. "What d'you want to know?"

It was surrender of a sort.

"I want to know what happened on Sunday evening, so far as you are concerned."

Jake Sanders cleared his throat.

"You'll have the whole truth now," he said. "First of all, I can tell you that I never believed the yarn about that fortune. It didn't seem likely that a wastrel like Ben Silver could get a great fortune like that when his betters have to slave all their days for less. But, listen! On Sunday evening I went along to the cottage and found Ben Silver leaning over the fence. He was having a smoke, and I stopped and had a chat with him.

"He told me that he expected to realise on his fortune within a few days, and had written to a man in London to come down and see his jewels. Even then I didn't believe him, and at last he said he would give me proofs, but he made a condition. If I was satisfied that he had the money, he was going to marry my daughter."

"And did he satisfy you?" asked Nelson Lee.

The builder leaned forward.

"I'm no judge of precious stones, mister," he said, "but I'll swear that I had a fortune

in these hands of mine last Sunday night. Diamonds and rubies, red as blood, stowed away in a wash-leather bag as though they were peas. There must have been a hundred of them, and some were as big as marbles. Handed them to me over the fence, he did, and laughed when I told him that he ought to be careful."

He dropped back in his chair and was silent for a moment.

"What happened after that?" prompted Nelson Lee.

"I gave him back the bag and he put it into his pocket."

"Was he wearing a blue jacket at the time?"

"Yes."

It had been a blue-serge jacket that had hung behind the door of the little bed-room, the coat out of which Nipper had drawn the dart with its flower.

"When did you leave him?"

"Must have been about half-past ten," said Jake thoughtfully. "He went back into the cottage and I went down to the town."

"Mrs. Silver says that her son came into the cottage, took off his coat in his bed-room, and went out again to have a smoke," said the inspector. "He walked down the road a little way in his shirt-sleeves."

"I didn't see him," said Jake, "but I expect it's true enough. The fool must have hung his coat up with the jewels in the pocket, behind the door of his room. But let me finish. I went down to the town and had a chat with Mr. Rose. I'm building a house for him, and I wanted his opinion on something. I stopped to have a bite of supper, and it was nigh midnight before I left. I went back along the road, and when I reached the cottage again, I noticed that the ladder was against the window. I could see it quite plainly from the road."

He stopped and drew a sharp breath.

"It struck me that something had happened," he went on, "and I slipped into the garden and climbed the ladder. The window was open and I stepped inside, and stepped on to the dead body of Ben Silver!"

He passed his hand across his brow, wet with sweat.

"Maybe you can understand how I felt," he continued, "alone in that room with the dead man—and a man who had always been at loggerheads with me. I knew at once that if I was caught there, I——"

"I quite understand," said Nelson Lee.

Jake rose slowly to his feet.

"I had put my hand on—on his face," he said, with a shudder, "and that handkerchief was laid on it. I don't quite know how I managed to do it, but I found the handkerchief in my possession after I had left the cottage. I must have put it into my pocket without knowing what I was doing."

There was a long silence, then Nelson Lee spoke.

"There is just one question I would like to ask," he said. "Did you move about the room at all?"

A curious change came over Jake Sanders' face, and at last he laughed grimly.

"I suppose you might as well have the whole truth," he returned. "Yes, I did. It was dark, but I could see a coat hanging against the door, and I—I went across and—and searched it! I knew he had put the jewels in his pocket, and I wanted to see if they were still there."

"And they had gone?"

"Yes."

He rapped out the word sharply, without any additional oaths or vows. Instinct told the listeners that he was telling the truth. Nelson Lee came forward and held out his hand.

"I believe every word you have said, Mr. Sanders," he put in, "and there is my hand on it."

Something like confusion came to Jake for a moment, then he made a convulsive snatch at the outstretched palm.

"I did wrong" he said, "and I know it. But there were those in Belsthrope as would have believed that I had killed Ben Silver, and I took the coward's way of holding my tongue."

His lean head went back, and he drew a deep breath.

"Thank Heaven that is off my mind," he added, dropping back into his chair again, "for I can tell you, sir, it has haunted me and my daughter night and day."

"Your daughter knew?"

"Not everything," said Jake. "But she found the handkerchief, and, fearing for me, she went and hid it. But she didn't hide it well enough, and maybe it was best that way, after all."

There was a movement at the door, and it swung open. The tall, slender figure of Ruth Sanders was revealed behind it. She was white to the lips, but her eyes were shining.

"I've heard all you've said, father," she exclaimed, half-sobbing. "If you had only told me everything at first, I might have helped you."

"How could you have helped me?"

She straightened up, and flashed a swift glance round the room.

"Because I could have told you something that neither you nor anyone else seems to know," said the woman, with a quick, passionate gesture, "and that is, that the dead man is not Benjamin Silver at all!"

She slipped her hand into her dress and drew out a long, folded slip of paper.

"I doubted it from the very first," she said, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "He was so different, so unlike himself. He did not even seem to know that—that I was his—his wife!"

She had her moment then. Everyone in the room stared at her, and a choked word came from her father's lips.

"His wife, Ruth? You must be mad!"

She handed the long slip of paper to him.

"I married Ben Silver in Liverpool eighteen years ago," she said, in a quiet, steady voice,

that made the story all the more dramatic. "He asked me to meet him just before he sailed away, and I—I did so. We were married at ten o'clock, and we had only just time to get down to the docks. He sailed away, and I came home to Belsthrope—to keep my secret and wait until he returned."

Jake had opened the slip of paper with trembling fingers. There was no mistaking the truth. Ruth had handed him her marriage certificate.

"This—this beats me!" said the builder, shaking his head. "I—I never dreamed—never thought——"

"I was waiting for Ben to come back," said the woman steadily. "I can show you letters that I got from him now and again. The last one was from Australia, when he was going as engineer on a pearl-fishing cruise. I hadn't had a word from him since then; but that man who came here as Ben was an impostor!"

Nelson Lee stepped forward.

"Have you proofs of that, Mrs. Silver?" he asked.

It was the first time that Ruth had ever been addressed by that title, and she coloured faintly.

"Yes," she returned. "But I was not sure until I went to the cottage and saw him lying dead."

She held out one arm and drew up her sleeve. On the white forearm was a crudely-formed heart and the initials "B. S."

"Ben did that years ago," she murmured, a blush crossing her cheeks, "and he made me do the same on his left arm. I put the initials 'R. S.' in the heart—and there was no mark like that on the dead man's arm."

Jake Sanders had dropped back in his chair and was looking at his daughter with eyes that were stern and drawn.

"And you've kept this a secret from me all these years," he said at last.

The slender woman turned towards him.

"Yes," she replied. "After all, it didn't do you any harm. I knew that you never liked Ben, and unless he came back again to claim me, what was the use of telling you? It didn't make any difference."

It was true enough, but the builder's grim face did not relax, and he turned away his head.

Nelson Lee was silent for a moment, then he turned to Jake.

"I think I need not trouble you any further, Mr. Sanders," he said. "You have told your story, and, as I have said before, I believe every word of it. Indirectly, you have helped me a great deal, and I believe that your evidence, and that of your daughter, will go far towards clearing up the mystery that hangs over this case."

"My daughter's evidence is her own," growled the builder. "I have nothing to do with it. In my opinion it was Ben Silver who was murdered and robbed."

Ruth looked down at him, calmly.

"You're wrong, dad," she said. "Ben is still alive. I feel sure of it."

Nelson Lee bowed to her.

"Perhaps you are nearer to the truth than any of us, Mrs. Silver," he put in, "but for the moment, I would ask you to keep this matter a secret. Whatever your belief may be, do not mention it to anyone else. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes," promised Ruth, nodding her head.

Nelson Lee turned to the builder.

"And I would also be glad if you keep the result of this interview secret, Mr. Sanders," he went on. "And, in return for that, I assure you that your part in the affair remains a secret between us. I can count on the inspector, I know."

"Look out!" cried Lee. "Don't let them get away!" a moment Lee and his companions were at

"Whatever you say, Mr. Lee," said Freeman, "is good enough for me."

"Then it's a bargain," said the builder.

Nelson Lee, Nipper, Wolf and Inspector Freeman took their leave, and went off down the road together. They reached the Sceptre, and Nelson Lee vanished into the garage for a moment, joining Nipper in the dining-room afterwards.

"I wanted to find out where the charabanc, that brought those foreign sailors, came from," he said. "The men were undoubtedly Japanese, and came from Saltport."

"And that means we're off to Saltport, guv'nor?"

"Yes. We can do no more here. Van Thol is willing to buy the gold casket for as much as eighty thousand pounds. The money was to go to old Mrs. Silver, but now that Ruth Sanders turns out to be Ben's wife, and the murdered man turns out to be an imposter, it's a puzzle to be sure to whom the money ought to go. Still, we'll see that the old lady doesn't want for anything. As for the rest, I think it is best to go to the enemy's camp and find out what he's up to."

!" And he flung himself at the Japanese sailors. In death grips with their cunning little foes.

He looked at Nipper for a moment. "This is where the excitement starts for you and I," he continued "Up to now we have been only interested spectators; but last night's visit, and the little emblem that was left behind, hints that you and I are to play a bigger part now. Right or wrong, these unknown men are determined to get the jewels. The queer thing is that if, after murdering the bogus Ben Silver they had obtained the jewels, they would have vanished from these parts. It is now obvious that they failed to find the jewels. In that case, where the dickens have they got to? It seems that the murderers think that they are in my possession. The discovery of the ruby would strengthen that belief, for they were not to know that the dead man sent it off by post."

His keen eyes glinted for a moment.

"I have made full inquiries," he went on. "We have to search for four little men—sailors—who have a mouse-coloured monkey as a pet. They are foreigners, and I am sure they are Japs. They came with the party yesterday, and must have a rendezvous at Saltport."

There was a knock at the door, and the maid entered to announce that lunch was ready.

"When will you make a start, guv'nor?" Nipper asked.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"There's a train for Saltport at 2.10," he said, "and that will suit us down to the ground."

He and Nipper went up to their rooms, and, as they reached the landing Nelson Lee halted for a moment.

"There was one part of Jake Sanders' evidence that still puzzles me," he said, half to himself. "He stated that the dead man placed the leather bag in his pocket. Mrs. Silver says that her son went out about half-past ten for a smoke. She noticed that he was in his shirt sleeves. In other words, in the same condition as he was found in the morning. Her evidence then goes on to state that she went up to her room, and immediately afterwards her son passed her door, entered his own room, was in there only a few moments, then came out again. She called to him through the closed doors, and he answered her. He said: 'All right, mother, don't worry.'"

Nelson Lee came to a halt.

"All this was in the evidence which you and I missed, but I've had an opportunity of reading the whole evidence," he explained. "And now, what strikes me as being curious is that Ben Silver should have gone up to his room immediately after showing Jake Sanders the jewels, taken off his coat, gone down and out again, then returned and went off once more, all within twenty minutes interval."

There was a thoughtful expression on his face.

"It looks as though he was anxious about his treasure, guv'nor," said Nipper.

"I wonder? It strikes me that if that had been the case he would have taken them with him when he went out. And if he had taken them with him they would have been in his possession when he met his death. But the fact that these unknown men are still searching for the jewels indicates that Silver could not have had them when he was murdered."

Nipper shrugged his shoulders.

"It beats me guv'nor," he admitted frankly, "because there is also other evidence that seems to squash all this. The fisherman, Saul, was ready to take his oath that Ben Silver was with him from after

eleven o'clock until the small hours of the morning. And yet, Mr. Sanders tells us that he found the dead body in the room between twelve and one!"

CHAPTER 7.

The S.S. "Rising Sun"!

SALTPORT owes its prosperity to the fact that it is near to one of the biggest coal-mining districts in the kingdom. It is also the terminating point of a fine system of canals, which makes the carriage of coals in barges a cheap and easy method of transit. Finally, local enterprise has seen to it that Saltport had its docks and cranes, its tugs and lighters, and also a couple of big dry docks, in which the barnacle-clad tramp may rest and be cleaned.

On the estuary side of the town there is also a great length of banks, dry enough for men and carts to move over during the low tides, and the cheaper type of craft often run themselves up on shore at high tide, wait until the tide recedes, then break into a bustling activity. Grimed sailors, armed with pots of tar and long brushes, swing over the sides, cleaning and scraping their vessels.

