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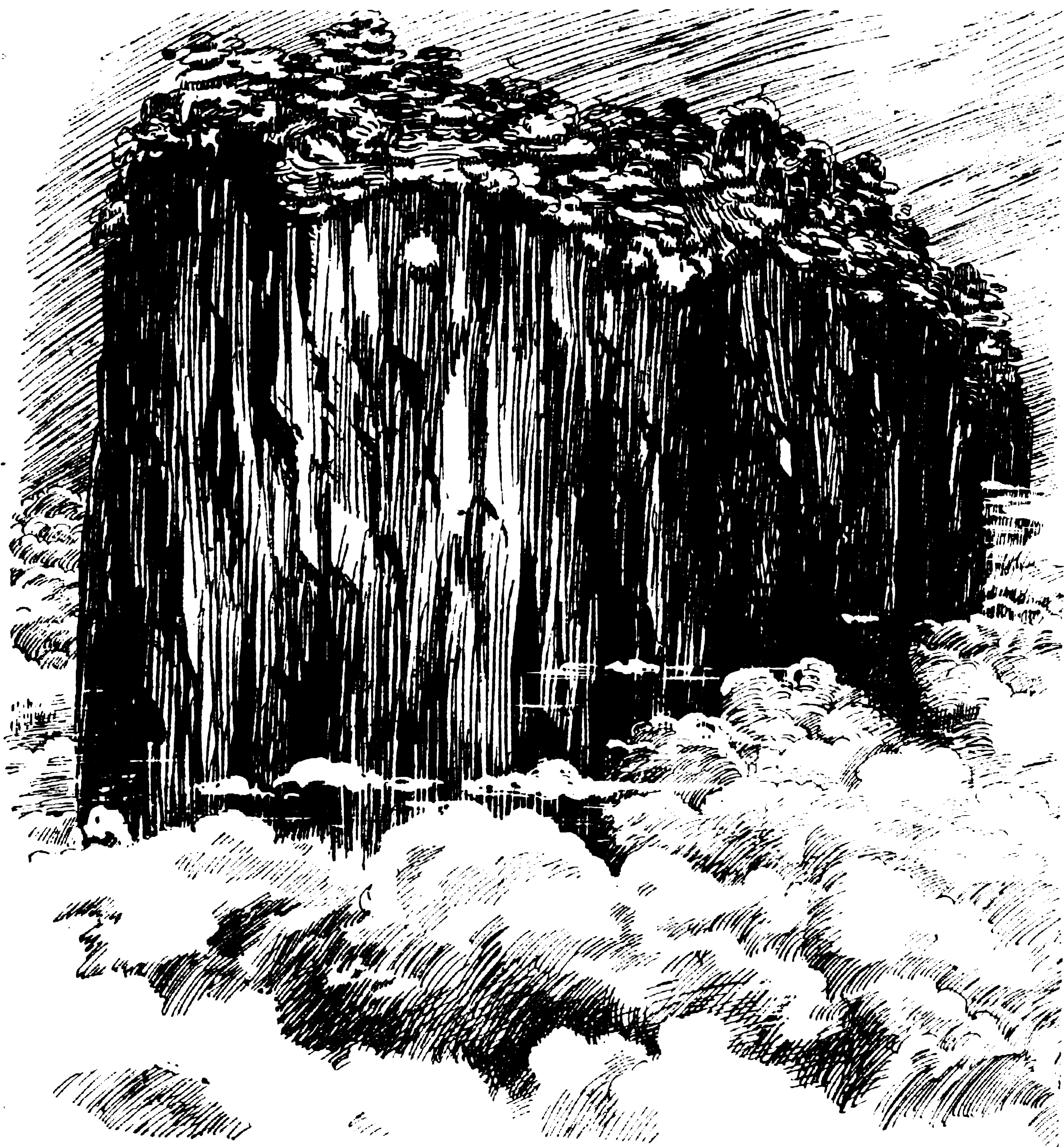


New Series No. 141.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 1st, 1932.

The ISLAND Above



CHAPTER 1.

Two Atlantic Trips.

NIPPER, leaning over the rail of the promenade deck on the liner *Torania*, watched the bustle and activity of the quayside with interest. In a neighbouring dock towered the vastness of a great Atlantic liner, a veritable giant in comparison to the modest *Torania*.

"Shan't be long now, guv'nor," remarked Nipper, as Nelson Lee joined him. "Seems to me that we're going to have a lonely send-off. Most people have heaps of friends to wave to them. But nobody cares about us."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I'm afraid you're getting sentimental, young 'un," said the famous detective dryly. "This trip of ours is an unexpected one."

—Starring **NELSON LEE, DETECTIVE**, and his assistant, **NIPPER!**

The CLOUDS—

—where prehistoric mammals roam, where cave men lurk, where old-time pirates have their lair. Such is the land, three thousand feet in the sky, where five stalwart adventurers are confronted with the most startling perils of their lives!

and we had to make our arrangements in a rush. At this hour, yesterday, we had no idea that we should be sailing for the West Indies so soon."

"Yes, it has been a bit hectic," admitted Nipper. "There hasn't been time for anybody to get in touch with us——"

He broke off so abruptly that Nelson Lee gave him a curious glance. A sudden flush had come into Nipper's face, and as he leaned over the rail his eyes were glittering with great excitement.

"Guv'nor!" he ejaculated breathlessly. "Look!"

He pointed to the throngs of people crowding round and about the main gangway. It was a colourful scene, with the busy dock, the numerous officials, and the crowds of pas-

well-fitting lounge suit seemed utterly incongruous. For this great negro was obviously an African of noble blood, and European clothing, even of the best, sat ill upon him.

"Upon my word!" said Nelson Lee softly.

"Am I right, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, turning an eager face to the detective. "If that fine figure isn't old Umlosi I'm going into my dotage! I could pick him out in a thousand!"

"Yes, he's Umlosi sure enough—and, by the same token, here comes our old friend Dorrie himself!" said Lee. "That clinches it, doesn't it? I thought you said we had no friends to see us off?"

But Nipper was leaning far over and waving and yelling.

"Hi! Umlosi!" he bel-
lowed. "Here we are!"

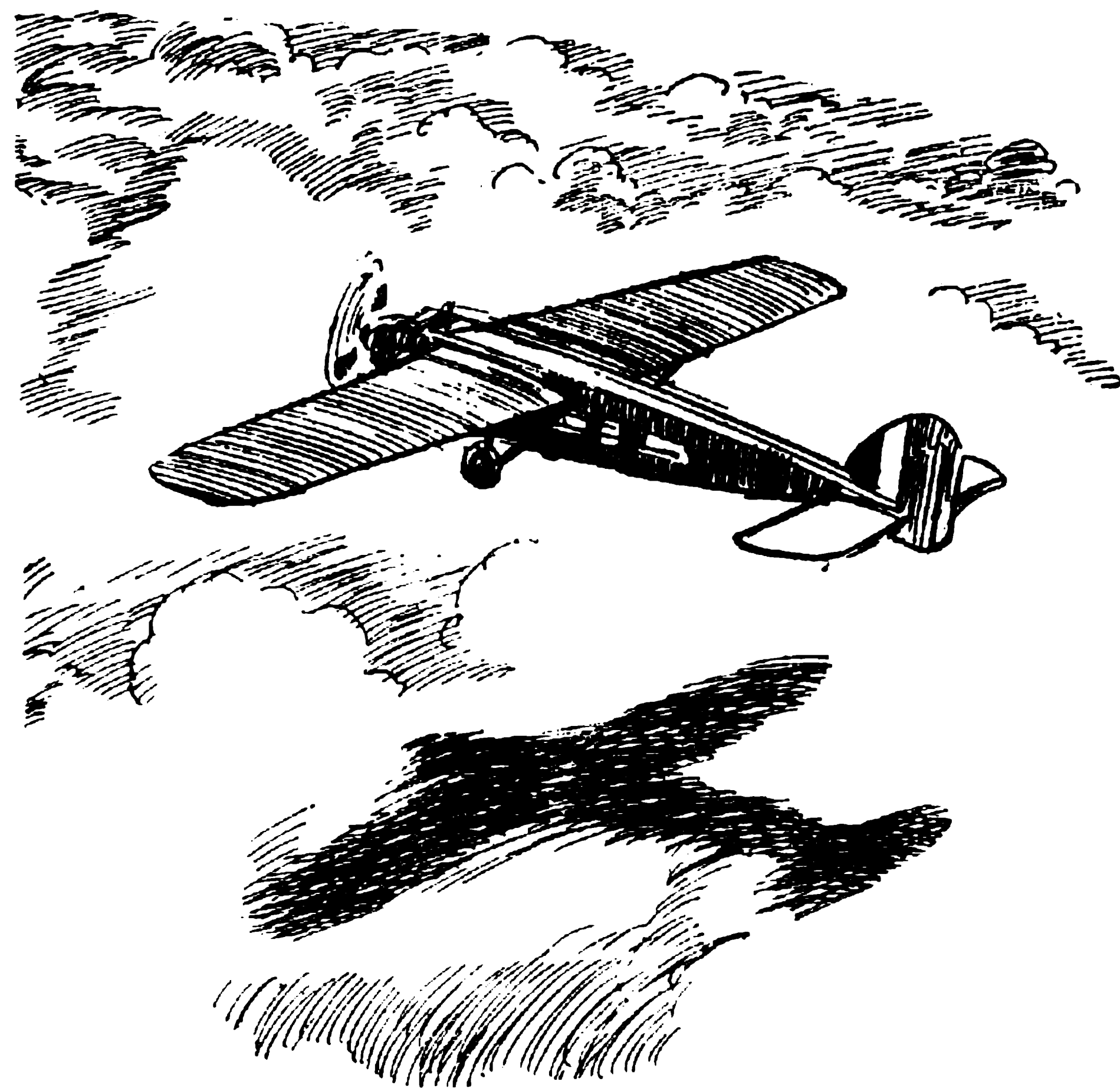
Umlosi, King of Kutana-
land, turned his great head
upwards, and a sparkle
came into his eyes. He
flung out an enormous hand
in salute.

"Wau!" came his deep,
rumbling voice. "'Tis he of
the quick eye and the
nimble limb! Greetings, O
Manzie!"

"Greeting yourself, O
chunk of anthracite!" re-
torted Nipper, grinning.
"Come upon deck, you old
boulder! There's nearly an
hour before the boat sails,
and we can have a jaw!"

"Strange words, young
master, but methinks I
gather their meaning," re-
plied Umlosi gravely. "I
come with N'Kose, my
master."

He made for the gangway,
and a polite official at-
tempted to detain him in
quest of a ticket or some
other authority to allow him



sengers' friends. But the figure which had attracted Nipper's attention was so different from all the others that even Nelson Lee gave a little start. For that figure was tower-
ing shoulder-high above his companions—a
huge, massive negro, with a fine carriage,
his head held proudly. And somehow his

aboard the ship. But he might as well have
attempted to detain a tidal wave. Umlosi
swept him aside and leapt up the gangway
with an agility astonishing in one so bulky.
However, Lord Dorrimore was close behind,
and he was well armed with permits.

"Wau! I am glad to once again shake

the hand of the mighty Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi, as he greeted Nelson Lee at the top of the gangway. "Well mayest thou be known as the Wizard, O sagacious one!"

Umlosi's delight was not very demonstrative, but it was wholeheartedly sincere. His manner remained grave, but his eyes were full of warmth and friendliness.

"Well, you slippery beggars, what's the idea of this?" demanded a cheerful, familiar voice. "Like your nerve, to make us come chasing down to Southampton to get a word with you!"

Lord Dorrimore, immaculate, debonair and smiling, shook Nelson Lee by the hand and clapped Nipper on the back. People paused on the deck to watch, for there was something singularly fascinating and fine about this virile, broad-shouldered, six-foot peer who was famous throughout the world for his feats of daring and his adventurous exploration work.

"Come down to my cabin, Dorrie," said Lee, smiling. "We can't talk comfortably here—and I'm afraid we haven't a great deal of time."

Umlosi accompanied them to the state-room, and in private they amplified their first greetings.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I first caught sight of you, Umlosi," said Nipper. "You're the last person I expected to see in Southampton—or in England, if it comes to that. I thought you were thousands of miles away, somewhere in the Malay States."

"N'Kose, my master, grows tired of the reeking jungles of that fever-ridden country," replied Umlosi, with an expression of disgust. "Wau! In my own beloved Kutana-land there are fair landscapes and mighty forests—"

"Don't take any notice of him," interrupted Dorrie, with a grin. "There's no place in the world like Kutana-land, accordin' to him. He trots out this record as regularly as clock-work. As a matter of fact, I brought him to England for a definite purpose. But more of that later. I want to know why you fellows are chasin' off to the West Indies just when I want you at home? Of all the confounded luck! I'm out East for over six months, and the first day I arrive home I'm darned if you don't go traipsing off West!"

"Just the cussedness of things, Dorrie," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile. "But if you act like a decent human being, and remain in England for a respectable time, you'll see plenty of me. I expect to be back in little over a month."

"But why go at all?" complained his lordship. "If you really need a holiday—"

"Don't run away with the idea that this is a holiday trip," interrupted Lee. "And old friend of mine, Colonel Stanton, came to me yesterday in acute distress. It seems that his young brother, who holds a Government appointment in Kingston, Jamaica, has been arrested on a charge of murder. An ugly case, by all that I can hear. The evidence against young Stanton is as black as it could

be, but the colonel swears by all the gods that there's been some colossal blunder."

"So he prevailed upon you to go out and investigate, eh?" said Dorrie. "Well, of course, that's different. If you're goin' out to save somebody's life, I forgive you. But it'll take about a fortnight to get to Jamaica in this old tub, won't it?"

"You'd better not let the captain hear you talk in that way, Dorrie—for the Torania is one of the newest and fastest boats in the service."

"No offence," grinned Dorrie. "But if you're really anxious to get to Jamaica quickly, I can land you there in— Let me see." He screwed up his eyes and concentrated. "Three days to get ready, and a couple of days— Yes, to-day's Monday. I can get you there on Saturday."

"And how do you propose to work this miracle?" asked Lee dryly.

"I'll fly you over."

"Very kind of you, but my object is to save a life—not to sacrifice two."

"But you don't understand," said his lordship eagerly. "I've come home to do the East to West Atlantic flight, and our old friend, Sir Hobart Manners, of the Manners Aircraft Corporation, is supplying me with the very latest amphibian monoplane. She's glorious, Lee. I've seen her already; she's nearly fit for the flight. I reckon to do the London—New York trip without a hitch. But if you only give the word, I shall change my course—"

"I wish you all the luck in the world with your venture, Dorrie, but please leave me out of it," said the great detective, shaking his head. "I do not doubt the reliability and sturdiness of your 'plane; but even you must admit that Atlantic flying is rather more uncertain than the slower steamship route. By remaining aboard the Torania I am at least pretty certain of arriving at my destination."

"Even liners go down sometimes," said Dorrie hopefully.

"No; I wouldn't think of it," laughed Nelson Lee. "Young Stanton's life is in the balance, and I cannot afford to take any chances. Otherwise I'd be glad enough to share the thrill of this Atlantic trip."

Lord Dorrimore grunted.

"Well, I won't argue," he said. "When you say 'No,' you mean 'No.' It's a pity you're such an obstinate, pigheaded blighter!"

"Well, at least you are perfectly frank," chuckled Lee. "Am I to understand that you are taking Umlosi on this flight?"

"Ballast," explained Dorrie briefly.

"Thou art truly jesting, N'Kose," said Umlosi in a troubled voice. "Am I no better than so much sand? I go with thee because my snake tells me that there will be many grim battles, and already my nostrils scent the tang of fighting. I grow soft with the idleness of useless travel. This, my master, I am prepared to even venture upon this strange ship of the air which flies like the great bird."

Lord Dorrimore became suddenly serious. "Yes, I can't quite understand," he said slowly. "It's very seldom that Umlosi's 'snake' leads him astray, Lee. That instinct of his is positively uncanny. But can you explain to me why he can already niff the tang of fighting? How many battles do you think we're likely to encounter over the Atlantic?"

"You might encounter some when you get to New York," said Nipper solemnly. "I've heard that New York is getting pretty nearly as bad as Chicago."

"He doesn't mean that kind of fightin', young 'un," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "When Umlosi's snake whispers the word of battle, it means gore, and plenty of it. It means more. Fightin' with swords, bare fists, an' all that sort of thing. He's not interested in gunmen."

"Perchance thou art scoffing at the whisperings of my snake," said Umlosi. "But in due course, N'Kose, thou wilt have cause to remember. Let us venture upon this strange trip, for it will mean excitement such as we have never before encountered. I have spoken."

"You see?" said Dorrie, with a keen glance at Nelson Lee. "I can't shift him from that settled impression. That's one reason why I'm so eager for the trip."

Nelson Lee had a secret thought that Umlosi's instinct was somehow foretelling death itself; and that the battles were to follow in his after-life. For it was palpably absurd to imagine any fighting—of Umlosi's particular brand—in the bleak and solitary wastes of the Atlantic.

For some little time Nelson Lee and Dorrie chatted on general subjects, and Umlosi amused Nipper by giving a brief account of his experiences in Malaya. Then, unexpectedly, Lord Dorrimore suddenly gave a whoop which would have done credit to one of Umlosi's fiercest warriors.

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Dorrie. "I've got an idea!"

"I'll warrant it's a rash one," said Lee promptly.

"Rash, be hanged! The amazin' thing is I didn't think of it before," exclaimed his lordship, his eyes glittering. "Here am I makin' plans to fly to New York—a common-place trip nowadays—when there's a chance of a much better route. You fellows are sailin' for Jamaica to-day, and I'm plannin' to take off later in the week. Well, why shouldn't I plan out a more southerly route, an' hop direct to the West Indies?"

"Well, for one thing, the distance is at least a thousand miles farther—and not a speck of land to alight on in case of trouble."

"My dear fellow, what does that matter?" asked Dorrie. "This Manners 'plane is like a private yacht—sleepin' cabins, saloon, electric light, an' everything your heart could desire. She has a range of six thousand miles, and accommodation for ten. I shall be travellin' light, and can even take extra fuel. So what's an extra thousand miles?"

"I shouldn't chance it, Dorrie," said Lee earnestly. "Far better to stick to the 'crowded' shipping roads. Even on the New York route, which is the busiest of all, you might fly for half a day without sighting a single vessel. On the more southerly route you would necessarily leave the shipping roads completely behind, and your chances of survival, in case of a forced descent, would be practically nil."

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"You can't scare me," he said. "You can expect to see my 'plane fly over this tub—I beg its pardon—this high-class liner, at about the end of the week. An' when you go down the gangway at Kingston, you'll find me waitin'—with Umlosi by my side. How's that?"

"It sounds quite interesting," replied Nelson Lee. "But I still think that it's a foolhardy proposition, Dorrie. But as you're such an obstinate, pigheaded blighter, it's no good arguing with you."

"Not a bit," grinned his lordship. "We seem to be a pair, don't we?"

IT was characteristic of Lord Dorrimore to come to such a sudden and dramatic decision. His adventurous spirit made him jump at this opportunity to do something "different." He regarded the Atlantic flight as something rather interesting, but by no means thrilling. It would really be heaps better to make the non-stop flight from London to the West Indies, and to perform a few evolutions over the Torania en route.

As a general rule, Dorrie took serious heed of Umlosi's "snake"—in other words, his instinct. But this time there was every indication that the Kutana chief was right off the scene. Even Dorrie, optimist though he was, quite failed to see how he could hit upon any war-like adventures in the Atlantic.

Yet Umlosi was so seldom wrong.

"We had to run down and see you before you sailed," said his lordship. "We only got into London last night, and I had quite a shock this morning, when I went along to Gray's Inn Road."

"Well, Dorrie, it was very nice of you to make the special trip to Southampton in order to see us off," said Nelson Lee. "A totally unexpected surprise—and a delightful one. Nipper was only saying, just before we saw you on the quay, that nobody had come to see us off—"

He was interrupted by the sound of an excited voice out in the corridor—and a familiar voice. Nipper burst into a laugh.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he yelled. "Somebody else come to see us off, by the sound of it."

The door burst open, and a burly school-boy, flushed and excited, stood framed in the open doorway. He was none other than Edward Oswald Handforth, of St. Frank's!

CHAPTER 2.

The Stowaway!

"HALLO!" said Handforth awkwardly. Yet there was a note of relief in his voice, too. And as he looked from Nelson Lee and Nipper to Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, the excited sparkle in his eyes increased.

"My only sainted aunt!" he ejaculated. "I—I didn't expect to see you here, sir."

"If it comes to that, I didn't expect to see you, Handy—so we're quits," said Lord Dorrimore pleasantly.

"Wau! 'Tis he of the uncontrollable limbs—the Clumsy One," rumbled Umlosi.