As a rule, it is the smaller type of sailing vessel which adopts this style of renovating, but occasionally one finds a sturdy steamer of the true bull-nosed species, high and dry on the beach, while its rusted plates enjoy the luxury of scraper and paint-brush.

The "flats," as the mudbanks are called, extend for about half a mile on the eastward side of the town, and it is in this quarter that the various sailors' homes and hostels have their being. The east end of a town usually is the slum portion, for some unknown reason, and Saltport does not vary from its larger sisters in this respect.

Along the grey shore, broken here and there by short wooden jetties, are a number of round stone towers that rather mystify the casual visitor. As a matter of fact, they are Martello towers, and were erected years go, when invasion of our shores was a nightmare. They are now mostly used as stores by the local fisherman, but one or two of them are still to be hired as summer residences, and to anyone who is not too particular, they afford comfortable quarters.

Late in the afternoon, a man, lying at full length along the flat roof of one of these towers, seemed to be particularly interested in the black hull of a tramp steamer, squatting low in the mud about three hundred yards from the shore. The roof of the Martello tower was surrounded by a ridge about two feet high, in which, at intervals, long slanting loopholes had been cut. Through one of these holes the brass end of a telescope projected for a few inches, and the stranger had levelled it on the tramp in front of him.

It seemed as though his intent scrutiny was hardly justified, for a more peaceable picture than the stranded vessel would have been hard to discover. From amidships there arose a wisp of smoke, and so still was the air that the smoke hung like a grey cloud between the black, salt-scarred funnel and the squat mast. Slung from the bows was a travelling cradle, on which a couple of figures were seated, wielding the long-handled brushes that make painting a physical exercise.

On the bows, in faded letters, could be read the name "Rising Sun," and the Stars and Stripes floated lazily from the peak. It was one of the 'Frisco tramp steamers, the type of vessel that one finds all over the world.

The stranger was a long, thin man, with a brown beard and a pair of sleepy blue eyes. He was wearing a pair of thin dungarees and had spread an oilskin beneath him where he lay. The blue sweater he wore was turned up at the sleeves, revealing brown, sinewy arms, and his hands were work-stained and hard.

The tide was out, and there were very few people on the length of beach. Close to the tower a fisherman was at work on his nets, and on the jetty a man was seated against a capstan reading a newspaper.

Presently the stranger shifted his position slightly, and moved near to the edge of the roof. He was able to see the jetty now, and he saw a slim figure of a youth appear from the row of houses behind. The lad came down the stone causeway, and passed quite close to the tower. From overhead the stranger watched him, stared closely for a moment, then across the bearded lips a swift smile of recognition flashed.

"Now, we'll see if my little theory is correct," he muttered aloud.

The youth went on to the jetty, passing the man with the newspaper, and seated himself on a high wooden block. The stranger watched closely, but could detect no sort of sign between the two; yet, a few moments later, the man with the newspaper arose, stretched himself, folded the paper, and strolled off down the jetty, to vanish at last amongst the houses.

"He's relieved you," was the stranger's comment. "And that has happened twice to my knowledge during the last two days."

If the stranger had only known the man with the newspaper was Nelson Lee, and the youth was Nipper. There was no mystery attached to the appearance of the young detective there on the jetty. He and Nelson Lee had arrived at Saltport on the previous day, and Lee had made inquiries at once concerning the char-a-banc and the Japanese sailors.

He learned that the vehicle had been hired by Captain Yamati, of the Rising Sun, to take his men for a joy ride. It appeared that the Rising Sun, an American vessel, had been beached at Saltport after having been disabled in a storm. There had been a lot of

trouble over dues and salvage, in the midst of which Captain Yamati arrived on the scene and bought the vessel cheaply. He had then appeared with his Japanese crew, and they were leisurely painting the ship, and setting her to rights, and it didn't seem to matter how long the job took.

Nelson Lee had reason to suspect many things, and he at once kept a watch on the Rising Sun, taking turns with Nipper. Nelson Lee's hours of duty were from the early hours of the morning, and it was now Nipper's turn. Nelson Lee would not return to the jetty until ten o'clock.

There was a big package of sandwiches and a thermos flask in Nipper's pocket, that assured him a good meal during his long vigil, and at about eight o'clock the lad opened the package and began his meal. The tide had now risen high enough to encircle the tramp steamer in a band of glimmering silver, and presently the creak of tackle made Nipper glance across towards her.

The boat was lowered into the water by a couple of short, thick-set figures, standing on the thwarts. She took the water with a plop, and presently another man and yet another appeared and shinned down a rope ladder into the boat. She was pushed off from the black hull, and the little stretches of sail was hoisted. A vagabond breeze caught the boat, and she slid away from the tramp and began to make a long beat up the estuary that would take them eventually to Belsthrope.

"You've forgotten the monkey," was Nipper's comment, as he watched the boat move off.

He continued his meal, and about half an hour later, when the tide was lapping against the wooden piles of the jetty, another boat came out from the tramp. This one appeared from the leeward side, and it was manned by five men. They came up to the jetty and Nipper noted that they were all of the lascar type—that breed of sailor that comes from the Malayan Islands, and is of a dozen different nationalities.

They were chattering away to each other and seemed in high spirits. They tumbled out of the boat, tied her up to a high pile, and came streaming down the jetty past Nipper.

It was fairly evident what had happened. The Japs had gone off, and with them had gone the captain and owner, and as soon as his back was turned the brown-skinned band had taken French leave.

"I'm very much obliged to you," was Nipper's grim thought. "I don't mind betting that you've left that old hooker without so much as a sentry—unless you fixed up the monkey to do the job."

He laughed to himself.

"And I don't think I've got much to be afraid of where he is concerned," he added.

He listened until the chattering of the handful of sailors died away, then rose to his feet. It was only about nine o'clock, and there was very little chance of these men returning until eleven, when the various homes and hostels closed their doors to the non-residents. In all probability they were off to play their eternal "fan-tan," a game of coloured beans and counting, which seems to fascinate all men from the Eastern waters.

"The guv'nor won't turn up till ten, and that gives me an hour," Nipper told himself. "I ought to be able to have a jolly good look round that tub by then."

Everything seemed to have been prepared for him. The boat was dipping and swaying at the end of its painter, and the coast was quite clear.

"I simply couldn't afford to miss the chance," he decided. "And there's only a blinking monkey to reckon with; and, of course, he doesn't count at all."

He waited another five minutes. Then, assured that the little group of sailors were safely out of the way, Nipper slipped down to the end of the jetty, and dropped lightly into the bow of the boat.

He loosened the rope from the ring in the bow, leaving it hanging on the end of the jetty. In its way that was a proof of the youngster's intelligence, for, had anyone come along for that boat, the fact of the rope remaining there would have suggested that it had been insecurely fastened in the first place and the boat had drifted off.

The oars were rather heavy, but Nipper was able to manage them, and turning the bow towards the tramp, he began to pull through the quiet sea. The shadow of the hull appeared above him at last, and the youngster guided the boat under the broad stern and brought her round against the iron sides of the Rising Sun.

Midship, a rope-ladder dangling caught his eyes, and towards this Nipper drew the boat. He wedged one end of the ladder under a thwart so that it held the boat secure; then, with a swift rush, he was up the swaying ladder and had dropped on to the broad deck.

A light was burning in the bow, and there was another at the stern. Nipper dropped down on his knees in the shadow of the bulwarks and took stock of his surroundings. Immediately opposite him was a closed hatch, and lower down was the open doorway of the companion-ladder. The youngster listened for a long moment, but there was no sound, and it came to him that his first surmise was correct. The whole crew had left the vessel.

"All the better for me," the young detective decided, straightening himself up. "I can have a look round without being disturbed."

He turned towards the after-part of the tramp, for he guessed that it would be there that the Japanese skipper had taken up his quarters. He reached the companion-way, and went down into a small saloon.

It was pitch dark below, and Nipper brought out his pocket torch and switched on the light. The saloon was a long one, and there was a table running the whole length

of it. At the other end a galley-way was revealed, leading, no doubt, to the cabins.

Nipper swung the light round slowly, and at last his eye caught sight of a high glass-case standing on a wooden ledge at the other end of the saloon. He went towards it and examined it carefully.

It was rather a clever structure. Beside it stood a little oil-lamp, which Nipper noted was lighted. The heat from the flame ran up a tube and passed into the glass case. In the centre of the case was a mound of earth, and growing there was a gorgeous mass of bloom, which on closer inspection was identified. It was the black chrysanthemum, from whence the blooms had been cut that had formed such curious links in the strange case.

"That settles it," the lad thought grimly. "If I don't find out anything else my visit has been worth while. The guv'nor was right when he said that that flower could not have been grown in England at this time of the year."

He swung the torch round again and made a slow circle of the saloon.

As he did so he heard a faint chattering noise from the corner.

Two little balls of yellow fire, as the light was turned on them, gleamed at him.

"Hallo, the monkey," muttered Nipper.

He looked at the animal. The lips went back, revealing the small teeth, and the creature began to chatter at him, hunching its back, and leaning forward, a picture of fury.

"All right, my friend," said Nipper. "I'm not going to do you any harm. But I want to see what's in here, if you don't mind."

It was obvious that the monkey did mind, and minded very much; but Nipper paid but little attention to the fury of the small creature. He went across to a chest of drawers and instantly his eye picked up a red gleam from the top of them.

"By James—the ruby!"

It lay in the centre of a white silk handkerchief, and Nipper could see that the centre of the handkerchief had the device of the red hand and black flower woven into it. The gleaming jewel seemed to send back its blood-red rays as though it realised its importance.

"Now, shall I take you, or not?"

It was rather a difficult question to decide. If he took the jewel it would mean that the Japs would know of his visit. If he left it behind him he might never get another opportunity of collaring it.

"Might as well make sure," muttered Nipper, reaching out his hand towards the gem.

A perfect storm of chattering and thin screams broke out from behind him, and lifting the ruby, Nipper sprang round. He was only just in the nick of time, for the furry animal, in a fury of rage, launched itself straight from the edge of the bunk full at him. It was a well-judged leap, and only the quickness of the lad saved him. As the savage face snarled and spat in front of him, Nipper clenched his fist and struck at it. There was a squall of pain and rage, and the monkey went down in a ball on the floor of the cabin, spitting and spluttering like a wild cat.

"That's quite enough from you, my son," said Nipper, with a gasp. "I think I'll leave you, now."

He backed out of the cabin, and the monkey, leaping to its feet, made another mad rush at him. There was no mistaking the pluck of the little animal, and Nipper nipped the door forward, closing it just in time. The monkey's body thudded against the door, and Nipper felt it tugging at the handle.

There was no lock on the door, and for a moment Nipper was nonplussed, then his quick wit gave him an idea. He drew out a length of string, and attaching it to the knob of the door, he carried the string across the narrow alley-way, and tied it round the handle of the door opposite.

He heard the door creak and strain as the chattering creature inside fought to get out, but the string held, and Nipper, with a grunt of relief, began to move off up the alley-way again.

"I give you best," he murmured, "and I'll never take liberties with your tribe again."

He knew that his search had been more than successful, and he decided to beat a retreat. He had established beyond any shadow of doubt the fact that these men on board the Rising Sun were implicated in the case at Belsthrope. Armed with that information he could return to Nelson Lee, and it was up to Nelson Lee to make the next move.

Suddenly the light of his torch faded swiftly and gave out, clear proof that it required a fresh battery.

"I can find my way in the dark, now, I think," muttered Nipper, as he felt his way along the table and reached the bottom of the companion way.

He climbed up to the deck and looked about him. The deck was in darkness, and he had to move forward very warily. Once he almost tripped over a coil of rope, and he stumbled against the high bulwarks.

The slight noise that he made came to a pair of sharp ears, and over the side of the vessel from the other end came a little black shape. Nipper had closed the cabin door all right, but had not reckoned with the wide port hole. The sinister little animal dropped noislessly on to the deck and ran across it like a flash.

The young detective had just reached the place where the rope-ladder hung, when, with a noiseless spring, his tenacious adversary attacked him again. But this time Nipper was at a complete disadvantage, for he was already half over the side and was clinging to the ladder, while he felt for the rungs with his feet.

The monkey landed full on the lad's shoulders, and its small sinewy hands caught

him round the throat, while the vicious teeth bit into his shoulder clean through the jacket.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that Nipper was almost thrown clear from the rope ladder, and it was only with a mighty effort that he managed to recover his balance. Then began as grim a struggle as ever the lad had tackled.

He could only use one hand, for he had to cling to the swaying ladder, and the monkey had wedged itself across his shoulders from behind, so that its feet and hands were all able to do their share. Nipper managed to get his fingers around the bullet-head, and with an effort he drew the teeth from their hold. There was a snarl, and like lightning the small head went round, and the teeth almost met in the palm of the youngster's hand.

The sting of the bite made Nipper give vent to a cry of pain, and he tugged his hand free. Again he tried to smite backwards at the clawing brute, and his fist landed on the hairy chest. The monkey squealed aloud, and almost fell from its hold, but as it swayed out it grabbed at Nipper's hair. Nipper's head went back with a jerk, and a scrambling rush saw the monkey back on its perch on his shoulder again. Then, as though it realised what to do, the creature butted forward, and its teeth bit into the hand holding the rope ladder.

That was the end of the fight. Nipper's grip loosened, and he made a wild lunge to regain his balance; then, unable to check himself, went down headlong into the boat below, monkey and youth, crashing on the thwarts together. The boat rocked and pitched for a moment, then steadied itself again.

A long moment passed, then there was a movement from the huddled heap in the centre. A whimpering cry came up into the darkness, and very slowly and painfully the little squat shape detached itself, dragging one of its limbs behind it.

Through its teeth were coming little sobbing sounds, such as a child might give when in pain. It reached the rope ladder, and, injured though it was, managed to climb up to the deck and drop over. But the other figure lying across the thwarts did not move, and it seemed as though the furry guardian of the Rising Sun had, after all, been worthy of its trust.

And an hour later, when a brown-sailed boat glided up to the black hull of the tramp, the other boat was discovered, and its occupant recognised. Stolid yellow faces looked down at the immovable features, and thin voices whispered together. Then Nipper's body was swung up the ladder and carried forward, to be placed at last in a narrow space redolent of tarred rope and lamp oil.

A light gleamed and the beams fell on the young face. Very grim and intent were the slant eyes that looked down at him. One of the thick-set men knelt and searched through his clothes. A grunt came from him as he held up the ruby, a grunt that was echoed round the little circle.

Placing the ruby on the deck the man bent forward again and placed his ear against the lad's chest and listened.

A moment later he straightened up and reached for a piece of rope, which he began to tie around the wrists and ankles of the motionless figure, an action which was plain as speech, for it meant that Nipper was not dead—no one would trouble to fasten the limbs of a corpse.

Yet there was a certain grim menace about the man's movements as he worked that might well have been taken as a warning had the lad been conscious. For Nipper was in the hands of his enemies—men who had only their own laws to follow, and who do not see things eye to eye with the white man. They were dangerous men to run against!

Starting Next Week . . . . Brilliant New Book-Length Story,

"WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!"

CHAPTER 8.

A Lesson in Wrestling!

WHEN Nipper appeared on the jetty, the man with the newspaper rose, and, folding the sheet, went off into the town, an act that was duly noticed by the bearded stranger from the roof of the Martello tower.

The man with the newspaper was in a light grey suit, and was sporting a soft, grey hat and spats. He had a pair of side-whiskers, and there were gold-rimmed spectacles balanced across his nose. A very mild and inoffensive individual he seemed as he walked off up the stone causeway. Gaining the main street he walked along it for about twenty yards, turned down a side-street and entered a tiny cottage, which he had rented for a week or two furnished.

A suit case which he had asked to be sent down from London had just arrived. Nelson Lee had wired for it, and he had his reasons for the case contained changes of clothing to enable him to adopt disguises. He needed a disguise, now.

While sitting on the jetty idly watching the Rising Sun he had been thinking over the strange case, and one fact worried him considerably. The murdered man was not Ben Silver, yet he had Ben Silver's papers. The jewels had vanished, and the murderers were still haunting the district, hoping to find them.

He had, too, paid a flying visit to Belsthrope, a fact of which Nipper was not aware, and had questioned Ruth Sanders again. She was more than ever convinced that Ben Silver was still alive, and the light in her eyes made Nelson Lee wonder just why she was more sure of it than ever.

Everything pointed to the existence of another man in that neighbourhood who was connected with the case, but who had not yet been seen by the police or Nelson Lee. Where was he? Who was he?

While sitting on the jetty pondering this point Nelson Lee noticed several things; and chief amongst them was the fact that from the Martello tower there came a bright flash of light at irregular intervals. He had watched his opportunity and had spotted the exact place from where the flash came —a gap in the solid masonry of the roof.

When a man uses a telescope he ought to take care that the sun does not catch the end glass and make it into a heliograph. Lee was soon aware of the fact that some unknown person was lying on the roof using a glass for some purpose. And no one would lie there through the heat of a broiling afternoon at that occupation unless there was some urgent need for it.

Nelson Lee made up his mind to find out about this stranger, and accordingly disguised himself to appear as a seafaring man looking for a berth. He went along an alley that led out on to the mud flats close to the tower, and was just in time to see the stranger step out of the Martello tower and go down along the jetty towards Nipper.

He soon came back, however, and Lee hid behind a heap of stones as he passed on his way to the town, then the detective followed him along the High Street and into a small eating-house. It was a place patronised by the sailors, and Nelson Lee, entering it, found a seat in a corner close to where the tall, bearded man had seated himself.

The stranger had given his order, and presently a steaming cup of coffee, a couple of eggs, and some bread-and-butter were placed in front of him, and he began to eat with the healthy appetite of a hungry man.

The blue jersey was rolled up over the brown arms, and suddenly Nelson Lee, who had been watching his quarry quietly, leaned forward.

"Pass the salt, mate," he said.

The stranger reached for the salt, and extended a long, powerful, bare arm.

Nelson Lee's eyes fixed themselves for a moment on the brown skin, but the expression on his face did not change.

"Thanks!" he said, taking the salt.

There was a grim delight in his heart, for his ruse had been very successful, and had revealed the secret that had puzzled him. From that moment, the mystery of the crime at Belsthrope was no longer a perplexity to the keen-eyed man. He had solved one riddle that had baffled him.

It was an hour later before the stranger emerged from the eating-house, and when he did so, Nelson Lee, who had taken his departure some time before, saw him emerge from the door. The detective had waited opposite, and once again he followed the tall man.

This time the stranger turned eastward, and presently he had cleared the town and was out on the white ribbon of road that ran along the banks of the estuary to Belsthrope. The road wound round a bend, and as Nelson Lee followed it, he noted that the stranger was no longer in sight.

There was a high mound of earth on the right, and Lee headed for it. The aroma of tobacco came to him, and he saw a thin cloud of smoke rise from the other side of the knoll. The stranger had evidently thrown himself down behind the knoll and was enjoying a smoke.

Nelson Lee stepped noiselessly towards the mound, circled round it and caught sight of a square pair of shoulders and a ruffled brown head. The stranger was lying at full length on the grass, propped upon one elbow, while he puffed contentedly at a pipe between his lips. In front of him lay the wide waters of the estuary up which the rising tide was slowly creeping. Lee followed the direction of his gaze, and saw a brown-sailed boat heading up towards Belsthrope, and it contained Japanese seamen.

The stranger seemed to take them for granted, although he watched them intently. Nelson Lee was suddenly undecided, wondering whether he ought to double back to Belsthrope to see what the Japs were after. He turned to watch the boat, and a loose pebble clattered from under his foot.

In a flash the stranger was on his feet, facing him. Recognition came to his eyes at once.

"So you're following me, eh?" he said with a swift, indrawn breath. "What's the game?"

Nelson Lee saw the lithe figure go tense, and the sinewy hands closed. He braced himself up instinctively for the charge that he knew was coming.

"You interest me, my friend," he said, "and I want to find out something more about you?"

"Why should I interest you?"

"Why not? I already know one or two things about you. You spend a lot of your time at the end of a telescope, and seem vastly interested in a certain vessel called the Rising Sun. You are also extremely anxious to keep your hiding-place a secret; but the Martello tower is not so safe as you imagine—and——"

"Then you know too much—you spy——"

With a rush, the tall man closed with Lee, and they swayed together in a fierce lock. The bearded man was as tough as nails, and was evidently used to the rough-and-tumble fighting of a wild life. His long arms locked themselves around Nelson Lee, and he put out all his strength in an attempt to lift the detective from the ground and throw him.

The brown-bearded man was uppermost, but that position of affairs did not last long. Once again the detective shifted his hold, and this time it was the collar of the stout blue jersey that he gripped tightly. Then suddenly he drew his feet beneath his assailant, wedged them up against the powerful body, and, with a mighty lunge, straightened his legs.

A perfect storm of chattering broke out from behind Nipper. He whipped round just as a furry form launched itself straight at him !

Nine out of ten men would have gone under at that fierce strain, but Nelson Lee, a trained athlete, was ready for all methods of attack. As the tall stranger lifted him, Nelson Lee freed one hand and struck down sharply a side blow with the edge of the hand on the neck of his assailant.

To an onlooker it might have seemed that the blow was a very light one, but its effect was amazing. The stranger gasped, and his head dropped forward, while he reeled on to Nelson Lee, with the result that the detective and his assailant went down on the turf together.

The sailor was shot clean into the air, and Nelson Lee's deft tug at the collar completed the fall. The brown-bearded man went clean over the detective's head and came down on his back with a thud that almost knocked the breath from his body.

A swing and a lift of his body saw Nelson Lee on to his opponent again. Then suddenly the man felt his arm caught in a terrible lock, so powerful that he realised that another ounce of pressure would snap the bones.

"When you've had enough, my friend, will you say so?"

Nelson Lee's level, unemotional voice completed the sailor's subjection. Flat on his back, with that deadly lock on him, the man surrendered.

"You—you'll break my arm!" he muttered, with a stifled groan. "Let me go!"

Nelson Lee swung clear, and was on his feet in a moment. Then, as the sailor lay still, nursing his wrenched arm, the detective looked down at him.

"And now we'll have a quiet chat together, Mr. Ben Silver!" he said.

The tall man leaped up to a sitting position at once, and his blue eyes were wide with alarm.

"You're making a mistake!" he stammered. "My name is Dave Reed, not—not what you said it was."

He dragged himself to his feet and eyed Nelson Lee slowly.

The detective smiled.

"Don't you think that it would be better for you to make a clean breast of this," he went on quietly. "I know that you are Ben Silver, and that little heart and the initials R. S. tattooed on your arm is one proof that I am right."

The man drew down his sleeve hastily.

"A tattoo mark means nothing," he grated. "If you say I'm Ben Silver, you'll find it a hard job to prove that, mister—a mighty hard job. Who are you, anyway?"

"Nelson Lee, the detective."

"Your name means nothing to me. I've been abroad too long."

"I'm investigating the murder of the other Ben Silver. Did you know he had been murdered?"

"Yes. I heard about it. But I didn't do it, mister. No use trying to bluff me that way."

"I'm not bluffing you. I want to be friendly," said Nelson Lee. "I'm eager to help, if I can. I wanted to help someone whom Ben Silver used to be very fond of—a woman who has waited for him for eighteen long years—a woman who, with everybody against her, still refuses to believe that the man she loves is dead."

The tall man turned away his head, and Nelson Lee could see his lips twitch.

"I don't believe it!" he grated. "The—the woman knew the truth all the time, and—and she didn't make any sign. She was just like all the rest of her sex—money tempted her!"

"I think you're wrong, my friend," replied the detective. "I believe that at first Ruth Sanders did think that it was Ben Silver who had returned, but her suspicions were roused later by his strange conduct. He refused to see her or send her any message, and it almost broke her heart, for through the long years she had always loved this husband of hers, who, on his return, seemed to ignore the tie that bound them."

A sudden laugh broke from the bearded lips.

"He ignored it because he—he didn't know the truth," came the swift response. "That was a little secret that I kept away from him. And I was right, too, for he was a double dealer! But, by James, he got what was coming to him! And it was his own fault—his own fault. If he had played the game with me, I'd have done the same with him."

"Who was he?"

The reply came almost before the sailor knew what he was saying.

"Dave Reed," he returned, "first mate of the Yokohama Belle."

"And so you are Ben Silver, engineer on the same boat, eh?"

The tall man shrugged his shoulders.

"That's my name, mister," he said. "No sense in denying it, I suppose. But I didn't murder Dave Reed, although——" He jerked the stem of his pipe towards the Rising Sun. "You'll find the murderers over there, sir," he said.