"By George, it's good to see you, Umlosi—you, too, sir," he added, turning to Nelson Lee. "Thank goodness I got here in time! I thought I shouldn't manage it. Don't mind me coming to see you off, do you, sir? How are things with you, Nipper, old son? We miss you at St. Frank's, you know."

He rattled on, scarcely allowing anybody else to get a word in edgeways.

"Well, it's very nice of you, Handforth," said Lee, patting the burly Removite on the shoulder. "Nipper and I must take it as a very big compliment. But I'm afraid there is very little time left. Visitors must be off the boat very soon now."

"That doesn't matter, sir—as long as I've seen you and Nipper," replied Handforth promptly.

His awkwardness had left him, and he was once again his cool, self-confident, aggressive self. His face was unusually flushed, his eyes carried a sparkle, and his unruly hair was more untidy than ever.

"Came along in my Morris Minor, sir," he explained. "It's not a very great distance, you know, from St. Frank's to Southampton. As a matter of fact, I've had a bit of a row with Church and McClure."

"Oh, indeed?" said Nelson Lee gravely. "I am sorry to hear that, Handforth. I was rather wondering, in fact, why Church and McClure were not with you. You are generally such staunch chums—so inseparable."

"I've finished with them for good!" said Handforth darkly. "They're a couple of rotters!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" grinned Nipper. "You don't mean that. Churchy and Mac are two of the best—"

"They used to be," interrupted Handforth fiercely. "They're not now, by George! You ought to see their faces!"

"What have their faces got to do with it?" asked Lord Dorrimore politely.

"Last night, after lights-out, I had a scrap with them in the dormy," replied Handforth. "I biffed them—"

"Ahem! Let us draw a veil over the remainder of this sad story," put in Dorrie. "In fact, I think we can guess the rest."

"No, you jolly well can't, sir!" said Handforth, his voice bursting with indignation.

"It happened last night. That ass, Travers, played a silly practical joke, and made me think that a murder had been committed in the monastery ruins. Bloodstains and everything! I got on the track like a shot, and I even proved that old Pycraft, of the Fourth, was the murderer."

"Dear me!" said Lee gravely.

"Yes, sir," went on Handforth, his voice becoming bitter. "Then Church and McClure found out about it, just as I was going into Mr. Pycraft's study to arrest him."

"Good glory! To do what?" asked Lord Dorrimore, in wonder.

"To arrest him, sir."

"But you're not a police-officer—you can't arrest people."

"Anyhow, I was going to handcuff him and take him down to the police-station," explained Handforth. "But Churchy and Mac grabbed me, and then they howled with laughter because I had been spoofed. And to make it worse, Irene happened to come along—"

"Irene?" interrupted Dorrie. "You mean Irene Manners, the daughter of my old pal, Sir Hobart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Splendid girl!" commented Dorrie. "And now I come to think of it, you were always a bit sweet on her, weren't you, young 'un?"

Handforth turned a brick-red colour.

"She laughed at me last night, sir—she made fun of me, like the rest!" he said thickly. "I've finished with her for good."

"Well, well! That's very serious," said Dorrie.

"Yes, sir, we had a frightful quarrel—and everything's finished," said Handforth. "So—so I thought I'd come along and see Mr. Lee and Nipper before they sailed."

Nobody could quite see the connection, but they thought it better to let it go.

"But how did you know that the guv'nor and I were sailing to-day on the Torania?" asked Nipper.

"Saw it in the morning paper."

"We can't even go on a sea voyage without the Press hounds publishing all the details," said Nipper, with a sniff.

"There weren't any details at all," replied Handforth. "It was only a small paragraph, and it just said that Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective, accompanied by his young assistant, were sailing on the Torania for the West Indies—on an important case."

"So now we know everything," said Nelson Lee dryly. "Well, Handforth, I know that you are far too sensible to let this silly quarrel go any further. By the time you get back to St. Frank's you will have forgiven Irene—and Church and McClure, too."

"Never, sir!" vowed Handforth fiercely. "I'll never forgive them— Oh, well, perhaps I might!" he added hastily. "It'll be

a long time before I get back to St. Frank's. A jolly long time!"

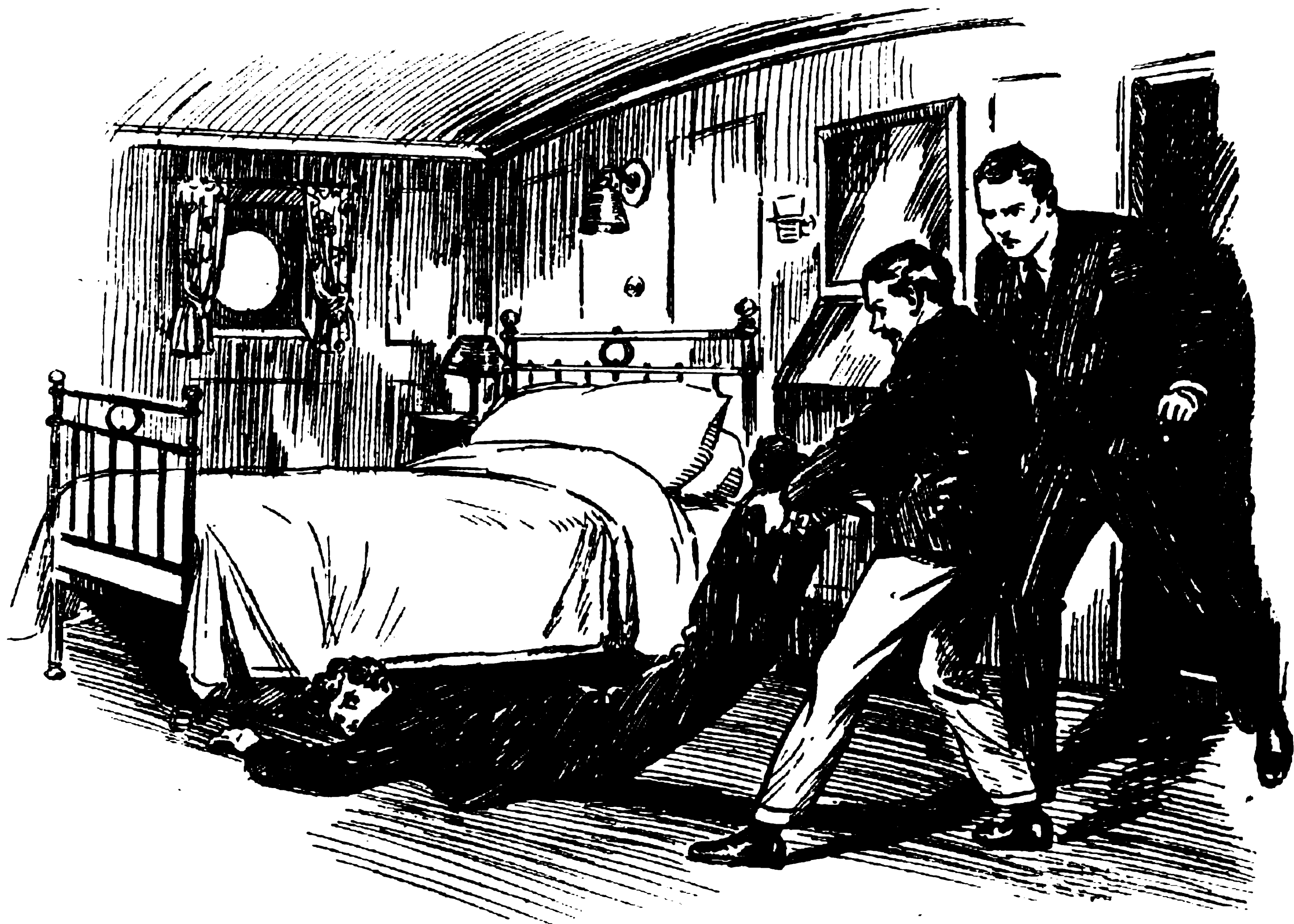
And there was something in his voice which caused Lee to regard him keenly.

"I hope you're not thinking of doing anything silly, Handforth," said the detective gently.

"Silly, sir? Me?" said Edward Oswald. "Not likely! Perhaps—perhaps you're right, sir. There's no sense in keeping up a quarrel, is there? Well, I'll be pushing off. Glad to have seen you, Nipper. You, too, Dorrie.

"Before then," said Dorrie. "I'll try to locate this ship on the way across."

Nipper expected Handforth to prick up his ears, but Handforth showed no sign of having heard. He was so preoccupied with his own troubles that he had no ears for the general trend of the conversation. Indeed, Handforth's jaw had set itself in a curiously dogged way—and Nipper, at least, began to wonder. He had seen that expression on Handforth's face many times—and it always meant something unusually rash.



Nipper seized Handforth by the ankles and dragged him from under the bed. "So you're a stowaway, you idiot!" he howled.

About time for us to get off the boat, isn't it?"

He was so anxious to be gone that Nipper came to the conclusion that he had abruptly made up his mind to forgive Irene—and now he was all anxiety to hasten back to St. Frank's in his Morris Minor, and patch up the quarrel.

Even Nipper, knowing Handforth as he did, scarcely realised that the burly junior was in one of his most reckless moods. Handforth wanted to do something drastic—something sensational, so that Irene would realise the full extent of the hurt she had inflicted.

"There goes the bell," said Nelson Lee. "We'd better all go along to the gangway, Dorrie. Well, I am very pleased to have seen you—and I hope your flight will go well, and that I shall see you again in Jamaica."

"Well, good-bye, old son—hope you have a good time," said Handforth abruptly.

He gripped Nipper's hand, and would have pulled his own away only Nipper held it tightly.

"Just a minute, Handy," said Nipper. "What's the idea?"

"Idea? What idea?"

"If you're thinking of doing something silly——"

"Don't be an ass!"

"You're going straight back to St. Frank's, aren't you?"

"Eh? Where else should I go?" said Handforth, in sudden alarm. "Don't be so dotty! Well, good-bye!"

He pulled his hand away, and then made his adieux to Nelson Lee—who thoughtfully refrained from giving any fatherly advice. He knew Handforth too well for that.

And Edward Oswald, having shaken hands with Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, stalked down the crowded deck towards the gangway—in an obvious hurry to get ashore. The others lost sight of him almost immediately.

"He'll be all right within an hour or two," chuckled Nelson Lee. "An impulsive boy—but as good as gold at heart."

Having reached the gangway, Handforth found himself accosted by an officer.

"Going ashore?" asked this man.

"Yes, rather! Eh? I—I mean, no!" said Handforth hastily. "Not just yet. I—I'm looking for somebody."

"Better hurry up, then—there's not much time," said the officer.

Handforth sped away, and a moment later he was hurrying through the lounge lobby to the opposite promenade deck. It was now possible for him to double back on his own tracks. Thus, with comparative ease, he again reached Nelson Lee's state-room—for, with unusual forethought, Handforth had noted the number of that apartment.

He found the door unlocked, and when he got in, the state-room was empty. He stood there, breathing hard, and his face was now flushed more than ever.

"Done it!" he muttered tensely. "By George! I wonder if I can get away with it? I thought I should have to get below, somewhere, and stow away in a store-room, or something like that."

He looked round eagerly. Nelson Lee was occupying a small suite, and Nipper's room opened out from this one. There were two sleeping cabins and a small lounge. Handforth had no difficulty in finding out which cabin was Nipper's—for it contained Nipper's baggage, all of it initialled.

And Edward Oswald, calmly and deliberately, now proceeded to roll himself under Nipper's bed. He had made up his mind, and he was calm.

He had come aboard the *Torania* with one object—and that object was to act the part of a stowaway!

Now that the tension was over, he felt strangely calm. The thing had worked. He had got aboard, and now all the passengers' friends were leaving. He wouldn't be missed in all that crowd.

He realised, in fact, that he had had a narrow escape. Reaching out, he pulled some of Nipper's baggage nearer to the bed, so that it helped to conceal him. The chances were that the bags would not be touched for hours—not until the evening. And by that time the *Torania* would be well out to sea. Handforth, with unusual sagacity, had already ascertained the fact that this particular liner did not call at Plymouth—or even at Cherbourg. Once out of Southampton, she sailed straight into the Atlantic. So it would not be possible for the captain to put Handforth ashore later. He meant to go!

And it would jolly well serve Irene right! And it would serve Church and McClure right, too! They would all be in a rare old

stew by the evening, when he failed to turn up! Handforth smiled happily as he thought of the hue-and-cry which would be set up for him.

Characteristically enough, the burly junior set a totally false value on the circumstances. The whole affair had been a storm in a teacup—but to Handforth's mind it was a veritable catastrophe. He had worked himself up to such a pitch that he told himself that nothing short of running away from school could suffice.

He waited with mingled apprehension and eagerness. He expected Nelson Lee and Nipper to return to the state-room, but the minutes ticked away, and nothing happened. It seemed to Handforth that hours must have passed. Then came the unmistakable "throb-throb-throb" of the engines. He throbbed in accompaniment. The *Torania* was off!

A sense of great triumph came over him. An impulse surged through him—an impulse to rush out on deck and triumphantly shout out that he had done the trick. But common sense came to his aid. He remembered that there were probably tugs alongside, and a pilot aboard. It would be a feeble ending to his adventure if he were to be sent ashore with the pilot!

So he waited—and the inactivity, coming on top of the realisation that the tension was over, made him feel sleepy.

This was not really surprising.

For Handforth had had practically no sleep the previous night. He had tossed in bed, thinking—planning to run away—turning over all manner of wildcat schemes in his mind. Morning had come, and he had resolved upon nothing better than to cut morning lessons and to get into his Morris Minor and drive at random across country.

Then, in the morning, he had seen the little paragraph in the paper about Nelson Lee and Nipper. That had given him his great idea. It would be easy enough to get on board, to see Nelson Lee and Nipper off. And once on board—

And here he was—and the whole plan had worked!

And now, what with his lack of sleep, his troubled mind, and the stuffiness of his hiding-place, drowsiness overcame him. He dozed. And finally he slept.

NELSON LEE and Nipper decided to turn in early that night. They had had a tiring day, and they would both be glad enough to get into their beds. There was dancing in the big lounge, but it did not appeal to them.

So, after a "constitutional" round the promenade decks, an hour after dinner, they turned in. By this time the *Torania* was well and truly on her voyage, and well down the English Channel.

"I keep thinking about Dorrie," remarked Nipper, as he paused in the doorway of his own cabin. "He won't be rash enough to chance that long flight, will he?"

"Dorrie is rash enough for anything," replied Nelson Lee gruffly. "I don't believe in these Atlantic flights. They prove nothing and lead nowhere—and the risks are very great. For, no matter how reliable the machine, no matter how perfect the engine, the weather of the Atlantic is notoriously uncertain. When you are flying over an ocean thousands of miles in extent, there is always a possibility of running into a sudden violent storm. You can't land, and if you change your course too drastically you are adding an enormous amount of mileage to your average—and that, in itself, may spell disaster. No, Nipper, I do not approve. Incidentally, most of these spectacular flights are undertaken in a spirit of pure vanity. People grow contemptuous of risks, they become over-confident, and they are simply out for glory."

"But you can't say that about Dorrie, sir," protested Nipper. "He's not a vain man——"

"In Dorrie's case it is just sheer love of adventure. He doesn't care a snap for the glory. He believes there might be a new kind of thrill."

"I believe he's influenced a bit by Umlosi's rummy instinct," said Nipper. "I wonder why Umlosi believes that there will be fighting and bloodshed?"

"There is something very strange about Umlosi's 'snake,' Nipper," said Lee slowly. "I have seldom, if ever, known him to be wrong. Call it instinct if you like, but he seems to possess the faculty of seeing into the future. Sometimes his dreams, or visions, are vague and illusory——"

"Just a minute, guv'nor," interrupted Nipper, frowning: "There's a rummy noise in my cabin. Something vibrating, I think."

He walked in, switched on the light and looked round. But the cabin was just as he had left it. Even the baggage had not been touched. Nipper heard the sound distinctly—a curious, reverberating buzz, which seemed to proceed from somewhere near the floor. Perhaps the throbbing of the engines——

Nipper bent down, shifted some of the bags, and glanced half casually under the bed. For these cabins were not fitted with ordinary bunks, but comfortable beds.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" yelled Nipper. "It's somebody snoring, guv'nor—somebody under my bed!"

As Lee strode into the cabin, Nipper went down on his hands and knees and examined the intruder more closely.

"It's Handy!" he gasped in amazement.

"Eh? Don't bother me now, fathead!" came a mumbling voice from beneath the bed. "The rising bell hasn't gone—— Eh? Hallo! What the—— My only sainted aunt!"

"Pull him out!" commanded Nelson Lee grimly. "What an idiot I am, Nipper. I might have guessed this. There was something strange in Handforth's manner when he said good-bye to us."

"That's what I thought," said Nipper breathlessly. "But I never dreamed that he would be so dotty as to stay on board."

He seized Handforth's feet and gave them a wrench. A moment later the burly Removite of St. Frank's was sitting up in the middle of the floor, blinking. He found Nelson Lee and Nipper regarding him with stern, concentrated attention.

"You'd better wake up, Handforth," said Lee curtly. "And you will have to explain what this means."

Jerked into wakefulness, memory came back to Handforth in a flood. He flushed with excitement, and his eyes filled with mingled triumph and doubt.

"Where—where are we, sir?" he asked, staggering to his feet. "I—I mean, is the ship at sea?"

"Well at sea, you howling idiot!" said Nipper. "And we don't call at any other home port."

"Then everything's all right," said Handforth happily.

"What?"

"I'm a stowaway—and I'm going to the West Indies," said Handforth. "Sorry, sir! I hope this won't inconvenience you at all?"

"It won't inconvenience me—but there might be quite a lot of trouble for you, Handforth," replied Nelson Lee, striving hard to keep the twinkle out of his eyes. "You hopeless young ass! So you did this deliberately, did you?"

"I thought I'd teach Irenc—— I mean, I thought I'd teach Church and McClure a lesson, sir," replied Handforth stubbornly. "They'll have a blue fit when day after day goes by and nobody knows where I am!"

"In that, young man, you are quite wrong—for I am going to take you straight to captain," said Nelson Lee briskly. "Come along! After that I shall send wireless messages both to St. Frank's and to your parents, stating that you are safe and in good hands. But exactly what will become of you during this trip remains to be seen."

"What will become of me, sir?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"It is a common rule at sea to make stowaways work their passage," replied Lee, without moving a hair. "And I may tell you that Captain Branson is a great stickler for custom and tradition. You look like having a hard, strenuous voyage."

CHAPTER 3.

The Great Venture.

CAPTAIN BRANSON, having had the facts related to him by Nelson Lee, regarded Handforth with a stern, relentless face.

He was a grizzled old man, with forty-five years of deep-sea experience behind him, and he knew the Atlantic better than most men know the palms of their own hands.

"It's a serious case, Mr. Lee," he said, in a tone of gravity. "The boy's a stowaway, and he'll have to be dealt with drastically."

"I—I didn't mean any harm, sir——" began Handforth.

"Silence!" thundered the skipper.

"But my people will pay my passage, sir——"

"Your people are of no interest to me!" snapped Captain Branson. "You're a stow-away on this ship, and it's a good thing you're a hefty-looking young fellow. Think you could use a shovel, down in the stokehold?"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Handforth in dismay. "A—a shovel, sir?"

"That's what I said, boy!"

"But I didn't think that I should have to——"

"No, you only thought of sneaking aboard my ship and hiding yourself away," broke in the captain sternly. "Well, young man, we shall have to see. Think you'd be any good as cook's boy? There's some painting to be done, too."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth feebly.

"I'll tell you what we might do, Mr. Lee," said the skipper, thoughtfully stroking his grizzled chin. "The bilge needs cleaning out, I dare say. We can put the boy down in the bilge, and although it's dirty enough work, it would occupy him for the whole voyage. With a board to sleep on, and bread and water to drink——"

He broke off, for Handforth's expression was so dismayed that the kindly old man could not keep up the pretence any longer. He burst into a loud, boisterous laugh, in which Nelson Lee joined. Handforth regarded them in wonder and relief.

"Then—then you don't mean all that, sir?" he asked breathlessly.

"Better take him away, Mr. Lee," chuckled the captain. "You say that he can share young Nipper's cabin? All right! I'll have a word with the chief steward. How's that, young man? You'll make this voyage as Mr. Lee's guest? But I'm not saying you don't deserve a good tanning, all the same."

Handforth was enormously relieved. Both Lee and the captain, it seemed, had been pulling his leg.

Later, after wireless messages had been sent ashore, Edward Oswald settled down to enjoy this most unexpected treat. He would probably have to go through the mill later on, when he arrived home—for his father would certainly have something to say to him—but that day was so far distant that Handforth did not worry.

He even forgave Irene and Church and McClure—and he persuaded Nelson Lee to send friendly wireless messages to them in his—Handforth's—name. So, as he confided to Nipper, everything in the garden was lovely.

But even the adventurous Handforth had not the remotest conception of the amazing adventures which lay ahead!

AND back in England, Lord Dorrimore was cheerfully going ahead with his preparations.

And the day came, at the end of the week, when the great monoplane was ready for her big flight.

She was a thing of glorious blue—a pale sky-coloured tint. She looked more like a flying boat than an aeroplane, for her body was long and graceful, and built in the shape of a yacht. The landing-wheels, which were squat and small, were capable of being withdrawn right into the body. Her name, the Sky Wanderer, was painted in deeper blue on either side of her bows.

The start was made in the early hours of the morning. And there were no Press photographers or reporters present—for Dorrie did not care a snap of his fingers for publicity. Only a handful of people saw the commencement of the flight—aerodrome officials, mechanics, and representatives of the Manners Aircraft Corporation.

Sir Hobart Manners himself had come, and he was looking just a little troubled.

"I have absolute faith in the machine, Dorrie," he said, "but I am not sure that you are doing right in taking this much longer Southerly route. Weather experts have told me that you are much more likely to encounter storm areas—and the information from such areas is much more scanty. On the northerly route, with ships in every part of the Atlantic, radio reports are coming in constantly."

"If you think you're goin' to talk me out of it, old man, you're wrong," laughed Lord Dorrimore. "As soon as I found that Lee was goin' to Jamaica, I plumped for Jamaica, too. And why not? It will be more of an adventure. Well, I'll be poppin' off. Good-bye, Manners—I'll keep in touch with you by wireless all the way over."

They shook hands, and it was quite an ordinary, casual grip. Umlosi was already in the machine, and thus the start was made—with as little fuss or commotion as though Dorrie was flying to Paris.

In spite of her great load, the machine rose easily, and her three powerful engines, ingeniously silenced, purred with a quiet, low sound of infinite power. She faded into the early morning haze, mingling uncannily with the sky.

So perfect was the machine's control that she could look after herself. Having taken her to a height of five thousand feet, Lord Dorrimore merely set the course and then left the machine in the hands of the "automatic pilot"—this being an ingenious device, a scientific wonder, which made it possible for the pilot to be absent from the cockpit for hours at a stretch, if he desired. In good weather, and at a safe height, the 'plane required little or no attention.

So it was that Lord Dorrimore, at the usual breakfast hour, sat down to an appetising meal in the luxuriously appointed cabin. Umlosi, immobile and placid, had prepared breakfast.

"Well, old friend, we're off," said Dorrie genially. "Going towards Ireland by now, I imagine. We'll soon be out over the watery Atlantic, and all's well."

"Last night, in my sleep, strange visions came to me, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "Perchance thou wilt laugh at me and make fun of my dreams. But we go into peril, my father; we rush headlong towards dangers."

"Any idea what kind of dangers?" asked his lordship. "Did your visions tell you that much?"

"N'Kose, I saw a wondrous land," replied Umlosi solemnly. "I saw strange and terrible people."

"That sounds like America—and we're not aimin' to touch America at all," said Dorrie lightly.

But he was impressed, nevertheless. These persistent "visions" of Umlosi's intrigued him.

He knew, moreover, that Umlosi loathed the aeroplane as much as he loathed the flight. But his loyalty and devotion to Dorrie ranked first. Where Lord Dorrimore went, so Umlosi would go. And the great Kutana chieftain remained stolid and immobile. He did not utter a word of complaint. He was content to be with his beloved N'Kose.

He took his turn in the pilot's seat, too. Lord Dorrimore slept for several hours that day—and he slept dreamlessly. Umlosi, sitting at the controls, had instructions to awaken Dorrie in the unlikely event of any emergency. But nothing happened. And when his lordship came to relieve him all was well. Far below lay the vast, unbroken expanse of the ocean. The Sky Wanderer was out over the Atlantic, and land had been left behind many hours since.

So accurate were the machine's instruments that Lord Dorrimore's work was negligible. He set his course, and only a slight deviation of the set rudder control was necessary now and again. The compass made no blunders. It was purely automatic, and even when night descended upon the Atlantic, and the machine was flying blindly through the darkness, there was no occasion to worry. For within that 'plane the electric lights gleamed warmly, and Lord Dorrimore, with an occasional glance at the instruments, kept the machine truly on her course.

"I'm afraid it's goin' to be a bit of a wash-out, old man," said his lordship sadly. "I was half-expecting a thrill or two—but, by the look of things, we shall do the trip without a hitch."

After Umlosi had turned in for his own spell of sleep, Dorrie got busy at the radio installation, and he was soon in touch with various ships, and, to his joy, he opened up communication with the Torania.

"If you'll let me know your position," he wirelessly, "I can tell Mr. Lee when to be on the look-out for my 'plane. Some time to-morrow, I expect."

A swaying lurch of the machine warned Dorrie that the weather was not improving. He had seen earlier that clouds were gather-

ing; and the sunset had been ominous. Somewhere below the clouds were thick, and all was intense blackness. The wind was rising, and later, when Dorrie sat in the cockpit, he found that the great machine was swaying and pitching uneasily.

As the night advanced, the conditions became steadily worse. Outside, above the rhythmic drone of the engines sounded the shrill shriek of the rising gale.

"Looks as though we might have a bit of excitement, after all," murmured Dorrie.

He had noticed, during the evening, a steady drop in the barometer; but for the past hour it had positively tumbled. The altimeter indicated that the machine was four thousand feet up. No stars could be seen; ahead and above there was nothing but stygian darkness. And it was the same below. More than once the Sky Wanderer was clutched as though by a giant hand, and she quivered and trembled in every strut and in every fibre. Sometimes she seemed to hesitate, and then, with a shudder, she would plunge on again. More than once her nose was tossed upwards, and after a giddy minute she would again assume an even keel.

"The storm demons are angry, my father."

Dorrie found that Umlosi had come through from the cabin, and was standing just behind the pilot's seat.

"Yes, it's a big blow, by the feel of it," agreed his lordship. "But we shall weather the storm, Umlosi. Anyhow, we seem to be flying with it, judgin' by our speed. We're doin' something like three hundred miles an hour—and that means that the gale is helpin' us considerably. It's got us well in its grip, an' we're running with it."

Conversation was not easy, for the wind was howling ferociously, and it whistled and shrieked past the sturdy windows. Umlosi was obliged to hold on to the wall, for the 'plane was tossing alarmingly; and occasionally, without warning, she would drop apparently like a stone, and then jolt with a sickly jar.

"Air pockets," said Dorrie. "Some of them are nasty. It wouldn't be a bad idea to see what the weather is like on a lower level. We might get out of the storm by doin' that."

He sent the great aircraft on a long dive, and the storm seemed to get her more firmly into its clutches, and down she went—down—down—

Dense vapour enveloped the cabin windows. The visibility was nil. The machine was plunging blindly, and very soon the altimeter warned Dorrie that the very sea itself was dangerously near at hand.

Zzzzzzzh!

For an instant the Sky Wanderer was enveloped in a dazzling flare of blue light; and above the drone of the engines came a noise which was like a terrific explosion. The great machine rocked, reeled, and then side-slipped dizzily. Only by a tremendous effort did Lord

Dorrimore regain control; and now he sent her climbing again, every engine doing its work manfully.

CHAPTER 4.

Lost?

NELSON LEE, aboard the liner *Torania*, was leaning over the rail of the promenade deck; and he was obliged to hold tightly, for the vessel was rolling considerably.

"Looks like being a dirty night, guv'nor," said Nipper, who stood next to the great detective.

"It is already dirty," retorted Lee. "Captain Branson tells me that the glass has tumbled ominously. He is expecting a hurricane."

"That means something pretty bad, doesn't it?" asked Nipper.

Lee nodded.

"When a grizzled old sea dog like Branson talks of hurricanes, you can be certain that something unusual is brewing," he replied. "What we should regard as a violent storm the skipper would call a mere blow. I believe we're running into a great cyclone—one of those terrific storms which sometimes sweep into the Atlantic out of the Gulf."

For some minutes the pair stood there, gazing down upon the dimly-seen, foam-capped ocean. The visibility was limited. Out beyond the range of the vessel's lights all was intense blackness. A storm-ridden area where the wind hooted and howled; where cloud and sea joined together on the horizon in one indistinguishable whole.

The weather had been excellent during the week, and the *Torania* had made a good voyage. This was really the first storm, and it promised to be a real beauty. All day long the heat had been stifling, and when evening had come the air had been oppressive and sullen.

Most of the passengers were now in their cabins, for the hour was fairly late. But Nelson Lee could not sleep. He was looking unusually worried and anxious—and it was not on his own account. He had plenty of faith in Captain Branson, and in the *Torania*, too. She had weathered many a hurricane, and it was any odds that she would pass through this storm without damage.

"I expect it'll be one of those quick, violent affairs, sir," said Nipper. "A tremendous uproar to-night, and then a glorious day to-morrow."

"Yes," said Lee absently.

He moved along the deck, and Nipper was not surprised to see that he was walking in the direction of the wireless-room.

"You're thinking of Dorrie and Umlosi, aren't you, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"I am," said Lee, frowning. "Confound the fellow! I told him not to take this southerly route, Nipper. It's any odds that Dorrie's 'plane is becoming involved in this very storm."

There had been several wireless messages from the redoubtable Dorrie during the day; the last one had been received just after sunset. Dorrie had reported that all was well, and that the *Sky Wanderer* was going great guns. Since then there had been silence.

"Don't you think he'll change his course, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"He may not be able to," replied Lee. "Once an aeroplane is overtaken by a violent storm there is no telling what may happen. Perhaps Dorrie is riding before the storm. Perhaps he has taken a different route. But we can't tell."

At that moment a door further along the deck opened, and a young man in smart uniform came hurrying out.

"Just the man I wanted to see!" he exclaimed, running up to Lee. "We've just had another message from the 'plane."

"I'm glad to hear that, Barnes," said Nelson Lee. "Well, is everything all right?"

"Lord Dorrimore says that he's having a picnic," grinned the wireless operator. "He doesn't seem to care a bit—although it's evident that he's in the middle of this storm. That means that he can't be a great distance away from us."

"My only hat!" said Nipper. "He must have made amazing progress."

"It almost seems that there is a second storm," replied Lee thoughtfully. "The one we are encountering is certainly coming out of the Gulf, and if Dorrie was in the middle of that he would be fighting against it, not travelling with it."

They went into the wireless cabin with young Barnes, and presently Lee himself was in communication with the *Sky Wanderer*. Nipper stood by, fascinated. It was wonderful to stand there in this storm-tossed liner and to be in direct communication with an aeroplane which was hundreds of miles distant, fighting the elements in the darkness.

Dorrie's reports were all cheerful. Communication was difficult. It was patchy; no doubt the electricity-charged atmosphere was responsible for the poor reception. But at least Lee and Nipper were assured that the great 'plane was safe and fighting the storm gamely. Dorrie, as usual, was not only optimistic, but convinced of success.

"Let me have your exact position," came his lordship's radio. "I'll be able to work out my own position as soon as daylight comes, and then I'll overtake you. Be ready to wave."

Nelson Lee sent a message back advising Lord Dorrimore not to take any chances. The exact position of the vessel was given, and soon afterwards Dorrie's acknowledgment came.

But in the middle of it the chief wireless operator looked startled. He made various tests with his instruments, and then he removed his earphones and looked at Lee significantly.

"I don't like it, Mr. Lee," he said bluntly.

"You mean that there is something badly amiss?"

"Lord Dorrimore's message broke off abruptly," replied the chief operator. "He was saying that the lightning was growing worse—and then there was silence. I can't get him at all now."

"You—you don't mean that the machine has crashed?" asked Nipper breathlessly.

"It's impossible to say, young 'un," put in Lee. "The very fact that Dorrie broke off in the middle of a sentence is significant. The machine may have met with disaster, or, on the other hand, there is just a chance that the radio was put out of commission. I prefer to believe the latter. Still, in such a storm as this——"

He broke off, and his expression was anxious.

Again and again the wireless operator attempted to get into touch with the Sky Wanderer, but all their efforts were useless. There was only—silence.

"I hate to think that Dorrie is really lost," said Lee, later, as he and Nipper went to their own cabin. "For I somehow feel responsible."

"But that's not right, sir," protested Nipper. "How can you be responsible?"

"Dorrie only attempted this longer flight because he knew that I was aboard the Torania," replied Lee. "I cannot believe—— But what's the good of conjecturing?" he went on, with an impatient shrug. "Of all the infernal idiots! Why did he start on such a flight?"

The detective was restless. He did not want to sleep. He was almost on the point of going up on to the bridge to confer with Captain Branson, but he hesitated. The skipper was on duty, and he would not want to be disturbed at such a time as this.

Tap—tap!

Lee went to the door and opened it. Barnes, the assistant wireless operator, stood there.

"Radio for you, Mr. Lee," he said. "I knew you weren't asleep, so I thought I'd bring it straight along, instead of leaving it until the morning."

"From Lord Dorrimore?" put in Nipper quickly.

"No—this radio is from Kingston, Jamaica—relayed by an oil boat," said Barnes. "We've tried to get in touch with the 'plane again, but it's no use. Can't get a sound. We're still trying, though."

Nelson Lee took the message, opened it, and read it.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed at length.

Barnes had gone, and Nipper looked at his guv'nor in surprise. For Nelson Lee had spoken in a decidedly exasperated voice.

"Is it bad news, sir?" he asked.

"Decidedly good news—but this trip of ours turns out to be so much waste of time," replied the great detective. "This message is from young Stanton."

"But how could he send you a radio message, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "He's under arrest—held on a charge of murder?"

"Stanton is free," replied Nelson Lee. "He says that the real murderer has confessed, and the authorities have set him at liberty."

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Nipper. "Then we're going out to Jamaica for nothing?"

"Merely for our health," replied Nelson Lee. "Our case has collapsed. With Stanton freed of that charge, and with the real murderer in the hands of the police, there will be nothing left for us to do."

"Well, I'm glad, for young Stanton's sake," said Nipper. "And, anyhow, you needed a rest, guv'nor, so perhaps it's all for the best."

"And if we had not come out on this case, Lord Dorrimore would not have undertaken that flight," said Lee grimly. "It's queer how things happen."

But even Nelson Lee did not realise exactly how queer things were to turn out!

THE Sky Wanderer, battling gamely, fighting valiantly, plunged on through the inky smother of the night.

Lord Dorrimore, grim-featured, unusually tense, sat at the controls. Perspiration streamed from him, for he had been fighting gamely for hours. Amazingly constructed as the great 'plane was, she was like a clumsy barge in the grip of this terrific cyclone. Dorrie had kept her on an even keel only by dint of constant effort. The gale lifted her in its grip, sweeping her upwards, sending her zooming out of all control. But again and again Dorrie had conquered.

The wireless instrument, he knew, was out of commission. There had been one terrific flash of lightning, and blue flames had licked round the radio controls, and there had been smoke. After that the set had failed to function.

The compass, however, owing to a tremendous jolt which had sent the 'plane heeling over nearly on her back, was useless. The other instruments were affected, too. The Sky Wanderer was flying blindly—more blindly than ever. Dorrie did not know whether he was near the sea, or whether he was ten thousand feet above. He was trusting to luck now—and he knew, from experience, that his luck was uncanny.

The great machine was really behaving magnificently. Under such stresses many aeroplanes would have crumpled. But the Sky Wanderer, to her everlasting credit, withstood every strain, every sickening lurch. And her great engines were still functioning perfectly, humming with that same purring, rhythmic music.

"If only we can carry on until daylight we shall be all right," yelled Dorrie, above the din of the storm. "It's this infernal darkness which baffles me."

Umlosi, who was near by, calm and untroubled, nodded gravely.

"The dawn will come, N'Kose, and we shall live," he said. "But think not that we shall then be free of dangers. Wau!

My 'snake' tells me that we grow nearer and nearer to a land of much strife."

"Strife or not, any kind of land would look good to me just now," said his lordship fervently.

It was a nerve-racking experience. And Dorrie's nerves were almost shock-proof. Yet, for once in his life, he had more than his fill of excitement. He realised that disaster might come at any second—a crash, a shattering splintering of metal and fabric—and then oblivion.

One minute the great monoplane was soaring dizzily, completely out of control, caught in the mighty grip of a demoniac squall; the next minute she would dive, shuddering, shaking, and Dorrie, at the controls, would fight madly to retain command. Then another spell of more or less steady flying, with the wind shrieking and buffeting.

And all around, the darkness.

Dorrie believed that the machine's speed was some incredible figure—not less than four hundred miles an hour. She was hurtling onwards, carried by the storm, whirled along like a gale-blown feather.

"By gad, she's marvellous!" declared Dorrie enthusiastically. "If she can stand this and come out on top, she can stand anythin'."

By this time he had dismissed all fears of the Sky Wanderer disintegrating in mid-air. She was proof against the fury of the elements. There was only one danger—and that was deadly enough. Without any means of knowing his height, Dorrie was troubled by the constant dread that the great machine would touch a wave. At such speed as this, the merest graze would spell disaster. For the sea would be like solid concrete, and the Sky Wanderer would split herself up into fragments.

Conscious of this deadly peril, Dorrie strove to keep the machine climbing. Her powerful engines were running all out, but Dorrie knew well enough that it would be a matter of sheer luck.

Thus the battle went on, hour after hour, Lord Dorrimore grim and calm in the pilot's seat; Umlosi standing by, impassive, almost indifferent.

The intense darkness had changed to a dirty, drab, indefinable grey—heralding the dawn—when the end of all things seemed to come.

Fierce as the gale had been before, it now became terrifying in its fury. More than once the Sky Wanderer was lifted and sent rocketing upwards vertically. Only by clinging for dear life did her occupants save themselves from being flung headlong. The trusty 'plane shuddered and groaned—but she still battled on.

It seemed to Dorrie that they had reached a zone where two storms were meeting—a vast upheaval of the atmosphere which was cataclysmic in its violence. Twice, at least, the Sky Wanderer was spun round just like a top, and on one occasion Dorrie was convinced that she had turned over on her back

—and this was followed by a giddy, terrifying vertical dive. But yet again she came through the ordeal safely, resuming an even keel, and flying on.

This period lasted, mercifully, for only thirty or forty minutes. But by the time it was over both Dorrie and Umlosi were feeling stunned. They scarcely cared what happened now. Their brains were dulled.

But Dorrie clung doggedly to the controls—and so the day came, and the violent storm area was left behind.

CHAPTER 5.

The Mystery Mist.

MIST—grey, clinging, impenetrable mist.

The Sky Wanderer was flying blindly onwards, no longer tossed and buffeted. She flew on an even keel, smoothly, placidly. As though by the waving of a magic wand, the gale had completely dropped, and here, in this dense mist, there was a dead calm.

In reality, the machine had flown out of the storm area. The cyclone, keeping to a fairly narrow path, was hurtling onwards across the Atlantic. For many hours the Sky Wanderer had flown with the cyclone, unable to get free of it.

But it was over now—and both Dorrie and Umlosi were thankful. Yet their condition was not greatly improved. They longed for a sight of the clear sky—for a glimpse of the sea. Flying gropingly in this mist was almost as harrowing as the earlier darkness.

"Well, Umlosi, old pal, it looks a bit like hoppin' out of the fryin'-pan into the fire," said his lordship. "We're free of the storm—but this fog is awful. At first I thought we were flying through a cloud, but we've been climbin' steadily for an hour, and we can't seem to get above it."

"I know nought of these matters, N'Kose," replied Umlosi. "It is for thou to decide."

"Well, accordin' to the altimeter, we're seven thousand feet up—but I'm not trustin' these instruments now," replied Dorrie. "Most of them are out of adjustment, I believe. The compass, for example, is about as useful as a turnip. I expect we're hundreds of miles off our course—an' for all I know, we may be heading direct for the South Pole."

His lordship was not exactly worried—nothing ever really worried him—but he was certainly troubled. It was very necessary to get out of this strange mist and to take some observations. Dorrie knew a good deal about navigation, and he would be able to work out a rough estimate of the machine's position. Yet he could do nothing in this mist. And the precious minutes were slipping by—the Sky Wanderer's fuel was being used. Ample though her fuel supplies were, they nevertheless had a limit.

There was a quality in the mist which puzzled Dorrie considerably. He had never

seen anything quite like it. The temperature in this region was evidently high, for the heat was stifling within the machine—a damp, unpleasant humidity. The cabin windows streamed with moisture, and nothing was visible beyond. This was no commonplace fog. Neither was it a cloudbank.

Dorrie throttled the engines down so that they were enjoying a comparative rest—after their strenuous labours of the night. And with the machine flying perfectly on an even keel, Dorrie had time to look round.

“Anyhow, Umlosi, I think we’ve earned some breakfast,” said his lordship lightly. “How about preparin’ some hot coffee, with a spot of grub? Anythin’ will do. I’m famished.”

“Wau! Thou thinkest of food at strange times, N’Kose,” rumbled Umlosi.