"There's more in this than just murder," retorted Nelson Lee. "It strikes me you're in a tight fix, or you wouldn't be hiding in the Martello tower. Why not let me have your story. Maybe I can help you to clear up the mess."

The tall man thought that out carefully, then eventually he nodded agreement.

"You're right, sir," he said. "I need all the help I can get. The situation is getting beyond me. Yamati is too clever, and that's a fact. It's a long story, sir."

He dropped on the knoll again and reached for his pipe. Nelson Lee waited in silence for the story to commence.

"I met Dave Reed at Kobe," Ben Silver began, "and we were both down on our luck. Then one day we went to Yokohama, and fell in with a Scots skipper, M'Dougall, who offered us jobs aboard the Yokohama Belle, a pearler. Dave had his master's certificate, and shipped as first mate, while I went to look after the engines. We had to agree to join the league—the Black Chrysanthemum."

He looked at Nelson Lee, who nodded.

"You've seen the handkerchiefs and flowers, no doubt," he added. "They were all part of the business. It appeared that the Belle really belonged to the society—a sort of religious affair, it was—and Mac himself had had to agree to take the oath before they'd make him skipper. We were on good terms—good wages, and a share of everything we took. But the bulk of the catch had to go to the league. Yamati, that grey-haired man whom you saw steering the sailing boat just now, was our head-diver, and the rest of the crew were all Japs. They seemed to think Yamati a sort of little god for they obeyed him in everything."

He sucked at his pipe for a moment.

"Well, to cut a long story short," he went on, "we were out for about three months and had done fairly well, when old Mac was taken ill and died. Dave took command then, and a week later the big thing happened."

He paused for a moment.

"I don't know if Yamati knew where the wreck was, but Dave always swore that he did. Anyhow, Yamati asked him to steer a certain course, and we hauled up at last, and Yamati went down. He is the best diver I've ever known or seen, and that's saying something. The Japs are much better at the game than our fellows, and they are almost monopolising the pearling grounds now. The Australians don't like it, but after all, the sea is open to everybody, and the Japs take risks that a white man won't. So that's about all there is to it."

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee, quietly. "I've been out that way."

"Well, Yamati was down for an unearthly time, and when he came up again he was carrying a small iron chest. It was crusted with barnacles and looked as though it had been down below for years and years."

He puffed at his pipe.

"We noticed that all the Japs gathered round him, and Dave and I could hardly get anywhere near him; but Dave did manage to get to the box at last, and although there was a bit of grumbling, he opened it." The eyes of the sailor lit up for a moment. "It was chockful of jewels!" he said, with a swift catch of his breath. "I never saw anything like 'em in my life!"

"I have had a sample of them," the detective put in— "a ruby, and a small casket."

The sailor nodded.

"I remember the box," he returned. "It had a pair of ear-rings inside it. They were pink pearls, as big as thumb-nails. Dave used the box for his tobacco, I remember."

He laughed grimly.

"I knew there was going to be trouble," he added. "Dave insisted on keeping the box in his cabin, and there was a riot. Yamati said that that day's catch was a special one for the Black Chysanthemum only. He showed us an entry in Mac's log which stated that on that day any haul would be set apart as special. Yamati swore that Mac had agreed to this before he sailed, and that was what made Dave and I believe that the whole voyage was undertaken solely to collar the jewels."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't see anything wrong in it myself, but Dave was mad over it. He vowed that we'd been tricked, and he brooded over it. Then he came to me one evening with his plan. He was going to pile up the Belle on the Barrier, and him and I were to get away in the longboat."

He stopped, but Nelson Lee did not make any comment, and he went on again.

"Maybe I was wrong to fall in with him," said the sailor, "but it was either go with him or the others. And besides, I'll admit that the jewels had made me hungry for them I was anxious to make sufficient to return home to my wife."

His lean fist closed for a moment.

"Well, we worked it smartly enough. One dark night Dave ran the old hooker ashore and the pair of us got away without the Japs following us. We worked our way round to Perth on a coaster, then got across to Durban. Then Dave said he'd take my papers, and my name, come to England, sell the jewels, and join me again for the share out. He wanted my name because he'd be in gaol years before and his own name wasn't any too safe. But I trusted him, and he booked a passage on a Union Castle boat.

"But the day he sailed I went into a saloon and was drugged, in such a way that under the influence of it I told all our plans to Yamati. Yes, he had followed us, and this was his way of learning the truth. The saloon keeper told me afterwards. By that time Yamati and his men were aboard a big freighter bound for Southampton. I knew I had to do something, so I shipped as deck hand on a troopship."

He looked across at Nelson Lee.

"That transport was a clipper, mister," he said, "for although I had lost a lot of time, I was in England only four days behind Dave, and on Sunday evening I was in the woods, just behind the cottage—and—and I heard Dave talking to Jake Sanders—bargaining with him—to marry my girl! Dave was double crossing me. I know now he never meant to let me have my share of the proceeds of the sale of the jewels!"

He laughed harshly.

"I could have strangled him there and then," he said fiercely. "But I thought of a better trick than that! He'd been showing Jake the jewels, and I watched him go back to the cottage and come out again in his shirtsleeves. He went down the road for a stroll, and I—I nipped across and went into the cottage, and up into his room—my room. His coat was hanging behind the door, and—and——"

He came to a halt, and, rising to his feet, knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"That's as much of the story as you need to know, mister," came the laconic remark. It was dusk now, and the sailor pointed out to the estuary.

"Yamati and his men have gone up to Belsthrope again," he said, "and they were up there on Sunday night. I saw them when they left early in the morning."

"After one a.m., you mean?"

Again Ben glanced at the keen visaged man.

"Yes, it was after that," he replied, "but how do you know?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Your story is not complete," he said, "and as you refuse to complete it I must keep my few secrets to myself. But I can tell you much more about yourself than you imagaine. For instance, I know that you spend your days in watching the Rising Sun, and your movements depend on the movements of Yamati."

Ben Silver drew a deep breath.

"I'm afraid of him," he said, in a husky voice. "I know why he is hanging about here, and I've got to lie low until he goes

—or until someone puts a stop to his game. Why don't you tackle him, sir?" he remarked, eagerly. "If Dave Reed was murdered, it is Yamati and his gang who are at the bottom of it. They hunted him across the world and had their revenge."

Nelson Lee looked at the tall man slowly.

"Have they had their revenge?" he asked, pointedly, "or is there still something missing? I don't think it was Dave Reed's life that they were after, but Dave Reed's ill-gotten gains."

Ben Silver drew back a pace.

"And who is to say that we haven't got the—the gains?" he muttered.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Would they be hanging around Saltport if they had?" he asked.

The tall sailor looked out over the estuary, and was silent. The detective waited for a moment to give the man an opportunity of speaking, if he desired to do so; but Ben Silver had a vein of obstinacy in his character, and he was not to be coerced.

"I'm off now," said Nelson Lee, "and I have quite enjoyed our little chat. Perhaps you and I may meet again, Silver."

The sailor swung round on his heel and faced his companion.

"I hope so," he returned. "I can see that you are a match for Yamati, and—and anyone else that comes along, so I'm not going to worry. But, maybe, if you do get into a fix, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll come to the rescue, eh? Well, that's a bargain, and I'll do the same by you, if necessary."

They shook hands on the little compact, and Ben looked hard into Lee's eyes.

"I'm not sure that I'm doing the wise thing," he muttered, half to himself, "but I'll hang on for a bit longer. I'm afraid of Yamati and that's the long and short of it. I've been a poor man all my life, and—and——"

He said no more, but his silence was as eloquent as speech. When Nelson Lee walked off down the road his mind was already satisfied that he had solved the second problem that the case had presented.

"Ben Silver will have to speak sooner or later," he muttered to himself. "But I think I understand why he keeps silent now. There is one way of making him speak, and I think I can manage that."

He reached the little seaport and turned down the alley going along the stone causeway, and stepping out on the jetty. It was dusk now, and Nelson Lee made his way along the wooden structure to the end. There was no sign of Nipper, and Nelson Lee looked about him. It was only a few minutes past ten o'clock, and Nipper was not the sort to leave his post until relieved.

But there was no sign of the lad, and at last Nelson Lee turned and went back to the cottage where they lodged, and made inquiries. Wolf was still there, but Nipper was not to be found. The big dog came up to Nelson Lee and thrust his soft muzzle into the detective's palm.

"Getting tired of being left alone, are you?" said Nelson Lee, patting the dog's head. "All right, old man, I'll take you with me this time."

He went out into the town and spent an hour seaching in the darkened streets, but there was no Nipper to be seen. Finally, Lee made his way down to the jetty again.

He heard the sound of angry voices as he stepped on to the causeway, and he came to a halt and listened. He could just discern a knot of sinewy figures gathered on the edge of the jetty, apparently wrangling with each other over something.

At last, the knot of men came down the jetty and turned along the beach. Nelson Lee noticed that the tide was on the turn again, and presently he saw a boat put off from the shore and move out into the estuary. It was dark, but he was able to follow the slow moving boat, and he saw it head out for the Rising Sun.

He paced along the beach and waited. Half an hour later the boat returned with a solitary figure at the oars. When it grounded on the soft mud the man stepped out and came up to Lee.

"Good-evening," said the detective,

The burly fisherman came to a halt.

"It's more like a 'good-morning,' mister," he corrected, peering through the dusk at the speaker.

"I'm looking for a friend of mine," said Nelson Lee, "a youngster. He was going to do some fishing from the jetty while the tide was up. Have you seen anything of him?"

The fisherman laughed harshly. He was the man who had been mending his nets lower down the beach.

"It seems to me that there are a lot of people looking for that young friend of yourn," he returned. "I've just taken a load of Lascars out to that steamer. They swear that someone pinched their boat—took it away from the jetty—and—well, it's the sort of thing a youngster might do. But—it comes hard, you know, at my years—they got me out of my bed to row 'em aboard, and when we got there, we found their boat tied up alongside the hooker. There was something in her, too, the way those lascars gathered round and jabbered. But I came away and left 'em to it. I can't do without my night's rest. Good-night."

Nelson Lee watched the figure until it had vanished in the low-roofed hut behind the sea-wall, then the detective turned and went down towards the jetty once more.

He was satisfied now that Nipper was on board the Rising Sun, and there was every reason to believe that he was either a prisoner or in hiding there.

CHAPTER 9.
A Terrible Ordeal!

NIPPER came back to consciousness with a throbbing head and a pain across his shoulders that no movement or change of position could shift.

For a long time the lad lay still, trying to

piece together the whirl of events that came into his brain. He felt the stout cord around his wrists and ankles, and realised that he was a prisoner somewhere.

Gradually, the smell of tar and oil gave him a clue to his prison. And he also noted another fact. The floor on which he lay was not quite level. It tilted slightly, and once in trying to move, Nipper rolled over against the side, and the stout bulkhead came beneath his shoulders.

"I think I've got it," the lad muttered. "I'm aboard the Rising Sun, and must be low tide, now, for she's settled into the ooze again."

His deductions were perfectly correct, and were easily arrived at. Had the vessel been still afloat, she would have been riding on a level keel, and was bound to have a small movement beneath the roll of the tide.

"And it's all through that blinkin' monkey!" was Nipper's second decision, as he smothered a groan. "I remember it all, now. Phew! But that little beggar put up a rare fight. I hope I didn't hurt him much."

With this charitable thought the youngster lapsed into silence and a long moment passed. Then the silence was broken, and Nipper's quick ears were on the alert once more. Scuffling footfalls were sounding above, feet that slipped and gripped on the iron deck above. Once the sound of a man's body thudding on the deck came to Nipper through the scuffling noise.

He sat up and listened with bated breath. There was a fight of some sort going on above his prison. A rough and tumble affair evidently, for the place he was confined in fairly echoed and re-echoed to the din of it. Nipper could even tell that while most of the unseen fighters were barefooted, there was at least one who had iron-shod boots on, for the sound they made was quite different to the wet, sloppy flap of the naked soles.

The deck above fairly shook to the impact, and the scuffling seemed to centre itself on the spot where the thud had sounded. The silence was unbroken for a long moment, then another sound came through the dusk—feet moving on a narrow companion-way, and, a moment later, the creak of a rusted lock.

There struck through the narrow doorway a shaft of yellow light and Nipper, blinking like an owl, had just time to see a huddle of sinewy forms standing in the narrow space beyond the door. A man's body was thrust through the opening, and it tilted forward and fell across Nipper's knees.

"Hallo! Hold up——"

The door went to with a bang and the key was turned in the lock again. Nipper made an effort to drag his knees from beneath the heavy-breathing stranger.

"What's happened to you?" he asked.

There was no reply, and it dawned on the lad then that the man was unconscious. The breath was coming and going in that stertorous sound that cannot be mistaken.

The moments dragged past, and presently Nipper heard a change come in the deep-gasping breaths. They lenghtened, and at last there was the sound of a half-sigh, and the heavy body that was wedging the lad down shifted slightly.

"I say, old man."

Nipper spoke aloud, and the man moved again. Very slowly and awkwardly he dragged himself to a sitting position. Nipper could feel the body leaning against him in the dusk.

"All right, old man," said Nipper again. "Lean on me, if you like."

To his amazement he heard a short laugh.

"So I have found you after all, eh?"

"The guv'nor!" Nipper gasped.

He turned his head as though to try and see the face of his companion.

"What a dashed fool I am," he went on. "I might have known that it was you. By jiminy, guv'nor, we've got into it this time, and no mistake."

"It seems very like it," said Nelson Lee, and to Nipper's delight the voice was quite steady and strong again.

"How did you find out I was here?" Nipper asked.

Nelson Lee had shifted his position slightly, so that he was able to lean against the bulkhead beside his young assistant.

"Let me have your story first," was the reply.

It was only when Nipper started to tell of his adventure that he fully appreciated the stupidity of it. There had been no real need for him to board the tramp steamer at all. It sounded a very feeble sort of a yarn.

"The monkey and I went head over heels into the boat, guv'nor," he wound up, "and that's about all I remember until I found myself in here. But I reckon that Yamati and his men came across me and I'm their victim. Suppose I've made a fool of myself coming out here at all."

"I'm not so sure," replied Nelson Lee. "You've found out a lot. I should have done the same had I been in your shoes. Your biggest mistake was in underestimating the powers of the little monkey. Anyway, Yamati has caught me, too." He was silent for a moment. "I knew you had boarded the vessel," he went on. "And I thought it best to come and search for you."

"How did they collar you?"

"I got on board by climbing the rope ladder," Lee explained. "I must really blame Wolf for what happened, although he did it for the best."

"Wolf?" Nipper echoed. "Have they got him as well?"

"No; but he came with me, in the boat I borrowed, to the side of the vessel, and just as I got on deck there was a deuce of a rumpus—I think that that monkey had a hand in it! I reckon it spotted Wolf, and the average monkey hates a dog."

Nipper smothered a groan.

"That monkey again!" he muttered.

"Yamati and his gang could not have been asleep," added Lee quietly, "and the lascars came up just as the fight was getting inter-

esting. Where Wolf is now I don't know, but I fancy he leapt over the side and got clean away."

"Well, I heard the row," said Nipper. "And it strikes me that you gave them a rough ten minutes. But here we are in a jam, guv'nor, and it isn't going to be easy to get out of it."

"It seems next to impossible," replied Nelson Lee, grimly.

There was a long wait, during which Nipper found himself dropping into a deep sleep. He was roused by a light shining on his face. and he started up to a sitting position, blinking at the yellow gleam from the lantern. Behind the lantern he could see a wizened, yellow face. Yamati was squatting on a heap of sacks in the centre of the lazarette, and behind were the other three Japs. The head diver was looking at his two prisoners with steady, inscrutable eyes.

"You wake now, eh?"

Nelson Lee was leaning back against the bulkhead, and he nodded his head.

"We have been waiting for you, Yamati," he returned slowly, and he spoke in Japanese, a language with which he was fairly familiar. The look that came into Yamati's eyes made Nipper smile.

"You know our tongue, then?" he said, in the soft, clipped speech of his island race.

"A little," said Nelson Lee.

Yamati moved the lantern slightly, so that the beams might fall on the clean-cut features of the detective.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"What does that matter?" Nelson Lee returned, quietly. "My name would not explain anything, Yamati."

The grey-haired little man nodded his head.

"True!" he returned. "It is not your name, but your deeds that interest me." His deep-set eyes flamed for a brief moment. "You are a thief," he said, impressively. "You have taken that which is not yours to take. Where have you hidden the jewels?"

Nelson Lee knew that much depended on his answer. In his own mind he was satisfied that the stolen jewels were not in another's care, but Yamati's question plainly indicated that the head diver was not aware of the fact.

"I do not know where the jewels are!" said Nelson Lee.

Just for a moment a shadow crossed the wrinkled face of the old Jap. He leaned forward and looked straight into Nelson Lee's eyes.

"You must be lying," he murmured, "and yet your face is the face of a brave man—and brave men do not lie."

He stepped out of the little store, and the three Japs went across to Nipper and lifted him. Just for a moment the youngster felt tempted to make a fight for it, bound though he was, but the futility of that course came to him, and he submitted with a shrug of his shoulders.

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Ten minutes later he and Nelson Lee found themselves in the bottom of the brown-sailed boat, moving off up the estuary. It was dark, and the stars were glimmering overhead. A slight wind filled the sail, and the boat began to move swiftly through the rustling water.

Yamati was at the tiller, and Nelson Lee could see the wrinkled, expressionless face standing out against the dusk. It seemed to the detective that they were beating up the estuary, and the boat took two long beats to windward before a murmur from Yamati brought some of his companions down to the sail.

A moment or so passed, then Yamati gave another order, and the sail was lowered. The boat glided on, and Nelson Lee saw two long, curved uprights appear on either side of the boat. Then one of the Japs reached out and caught at a projection, and the boat was brought to a halt.

Nipper sat up and peered about him.

"Where the deuce have they taken us to?" he asked.

It seemed to him as though the boat had slid into shelter of some sort, for all round it he could just discern high, curved uprights, set at irregular intervals. Then suddenly the symmetry of the shape came to him, and a low whistle broke from his lips.

"It's a wreck of some sort, guv'nor," the lad whispered. "The skeleton of an old vessel."

The boat had been pushed forward into the centre of the wreck, and a word of command came from Yamati's lips. Two of his companions swung themselves over the side of the little sailing-boat, splashed forward for a moment, then returned, and Nipper was lifted out of the boat.

Nipper's guess had been correct. It was the skeleton of a wrecked schooner that they were in, and the two custodians carried him to what had once been the mast, and was now a mere broken stump, deep in the hull. To one of the rusted rings they tied the youngster, so that he could just stand erect.

Nipper was knee-deep in the water when they left him, and a quick shiver passed through him. A hint of what was to be his fate came to the lad, and he had to bite on his lips to prevent a cry from breaking out.

Again he heard the splashing sound, and the two sturdy men returned bearing Nelson Lee between them. The detective was fastened to the same ring, so that he and Nipper stood side by side, bound helpless.

A light flashed from the boat, and Yamati arose to his feet, holding up the lantern, so that the yellow gleams might fall on the two figures bound to the stump of the mast.

"You are thieves, and have stolen what was not yours," the calm, slow voice said. "In my country a thief is punished with death. Yet it is not for me to be your judge."

He made a motion of his hand eastward. There was something picturesque about the squat body and the aged face.

"The tide is going out, and will not return again until its appointed time. If the god you worship knows the secret of your souls he will stay the tides and you will escape. But if you are guilty, then the tide will rise and you will drown. And your blood will not be upon my head nor will the Black Chrysanthemum suffer a stain."

The two sailors splashed into the boat, and one of them, picking up an oar, began to push the boat out through the gap in the battered sides of the wreck.

Yamati was still standing upright with the lantern gleaming on his face.

"Pray to your gods," his thin, austere voice came over the water, "for I judge you not. They will decide your fate."

His hand went up above his head, and he made them a gesture of farewell, then the boat shot through the gap, and the light vanished. Nipper heard the creak of the block as the brown sail was hoisted, caught the faint lap, lap of the waves as they rustled and fretted to and fro through the half-rotted ribs of the wrecked vessel. He caught his breath sharply, and then turned towards Nelson Lee.

"It—it was all my fault, guv'nor," the lad broke out. "I got you into this mess. I'm sorry."

Nelson Lee leaned up against the stump of the mast, and moving his bound wrists slightly, managed to grip Nipper's pinioned hands. His fingers tightened in a warm, friendly pressure.

"Not another word, old man," he said. "It was not your fault at all. We went into this thing knowing what might happen, and we've got to take what turns up."

He heard Nipper smother a half-sigh.

"Besides, while there's life there's hope," the calm voice went on. "The tide is going down, and will not return again for at least seven hours. Look—it is getting towards dawn, Nipper. We have another day in front of us."

Nipper raised his eyes eastward. The black ribs of the vessel were beginning to form and take definite shape. He could see the sheen of the waves now as they frothed out and in through the naked ribs. And eastwards the grey dawn was spreading out its fingers over the dark sky, heralding the coming of the day.

"Seven hours, guv'nor," the lad murmured.

Seven long hours to wait—seven hours to drag their weary moments on until the tide would again return. The light was increasing rapidly, and Nelson Lee's eyes scanned the ribs of the wrecked vessel. Quite plainly he saw the mark that the high tide had left on one of the long, curved ribs. It was at least two feet above his head.

So, when the tide returned, and reached its full, he and Nipper would be covered. His swift brain reckoned out the time. He knew that low tide was due about 3 a.m., and he judged that it was near that time now, By 9 a.m. or 10, at the latest, high tide would come again.

CHAPTER 10.

Full Tide!

"THE tide has turned, guv'nor."

"Yes, old man."

One hoarse voice answered the other, and again silence fell.

Nipper, watching the curved ribs of the wreck, saw that the little waves that had been circling steadily in and out had begun to rise again, and they were setting towards them.

The long hours had passed slowly, and the task of shouting had brought its inevitable effect. Nipper's voice was little more than a croak now, and Nelson Lee was also feeling the strain.

Overhead the blazing sun had risen higher and higher into the cloudless sky. Now and again a white winged seagull would swoop down towards the wreck to poise midway, and, with an angry shreik, go slanting off up wind again.

The tide rises swiftly on that part of the coast. As Nelson Lee and Nipper stood side by side, watching the oncoming waves, they could almost see the gradual rise of the tide. Nipper marked a bolt in one of the black ribs, and watched it. It was two feet above the level of the tide, when he first noted it. It seemed to him only a matter of moments before the waves were running above the bolt.

"It's going to be swift work," the youngster thought, with a quick catch of his breath.

The long moments dragged on, and then the tide came round with a swing, and Nipper saw that he was now almost waist deep. A wave, lumbering against the stump of mast, broke and its salt foam flicked across the lad's cheek, wet, and cold, and menacing.

They set to shouting for help again, until scarcely a sound could they get from their throats. Meanwhile, the water rose higher and higher, until only their heads were visible. A wave splashed right over Nipper's head.

Nelson Lee felt Nipper start slightly, and he turned and looked at the slender figure. He realised that the end was not far off now. He knew that the next great wave would probably sweep over Nipper and might not recede again. If only he could have lifted the youngster— but that was impossible, bound and helpless as he was.

He looked out through the black ribs at the green seas. The sun was behind him, and he could see the long shadows cast by the curved ribs.

As he gazed, it seemed to him that one of the shadows had moved, it seemed to broaden slowly, and a silver ripple ran out from it. His wearied eyes strained themselves, and he watched the shadow closely. Surely he was dreaming! And yet—the black shape came nearer, and suddenly it appeared in the wide gap through which Yamati had steered the boat—a black shape that sent out two fat ripples from its sides. Nelson Lee caught sight of a sleek head and a great lolling tongue and mouth, then from a panting throat came a deep wouf!

Nipper dropped back against the mast, and was waiting with closed eyes for the wave which he knew would send him under. In that grim moment the lad's clean spirit had nerved itself to the last great trial, and he was not afraid. But the sound of the frantic bark brought him upright, and he opened his eyes.

"Wolf!"

Swimming straight for him was the Alsatian, its faithful eyes fixed on the white face.

"Wolf!" Nipper breathed again.

Then a boat came in sight. The bow thudded against the curved ribs, sagged onwards, and came into the centre of the wreck. A tall man was standing up in the stern, and his bearded face was alight with absolute amazement. Nipper heard a choked word break from the sailor's lips, then in another moment the boat had been urged up to the stump of the mast, and the sailor, leaning forward, caught at Nipper's arm.