He passed through into the well-appointed cabin and got busy. Meanwhile Dorrie tried an experiment. With the engines almost completely throttled down, he sent the *Sky Wanderer* into a slow gliding descent.

He was hoping to catch a glimpse of the sea. At the first indication of danger he could zoom upwards. With his gaze fixed on the streaming glass, he descended lower and lower.



The strangely garbed men came swimming up the ladder, their cutlasses gleaming in the sun. “Pirates!” muttered Handforth, quivering with excitement.

It was a big strain. Never for a second could Dorrie relax his vigilance. It would be necessary to act like lightning when the critical moment arrived. But he felt that he must get a glimpse of the heaving ocean. Not until then would he feel himself at grips, once again, with realities.

Never in his life before had he so longed for a sight of sea or land. He felt that his very reason depended upon that glimpse.

It was curious that there should now be such a dead calm. As far as Lord Dorrimore could judge, not a breath of wind was stirring in this strange fog zone; and the *Sky Wanderer* answered her controls as obedi-

ently as ever. In order to be on the safe side, Dorrie tested her, and up she zoomed, her engines singing serenely. Now she was gliding down again, and still there was nothing but the grey, blank mist.

“Well, dash it, the sea must be somewhere!” grunted Dorrie, exasperated. “I’ve dropped a couple of thousand feet already, and I don’t see—”

He broke off, and his hands, on the controls, were ready for instantaneous action. He thought he had glimpsed something through the mist—something below, vague, illusory. But, curiously enough, it did not seem to be the ocean.

The Sky Wanderer dropped lower and lower—and suddenly, for the first time for many hours, Lord Dorrimore saw something tangible. In that second his sense of realities returned to him. No longer was he floating in a zone of mystery. Not twenty feet below, just visible through the grey mist, there was something. But it was neither land nor sea.

Lower . . . Lower . . .

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Dorrie, in wonder.

He could now see, with a fair amount of distinctness, a sullen, brooding tangle of brownish-greenish vegetation. It was ugly and sinister. An everlasting expanse of moist, steaming weed!

Yes, that was it—weed! Miles and miles of tangled, festering weed! Fascinated, Dorrie allowed the Sky Wanderer to drop lower still, so that she was now skimming the very surface. She was not more than ten or twelve feet above that heaving mass. Yet, it was heaving—gently, sullenly, as though some monstrous thing beneath it was in movement.

"Well, may I be kippered!" said Dorrie breathlessly. "If this isn't the Sargasso I'm an artichoke!"

The Sargasso!

Lord Dorrimore's mind immediately became thronged with the fanciful tales he had heard of the dreaded and mysterious Sargasso Sea. It was a place of mystery—a great expanse of tangled weed, hundreds of miles from any shipping route, and legend had it that ships, rendered helpless in storms, drifted inexorably into this deadly weed—there to become entangled for ever. For once the Sargasso took possession of a ship, it never released its hold.

"Hi! Umlosi!" yelled Dorrie.

The giant negro appeared almost at once.

"Look out of the window!" said his lordship. "What do you think of it, old friend?"

"I have seen, my father—and I like it not," replied Umlosi, shaking his great head. "'Tis an evil sight. In my own land there are dread swamps, where strange creatures abound; but this vast tangle of weed is a very plague-spot."

"I'm beginnin' to understand now," said Dorrie, his eyes gleaming. "That confounded storm swept us hundreds of miles out of our course—to the southward, I imagine. We should have passed comparatively near to the Sargasso Sea zone, in any case. But by all appearances we are right over the heart of it now. And that helps us to determine our position. Things would be a lot better if we could only get out of this mist."

So dense was the mist that the weed-choked sea could only be seen when the machine was flying a few feet above its surface. As soon as Dorrie flew higher the weed vanished, and once again the plane was flying in a blind world of unreality.

With great caution Dorrie descended again; it was better to keep that weed in sight. He

felt that he was in touch with something solid and real.

"Never mind breakfast, old friend," he said, never relaxing his vigilance for a split second. "I can't bother with food or drink now. I've got to keep my eyes glued to this wretched weed."

He knew that if the machine touched she would capsize. It would not be possible to effect a landing on that spongy tangle of steaming weed.

But Dorrie was more hopeful than he had been for many hours past. The great machine was only cruising, but her speed, even so, was considerable. Sooner or later she would inevitably fly out of this Sargasso zone, and it would be good to see the clear, blue-green sea beneath.

"I like it not, N'Kose," said Umlosi, his voice strangely uneasy. "Perchance thou wilt stop, but I feel, in my bones, that peril is near. There is a danger unseen."

"Well, pretty nearly unseen," agreed Dorrie. "By strainin' we can just manage to keep sight of the weed——"

"N'Kose!" thundered Umlosi suddenly. "See! The cliffs!"

"Cliffs!" yelled Dorrie.

He had been keeping his gaze fixed on the weed below. But now he looked directly ahead.

"Great Scott!" gasped his lordship.

Directly ahead, right bang in the path of the Sky Wanderer, rose a sheer wall of rocky cliff, vaguely but horribly visible through the mist. A second's fraction of hesitation would have spelt death and disaster. But Lord Dorrimore kept his head.

With a simultaneous movement he wrenched at the controls and opened the throttle wide. The Sky Wanderer's nose shot upwards and her engines roared with triumph.

Up she went—up, up—and so narrow was the escape that her under-carriage came within a mere foot or so of the jagged rocks of the cliff.

For a few awful moments it was touch and go. The great machine went right over on her back; and then Dorrie, by a brilliant manoeuvre, swung her right over, getting her on an even keel once again—and now, so successful was his move, the towering cliff was visible just alongside.

The Sky Wanderer was flying parallel now, and death had been cheated by a matter of inches.

CHAPTER 6.

The Island Above the Clouds!

"PHEW! That was rather nasty!" muttered Lord Dorrimore.

The perspiration was streaming from him. And he found time to remember Umlosi's uncanny foreboding of peril. It was impossible that Umlosi could have seen anything, yet that instinct of his had warned him. Indeed, but for Umlosi's dramatic shout, nothing could have saved the

Sky Wanderer from charging headling into the rocky cliffs.

"Thou art truly a man of magic, N'Kose," said the giant Kutana. "Wau! I know not how you saved us from the long, long sleep."

"Neither do I, if it comes to that," replied Dorrie with a gulp. "Just blind luck, I suppose. Good glory! I don't understand this at all, Umlosi! Look at that cliff. It's solid enough—and yet it just can't be! There's no land in the Sargasso—there's no land within a thousand miles!"

"How canst thou say such things, my father, when land is visible unto our very eyes?" asked Umlosi.

"I know it is—but, all the same, it's impossible," said Lord Dorrimore. "I tell you, Umlosi, there's no land within a thousand miles! Yet there it is! I might be goin' dotty, or you might be going dotty, but it's hardly possible that we should both be goin' dotty together!"

Greater care than ever was necessary now. The all-pervading mist rendered Dorrie's task well-nigh impossible. Just below, as before, was the weed. But it was thicker here; so thick, indeed, that it looked solid. And towering upwards, close at hand, to starboard, rose the black, massive cliff. Dorrie was thinking quickly. If he sheered off he would lose sight of the cliff, and that would be dangerous. Yet, if he kept it within his vision, a sudden turn of the rock might lead to a disaster just as horrible. He wanted to keep the cliff in sight, too; he dared not let it vanish into the murky fog.

A wild excitement had taken possession of him, but he kept his head. Outwardly he was as cool as ice. His hand was as steady as a rock.

And now, casting all caution to the winds, he opened up the engines to their fullest extent, and he sent the great machine soaring up, climbing powerfully.

"We're not mad, Umlosi—an' this is land right enough!" he shouted. "There must be a top to that cliff, and we've got to find it."

He did not care—now—about losing sight of the weed. That was of smaller importance. As long as he could see the cliff he could take the chance of climbing. Thus, sooner or later he would rise above the fog bank.

The weed had long since vanished. Lord Dorrimore's only contact with solidity was the sight of that grim cliff, so dangerously near at hand.

And abruptly, dramatically, this vanished, too.

One moment it was there, and the next moment it was no more. There was mist both to starboard and to port—mist below, and mist above.

"I was afraid of it!" growled Dorrie, half angrily.

But there was no hope for it now. He had to carry on—to keep on climbing. It would have been madness to attempt to find that cliff again—for there could be no two such narrow escapes.

Suddenly he realised that the mist was thinning. It still enveloped the aeroplane in the same ghostly pall, but there was more light now; a golden brightness was developing. And that could only mean the sun.

"I think we're gettin' out of it, Umlosi, old friend," said Dorrie exultantly. "By gad! If only we can catch just one glimpse of the sun—and the blue sky!"

Even as he was speaking the great 'plane shot clear of the mist bank, rising up with dramatic unexpectedness into crystal clear air.

It was a wonderful experience.

"See, N'Kose!" boomed Umlosi. "'Tis the sky!"

"Blessed sky!" replied Dorrie fervently. "And blessed sun!"

The sun was low, for it was only an hour or two after dawn. The glorious sunshine streamed in through the cabin windows, bathing both Dorrie and Umlosi in golden fire. Above them, and all round, was the perfect blue of a cloudless sky.

And below, only just beneath the speeding 'plane, a veritable sea of white mist. It stretched away as far as the eye could reach—a rolling expanse of vapour, like the upper-side of a cloudbank.

"Now we can begin thinkin' about breakfast again," said Dorrie gaily. "We're out of that beastly mist, an' the weather's fine, and we can set our course by the sun. But I'd give a thousand pounds, spot cash, to know what happened to that mysterious cliff."

"Thou canst see the cliff without the payment of a single coin, N'Kose," said Umlosi, stretching out a great arm. "See! Behold this wondrous sight! Never in my life have I seen such a spectacle."

Umlosi was usually so unemotional that Dorrie looked at him sharply. The Kutana chieftain was positively excited. Dorrie turned his head, and stared out of the opposite windows. Then he gave a gulp.

"Great heavens!" he shouted amazedly.

Incredible as that mystery cliff had been, the sight which Lord Dorrimore now beheld was ten times more incredible. There, rising upwards out of the sheer mist, was a great pinnacle of land. It stretched for miles, and it rose above the mist for a full thousand feet. The summit, indeed, was a great deal higher than the aeroplane, and Dorrie and Umlosi could only catch a glimpse of green verdure along the cliff edge. The whole astounding spectacle was bathed in brilliant sunshine.

There could be no optical illusion about this. It was a great pinnacle of land, with a plateau on the top, and it rose sheer out of the mist, the cliff being utterly perpendicular. Sometimes, back in England, when flying across country, Dorrie had seen a solitary factory chimney bursting its summit out beyond a bank of low-lying clouds. This sight reminded him of those occasions—but it was on a gigantic scale.

He knew perfectly well that he had climbed several thousands of feet to get above the mist. The top of this great pinnacle went upwards for another thousand. In other words, for over three parts of its height, the pinnacle was enveloped in the everlasting mist. Only the summit jutted out into the clear air.

"Well, this beats everything!" said Dorrie tensely. "Umlosi, we've made a stupendous discovery. Do you realise that? We shall go down in history, like Christopher Columbus himself, as the discoverers of a new land!"

For at the very sight of this pinnacle, Lord Dorrimore knew that it was something which no mortal man had ever seen before—no man belonging to the twentieth century, at all events.

"It must be an island," said his lordship, staring eagerly. "An island with its summit thousands of feet above sea level. An' that summit appears to be pretty flat, too."

His hunger and thirst had gone. He no longer felt tired. All he wanted now was to fly higher—to fly right over the surface of this amazing land.

Already a wild idea had come into his head—a possible explanation of this hitherto undreamt-of island. But before he allowed his thoughts to go further, he wanted to get a clearer view. The Sky Wanderer was still climbing, and now that Dorrie could see exactly what he was doing, all his old confidence returned.

Soon she was level with the summit, and Dorrie successfully fought against the impulse to fly immediately over this newly-discovered land. He decided that it would be better to get his first view from a higher altitude.

So, keeping still clear of the island itself, he continued to climb, now rising seven or eight hundred feet above the actual level of the plateau. For such it turned out to be. There were minor hills and valleys, but, in the main, the island was fairly level.

And the picture it made, as it was spread out beneath the cruising aeroplane, was astonishingly wonderful. Dorrie estimated, roughly, that the extraordinary island was fully twenty miles in length, by fifteen miles broad. So it was no mere pin-point of land. It was quite a little country of its own—as extensive, approximately, as the Isle of Wight.

And on every "coast" the cliff dropped sheer. They dropped for a thousand feet into the mist—and then for another two thousand feet through the mist, to the surface of the weed-choked Sargasso Sea.

The sun was bathing the island in golden light, and the picture was truly a glorious one—particularly to the eyes of Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, who had so recently passed through the harrowing experience of the night. For this was land—blessed, glorious land!

And it seemed to Dorrie, as he eagerly scanned the landscape beneath him, that the island was tropical in vegetation. Notwithstanding the altitude, the verdure was rich

and luxurious. The green of the trees, and of the grass, was curiously different from the ordinary green of a tropical landscape.

There were dense forests in view, and large open spaces, and in some of these spaces gleamed small lakes.

"I can't believe it," said Dorrie. "To think that this island could have remained undiscovered throughout the centuries! It's—it's stupendous, Umlosi! A gem of verdure, rising up out of that filthy mist! The glorious green of this landscape proves clearly enough that the island gets plenty of sunshine. I doubt if the mist ever rises to the summit. If only we could land we should be the first human beings to set foot——"

"Nay, N'Kose," interrupted Umlosi, shaking his head. "Methinks thou art wrong. My snake tells me that strange people live in this land."

"What!" ejaculated his lordship sharply. "Good gad! You can't really mean—— But that's too marvellous for words!"

It came to Dorrie with something of a shock that perhaps this rocky pinnacle of land, with its verdant summit, was the last remaining scrap of the lost continent of Atlantis. It was a thought which left him breathless.

With characteristic recklessness he came to a decision.

"Umlosi, we're goin' to land!" he said.

"Thou art rash as ever, my father!" rumbled the giant Kutana.

"Rash or not, I'm not going to leave this island without landin' on it," replied Dorrie doggedly. "There are several stretches of flat country there, and it ought to be easy. I want to have a look at the landscape at close quarters—and I need to repair the compass, too. The other instruments require adjusting, an' it is highly important that we should discover the exact position of this spot, so that we can return to it later. For, by the Lord Harry, I intend to explore this unknown land from corner to corner!"

And as he spoke, Dorrie throttled the engines down, and the nose of the Sky Wanderer dipped, and soon she was gliding straight down towards this island of mystery.

CHAPTER 7.

Amazing Encounter!

NOT many hundreds of miles away the Torania was ploughing steadily onwards, and getting back to her original course. For the cyclone which had driven Lord Dorrimore's aeroplane astray had also affected the liner.

Captain Branson had been compelled to let the vessel run before the storm—which, during its worst hours, had been exceptionally violent.

That tempestuous night was succeeded by a brilliant day, with the sun beating down mercilessly out of a cloudless sky. The sea was still a bit angry, but the wind had completely

(Continued on page 20.)

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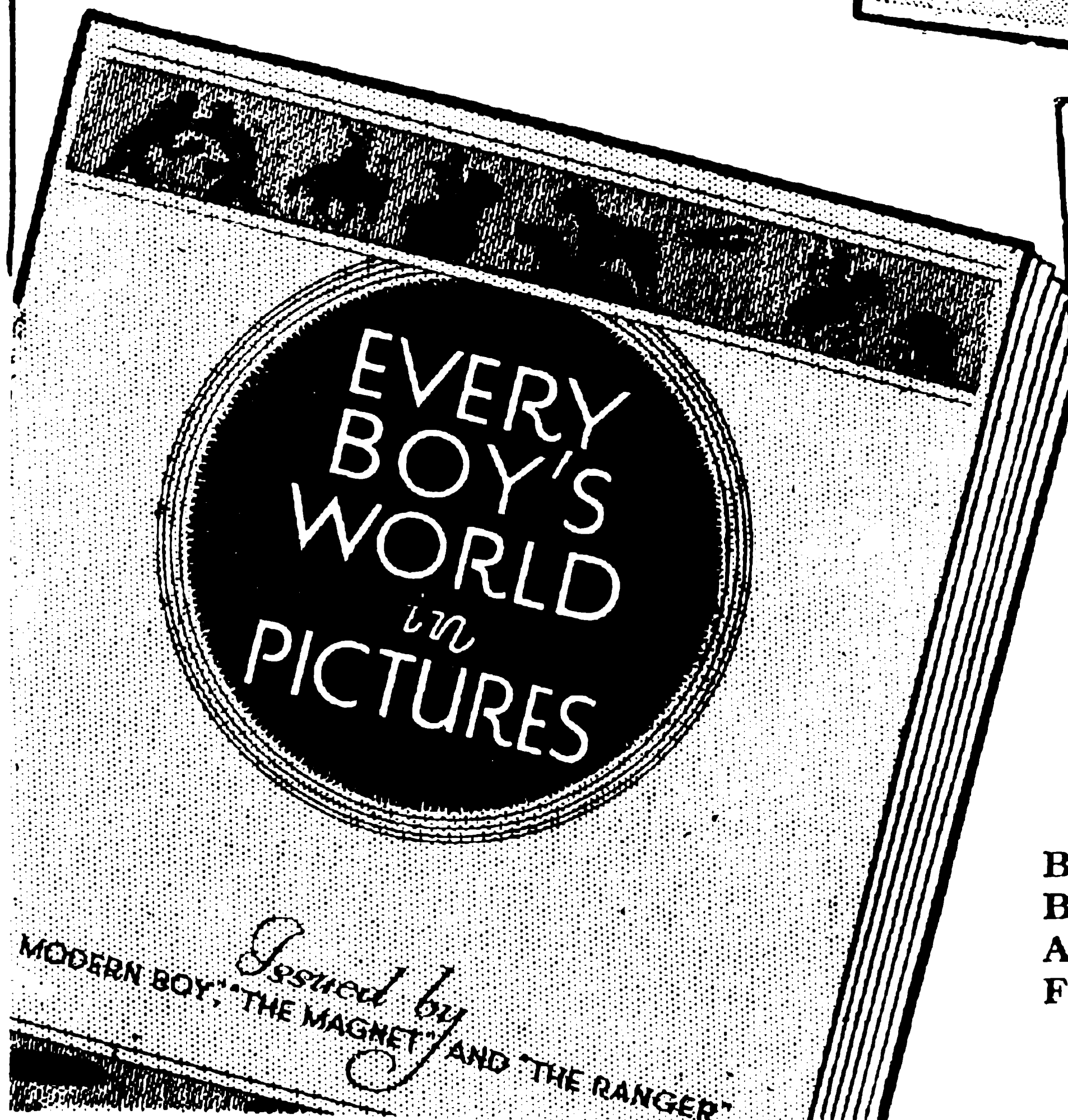
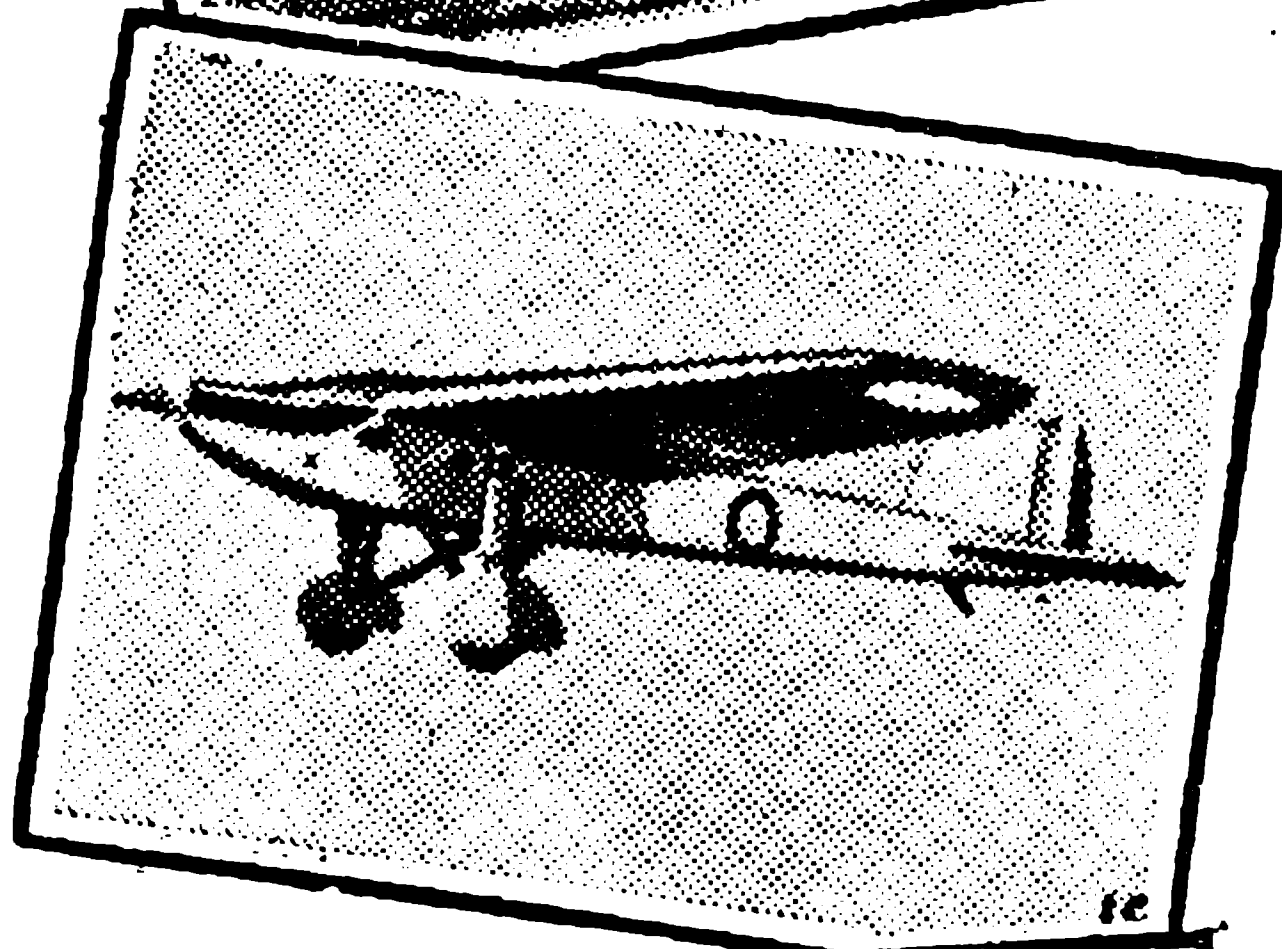
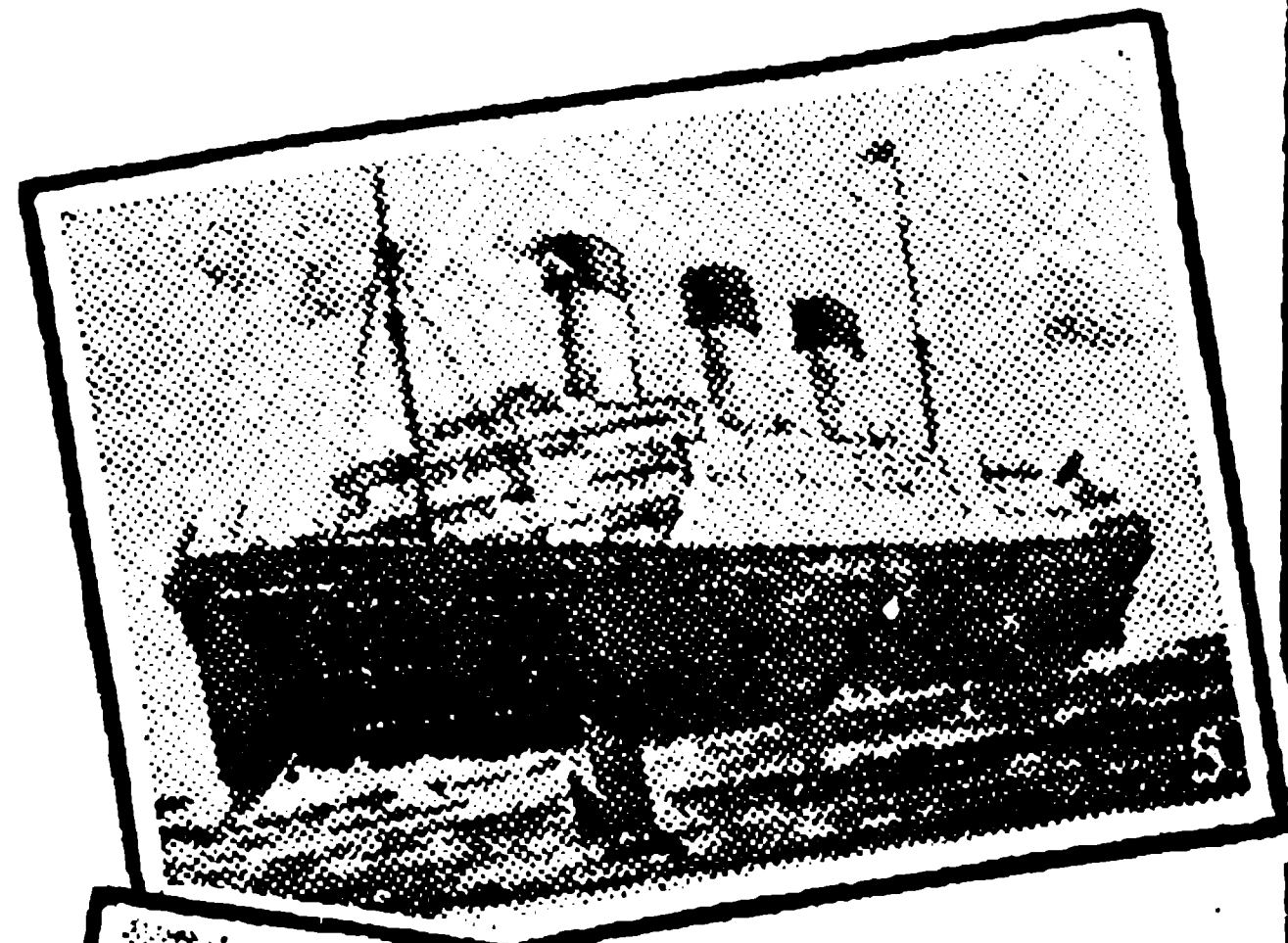
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dropped, and very little remained to tell of the storm's violence except the heavy swell.