"What the dickens does it mean?" Ben Silver cried.

As he spoke he saw what had happened. The sea had hidden the fact that these two figures were tied to their wooden support. Ben's fingers fumbled in his pocket and he drew out a thick clasp-knife.

"Hang on!" he cried, as he dipped forward. He had to reach down into the sea to cut at the bonds, and as he did so, the last great wave came booming into the wreck. It surged over Nipper and Nelson Lee, and their rescuer, as though enraged that this grim game it had played was at an end. Ben was almost drawn out of the boat, but he saved himself in the nick of time, and another slash of his knife saw the stout cord severed. Nipper swayed forward, and would have been dragged away by the wave had not Ben made a swift grab at him.

"Steady, my lad," the sailor shouted, as he clung to his hold.

He flung himself back and tugged Nipper bodily into the boat. It was only then that he saw that the lad was bound hand and feet.

"No wonder you couldn't save yourself," Ben muttered, leaning out again. Nelson Lee was shoulder deep in the sea, and he nodded quickly to Ben.

"You'll have to do the same with me," Ben Silver," he said.

And that was the first hint that Ben had of the identity of these two white, haggard figures. Nelson Lee was helped into the boat, and then, and not until then, did a certain wearied animal swimming slowly to the stern, allow himself to be dragged, utterly exhausted, into saftey.

"This beats everything," said Ben thickly. "How in the name of fortune did you manage to get stuck here? It looks like Yamati's work."

"Better finish off your work, first, Ben," said Nelson Lee, indicating his bound wrists

and ankles; for Ben's knife had only cut the cord that had held the two doomed figures to the masts, and their bonds were still tight.

The sailor reached out and severed the bonds; then, bending over he began to chafe Nipper's numbed limbs.

"Another five minutes and you'd have both drowned," he said. "Was it Yamati?"

"Yes," said Nelson Lee, describing briefly all that had happened. "I knew that Wolf had got away, but I still can't see how he knew where to find us. I suppose he had something to do with your arrival here?"

"He has everything to do with it," said Ben. "I was down on the mud flats, watching the Rising Sun as usual. I had got a trifle scarred of that Martello tower. I knew you had spotted me up there and I thought that if you could see me, then Yamati might see me, too. So I got in amongst the dunes by the mud flats, and watched from there. I was lying beside this boat, as a matter of fact.

"And suddenly I saw this dog come out of the sea. I stared at it. I couldn't make out where it had come from, and no dog could swim across the ocean. It stood there, staring up the estuary, ears cocked, listening. I couldn't hear anything particular, but he seemed to, and he got all worked up about it.

"Then he saw me, and came over. I thought he was going to attack me, but he took my coat in his teeth and forced me to pay attention to him. I'll admit it took that dog a long time to knock a little sense ino my thick skull. But I spotted his collar at last, and saw your name on it—Nelson Lee, Gray's Inn Road, London. That made me sit up. I guessed then that you wanted me to do something, so I followed the dog. He took me down to the water. He plunged in and started swimming. I followed him in the boat and—and here we are!"

The great dog was lying serenely happy curled up at his master's feet, and he seemed to understand all that was said.

"I can't tell how he understood," said Nelson Lee. "I expect he saw Yamati and his friends leave the boat, and his scent would tell him that Nipper and I had been on board it. But all the same, it was a great bit of work for the old chap, and there was something human in the way he picked on you to do the rescue work."

"But how did he know that you were out in the wreck?" asked Ben.

"Perhaps he heard that last rotten shout of mine, guv'nor," suggested Nipper, weakly.

"We shall never know the truth, but we owe him our lives," returned Nelson Lee. "And now we'd better get back to Saltport. We must rest and get over this ordeal, after which I shall have to catch Yamati, I'm afraid."

"What of?" asked Ben.

"Yamati, he wants the jewels, Ben Silver. You know that as well as I do. He thought I had them, but that has failed him. He does not know that you are here, but there are two people at Belsthrope connected with you. Either of them might have the jewels."

"Who are they?" queried Ben huskily.

"Your mother and your wife," said Nelson Lee sternly.

The tall man's gnarled fists clenched suddenly.

"If that yellow fiend harms either of them——"

"Threats are of very little use where a man like Yamati is concerned," the detective put in drily. "Action is what you require."

"I'll do anything I can, sir," said the sailor earnestly.

Nelson Lee looked at him.

"I'm willing to help you," he said, "but on one condition, and that is that if I succeed in preventing Yamati from carrying out his designs, whatever they are, you will give me an honest reply to a certain question I will have to ask you."

Ben looked at him for a moment, then his eyes dropped.

"All right," he said with a sigh of resignation. "That's a bargain."

"Good!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Now get us back to Saltport. Nipper and I are about done in and must have rest before we do anything else. Once there, we must rest, and you must watch. When we have recovered from our ordeal we shall pay Yamati a visit, and the police will be with us. But if, before we are ready, you see

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1D BARS (Wrapped)

MILK — NUT MILK — PLAIN

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Yamati leave the Rising Sun to sail up the estuary to Belsthrope you must come and rouse us at once. It may be a matter of life and death. You understand?"

"Yes sir," said Ben grimly. "You can count on me."

CHAPTER 11.

A Dramatic Offer!

NELSON LEE and Nipper rested for the remainder of that day, and they badly needed it, for their nerves were frayed, and their bodies tired out. Even so, the sun had scarcely sunk below the horizon when Ben Silver came rushing to the cottage.

"Yamati and his Japs have gone up the estuary," he announced breathlessly.

Nelson Lee and Nipper had just finished a meal, so there was no time wasted. A car was commandeered, they motored out in the Belsthrope road as hard as they could go.

Yamati would have the wind dead astern all the way up the estuary, and as the road wound in and out amongst the mud flats, and over the hills to Belsthrope, it was touch and go whether they could get there in time.

Arriving in Belsthrope, Nelson Lee roused out Inspector Freeman, who rushed with them down through the wood to the shores of the estuary. It was now quite dark and they had some difficulty in picking their way.

They were only just in time. They came suddenly on the shadowy shapes of several small men, who, on seeing them fled a little way along the shore and vanished by a hut. They heard someone protesting loudly—then silence.

"That is old Saul's hut," said Freeman—"the fisherman who declared he saw Ben Silver after he had been murdered."

The inspector had not yet been told who the tall, bearded man was who ran by his side.

The party stole across the beach towards the hut, then, at a signal from Nelson Lee they stepped out into the lighted doorway.

"Good-evening, Saul!" said the deep-voiced inspector. "Anything wrong?"

There was something wrong! One Jap held old Saul's wrists, and another had clapped a hand over his mouth to prevent him calling for help. Yamati's men was hoping the inspector and his party would not look in the hut. But the cat was out of the bag, now, with a vengeance.

Nelson Lee made a movement forward so that he cut off the retreat of Yamati and his men. His movement was made adroitly enough, but Yamati recognised him, and almost before Lee was aware of it, the head diver had made his leap.

"Look out," cried Lee, "don't let them get away, Freeman!"

Yamati, old man though he was, appeared to be as tough as nails, and he had closed with the detective, feeling for a hold. Nelson Lee saw Freeman fling his huge bulk on one short figure and bear it down to the ground, while Nipper, helped by old Saul, was tackling the others.

It was a wild scene while it lasted. Yamati was obviously an expert at that wrestling which his race have introduced into Europe, and it was well for Nelson Lee that he had spent long hours practising ju-jitsu with one of the best men in London. He and the wiry old diver swayed out of the hut and across the beach together, and in quick succession Yamati put two holds on Lee, each of which the detective countered by just the right move.

Finally he, in his turn, went for a lock, and got it. Yamati felt himself going under, and made one last desperate attempt to break the iron hold. Then he went down, and the strain on his arm warned him of what would happen. A move of an inch would see the limb broken, and as he bent over the tough form, Nelson Lee heard the old fellow draw a quick breath.

"Well fought, Yamati," said Lee, in Japanese, "but your age has beaten your cunning now. Better tell your men to surrender."

Yamati rapped out a command, and the fight ceased. Nelson Lee told Freeman, Nipper and Saul to stand to one side. Ben Silver seemed to have vanished, but there were other things to see to just then.

The head diver stood proudly before Nelson Lee.

"The battle is yours," he said, "and your gods have fought for you. We are in your hands."

"The gods fought for me because you were in the wrong, Yamati," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I told you the truth when I said that I did not know where the jewels were."

"So you escaped the tide," said Yamati. "It is fate, and how shall we fight against it?" He turned to his men. "We have come to the end of our destinies. We have tried and failed, and we will be punished according to the laws of the white man. May those who follow us have better fortune. For follow us they will, and that which once belonged to the Black Chrysanthemum must one day come back to the——"

So interested was the circle, although two of them did not understand a word that fell from the grave lips, that they did not hear the grate of a boat on the sands, nor the footfall of a man coming up the beach. But suddenly Yamati came to a halt, as a voice, a panting voice, sounded.

"They will not need to come here. Yamati," said Ben Silver. "There is the treasure!"

On the beach, in the light from the doorway, he cast a wet, soft bag, from which the water was still dripping. Saul had turned at the voice, and the old fisherman gave vent to a cry.

"Ben—Ben Silver!" he cried, dropping back a pace.

Nelson Lee leaned forward, and picked up the soft leather bag. He turned and looked at Ben.

(*Continued on page* 40.)

All About Our Great New Story Of The Chums Of St. Frank's!

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR CHUMS—Next week sees the start of a Great New Story of the Chums of St. Frank's. Without beating about the bush, I say that this yarn is the best E. S. Brooks has ever given us. And as so many of you have written in asking for a really good school yarn, the result of E. S. Brooks' latest effort is doubly gratifying.

Whilst our Detective-Thrillers, which took the place of the long complete St. Frank's story weeks ago, have proved a universal success, a good many readers felt that it was a bit of a wrench to lose the St. Frank's stories. And they wrote and said so.

They wanted the detective-thrillers every week, and at the same time the St. Frank's stories. Give them both, is what I said, and set to work accordingly.

Mr. E. S. Brooks was approached, and he very eagerly set about writing what he said "will be the best story of St. Frank's I have ever written." When you see the first chapters of this story you will instantly agree with him and me: he has made it a winner.

"IS ST. FRANK'S GOING TO SLEEP?"

That is an unusual question to ask. But it is brought up, and by the most amazing character you have yet to meet. Perhaps you will say the old school is very much awake, and in turn ask who is this person? Who is this someone who has dared to say such a thing? Well, I'll just tell you. He is Mr. James Kingswood—Fighting Kingswood, the new headmaster of St. Frank's.

Young, virile and original, a produce of the modern age, Fighting Kingswood has made a great reputation for himself in scholastic circles. Something unusual happens at St. Frank's which brings the governors to the conclusion that now Nelson Lee is absent from the school a much stronger man than Mr. Wilkes is required to hold the reins. Their choice falls on Mr. James Kingswood, and from that moment the fur begins to fly.

You will like Fighting Kingswood. Everyone does—except the slackers, and they don't count. Everybody is struck by the commanding presence of the man. He is a sort of super Handforth—a man of dynamic personality and energy, and these characteristics are soon observed by every boy with whom he comes into contact. As you may very well expect, St. Frank's becomes "split." Some are in favour of the new Head, a good many are not. But Fighting Kingswood simply throws back his broad shoulders and sets about his task of

"WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!"

in the most original and sensational methods.

Here is the general theme of the story Mr. E. S. Brooks has written, and it starts in next week's issue. You'll not only like it—you'll go crazy over it!

Grand Prizes for Readers.

Teacher: "What is salt?"

Tommy: "Stuff that makes potatoes taste funny if there is none on them."

(*H. McLaughlis, 9, Turgrand Street, Walworth, S.E.17—a pocket wallet.*)

An old gentleman visiting a country mansion thought he would take a rise out of the groom.

On seeing the stone dogs at either side of the door he exclaimed:

"Say, my man, how often do you feed these dogs?"

"Every time they bark," was the prompt reply.

(*T. Maye, Bank House, Plympton, S. Devon—a penknife.*)

Old Farmer (tending threshing machine, to applicant for work): "Ever done any thrashing?"

Applicant (modestly): "Well, yes, seeing that I am father of eleven children."

(*C. Bott, 53, Dunsten Street, Hickley Road, Leicester—a pocket wallet.*)

Trent: "Was Brown cool when you told him that burglars had broken into his house?"