"Yes, we're a long way off our course, Mr. Lee," said the old skipper. "And I don't quite like it. Look down there!"

They were on the bridge, and Nelson Lee, staring down at the sea, saw the patchy appearance of the water. In places there were tangled, rope-like masses of weed.

"We came a lot further south than I wanted," went on the captain, frowning. "I'm not particularly fond of this zone, Mr. Lee. It generally means trouble. That stuff you're looking at is gulf weed."

"Yes, I know," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "That means that we're uncomfortably near to the Sargasso, doesn't it?"

"We're practically within the outer limits of the Sargasso Sea at this very minute," said Captain Branson gruffly. "If it wasn't for this weed—and there's a great deal more of it under the surface than you'd believe—the sea would be much rougher. I can give you my word, I shall be glad to see the last of it."

"You're thinking of your propellers?"

"I've only had this weed foul ~~my~~ propellers once—and that was enough," retorted the captain. "I give you my word, Mr. Lee, this stuff is filthy. As tough as six-inch cable, and if we get really entangled we shall be little better than a hulk."

Throughout the night Captain Branson had endeavoured to keep his ship clear of the weed zone. But so terrific had been the storm that he had been forced to run before it. Not many of the passengers realised what had actually happened. The storm had been violent, but, mercifully, it had been brief. To-day was so fine that very few people knew how seriously the Torania had been set off her course.

"We ought to be clear of the weed by the evening," said the skipper. "I've got a couple of look-out men in the bows, and we're steering clear of the worst masses. There's not really very much danger of running into a bad tract of the stuff."

Nelson Lee was hardly listening, and Captain Branson soon noticed this.

"Thinking of your friend Lord Dorrimore, eh?" he said abruptly.

"Why, yes," admitted Lee.

"Afraid he's done for."

"It looks very much like it," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Poor Dorrie! And poor Umlosi! It's dreadful to think of them hurtling to destruction during that storm."

"I've experienced a few southern cyclones in my time, but last night's was one of the worst," said the captain. "It developed with extraordinary rapidity—and we know for a fact that Lord Dorrimore's aeroplane was in the thick of it. He got several wireless messages through before—before the silence came. I can't help thinking, Mr. Lee, that the machine was suddenly capsized by a particularly heavy squall."

"Yes, that would account for the abrupt break-off in the middle of one of Lord

Dorrimore's messages," said Nelson Lee. "It's a terrible pity."

Soon afterwards he left the bridge, and he found Nipper looking troubled and anxious. Edward Oswald Handforth was with him, and the redoubtable Handy was no less worried.

"I shall never forgive you for not waking me up last night," Handforth was saying. "And I don't believe that Dorrie is dead. I won't believe it!" he added fiercely. "It's—it's too awful!"

"Yet we must look the facts in the face, old man," said Nipper. "Dorrie's plane was in that storm, and you know what the storm was like. We weren't in the dead centre of it, either—we only got the outer fringe. Captain Branson thinks that the aeroplane was caught in the very vortex. We can only hope that poor Dorrie and Umlosi were finished off quickly."

"My only hat! Don't talk like that!" said Handforth. "Any fresh news, sir?" he added as Lee came up.

"None, my boy," replied the detective. "Since that interrupted message last night not a word has come from Lord Dorrimore. I hate to think the worst—but it would be foolish to entertain a great deal of hope. The Sky Wanderer will not be the first trans-Atlantic aeroplane to meet with disaster."

"But even if the machine had been forced down, sir, it doesn't necessarily mean that Dorrie and Umlosi are dead," said Handforth eagerly. "It's a kind of flying boat, isn't it?"

"My dear Handforth, in such a storm as raged last night the Sky Wanderer could not last a single minute—if it had alighted on the sea," replied Lee. "No; things look very bad indeed."

It was not often that the famous detective was irritable and gloomy, but to-day he felt thoroughly sick of everything.

A young officer approached Lee and saluted.

"The captain's compliments, Mr. Lee, and he'd like you to join him again on the bridge," said the officer.

"Yes, certainly," replied Lee.

Nipper and Handforth took it for granted that they were included in the invitation. So they accompanied Lee up to the bridge, and Captain Branson only smiled when he saw them. They were privileged persons.

"Thought you might be interested, Mr. Lee," said the captain, handing Lee a telescope. "What do you think of that boat?"

He pointed to a speck on the horizon, and Lee saw at a glance that this other ship was much more deeply into the Sargasso Sea zone than the Torania.

"She seems to have been blown out of her course, like us," he remarked.

"Exactly," said the captain. "But that's not the point. Have a good look at her."

Lee put the telescope to his eye, and as soon as he had got the focus he received a surprise. The vessel now came into sharp relief, and by the cut of her she seemed to be a cruiser of obsolete type. There could be no mistak-

ing her lines; and the clumsy heaviness of her superstructure.

"Well?" asked the captain.

"I must confess that I am puzzled," said Lee. "Either she is painted most peculiarly, or she is simply red with rust. Her sides are literally streaked. I don't think I've ever seen a ship in such a condition before."

"Not a warship, anyhow," said the captain. "I believe you're right, Mr. Lee. Anyhow, your view agrees with my own. She's rusty from stem to stern. And what do you make of that queer looking contraption at her stern? A sort of crude cage, as far as I can make out."

It was difficult for Nelson Lee to see, for the other vessel had changed her course since the captain had made his observation, and now she was heading direct in a line which would bring her as near as possible to the Torania.

The captain and Nelson Lee were not the only interested parties. Other officers were peering at the stranger through glasses, and all sorts of comments were being made. This rusty warship was indeed something of a phenomenon.

"Can't make out her flag at this distance," said the skipper, as he once again looked through the telescope. "Clear sort of design—and not much colour, if any. Yet there's something vaguely familiar about her lines—By thunder! She looks extraordinarily like the Porto Marlo."

"But surely the Porto Marlo was lost last year?" asked Lee. "I remember reading of the case in the newspapers. Wasn't she the Parazilian warship which was abandoned by her officers and crew in mid-ocean—after the magazine had caught fire?"

"That's right," said the captain. "And as far as I can remember she wasn't a great deal out of this latitude, either. This is just about the region. It happened at night—and there was a good deal of mystery about the affair. There were whispers going about afterwards that the officers had flown into a needless panic. Anyhow, there was no explosion, and it's a fact that the glow in the sky was seen to die down after the boats had drifted away. Lots of people believed that the Porto Marlo had never sunk, but had drifted away, a derelict."

"This is singularly interesting," said Lee keenly.

He took the telescope again. If this vessel was indeed the Porto Marlo, then all sorts of surprising possibilities arose. Who were the people aboard her? Who were the men who composed her officers and crew? The very fact that she was so rusty indicated that she was in strange hands. Yet she could not be a derelict now—for smoke was pouring from her single old-fashioned funnel. She was wallowing a good deal, and she seemed to have a slight list to starboard. And her progress was erratic. Her position, however, was such that by cutting diagonally across the Torania's track she must inevitably come alongside the liner.

Most of the passengers were alive to the interesting situation by now. The deck rails were crowded, and as the minutes passed, the strange rusty warship could be clearly seen with the naked eye.

"Queer-looking tub, I must say!" said Handforth critically. "My only sainted aunt! She's rusty from stem to stern! What about her officers? Why don't they make the men clean her up, or paint her, or something?"

"It's my belief, Handy, that she doesn't belong to any recognised navy," replied Nipper. "There's something so rummy about her——"

Boom!

He was interrupted dramatically. A puff of smoke appeared from the warship, and the report was ominous. The next second came a screaming wail as a shell went hurtling half a mile ahead of the Torania.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper in amazement.

He glanced at Captain Branson. The liner's skipper was mentally stunned for a moment. His weather-beaten face had become almost purple.

"By heaven!" he burst out at length. "A shot across my bows! Have they gone stark raving mad?"

The thing was so extraordinary that Captain Branson could scarcely believe the evidence of his own wits. Even Nelson Lee, usually so imperturbable, was looking positively excited.

"This looks rather like trouble, captain," he said.

"Trouble?" thundered the Old Man. "D'ye think I'm going to heave-to at the command of this rusty, pottering tin kettle? Do they think they can scare me? There'll be a whole heap of trouble in Parazil over this, or I'm a slab-footed landsman!"

He was in a towering rage, and Nelson Lee did not blame him.

"We are not certain yet that the warship is really Parazilian," said the detective gently. "That flag, for instance——"

"By George!" broke in Handforth, bubbling with excitement. "I just spotted that flag properly, sir—and a puff of wind opened it out. It's got the sign of the skull and crossbones on it! It's the pirate flag! These people are pirates!"

"Cheese it, Handy!" muttered Nipper, giving Edward Oswald a nudge. "Don't be such an ass!"

"But I tell you——"

"Rats!"

"I tell you these people are pirates——"

"You're mad!"

"I saw the flag!" insisted Handforth breathlessly. "Do you think I don't know what the Black Flag looks like? I've read heaps of pirate stories——"

"May I be keel-hauled!" burst out Captain Branson. "The boy's right! That flag! It's no Parazilian ensign! It bears the design of the skull and crossbones!"

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

But Nelson Lee and Nipper were paying no heed. Captain Branson was staring through his glasses, and now he could see another amazing sight. The decks of the rusty warship were crowded with queer, nondescript figures. None of those men were in naval uniform, and the majority of them wore great, shaggy beards.

Boom!

Another shot was fired—and this time the shell came very much closer to the liner, shrieking overhead and falling into the sea a long way distant, sending up a great tower of white spray.

By now the Torania's passengers were shouting in their excitement; there was no actual panic, but it would not be long, unless something was done, before real trouble started.

Gritting his teeth with rage, Captain Branson telegraphed to the engine-room—and the Torania, with engines silenced, glided noiselessly through the sullen, weed-covered sea.

CHAPTER 8.

The Sign of the Skull and Crossbones!

NELSON LEE, during the past few minutes, had been thinking rapidly—and his thoughts were of a strange nature.

Undoubtedly, this rusty old cruiser was a pirate. She was no longer flying the Parazil flag; her company did not consist of Parazilians officers and men. In some extraordinary way the derelict warship had fallen into the hands of ruffians.

At closer quarters the old Porto Marlo presented an astounding spectacle. Her decks, usually so clean and tidy, were littered with indescribable rubbish. Parts of her superstructure were completely rusted away, and falling into ruin. Her engines were thudding and hammering painfully. Scarcely a trace of her original grey paint remained; she was rusty all over, and her funnel was full of gaping, jagged holes.

Everybody aboard the Torania watched breathlessly. The captain himself, now that he had got over his original fury, was filled with wonder and incredulity. Never in all his experience of the sea, had he encountered such an adventure as this.

The warship had drawn quite close in by now, and when her engines were stopped, the silence seemed unnatural. She came gliding nearer, wallowing somewhat in the swell. And it could now be seen that active preparations were afoot for the launching of a boat.

"Coming aboard, are they?" growled Captain Branson, his eyes burning. "I'll give the dogs the length of my tongue! I know the dago lingo pretty well, and I can express myself pretty fluently, too!"

The captain's first thoughts were for his passengers; he could not risk open defiance of this strange pirate. But his curiosity, as

well as his anger, prompted him to permit the stranger's boat to come alongside.

"In Heaven's name, Mr. Lee, what do you make of her?" he asked blankly. "What do you make of those men? I am fairly flummoxed, and I don't mind saying so!"

Nelson Lee was looking keen; his eyes contained a hard glint of grimness; his whole being seemed to be a-quiver with tense expectancy.

"Only a rash man would venture upon an opinion at this early stage, captain," he



All round Dorrimore and his companion the hid

replied. "Yet I believe we are truly privileged."

"Privileged?" repeated the puzzled captain.

"Yes—in the sense that we are the first victims of the most remarkable pirate vessel which had ever sailed the seas," said Lee. "And as far as I can see, captain, you will have to obey orders—no matter how unpleasant they may be."

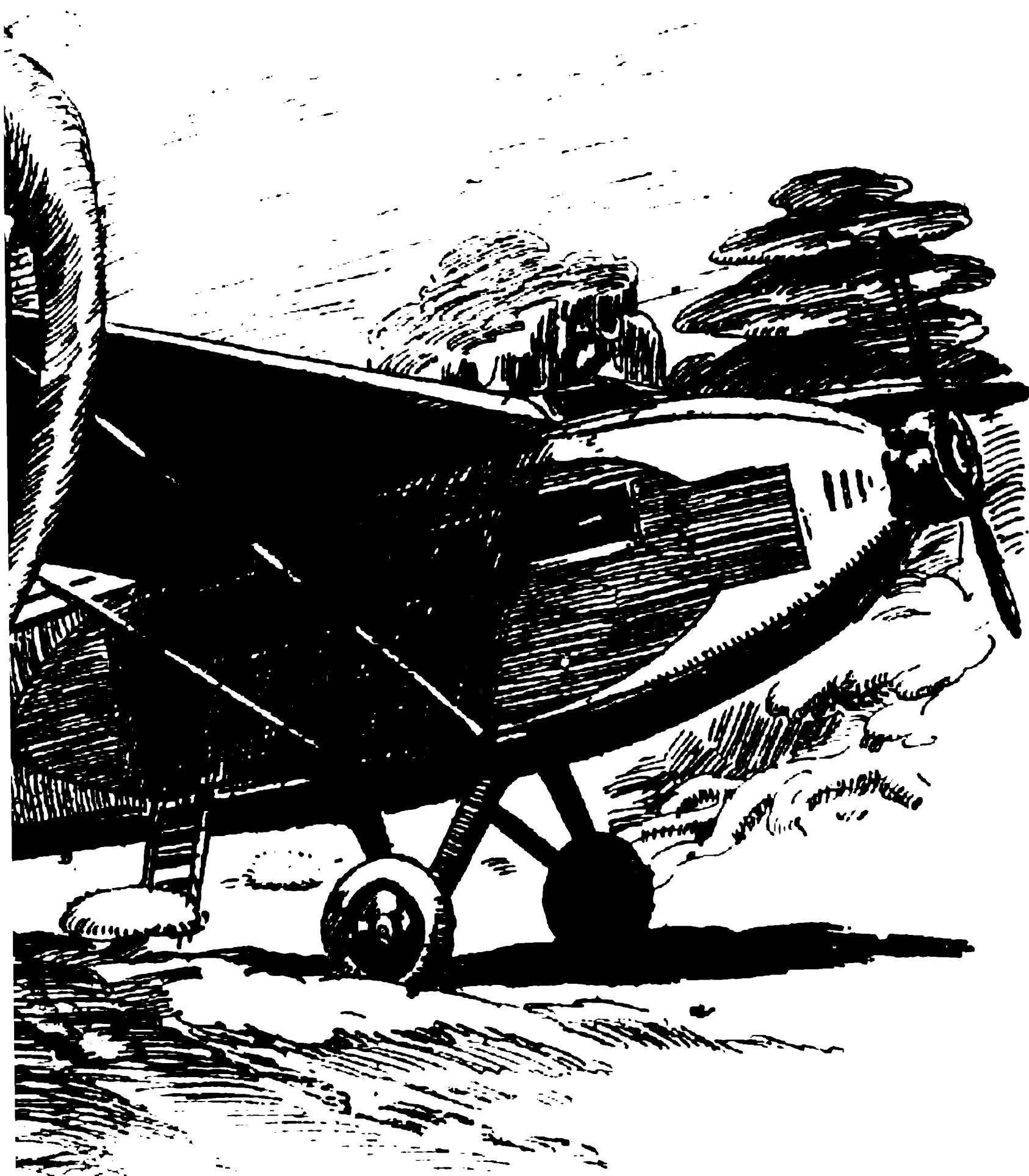
"But, man alive, I'm not going to be dictated to by a mob of dirty dagoes!"

"Either you will be dictated to—and obey that dictation—or your ship will be blown out of the water!" said Lee grimly. "This old cruiser may be obsolete, it may be rusty, but some of the guns are still in workable condition. We have had startling evidence of that. How can you possibly defy these

men? You haven't as much as a peashooter aboard!"

Lee was leaning over the bridge rail, and he was watching the approaching boat closely.

"I'm not sure that these people are dagoes, either," he went on. "It is difficult to conjure up even a wild guess at their nationality. They look like men from out of the past. If that vessel was an old-time galleon instead of a rusty steel cruiser, the pirates would be in a more fitting setting."



tentendrils of the fungus tree writhed and clung.

The boat which was slowly approaching contained a motley crew. There were at least a dozen men, and all of them were so shaggily bearded that it was difficult to see their faces. They were dressed in nondescript clothing, cut in a quaint, old-fashioned style. A picturesque-looking crowd, indeed. Many of them carried gleaming cutlasses at their belts.

The cruiser's boat, now fairly close in to the Torania's towering side, was resting. The men had ceased to ply the oars. And one man, a great, shaggy, untamed giant, was standing up in the thwarts.

"Steamship, ahoy!" he shouted.

His voice was as powerful as his frame; it carried across the water as though he had used a megaphone. And even Nelson Lee

started as he heard the words. He and Captain Branson exchanged quick glances.

"English, by thunder!" said the skipper. "Well I'm hanged! This affair is getting queerer every minute!"

He leaned over the end bridge-rail, and cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Boat, ahoy!" he bellowed. "Who are you, and what do you want? What do you mean by firing at me?"

"May your marrows rot!" came the picturesque reply. "Ye'll do as I say, or we'll send you and your ship to the bottom. Let down a ladder. We're coming aboard."

The bearded man's English had a strange tang to it; there was no actual accent, yet he used a dialect which was totally unfamiliar to Nelson Lee—and Lee prided himself upon knowing every English dialect which was still in use.

"Ye'd best understand that I've got two guns trained on your ship, and if there's any treachery to me and my men, you'll be sunk!" shouted the bearded giant. "One signal from me will be enough."

Nipper and Handforth were so thrilled that they even forgot the supposed tragedy of Lord Dorrinore and Umlosi. They had ears and eyes for nothing but the pirates.

A ladder was lowered, and Captain Branson went down from the bridge. He invited Nelson Lee to accompany him, and once again Nipper and Handforth managed to keep with the detective. They went to a section of the deck, forward of the bridge, which was not open to the ordinary passengers. Here stood several of the ship's officers and some men. When Captain Branson and Nelson Lee had joined them they formed a grim-looking crowd.

And up the ladder came the remarkable visitors.

The first man to reach the top was the giant who had already spoken. He stepped upon the deck, and even Lee, tall as he was, felt dwarfed. This man, with his great, massive shoulders, and his black beard, towered high above Nelson Lee. He was six-foot-eight, if he was an inch.

"Which of ye is the captain of this craft?" he demanded, in his deep, throaty voice.

"I am!" said Captain Branson curtly. "Once again, I ask who you are and what —"

"Ay, ye may well ask who I am!" broke in the other, with a great, noisy laugh. "Know, then, that I am the Black Hawk. I am the ruler of the sea! What do names matter? Obey me, and nought shall be amiss with ye. But, by my bones, those who thwart the Black Hawk trifle with death!"

Handforth positively gaped. The man spoke like a character out of a pirate story.

Nelson Lee was eyeing the so-called Black Hawk closely; he was also giving the same careful scrutiny to the other men. For it had occurred to the shrewd detective that these men were play-acting. They were commonplace crooks, dressed specially for the occasion, and—— But no! Lee decided,

almost at once, that that theory would not hold water. The great beards were real—they had been uncut, untrimmed, for many years. All the men had their arms bare to the elbow—great, brawny, hairy arms, with gnarled hands. And the skin was curiously yellowish—weather-beaten, but not tanned by the sun. Their faces displayed the same peculiarity. All the men were barefooted, and their toes were widely splayed, proving conclusively that they had never worn shoes. Ever since they had been babies they had used no footwear. Their great toes stuck out like the toes of savages.

A wild, untamed, amazing mob of English-speaking men!

Lee had heard the other men muttering amongst themselves—whilst they looked eagerly and wonderingly above them. And they all spoke in the same strange-sounding English.

"These men are but fools—baby-faced weaklings!" said one of the men, in a contemptuous voice. "May my sinews dry up if I have ever seen the like! Ye've no need to fear such trash, captain!"

"Do I fear them?" roared the self-styled Black Hawk. "Bones and blood! I command, and they obey. See you, my friend, what food have ye on this great ship?"

"Food?" repeated Captain Branson, in astonishment.

"Ay, ye heard me. Food!"

"But—but I don't understand!" said the old skipper. "Are you telling me that you require—food?"

"Have I told ye aught else?" retorted the Black Hawk. "Ay, food, ye old thickhead! Flour, good, honest wheat flour—rice, tea, sugar, and perchance, even, some meat. I've heard tell that ye sometimes carry live oxen on these great ships. Well? What say ye?"

Captain Branson had nothing to say at the moment. He was bewildered. He had expected these ruffians to demand money, valuables—and loot, generally. This bold request for food puzzled him.

Nelson Lee, glancing across at the Porto Marlo, now much nearer, and looking indescribably rusty and filthy, saw that two other boats had put off. One, indeed, was rapidly approaching the Torania. Both were crowded with men.

Lee found his attention fixed upon the old cruiser herself. He was intrigued by the strange metal cage contrivance which was crudely constructed on the warship's stern. It was clearly an addition—and, just as clearly the work had been done by untrained hands. The metal grille-work was of crazy design, and it was apparently held in position by long lengths of stout cable. Any kind of rough weather would wash the whole contraption away within half an hour.

Nelson Lee's attention shifted down the red-streaked sides of the cruiser to the bows. And here, again, the detective was intrigued. There was another addition at the bows—a sort of knife like projection, clamped on to the hull, which stuck out grotesquely.

"Rot my skin! But ye take a plaguey time to answer!" roared the Black Hawk, with sudden impatience. "Take heed, my smooth-faced friends! We do not come aboard your craft to kill. We come for food. Let there be any resistance, and we will cut ye down. And remember that our guns are trained on this ship. Let us proceed peaceably. How say ye, captain?"

"If it's food you want, I will see what can be done," replied Captain Branson, recovering some of his composure. "But tell me this. Where do you come from? How did you get possession of that warship?"

The Black Hawk struck his great chest with a gnarled fist.

"I am asking the questions!" he thundered. "I am giving the orders. Think ye that I will tell ye whence we came? Nay! We waste enough time already; my men grow impatient. Let us to work."

Even as he was speaking, more of the motley crowd came climbing up the ladder. There were two or three dozen of them by now, and as they crowded round their leader they withdrew knives and cutlasses. A more ruffianly-looking bunch could not have been imagined.

And it was evident that they were in deadly earnest. But for the Black Hawk's presence many of those wicked knives would have been used.

"Away, men!" shouted the black-bearded giant. "Bring ye flour, sugar, butter! We shall return with full hands, and thus our first venture upon the deep water will be a great success."

Nelson Lee heard those words gratefully. They gave him the one piece of information he had required. So this was the first raid the pirates had ever undertaken! And they were not out for mere loot—but for food! There was a singular significance in that fact.

Captain Branson did the only thing possible in the circumstances. He gave orders to his officers, and the astonishing raiders were escorted into the liner's store-rooms.

Other officers went amongst the passengers, reassuring them, and doing their best to make light of the whole affair. But most of the passengers, thoroughly excited, were not to be put off. Quite a few dashed for their valuables, and insisted upon them being locked away in the ship's strong-room. They could not believe that these modern pirates had no intention of robbing them of their money and their jewels.

"Why is nothing being done?" asked one man. "What about the wireless? Can't the captain get help?"

"We're a thousand miles from the nearest land—and there is no ship nearer than three hundred miles," replied one of the junior officers. "I'm sorry, sir—but we can't expect any help of that kind. The captain is doing the best he can—always bearing in mind the safety of the passengers."

This was true enough—but there were indications that the passengers, for the remainder of the voyage, would have to go on

short rations. For the Black Hawk and his motley crew raided the Torania's stores in an exceedingly thorough manner.

They at once fairly started on the work, the brawny ruffians continued it with a will and an enthusiasm which was quite good to see. For hours they laboured. A continuous line of men—a veritable chain—ran from the ship's side, down into the store-rooms. Sacks, cases, boxes, and so forth, were lowered to the waiting boats. And the boats themselves, fully laden, were ferried across to the rusty cruiser. Back they came empty for fresh loads.

And so it went on.

"Well, it beats me!" said Handforth helplessly. "Where the dickens do these pirates come from? By George! They must have a lair somewhere. All pirates have lairs? There must be an island, or something——"

"Can't be an island, Handy," interrupted Nipper, as he and Handforth leaned over the rail, watching the operations. "There's no land for many hundreds of miles. There's the Sargasso Sea, of course—the very centre of it is not a great distance from this exact spot. We're practically within the outer limits of the Sargasso now. There's something rummy above the whole business—and, between you and me, I believe that the guv'nor has twigged."

"Twigged?" repeated Handforth, staring. "Twigged what?"

"I believe he knows just where these men come from—and all about it!" replied Nipper. "Anyhow, he's looking as keen as mustard—and I'm glad to see it. Ever since we heard that we were going out to Jamaica for nothing he has been like a bear with a sore head. This affair has bucked him up."

"Perhaps he won't be so bucked to-morrow—when there's nothing to eat!" grunted Handforth.

"Rats! We shan't starve," laughed Nipper. "We can get in touch with another ship by to-morrow easily enough, and obtain some temporary stores. What's a bit of food compared to this amazing experience? And if there's any way of tracking the pirates to their lair, the guv'nor will get there! I tell you he's just spoiling for a real adventure."

"So am I—but we seem to be pretty helpless," growled Handforth discontentedly. "If only we had some guns, we could have a scrap with this giddy pirate!"

They heard sounds of commotion, and very soon they discovered the cause. Captain Branson and his officers were vigorously protesting; for the pirates, having made an almost clean sweep of the liner's store-rooms, were now giving their attention to the furniture!

The bearded rascals, streaming with perspiration, were actually tearing up the chairs and lounges from the smoking-rooms, and from the dining saloon. Officers, crew and passengers alike were freshly bewildered.

As before, the work went on unceasingly. The pirates laboured with the same glowing enthusiasm; they staggered under enormous

loads. Chairs, tables, carpets and other articles of furniture went overside in a continuous procession.

"It beats me, Mr. Lee!" said Captain Branson, almost echoing Handforth's own words. "I'm past being surprised. Food, I can understand. But what in the name of mystery can these infernal fellows want with our furniture?"

"I think I know," replied Lee briefly.

"The deuce you do!"

"Our friend, the Black Hawk, is the uncrowned king of the most remarkable colony of human beings in existence," continued Lee, his eyes gleaming. "All their lives, no doubt, they have existed without comforts. And these rough men, seeing the handsome furniture, soft carpets and the other luxurious fitments, could not resist the temptation. They came out for loot—and they are getting it!"

"But in heaven's name, where are they taking the stuff to?" demanded the captain blankly.

"Ah, I wonder!" said Nelson Lee. "You've seen that queer cage fixed to the stern of the cruiser? You've seen the crude knife affixed to her bows? What is that cage for—but to protect the propellers from the dense weed of the Sargasso? What is the knife-edge for, but to cut a path through the weed?"

"Then—then you think——"

"I think that this Parazilian cruiser was a derelict, and that it drifted into the depths of the Sargasso," replied Lee. "I think that it fell into the hands of the Black Hawk and his colony. They found a method of getting through the weed, and for the first time in their lives they saw the open sea. Now they intend to go back—and I don't mind admitting that I would give ten years of my life to see that actual colony of people in the heart of the Sargasso weed."

CHAPTER 9.

The Amazing Adventure!

WHEN Lord Dorrimore sent the Sky Wanderer gliding down towards the verdant surface of the Island Above the Clouds, he knew that he was taking something of a chance. Just for a moment, indeed, he half hesitated. It was not yet too late to zoom up and abandon the attempt.

He remembered the case of two daring American airmen who had flown the Atlantic in record time, landing in Berlin. Then they had flown on towards Moscow, intending to break the record for the round-the-world trip. But just beyond the Russian border a mishap had occurred to their machine, and they had landed in what appeared to be a cornfield. Too late they found that the "ground" was really a peat bog, and the great machine had overturned, wrecking it.

How easy it was to misjudge the nature of the ground—from above.

It seemed to Dorrie that there was a fair stretch of grassland immediately below. But this might be boggy—just as that piece of ground in Russia. But what a difference there was between that case and this! The two American airmen, mercifully unhurt, were soon able to communicate with a neighbouring village and to get help.

But if the Sky Wanderer crashed—what then? It would be the end.

So the chance Lord Dorrimore was taking was indeed a foolhardy one. He knew it. Yet he could not resist the temptation. And he relied, to a certain extent, upon his amazing luck; but he relied even more upon his skill and judgment. It was one of Dorrie's favourite sayings that men never got anywhere unless they took an occasional chance. "Safety first" never accomplished anything.

"Well, Umlosi, it's a risk—but I think it's

worth it," he sang out. "By gad! Look at those trees! Look at the bushes—an' the grass! Aren't you keen to feel solid ground beneath your feet—and to have a bit of a rest from the eternal drone of the engines?"

"Wau! If thou has made up thy mind to land, N'Kose, nought that I can say will change matters," replied Umlosi, with a shrug. "For thou art indeed a man who knows his own mind."

"Well, we're landin'!" said his lordship tensely. "Look out!"

Like a great bird the machine touched the ground. By the moving of a lever Dorrie had caused the landing gear to slide out from its slots. The wheels touched again, the Sky Wanderer bumped, and then ran smoothly forward. Lord Dorrimore's hands on the controls were marvellous. He was ready at the first "feel" of something wrong to fling the throttle wide open and zoom into the air once more. But finding the machine

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running forward easily, he allowed her to carry on.

She came to a standstill surprisingly soon—as though a brake had been applied. Dorrie guessed the reason. Either the grass was long, or the ground was soft and spongy. Well, the die was cast now. The Sky Wanderer was motionless, and Dorrie had switched off. Her great propellers ticked over for a few seconds, and then slowly stopped. The silence, after the interminable hours of incessant droning, seemed uncanny.

Dorrie's ears, and Umlosi's ears, filled with that noise, were so affected that they were obliged to shout at one another—for they were temporarily deaf, and were likely to remain so for some time.

"It is done, my father," rumbled Umlosi, his eyes aglow. "And it is well done."

"I didn't capsize the old ship, anyway," agreed Dorrie. "By the Lord Harry! Think of it, old friend! We've landed! Not on any known continent or island—but on this plateau above the clouds which has remained hidden from humanity throughout the long centuries! That's a solemn thought, Umlosi!"

As he spoke he unbolted the cabin door, and with a spring he jumped to the ground. His feet sank into a soft, carpet-like surface of green. Overhead the sun blazed down with tropical heat. The air, indeed, was stifling, for not a breath of wind stirred.

"So that's why we pulled up so quickly," said Dorrie, running forward and anxiously inspecting the landing wheels. "Good! It's not a bog, anyway. The wheels haven't sunk far."

It was not grass beneath their feet, but a strange kind of moss—intensely thick in growth, spongy, and somehow inherently moist. And as Lord Dorrimore looked down at his feet, he saw one or two greenish, worm-like insects wriggling away into hidden burrows.

"We are come to strange land indeed, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "Wau! It is even as I saw in my dreams."

"By glory! I'd forgotten those visions of yours, Umlosi!" said his lordship, staring. "Your 'snake' told you all about this, didn't it? You're an uncanny merchant, you know! An' wasn't there some hint of bloodshed an' fightin'?"

"Even as thou sayest, my father!" said Umlosi solemnly. "In this strange land we shall meet with danger and excitement. Laugh, if thou wilt; but in my dreams I saw a strange people, and they were angry people and warlike people."

"Well, there don't seem many on the spot to greet us," said Dorrie. "The first thing, I suppose, is to repair the compass and the other instruments; but I'm tempted to have a look round first. Upon my word! What an extraordinary place!"

They had walked away from the 'plane, and it was good to feel solid ground beneath their feet once more. And somehow the sight of the Sky Wanderer standing there,

so big, so strong, gave them confidence. And Lord Dorrimore, with the eagerness of the born explorer, was gazing intently at the bushes and the trees. Umlosi, a forest man himself, was no less intent.

The view was limited. Dorrie had selected a little hollow, with a stretch of level ground running along its centre, to land on. It was two miles in length, perhaps, but not more than half a mile in width.

Gentle hills rose on either side, and they were covered with dense woods. Up and down the hollow, at either end, there were further wooded hills. So, in this cup, the adventurers were more or less cut off. They could not gain a wide panoramic view of the island. Neither could they see the cliff, or the mist, far below. So far as appearances went, they might have landed in the very centre of some great continent.

It had really been a very skilful piece of work on Lord Dorrimore's part to land that machine so safely. It had required very accurate judgment. Some of the trees were jugged out into the hollow from the main belts of woodland; and the Sky Wanderer had come to a halt almost between two of them—so that their branches nearly overhung the wing-tips of the giant monoplane.

Standing back, Lord Dorrimore viewed the trees with sudden wonder. He had only looked at them in a general, comprehensive way until now—subconsciously knowing that they were queer, unusual-looking trees. But Umlosi had stared hard, and he had even uttered a low ejaculation of surprise. So Dorrie gave the nearest tree his wholehearted attention.

"Well, may I be cooked!" he ejaculated. "What do you make of it, Umlosi? I never saw a tree like it in all my life!"

"Wau! This is no tree, N'Kose," said Umlosi in a troubled voice. "I like not this strange land thou hast found! Trees which are not trees! Grass which is not grass!"

And Umlosi was right.

Under closer examination Dorrie found that the "tree" was really an extraordinarily large fungoid growth! The "trunk" was really a soft, pappy stem, and the branches and foliage were found to be, at close quarters, nothing but soft, brittle, toadstool-like fungus. And there were all sorts of climbing, cable-like tentacles. These proceeded from the same source—they came out of the "tree," but they were puffed and sinuous. There was something definitely unpleasant in the sight of the things; and they emitted a noxious odour.

"But this is incredible!" said Dorrie in wonder. "That wood, yonder! That can't be entirely composed of these—these overgrown mushrooms! I've never heard of such a thing! Wait a minute, though," he added suddenly. "There's a place in Africa itself where there are some really remarkable fungoid growths, reaching enormous size."

"Thou art referring, N'Kose, to that strange land in Africa known as 'The Mountains of the Moon,'" replied Umlosi nod-

ding. "But the strange growths there are but dwarfs in comparison with what we see here!"

Lord Dorrimore touched one of the creeper-like tendrils, and to his surprise it quivered—as though it had feeling. It almost pulled away from Dorrie's hand; he could see it vibrating. It was like a shudder at his touch.

They moved farther away, and soon, at their feet, there yawned a deep depression, the bottom of which was filled with a curiously greenish water. And even as Dorrie and Umlosi looked down into the depths, a swirl appeared, and for an instant a blunt-shaped head, of a pale, watery greenish colour appeared above the surface. Dorrie saw a pair of bright, baleful eyes—and then, with another swirl, the thing had gone.

"That was no fish!" said his lordship gruffly. "Looked more like an exaggerated tadpole!"

"See, N'Kose!" exclaimed Umlosi abruptly.

He was pointing to a "bush" near by. It was another fungoid growth, and yet it had exactly the appearance of an ordinary bush. Something was moving on it. Dorrie stared. The thing was very much like a beetle, but instead of being black or brown, it was pale green. It had an enormous antennæ, and the beetle itself measured fully three feet from end to end—a truly ghastly, gargantuan insect.

It dropped with a dull plop to the ground, and for a moment its antennæ quivered inquisitively in the direction of Dorrie and Umlosi; then, with a tiny little sound of moving feet, the beetle sped off, vanishing down a burrow in the ground.

"I wonder if they bite?" said Dorrie reflectively.

He felt instinctively at his belt—and paused. He was not wearing his automatic. And he felt the need of it. If there were insects of this size, there might just as well be animals. And both Dorrie and Umlosi were unarmed. The giant Kutana chieftain had not even brought his trusty spear—although that faithful weapon was in the cabin of the 'plane.