Jock: "Cool! I should think so. He was so cool his teeth chattered."

(*J. J. Manen, c/o Penghulu, H. Jalil, 76, Limbongan, 2nd M. Malacca, S.S.—a grand prize.*)

Teacher: "What state is Chicago in?"

Boy: "Awful, sir."

(*A. W. Hollingworth, 66, Ashfield Road, Sneitar Dale, Notts.—a penknife.*)

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The Brotherhood of Vengeance!

(*Continued from page* 38.)

"I think you have done a very wise thing," he said. "Where were they hidden?"

"I put them in a lobster pot and sunk them in the estuary." replied Ben. "But the danged things have only brought trouble to me and mine, and I'll be glad to see the end of them."

Nelson Lee turned to Yamati, and held out the bag.

"Here is what belongs to the Black Chrysanthemum," he said.

Even then the Oriental calm did not desert the old diver. He opened the bag, then spreading out a handkerchief on the sands, he emptied the glittering contents out on the square of silk. It seemed to Nelson Lee as though the old man knew how many jewels should be there, for he counted and examined them swiftly. Then his head went back, and he bowed to the detective.

"And what is your will in this matter?" he asked.

"I would first hear your story, Yamati," replied Lee.

It was a long history to which he listened.

The jewels were part of the treasure that had been stolen from a temple in Kobe hundreds of years before. A chart of a place where the vessel had sunk had been handed down from priest to priest, and at last the day had come when Yamati, one of the heads of the order, had been able to start off in quest of the treasure. Much of Ben's story was proved correct. Yamati and his men had managed to reach England three days ahead of the Cape liner with Dave on board. They had come down at once to Belsthrope, and had made their plans in readiness for the coming of the first mate.

Then came the most dramatic part of the story.

"We placed the ladder against the window, and Tyo, my monkey, climbed into the room. The man, who was a thief, saw him, and he made a rush to get at him. Tyo leaped for the window, and came down the ladder, with the man behind him. We were waiting at the bottom of the ladder and then suddenly, excellency, I saw the man halt and put his hands, so"—Yamati clasped his yellow hands over his heart. "For a moment he stood on the ladder; then, as tree falls, so did he fall downward, striking his head against the lower part of the ladder as he did so."

Nelson Lee nodded his head.

"You mean that he died of heart failure," he said.

"His coward heart failed him," said Yamati grimly.

Nelson Lee turned to Freeman and made a quick explanation.

"I am sure that he's telling the truth," he added, "for it was my first impression in the mortuary that the man had died of heart failure. The bruise was not deep enough, and there was very little blood. Then, again, in his room there were only one or two spots, and yet a full-blooded man like him would have bled profusely under a death-dealing blow."

Yamati continued his story in a quiet voice. How they had searched in the dead man's clothes and kit bag without success.

"You were too late, Yamati," Ben Silver put in, "for I went into the cottage and got the jewels from Dave Reed's pocket."

The old Jap bent his head.

"You played a clever part," he said, "for we did not know that you had followed us. We knew that the English woman was your wife, and we thought that the dead man might have tempted her with the jewels. We had meant to wreak the truth out of her to-night. But all we did, and would have done, was for the Black Chrysanthemum."

"I understand that, Yamati," put in Lee. "As far as I can see no crime has been committed by you, and as far as I am concerned you are at liberty to go free."

"I think the same thing," said Freeman.

Yamati dropped on his knees in front of the handkerchief, and began to arrange the jewels into five little heaps.

"We promised the captain a share of what he found," he said, "and that share had to go, in part, to the man who is dead and the man who is alive. Two are dead, so the share goes to you. The Brotherhood knows of that arrangement."

Ben gulped as the heap was thrust towards him, and he gathered them up in his cap—gems that meant that he was a rich man from that moment.

Then Yamati lifted the last heap. He arose to his feet, and the light, falling on his face, revealed it bathed in a smile of great contentment. He had achieved the object for which he had strived so hard, and at the last moment reward had come his way.

"And we can go?"

Nelson Lee indicated the boat on the edge of the creek.

Down the beach went the four figures, to enter the boat and push off into the estuary. Nelson Lee and Freeman and Ben Silver stood on the marge of the sea, watching them go. And suddenly there came across the sleeping waters a chant—a long, low, mournful chant, which arose and fell, plaintive, soul-stirring, remote. It was the song of the Happy Returning.

"I'm glad it's over," breathed Ben, at last. "I had to give the jewels back. I had to—for my wife's sake—for my mother's sake. As it is, Yamati has borne no malice."

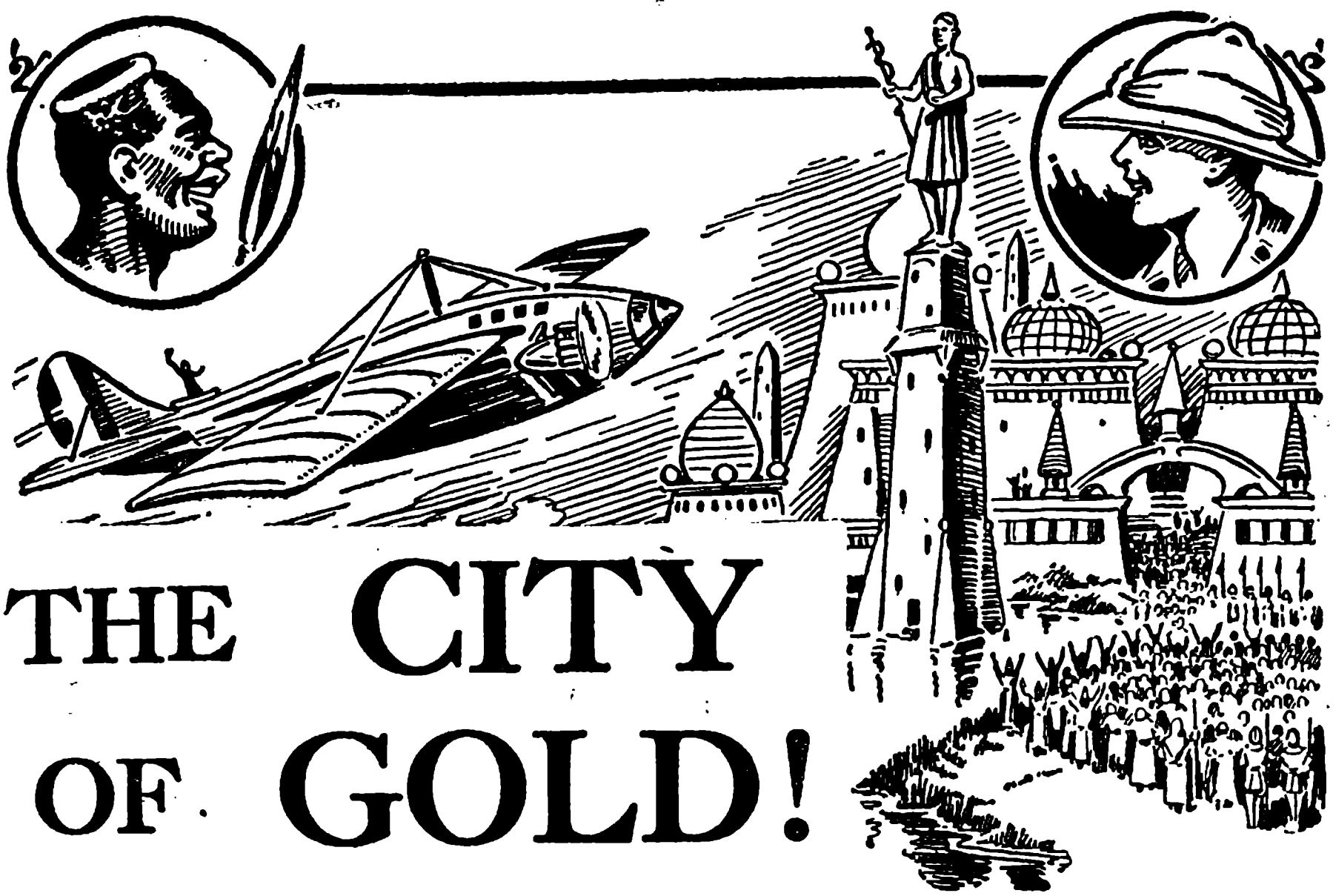
"Yamati fought for what was his," said Nelson Lee. "He fought fairly according to the laws of his people, running the great risk of falling foul of our laws. I am sure we have done right to let him go, as Dave Reed was not murdered after all, but died of heart failure, accelerated by terror—and a guilty conscience."

And the following day, that view was endorsed by the officials at Scotland Yard, thus closing the mysterious case.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's Gripping Complete Detective-Thriller, entitled "The Man From Chicago!" It's great!)

Thrills In The Heart Of Unknown Africa!



THE CITY OF GOLD!

Tom Cook, the white boy-king of a mysterious city in the heart of Africa, has vowed to free the people from the power of the priests. But before he can carry out his task an earthquake overwhelms the city, and he and his companions find themselves cut off by a forest fire.

Treasure Trove!

"BEN—will—make—for—the palace!" gasped Al; as he choked with the sulphurous fumes which permeated everything. "Tom, old boy—I m sorry—but I'm goin' to——"

Old Metla the councillor caught him as he swayed in the saddle, and for the rest of the ride held the boy firmly in the saddle.

It took them over an hour to reach the city for they continually had to make a long detour to get out of the way of freshly opened seams from which the steam poured or dodged trees that crashed down to right or left of them. They breathed a sigh of relief when at last they got out of the zone of resinous trees and entered the outer edge of forest surrounding the palace, mostly ironwood or other hard timber which would not fire so easily.

The white stone of the palace glared angrily red as they emerged, and they saw that the glare came not only from the forest fire, but also from the great mountain far in the distance, and whose top had been blown clear off, and was now belching flames and lava over the adjacent country.

Then Lulu let out a mighty yell and pointed to a small figure which was pelting towards them and waving frantically.

It was Ben Bold, engineer of their flying boat, wildly excited and trembling with eagerness.

"Say, bawss, I hope yuh didn't think thet I'd desarted yuh?" he inquired anxiously. "I waited 'long as I c'ud, but when they started droppin' red-hot cinders on th' old 'bus, I thought it 'bout time I vamosed an' waited for yuh—— Why, what's wrong wi' th' bawss?"

"He's about all in," said Tom quietly; "choked with poison gas, and he's had a pretty bad time generally. If we can get something in the shape of wine in the palace——"

"Wine, brandy, beer, cawfee; any li'l thing yuh say, sah!" glibly replied the little engineer. "I kinder rustled round an' got some grub together, guessin' thet yuh'd mebbe need it. Hallo, my black beauty; yuh been scrappin' an' me not thar to hold yer bonnet? What yuh done wi' yer trousis?"

"Stand away, li'l man, we been doing men's work this day!" replied the Zulu with great dignity.

"Sez yuh!" jeered Ben. "Wa'al, right inside th' pallis thar's someone a-doin' woman's work an' thet's your jane, Soupsa. She has rigged herself up in gilt armour an' she comes hustlin' in from th' forest all over sweat an' blood, totin' her aged parient on her back like a good 'un. He was squawkin' out all sorts o' things thet sounded like he wuz cussin' th' dame, but they disappeared inside, whar to I don't know. Yuh'd better go seek her if yuh wants to finish yer Romeo an' Juliet scene what yuh lef' off!"

Lulu's face changed, and the look that Tom knew so well came over it; the look of the warrior who scents battle; his "killer" look, as Tom's father always called it.

"Say you so, little one, in the palace?" he repeated very quietly, in his native tongue. "Then that bodes no good and Gobo is hatching mischief, Baas. I go to seek food for our journey. Waacht een beetje, inkosi, slamba gachle akka!"

He hurried away on his silent feet, slipping through the marble corridors like a black ghost, flitting from shadows to shadows with his eyes shining greenly. Two or three times he felt the solid pavement heave beneath his feet, but he only smiled grimly to himself.

"Death stalks indeed this day," he muttered to himself. "'Twould be pity if she missed Gobo who has sought my baas's life. It is ill to slay a woman so 'tis said, but mayhap one might be forgiven for—— Ah-h-h!"

He stopped dead in his tracks as a small figure darted across an opening through which the red glare of the great fire shone. Like a snake Lulu darted forward, grabbed the slender shape, and clapped his horny hand across the mouth ere the figure could cry out.