"Wau! Methinks it would be wise, my father, for us to return," said Umlosi, as though reading Dorrie's own thoughts. "Perchance there are even stranger creatures in this land, and we should be fools, indeed, to be caught unawares."

"You're right, Umlosi," said Dorrie promptly. "Let's get back."

He fought against his desire to explore farther. For once he was listening to the voice of caution. And he remembered, too, how necessary it was to adjust the compass and to effect rough repairs to the other instruments. Above all else, it was necessary to take the Sky Wanderer to safety.

Somehow Dorrie felt glad after he had climbed through the cabin doorway and was once again in that luxurious enclosure—out

of the glaring sunshine. Once more he was back in civilisation. Umlosi followed him in, but stood in the doorway, staring reflectively out upon that limited but remarkable landscape.

"I like it not, N'Kose—and yet I am urged to venture deeply into these unsavoury forests," rumbled the big negro. "For I believe that much adventure is to be found there."

"We'll explore later on, Umlosi, never fear," promised Dorrie. "But we mustn't be foolish. Our first job is to get away from this island, and to reach the mainland. Later, we can return—an' when we do so, we shall be fully prepared."

And then and there Lord Dorrimore gave his full attention to the intricate mechanism of the wonderful compass. He was more of a mechanic than he would admit—and he thoroughly understood the workings of the compass. Very soon he had located the trouble, and he was pleased to know that he had effected a good repair.

The other instruments did not matter so much; but Dorrie gave them his attention next. Meanwhile, Umlosi had thoughtfully prepared a rough meal. Food supplies were running short—for, actually, the time limit of the flight had nearly expired. There had been no need to carry a greater quantity of foodstuff.

"What do I smell?" asked Dorrie suddenly. "Coffee, by gad! I can do with a cup—"

"N'Kose—N'Kose!" came a sudden interruption from Umlosi. "Behold, the very trees themselves grip our ship which flies!"

Umlosi had just noticed it—for until now he had been preoccupied with his work. Dorrie, too, had not even troubled to glance outside.

Now he ran to the door and stared at the great spreading wings of the Sky Wanderer. And, sure enough, the long, greenish tendrils of the fungoid growths were reaching down, and they were attaching themselves to the 'plane, and big suckers were clinging with a grim, deadly tenacity.

CHAPTER 10.

A World of Wonder!

LORD DORRIMORE ran forward and seized one of the green tendrils. But although he pulled at it with all his strength, he could not drag it free. The tough cable quivered under his touch, and seemed to resist, as though it possessed animal life.

"Gad!" ejaculated Dorrie, startled.

Umlosi was by his side now. Together they stared up into the dense masses of the neighbouring "tree." They were not quite sure whether the creeper growth was part of the fungus, or whether it was a parasite creeper.

Other tendrils, with big suckers, were slowly and insiduously reaching down, seeking to obtain a grip on the aeroplane. And Lord Dorrimore noticed the great thick "leaves" of the tree. They were covered with glistening spots of glutinous moisture. An enormous fly, pinkish in colour, settled on one of the leaves as Dorrie watched; and instantly its legs became entangled. It struggled for some moments, then wilted, shrivelled, and died.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" exclaimed Dorrie. "The infernal tree has not only killed the fly—but is eating it!"

"Wau! 'Tis not possible, N'Kose," objected Umlosi.

"Of course it's possible—we've seen it with our own eyes, haven't we?" said Dorrie. "And the fool tree believes that it can eat our 'plane! This growth reminds me of the Portuguese drosophyllum—and, by Jove, I really believe that it is a branch of the same family."

"Thou art using strange words, my father."

"I'm not tryin' to kid you, Umlosi," said Dorrie keenly. "There is really a plant in Portugal—it grows all over the place—which is known as the drosophyllum. You'll find the leaves thickly covered with beads of moisture, like dewdrops. Insects think these dewdrops are honey, and they alight on the leaf, and in the same second they are entangled in the sticky mess. Then the plant actually eats the insect. Flies are captured in enormous numbers like that, an' the drosophyllum lives and thrives on this insect sustenance. People in Portugal hang these leaves outside their doors. I've seen them many a time in Oporto—outside butcher's shops, for instance."

This was perfectly true. Lord Dorrimore had many times wondered at the marvels of the drosophyllum plant. And it really did seem that the giant growth on this strange island was of a similar nature.

He took out a heavy pocket-knife, and he quickly slashed through the tough tentacles. They writhed as if in agony, and sticky drops of moisture oozed from the cut ends. The next moment other tendrils slithered down from the dense "branches," and several of them attached themselves to Lord Dorrimore's person.

"Good glory!" he gasped, his face distorted with agony.

He fought madly, slashing with the knife. For as the suckers attached themselves to him the pain was intense. This hideous growth appeared to possess a brain—an evil intelligence.

With a great shout Umlosi hurled himself forward, and with his bare hands he tore at the tendrils and dragged them away. They writhed wildly, and the two men, backing away, got beyond their reach.

"Thanks, old friend!" panted Dorrie. "By heaven! What a vile plant, or fungus, or whatever it is! We'd better shift the 'plane away."

Leaping into the machine, Dorrie switched on the engines, and they started up with a purring roar. And Dorrie was relieved when the Sky Wanderer taxied smoothly across the moss-like "grass" and got clear of the strange tendrils. These latter growths released their grip reluctantly, some of them stretching out like elastic until in the end they were compelled to relinquish their grip. The great machine now stood out in the open, and Lord Dorrimore seized the opportunity to taxi the 'plane round, so that she was ready to take off—with the whole length of the shallow valley in front of her.

"It had to be done, anyhow, Umlosi," said his lordship, as he switched off again. "We're ready to start now at a second's notice—in case there's any emergency. And, I'm tellin' you, there's somethin' so rummy about this place that I'm not feeling altogether safe. Anything might happen."

"Would it not be an act of wisdom, my master, to fly into the skies even now?" asked Umlosi. "'Tis well to remember that we are not prepared."

"I've got to fix these other instruments yet," replied Dorrie. "And what about that grub you have prepared? We'd better eat."

And soon they were sitting down to a welcome meal. After what had happened, however, both Dorrie and Umlosi kept a constant look-out. They took turns to go to the open door and view the restricted landscape.

But there was now nothing sinister in the aspect of the place.

The sunshine was mellow; the blue sky overhead was good to see. The heavy air was full of the quiet, lazy drone of insects, and when the adventurers looked closely they saw any amount of strange flies hovering and buzzing in the upper air.

"We've only seen this one little valley, Umlosi," said his lordship. "The rest of the island is a closed book to us—there are miles, an' miles of it in all directions. Well, we'd better be gettin' on with the work, I suppose."

He was determined to have the instruments right, for it was essential that he should work out the exact position of this Sargasso island. He meant to return to it.

So he went at his task diligently, patiently, and all those instruments which had been thrown out of adjustment during the violent cyclone were repaired. Dorrie could not be absolutely certain that they were now scientifically accurate, but they were at least near the mark. And, having done that part of the work, he now proceeded to take observation from the sun, and, being an expert navigator, he was able to roughly determine his position.

Having completed this job, Dorrie inspected the petrol and oil supplies, and he was gratified.

"Enough juice to take us almost a couple of thousand miles, if necessary," he said. "We're all serene, Umlosi. We ought to get to Jamaica quite easily. An' once we're clear of this mist zone, I don't think we shall have any difficulties."

"Thou art in command, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "I am but useless baggage. Yet I would remind you that night draws near. The sun grows low in the sky---"

"And we had better be makin' a move, eh?" said Dorrie. "You're right, O Chief! I'll stifle all my natural eagerness to do some more explorin', and we'll take off. Somehow I shan't feel comfortable on this adventure until our mutual pal Umtagati is with us."

"Thou speakest wise words, my father," said Umlosi, nodding. "For is not Umtagati a wizard of wizards?"

"Umtagati is a great detective—a wondrous tracker of men," said Dorrie. "Yet at heart he is a born adventurer—even as you an' I, Umlosi. He will revel in this---"

He broke off abruptly, for a sound had come from far down the valley—a long-drawn-out, wailing animal cry. It rose throbbing on the air, rising to a high-pitched shriek. Then it trailed away, throbbing as before.

"Did you hear that?" muttered Lord Dorrimore.

"Ay, N'Kose," said Umlosi, going to the open door. "'Twas a sound of death itself."

Lord Dorrimore joined him. For a second he caught sight of a black, shadowy object which rose above the line of hills in the distance. Dorrie blinked. That thing looked to him like a small aeroplane, but it fluttered out of sight before he could determine its true nature.

"If that thing was a bird—well, it was the biggest bird on earth!" he said impressively. "We'd certainly better be on our way, Umlosi. For, with the comin' of dusk, various animal creatures are awakenin' to life. Somehow I don't relish stayin' here in the darkness. I have an idea that it would not be healthy."

He was about to turn back into the machine when his attention was again attracted. At the same second Umlosi thrust out a great arm and pointed.

"See, my father!" he whispered. "Wau! There are beasts as big as mountains!"

Lord Dorrimore felt like pinching himself. It seemed to him that a part of the hills in the distance beyond moved. Umlosi's comparison was not so wild after all. For Dorrie abruptly realised that the movement he saw was caused by some living creature.

The greenish hills were dim, for the sun was low, and its effect was dazzling. When Dorrie looked again he saw another movement. Something greenish—two objects, in fact—moved some miles away. They were right down the valley.

"No, no! It must be some trick of the light," muttered his lordship, frowning.

But a minute later all doubts were set at rest. The greenish objects, mountains in size, were coming down the valley. They separated themselves from the background of hills; they revealed themselves as gigantic beasts. Or were they reptiles?

There were two of them. They came loping along, hopping something after the fashion of

kangaroos, using their gigantic hind legs with amazing agility.

They were pale green in colour—a sickly, unpleasant colour—and each possessed an incredibly long tail. One of them halted, rose on its hind feet, and reached upwards, as though clutching at some passing insect. And it seemed to Dorrie that the thing measured hundreds of feet. In the same second he was able to "place" it.

"Ye gods!" he ejaculated. "Am I dreamin', or am I goin' mad? Those brutes are Iguanodon!"

"'Tis a wondrous name," commented Umlosi.

"They're dinosaurs," went on Dorrie incredulously. "Reptiles which have been extinct in the world we know for countless ages!"

Dorrie was breathless with excitement. He had not the slightest doubt that these reptiles belonged to the order of Iguanodon Bernisartensis. In a word, they were carnivorous reptiles—flesh-eating monsters!

"If only I had an elephant gun!" muttered Dorrie. "Better still, a small cannon!"

"Thou art rash as ever, N'Kose!" said Umlosi severely. "Wouldst now give battle to these great creatures here—when our ship which rise ready to take to the air? Wau! If ill befalls our ship we are lost to the world for ever—as thou shouldst know."

"Great Scott! Look there!" shouted his lordship.

There was a note of alarm in his voice. Dramatically, unexpectedly, the two enormous reptiles had paused. They were sniffing the air—as though they had just caught the scent of the intruders. And now, with great leaping hops, they came thundering down the valley—straight towards the Sky Wanderer. Dorrie and Umlosi could hear the sinister "thud-thud-thud" as the creatures advanced. It seemed, indeed, that they shook the ground itself, and as they came nearer, their true size was more than ever apparent. At close quarters they would tower right above the aeroplane, large as she was. They had but to charge at the machine, and she would be reduced to wreckage.

"Inside—quick!" gasped Dorrie. "They're comin' at us—and that means destruction. We've only one chance."

Dorrie realised his folly. Already he had stayed too long. For, with the coming of dusk, the nocturnal creatures of this wonder island were emerging from their lairs.

It was impossible to get into the air in time to avoid an encounter with the Iguanodon—if, indeed, those enormous reptiles were really charging. It was touch and go. As Dorrie had said, there was only one chance.

Zurrrrrrrh!

With a roar the engines leapt into life, and Dorrie deliberately flung the throttle wide open, so that the motors bellowed. Instantly the Sky Wanderer moved forward, advancing straight towards the charging Iguanodon.

It was neck or nothing. Like a flash, Dorrie had seen that this was no time for hesitation. Destruction was certain unless he took action. And the action he did take was effective.

For the dread creatures, hearing that roaring sound—a sound so unfamiliar to them—checked in their charge, and now they leapt madly into the fungoid growths at the edge of the valley, fear having gripped them.

And the Sky Wanderer, gathering speed, moved over the soft, spongy moss. Dorrie let her go all out for almost the entire length of the valley, then he lifted her nose. Faithfully, she soared upwards, zooming with all that tremendous power for which she was celebrated.

With uncanny skill, Dorrie got the great machine over the neighbouring hills, and, making a half-turn, banking steeply, he brought her round. She was in the air again, triumphant, with Dorrie in absolute command.

"Phew! That was a hot minute, Umlosi!" said his lordship, grinning. "Seems to me we only just got off in time, eh?"

"'Tis a strange land, N'Kose—inhabited by strange creatures."

"Prehistoric monsters," nodded Dorrie. "What a discovery! Think of the amazin' adventures to be had! Why, there's no other place in the whole world like it. It's different—it's a relic of the long-forgotten

past. An' here it stands, towerin' above the eternal mist, lost in the impenetrable tangle of the Sargasso!"

He took the machine low now—skimming triumphantly over the tops of the fungoid forests. At this low altitude, the island seemed remarkably extensive. It stretched away in undulating hills and valleys, on all sides.

"Look, my father!" said Umlosi, pointing.

Immediately ahead, and below, yawned a vast hole in the ground—a black cavity, with rocky edges, and set amidst sun-scorched crags, measuring almost a full mile across. It was not unlike the crater of an extinct volcano—and the bottom of the crater had collapsed.

As the great aeroplane flew over, Dorrie and Umlosi stared down. But they could see nothing but intense blackness in the depths. There seemed to be no floor to that grim gap. But as they passed over, a number of enormous flying creatures came soaring outwards and upwards from the stygian darkness. Evidently they had been startled by the noise of the 'plane.

"Bats!" ejaculated Dorrie. "Bats as big as eagles! Everythin' seems to grow outsize here."

The twilight was brief. The sun had dipped down beyond the western edge of the amazing plateau, and the surface of the



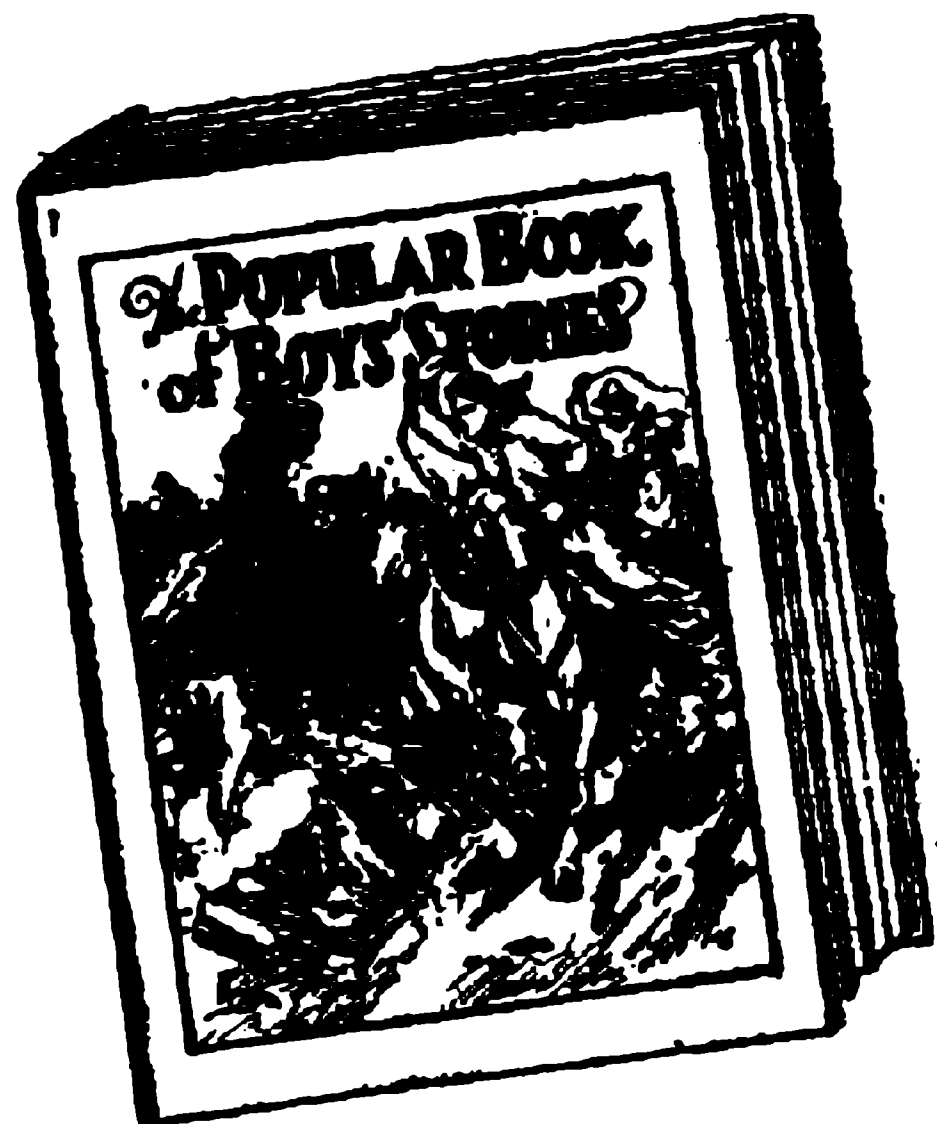
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IN DIRE PERIL!



island, in consequence, was now enshrouded in a deep, rapidly increasing gloom.

Lord Dorrimore was taking the *Sky Wanderer* round in a wide, sweeping circle—for he was anxious to see as much of this island as possible before the complete darkness shut down. He uttered a sudden ejaculation, and now he caused the machine to dip down, banking steeply to the left, at the same time.

"Look, Umlosi—am I seein' things, or are they huts?" asked his lordship, staring. "Huts, by all that's wonderful! Animals don't build huts, do they?"

Umlosi was staring with unwonted excitement. Dimly visible in the gloom, in a great clearing, half a mile to starboard, a number of crudely constructed dwellings could be seen. Dorrie had an idea that they were entirely encircled by a massive wall or fence. But in the semi-darkness it was impossible to be certain. He believed that the wall was many yards thick, and strengthened by great buttresses.

Dorrie had no eyes for this wall—for he had seen something else.

Many figures had come running out of the crude buildings, and they stood staring upwards, gesticulating, mouthing, and showing every sign of surprise and even terror.

But in that glimpse, as the great machine soared overhead, Dorrie saw, at least, that these creatures were human. They were of incredible size—veritable giants—and they were savage in aspect, hairy, uncouth.

"I just hate to scare you, my friends—but I've got to have another look at you!" said Dorrie grimly. "Umlosi, did you spot 'em? Prehistoric humans! Just like the pictures you see in books!"

"A warrior tribe, methinks, N'Kose!" said Umlosi, his eyes glittering. "Wau! They are men, indeed!"

Dorrie brought the *Sky Wanderer* round, in order to fly once more over that "village." And as he did so, he realised that there were probably many other such communities on this island. He regretted now that he had not taken to the air earlier, in full daylight.

A strange darkening of the air just ahead attracted his attention. He looked forward keenly—and then gulped. For there were a number of great creatures flying in dangerous proximity to the machine—monstrous things which fluttered and swerved and dived.

"Oh, my goodness!" yelled Dorrie.

He wrenched at the controls, and the great monoplane thrust her nose skywards and barely escaped plunging headlong into the midst of that flock of flying creatures. She came round, and Dorrie saw the things.

"Ornithosauria!" he roared exultantly.

"Animals that fly!" ejaculated Umlosi, in wonder.

"I believe they belong to the order Rhamphorhynchus," went on Dorrie, his voice throbbing. "Gad! You didn't know I could pronounce all those long words, did you, Umlosi? I'm not so ignorant as I look! These infernal things are flyin' reptiles—Pterodactyls."

He saw them against the fading light in the sky; they were nearly as big as light aeroplanes—gigantic creatures with wings of greenish, leather-like membrane. Their uncouth heads seemed too big for their bodies; and Dorrie was certain that he saw the baleful, wicked eyes of one of the reptiles.

"N'Kose, they fly straight at us!" shouted Umlosi, in alarm.

The *Sky Wanderer* had come round by now, and to Lord Dorrimore's consternation, he saw that the flying reptiles were intent upon a savage, death-defying attack.

Crash—crash!

Two of them struck against the starboard wing tip, and, instantly the entire equilibrium of the *Sky Wanderer* was upset. She shuddered throughout her entire length, and her nose went down, and Dorrie vainly tried to keep control.

But the sturdy machine was already in a spin, and down she went, swooping crazily. Faintly to the ears of Dorrie and Umlosi came a chorus of screaming, wailing cries.