"What do ye here?" he asked. "Who are ye?"

He dragged the frail form to the light and gave an exclamation of astonishment as he saw that his capture was little Olaf Jan, the fair-haired slave he and Tom had rescued. The boy smiled up at the big Zulu, who promptly removed his hand.

"It is you, then, big man?" piped the youngster in a whisper. "You frightened me; I thought he had come back and caught me again!"

"He? Whom?" demanded Lulu, glancing around, expecting to see some man.

"The large man in gold armour who was with Gobo," was the reply. "He smelt strange—like a crocodile——"

"Ow, Soupsa!" growled Lulu. "Where did sh—he go? Were you following him?"

"Yes." The boy nodded. "He shut me in a room and barred the door; but there was a small grating and I squeezed through. He and Gobo have gone to loot the treasure chests whilst the forest burns. I heard them planning, and after I crept out I tracked them. Come—I will show—— Oh, I am frightened!"

There had come a thundering crash from somewhere far below them, and the whole building seemed to rock to its foundations; then a ghastly silence in contrast.

"Huh, something happened that time!" muttered the Zulu philosophically. "Come, little man, be not frightened. Death comes but once, and it matters not how or when; and I think death waits awhile ere it smites me and thee!"

"I'm not frightened with you, big man; you are so strong!" said Olaf confidently, as he trotted along beside the huge Zulu. "We have to go away down under the ground to where Gobo and his soldier friend have gone."

"Soldier? Poison ivy!" growled Lulu, fondling the razor-sharp throwing-knife he had slipped into a belt at his waist. "I'll cut it down this day, if it so befalls!"

"Ssh, it is not far now!" whispered the boy, a few minutes later, as they crept down some stone stairs well below the ground surface, and lighted only by a narrow shaft from the roof. "See, their light!"

The faint light came from a square opening in the floor, and as Lulu tip-toed over to it he could see the bent form of old Gobo grubbing into an open chest, whilst the golden-armoured Soupsa held a torch for him. He ladled out handful after handful of glittering gems, which his granddaughter stuffed into a small hide sack.

Lulu fingered the throwing-knife, but paused as Soupsa spoke.

"That is all, is it not, my grandsire?" said the Amazon, in her affected voice. "Mayhap we had better be going ere the earthquake shake down the palace, though it has withstood many, as you say, in bygone years. Think you the Tomkuk escaped?"

"I know not and care not," rasped the old high priest. "See, Soupsa—your eyes are younger than mine—is that not another small heap, there, away in the corner?"

As Soupsa stooped to peer into the chest her neck was exposed above the protective armour. In a flash the old villain had made a tiny gash in her neck. Just as quickly Lulu's knife flashed through the air and quivered in the aged man's chest. The Zulu laughed aloud as the old scoundrel sank to the floor, cursing feebly.

"Ah-h-h-h, what have you done, my father?" gasped Soupsa, staggering back against the chest and feeling the cut in her neck.

"Killed you, she wolf!" grunted the old priest. "You were the only witness to the secret of the king's treasure. That—knife—was poisoned—the poison—of the—dwarfs."

"Ha! Mine was not poisoned, but it kills just the same!" Lulu called out, and with a start the precious pair glanced up at the stern black face.

Gobo gave a feeble groan and fell back dead

Soupsa made a great effort, and raised herself on the chest.

"So it is you, Inkobo, that I once thought was my lover, Lesardu?" she smiled. "I would have killed you once but the Fates willed otherwise. The world—is—falling to pieces around us, and I go—a journey—there is no—return. You may—escape. I leave you—small gift—in remembrance—of Soupsa."

With a mighty effort of will she tottered to her feet, slung the hide bag up to the Zulu, and with a feeble laugh fell back over her grandfather's body.

Homeward Bound!

"CAN we make it?" Tom asked anxiously as the "Flying Fish" skimmed the tops of the trees which were blazing below them and bucked through the smoke above the forest. "It's goin' to be a bit of a job crossing those mountains, isn't it?"

"Wouldn't be surprised!" replied Al cheerfully. "I've got just about enough capsules left to see us across with a bit o' luck, but I could make a certainty of it if we could only go by the river, but what a hope—look at it!"

The geyser which had spouted out from the bottom of the Pool of Death was now spouting out lava and burning ashes all over the surrounding countryside, demolishing the forest and blotting out every sign of the path which Tom and his friends had taken. The whole countryside was laid waste, and the Golden City itself was deserted, though the main portions of the palace still stood.

But the river down which they had come on their first arrival was now a turgid stream of almost hot water for the burning lava falling in had heated it until it was seething.

"How's old Metla and the kid?" asked Tom, as Ben came up from the cabin.

"Th' old man's snorin' like six pigs. Olaf's

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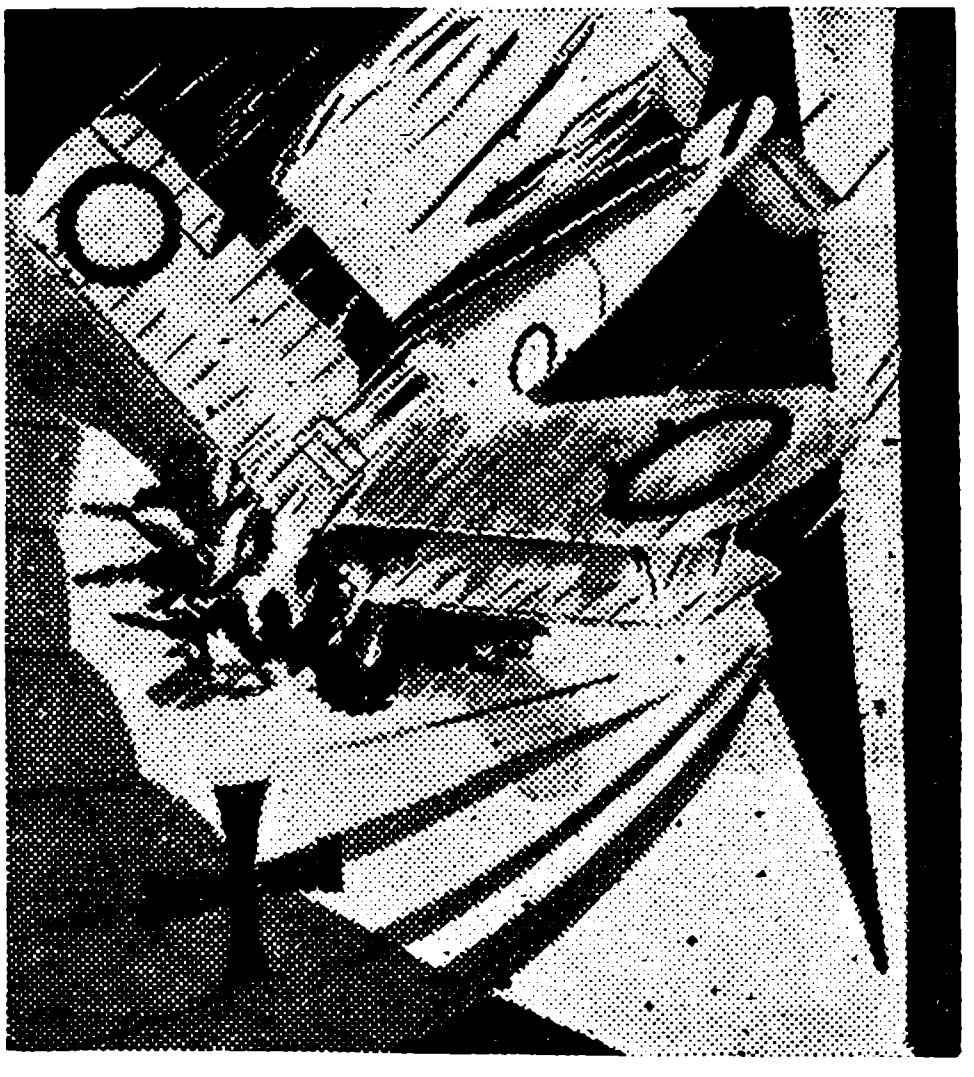

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fast asleep clutchin' Lulu's finger, which is about all his li'l fist kin hold. Thet Zulu has got 'em all on again an' ree-fuses to do any engine tendin'; says he's a warrior not a split-trousered mechanic; tho' he looks more like a kid's nussmaid at th' moment. Say, bass Tom, it was kind o' cu'rus thet kid should have led th' big feller to them hew-holes thet have made you a mellionaire, ain't it?"

"Not me," cried Tom. "I share equally with you all. You shared my trials and dangers——"

"Cut th' sob stuff!" said his cousin. "I've got enough for any reasonable feller, an' you can do with th' stuff to go cattle ranchin' with. Lulu's got a pile with his gold armour and those cups and things, and he'll be able to have a hundred wives if he wants 'em."

"But he'll never find another one like his lost Soupsa," grinned Ben. "Some dame thet, I'll tell a cock-eyed world! If we c'ud on'y have brought her along he'd be ra'al happy—I don't think!"

"Look, Al," Tom whispered. "the statue of Tomkuk still stands though his land has been blotted out and his people killed or scattered! You know—I feel like a traitor leaving the remnant of them like this. Perhaps I ought to have stayed and done what I could for them, or shared their fate——"

"Don't you fret your fat about that, ol' hoss!" said his practical cousin. "We've saved the only two that were worth a row of beans. T'other—pah!—they'd have turned on yuh some time an' cut your throat! What could you ever make of a people that sacrificed slaves to a beast like thet Ptero—what's a-name? I wonder what's happened to thet prehistoric dicky bird? I hope he don't start layin' eggs an' bringin' up a family. Yuh know—LOOK!"

He pointed downwards.

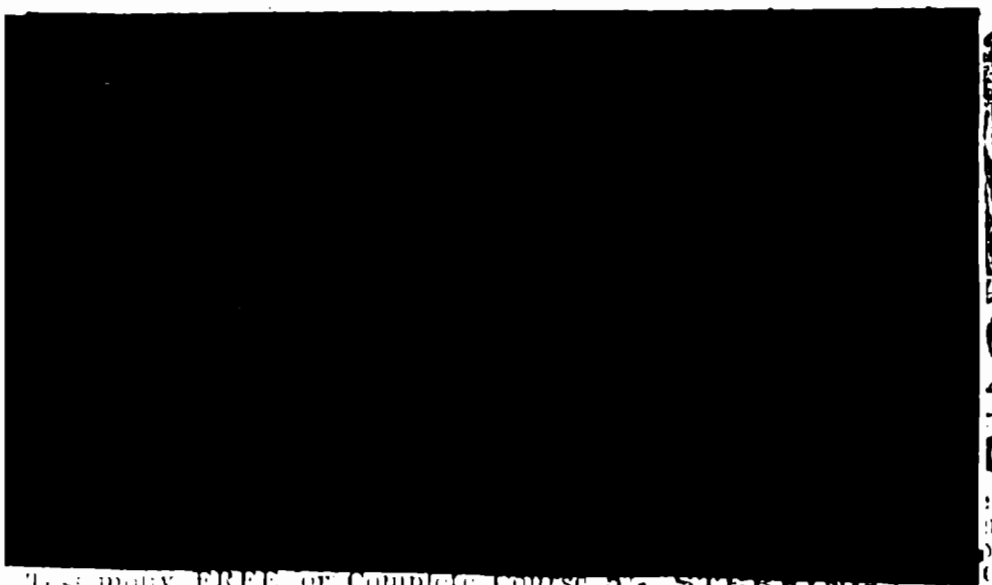
The statue of Tomkuk the Great was standing up above the murky floor like a great white shaft in the last rays of the setting sun. Then from somewhere up the river there came another explosion and a great wave of hot liquid and lava rolled down the river bed.

It hit the statue and poured its sluggish weight around the base. Higher and higher it rose, and then—silently the great figure seemed to bow in farewell, broke at the base, and the giant figure of Tomkuk the Great crashed with a thunderous roar into the flood, the golden head, with its glittering crown, being the last to disappear.

"And that's the end of Tomkuk the Great!" sighed Tom, with something of a quaver in his voice. "Now I think we'd better make for across the mountains and home, sweet home, eh, Al? Dad'll be mighty glad to see us, and we've got plenty to tell him."

THE END.

(Starting next week, "Waking Up St. Frank's!" a Thrilling School Tale by E. S. Brooks.)



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