Providence took a hand in the game, for this collision with the Pterodactyls had occurred over the edge of one of the great, sheer cliffs. But for this lucky chance, Dorrie and Umlosi would have crashed to certain death.

As it was, the *Sky Wanderer* missed the cliff edge by a sheer fraction, and the next moment the machine was diving headlong down into the mysterious depths.

Dorrie caught a glimpse of the cliff face as they swept downwards with ever-increasing speed. Then, like a blanket, the mist enveloped them.

They had dived a thousand feet downwards through the clear air; they were now plunging into the murky fog which everlastingly enshrouded the base of the pinnacle.

And Dorrie knew that death was near—unless he could pull the great machine out of this deadly nose-dive.

Down she went—down—down—her engines still roaring, the air rushing and shrieking past the cabin windows. It was a blur, a plunge into impenetrable mystery.

And there was always the dangers of colliding with the cliff face; for Dorrie knew that the machine was still perilously near to the pinnacle. The fear came to him that the wing tip was irretrievably damaged and that it was no longer possible to regain control. But even as these thoughts flooded into his mind he felt a change. The whole thing had happened within the space of seconds; and now he knew that the controls were answering. The great machine came out of the spin; she assumed an even keel, and flew steadily.

And now there was a new and terrible peril.

Dorrie had completely lost his bearings in this mist, and, for all he knew, he was now flying headlong into the cliff itself! He realised that he would have to trust to blind luck—

No. Not to luck! For just then, incredible and impossible as it seemed, lurid, yellowish, flickering lights showed. Dorrie

saw them with amazement—and then he was upon them. He caught a brief glimpse of great flares—of a kind of crude landing-stage, with clear water at the cliff base. He saw a cavern entrance—and on the rocky ledges, men! Ordinary men, dressed in ordinary clothing!

True, they were rough-looking specimens, bearded and savage. But they were not primitives, like those on the plateau above. Then, with a swoop, the Sky Wanderer veered away from the cliff, and went plunging outwards through the clinging mist.

CHAPTER 11.

The Promise of Adventure!

"LISTEN!" said Nipper, in a strange, strained voice.

It was dawn, and the Torania was ploughing steadily on her way towards Jamaica. The night had been clear and fine, and now that a new day had come the sky was innocent of any cloud. The day promised to be blisteringly hot.

The adventure of the "pirate cruiser" now seemed far distant. In fact, Nipper, awakening from sleep at this early hour, almost believed that he had been dreaming. It seemed so unreal. Here, in this luxurious cabin, everything was so normal.

"Listen!" repeated Nipper.

Handforth was sleeping with him—and Handforth, suddenly sitting up, became aware of the unusually urgent note in Nipper's voice.

"Hallo! What's wrong?" asked the burly St. Frank's junior, blinking. "I've been dreaming about those giddy pirates——"

"So have I—but never mind them!" interrupted Nipper. "Can—can you hear something rummy?"

"I dreamed that I was on a galleon, and that hulking blighter the Black Hawk was making me walk the plank," said Handforth. "I can tell you I was pretty scared—— By George! What's that noise? It's not the engines! It sounds like an aeroplane!"

"That's what I thought!" panted Nipper, leaping out of bed. "But I thought that my ears were deceiving me. Handy! An aeroplane—and we must be hundreds of miles from the nearest land, and it's only just dawn."

Handforth started.

"But—but you don't mean——" he began.

"I don't know what I mean," muttered Nipper, flinging open the door which led into Nelson Lee state-room. "Guv'nor! Guv'nor! Hallo, you're up, then! Have you heard——"

"Yes, and I'm going to see what it means!" cut in Nelson Lee crisply.

He was already attired in his dressing-gown; but Nipper and Handforth did not bother. They ran out just as they were—in their pyjamas.

The same thought was in all their minds.

The Sky Wanderer!

Each of them felt that it was a vain, crazy hope. They had long since given up Lord

Dorrimore and Umlosi as dead. The great Manners' monoplane had gone to destruction in that cyclone—that same storm which had sent the Torania so far out of her course. Nothing had been heard of the machine since that dreadful night. It was altogether too much to expect——

"Besides," burst out Nipper, as they ran on deck, "it can't be Dorrie. His petrol supply must have run out some time yesterday. He couldn't be flying all this time."

"Of course not," agreed Nelson Lee. "I realise that. You boys must not get any false hopes——"

"There she is!" yelled Handforth, pointing upwards.

The sun was just peeping over the edge of the sea on the far horizon, and the golden light gleamed on the pale blue wings of the enormous monoplane which was now soaring and zooming triumphantly round the Torania at a fairly low altitude. Several of the ship's officers were staring upwards. And quite a few passengers had come out, too—attracted by the sound of the purring engines.

"Upon my soul!" muttered Nelson Lee, with mingled incredulity and thankfulness.

For in that first glance skywards he had known the truth. There was not another machine in the world exactly like Lord Dorrimore's Sky Wanderer. There could be no mistaking that delicate blue of her hull and wings; there could be no mistaking her graceful lines.

"It's Dorrie!" yelled Nipper exultantly. "Handy—Handy! Look! It is Dorrie! That's his machine. I'll swear!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Handforth, leaping up and down, and waving his arms in wild excitement.

"What do you make of it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, his eyes glowing. "How can it be possible that Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi are still alive?"

"There is only one explanation—they must have landed somewhere and spent many hours with silenced engines," replied Lee. "But for that fact, their petrol supply would have been exhausted."

"But there's nowhere to land!"

"You seem to forget, young 'un, that this machine is an amphibian," replied Lee. "Providing the sea is calm, she is quite at home floating on the surface."

"By Jove, yes," said Nipper, nodding. "I expect they met with some damage during that storm, and Dorrie came down on the water as soon as the sea had got calm enough. Anyhow, we shall soon know the real facts of the case."

The Sky Wanderer was making a final circuit of the Torania, banking round steeply. Finally, she glided away, and now she descended upon the surface of the sea, about half a mile ahead of the liner. She touched the water, and clouds of spray shot up in cascades. She touched again, there was more spray, and at length she floated easily. Any kind of signals were quite unnecessary. It

was obvious that Lord Dorrimore was expecting the Torania to heave-to.

"Well, Umlosi, old friend, this is what I call a piece of amazin' luck," said his lordship, as he opened the cabin door and stared across the blue water at the bulk of the liner. "We fly all night, an', lo and behold, the very first ship we see in the dawnlight is none other than the old Torania!"

"Thou speakest of luck, N'Kose—but methinks there is more in it than that," said Umlosi. "Is it not a fact that thou didst seek this great ship?"

"Well, I knew she was somewhere in these waters—but I expected to find her much further northwards," explained Dorrie. "I wasn't very hopeful of finding her at all. An' here she is! By glory! Doesn't she look good? We're back to realities, Umlosi. That queer island, jutting far above the Sargasso mist, seems fantastic now."

His eyes were full of intense eagerness; they were alight with excitement. Yet his face was haggard; there were deep shadows under his eyes. He had not slept for nights. Umlosi, too, was looking weary and worn. But neither of them thought of sleep. They were sustained by the excitement which filled them both.

Two boats were putting off from the Torania, which was now gliding near, her engines still. And the sound of cheering came to the ears of Dorrie and Umlosi; they saw that the deck rails were lined with waving people.

"We seem to be causin' quite a diversion," grinned Dorrie. "I expect they had given us up as lost—because our wireless went west."

Dorrie and Umlosi were greeted by the Torania's second officer; they were taken aboard the boat. The other boat, with another officer and some men attached themselves to the Sky Wanderer, and there they remained.

And at last, when Dorrie and Umlosi came up the accommodation ladder, fresh cheering rang out. The excitement now was very real. Everybody could see that the daring Atlantic flyers were unharmed.

Nelson Lee was the first to greet Dorrie at the top of the ladder, and the pair clasped hands warmly.

"This is wonderful, old man," said Lee. "We had given you up for lost."

"Don't give me any credit," said Lord Dorrimore. "That 'plane of mine deserves all the praise. She behaved magnificently. She came through that storm without a scratch—an' I can give you my word that it was a storm!"

"Greetings, great Umtagati!" came a delighted and deep-throated shout from Umlosi. "Wau! 'Tis good, indeed, to see thy face again. And thou, too, Nimble One!"

There was an orgy of hand-shaking—for all sorts of people, in addition to Captain Branson, insisted upon shaking hands with Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, and congratulating them.

But at last they managed to get away from the crowd, and they found themselves in the captain's cabin—alone with Captain Branson, Nelson Lee, Nipper and Handforth.

"Phew! I'm glad that's over—although it may sound a bit ungracious," said his lordship, taking a deep breath. "Lee, old man, I've got somethin' to tell you. Somethin' you'll never believe. But first of all, I want to ask you a question."

"Go ahead," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Can you finish up that infernal murder case of yours quickly?" asked Dorrie eagerly. "Better still, can you send a wire to Jamaica an' back out of the case altogether?"

"You don't mean that, Dorrie," said Lee, giving his lordship a steady look. "You know perfectly well that it is not my way to back out—"

"All right—all right!" growled Dorrie. "I suppose I didn't mean it, really."

"In any case, it does not matter," continued Lee. "For there is no case for me to investigate."

And he briefly explained the situation.

"But this is marvellous!" shouted Dorrie exultantly. "Then you needn't go to Kingston at all? You'd rather not go to Kingston?"

"My chief desire is to get straight back home!"

"Rats!" said Dorrie. "Your chief desire will be to come with me—aboard the Sky Wanderer. Lee, old horse, there's an adventure awaitin' us—the adventure of our lives!"

"If you expect me to undertake any crazy, foolhardy long distance flight—"

"Easy—easy!" broke in Dorrie. "Let me finish. What would you say to me if I told you that I had discovered an unknown island three or four thousand feet above sea level, in the very heart of the Sargasso?"

"I should tell you that you were either dreaming, or out of your mind."

"What would you say if that rocky pinnacle turned out to be part of the lost continent of Atlantis?"

"My dear Dorrie, why tell me these fairy tales?" asked Nelson Lee indulgently. "You know as well as I do that the Sargasso Sea is a mere tangled mass of weed—"

He suddenly broke off, and a new light came into his eyes. An eager light—a light of incredulity. And he stared at Lord Dorrimore very hard.

"Perhaps I was too hasty!" he went on, with almost a sharp note in his voice. "Tell me more of this, Dorrie."

"That's better," said his lordship, grinning. "That's a lot better. Yes, I'll tell you more—I'll tell you so much that your hair will stand on end!"

This prophecy was not fulfilled. Nelson Lee's hair remained on its best behaviour; but the great detective certainly looked startled as Dorrie told of the strange Mist Zone, and the encounter with that rock precipice.

"But—but this is incredible!" burst out Captain Branson, his face flushed. "You don't know what happened on this ship, do you, Lord Dorrimore? Mr. Lee was saying to me, only yesterday, that he had a theory in connection with the Sargasso. He believes that there is a colony of people living there—a strange, uncouth people."

Lord Dorrimore jumped.

"Great gad! How could you know that?" he asked, in amazement. "Hang it, Lee, there's a limit, you know! You're not goin' to tell me that——"

"Don't get excited," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I had a very good reason for forming that theory. Before you go on with your story, perhaps you'd better hear the extraordinary adventure which befell this liner."

It was Captain Branson who told the story. He did so graphically, and with intense feeling.

"And those ruffianly pirates looted us about as thoroughly as they possibly could," he concluded. "The dining saloon and the lounges are virtually stripped. Never known such a thing in all my career at sea! We're having to serve meals to the passengers in their cabins."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Dorrie hurriedly. "I can understand your point of view, captain. But, by glory, what an adventure! I'm beginnin' to piece things together. Those flares, Umlosi!" he added, turning to the giant Kutana. "Remember them? We saw a glimpse of a lot of rough men, didn't we—and a sort of landin' stage! Those fellows were awaitin' the return of the cruiser—with the loot! That's what the flares were for."

"What flares?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

And Dorrie went into details. To a dumbfounded audience he told of the island of wonders—he told of the queer fungoid growth, of the monstrous reptiles, and the shaggy human beings, who lived in walled enclosures; he told of those great flying creatures, and he went into all the other details of the astounding adventure.

"An' that's all as true as gospel!" he concluded, hoarse with talking. "Think of it, Lee, a lost island—a scrap of the world which has escaped for countless centuries! Those people who live on that plateau are separated by thousands of feet from the people of the mist, at the bottom."

"There can be no doubt that the people

of the island proper are real primitives," said Lee keenly. "Those others—ruled by the Black Hawk—are the decedents of sailors and such people whose ships have become entrapped in the Sargasso weed. That's the long and the short of it."

"Man alive! Think of the adventures we can have!" said Lord Dorrimore. "We'll return to this Island Above the Clouds! Come with me now, Lee. There's no earthly reason why you should remain aboard the Torania. On your own admission, that murder case of yours has fallen to the ground. You can do with a holiday."

"And you can do with a long sleep!" said Lee gruffly. "There's no hurry, Dorrie."

"No hurry?" shouted Dorrie. "What about that cruiser? You're a detective, aren't you? The Black Hawk, or whatever he calls himself, has gone off with thousands of pounds of property belongin' to this steamship company. An' it's any odds that those pirates will come out again—an' menace other shippin'. There's your case! We can combine exploration with a real detective adventure."

"I must say, Dorrie, that you put it most temptingly," remarked Nelson Lee. "Yes, by Jove, you're right! Something must be done about these pirates; we cannot let them roam the seas, menacing innocent shipping. It's a real man's job."

"Guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "Do—do you really mean that we're going on this adventure?"

"Here's my hand on it, Dorrie!" said Nelson Lee, coming to a sudden decision. "We'll do it!"

"Good man!" chortled Dorrie. "We'll get straight aboard the Sky Wanderer—we'll fly to the nearest big port, and there we'll equip ourselves with food supplies, machine-guns, and everythin' else necessary for the expedition we're contemplatin'. Just the four of us, eh? You and Nipper and Umlosi an' myself?"

"Here, cheese it, Dorrie!" exclaimed Handforth, in alarm. "What about me? You can't leave me out of it!"

"You, too, young 'un!" said Lord Dorrimore. "You can come, and welcome—and if Mr. Lee tries to stop you, don't take any notice. You're with us now, and you'll stay with us."

"By George, sir, you're a brick!" panted Handforth happily.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK:

"THE PLATEAU OF PERIL!" *Amazing Detective-Thriller of Nelson Lee & Co's adventures on the island above the clouds.*

"COCK O' THE WALK!" *Grand long St. Frank's story starts.*

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THE little jewellery shop of Otto Finkmann stands at the corner of Picton Street and the Commercial Road, down in the East End. Actually, it is quite as much of an old junk shop as a jewellery shop—the sort of junk that can be labelled under the general term of “antiques” or “curios.”

Little of the stock was new jewellery, and what there was of that was cheap stuff, mostly mounted on cards, that suited the trade of the dockside district well enough; although, as Otto often observed, the people had enough to do in these hard times to buy bread and butter, let alone brooches and rings, so that the new portion of his stock seemed fated to be very old stock, old-fashioned and second-hand before it found a purchaser.

As for the rest of it, nobody would ever know how many hands it had passed through before it came to rest behind the panes of Otto Finkmann's shop-front. Bits of filigree gold, carved or incised walrus tusks, snuff-boxes in many materials and no two of the same design, brass boxes, ancient pistols, beads, clocks, grinning monkey gods and placid Buddhas, a sextant, vases, a silver ink-stand—these and dozens of things just as ill-assorted crowded the dingy window at the street corner, and month after month none of them seemed to be either missing or replaced.

P.-c. Arthur Bateson, when he had been freshly assigned to that beat, had got a mild sort of entertainment in looking in Finkmann's window, cataloguing its jumbled complexity of unrelated curios; but he had long since exhausted the interest of that pastime, and probably knew its contents better than the proprietor himself.

Because of the remarkable permanence of his window display and the lack of any noticeable evidence of trade, Bateson had been warned by his superiors to keep an eye

on Finkmann. It was suspected in the H Division that he might be doing a much more profitable trade as a fence, and that the antiques were merely a blind.

But there was never any evidence of that, either. During the weeks following big robberies in other parts of London at one time and another, unobtrusive plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard kept a better eye on the place than the constable on the beat could have done; but nobody known to the police ever approached it either by day or night. Mostly the callers were sailors from the docks, trying to sell some curiosity or trinket they had brought with them from overseas. Sometimes Finkmann bought what they had to offer; but more often he did not. Trade, he told them, was at a standstill.

Still hopeful of every possible clue, the Yard detectives came and went as occasion demanded,

but between whiles P.-c. Bateson carried on with his job, and combined the duty of watching Finkmann's customers with the pleasure of getting to know Finkmann himself.

On the whole, he rather liked him. The old man—he was nearing seventy, but looked past that age—was a stooped little figure, with a baldish head and a pair of steel spectacles apparently permanently perched on his high forehead. Never by any chance did he seem to look through them. He was of German or Austrian descent, but had lived in Whitechapel all his life, most of it at this same shop. He had, as Bateson learned, inherited it from an uncle as a going concern, and had served as the uncle's assistant for years before that.

“It might have been a going concern then,” he said to the policeman as he stood on the worn doorstep, rubbing his hands and chuckling to himself as he made the jest,

**A
BAFFLER!**

"but it's run down now and seems to have stopped altogether."

The paralysis of trade in curious oddments did not appear to trouble him in the least. The constable, speculating to himself, wondered whether the old fellow was anything of a miser with a secret hoard.

But that didn't appear likely. He lived adequately, if not sumptuously, and the old man's housekeeper, who came in by the day to attend to his wants, and whom the inquiring constable adroitly questioned, shopped regularly on his behalf at the grocery shop along the street, and many times he had noticed the full basket she carried. Also when he was on morning duty, he always saw the pint bottle of milk on Finkmann's doorstep—a thing by no means general in those parts, where the inhabitants, when they do not buy their milk in ha'porths at the shop, patronise the tinned variety.

Finkmann's clothes were threadbare but not shabby, and he always carried a yellow handkerchief tucked in his left sleeve. This was the only thing which discounted the ordinariness of his appearance, unless two pronounced bulges in his lower waistcoat pockets could be included. One contained a remarkably fat silver watch, of the old-fashioned kind known as a turnip; and the other a china snuff-box with a blue dog painted on the lid, both articles being from stock. From the snuff-box he constantly refreshed himself, and once offered a pinch to P.-c. Bateson; but the constable was of the younger generation which is interested in tobacco in other forms.

The solitary thing—apart from the mystery of how he had enough money to live on—which had caused Bateson to harbour the idea that old Finkmann might be a miser, was his dread of being robbed. This dread had been evident on several occasions during the chats they had had together at the shop doorway, but it was emphasised when Finkmann took the policeman into his confidence about his burglar trap.

"You ought to know about this, officer," he said, "in case." And he motioned him inside the doorway, stooped down and pulled aside the doormat.

The street door gave on to a flight of stairs which led to the upper storey—the old man's living quarters—and, immediately to the right, a few feet inside, was the shop entrance; so that customers stepped through the street door and then opened the shop door. This was glazed, and usually kept shut during the day (when Finkmann was either at the counter or in the little room behind the shop) on account of dust and noises from the street. His living quarters upstairs were not only locked to prevent unauthorised callers making free with the place, but there was a window in the shop wall through which the shadow of anyone ascending the stairs could be seen.

The passage inside the street door was about three feet wide, and as Finkmann

moved back the mat the constable saw, on the floor beneath where it had been, a big oblong of metal which occupied the entire space from wall to wall, and was about five feet in length. It was so placed that anyone entering the door and making for either the shop or the rooms above would have to tread on it, however long the pace he took. Even a standing jump would hardly have taken any but a trained athlete across it, and that was all that was possible, because there was no take-off for a running jump.

"I roll this mat up at night," explained the jeweller, "and leave this plate bare. It's made of copper, as you see, and connected with the electric supply. Directly anyone treads on it they get a shock. Nothing fatal, you understand, because I've put in a resistance, but just enough to stun them a bit. And, in addition, a small bell rings up in my room. So if you hear me blowing a police whistle out of the window one fine night, you'll know you've got to come in and collect the burglar in the passage. He won't be able to take a step off that plate, or even have time to shut the street door behind him; and he'll be too busy with the electric shock to put up a fight."

P.-c. Bateson gathered that the old man had thought out and installed the whole thing himself, and was rather proud of his handiwork. Also, he learned that the windows at the back were wired so as to ring a bell if they were disturbed; but he did not expect anything from that quarter, because the house backed directly on to the Endway Cut, as the local canal was called, and the water came



As the constable rushed into the shop his feet came into contact with the electric plate.

almost up to his yard wall, for the towpath had caved in at that point and was now disused.

Access and retreat were alike difficult from the rear. It was from the front that Finkmann expected attack, if any, to come.

Apart from this somewhat elaborate anti-burglar precaution, there was nothing to connect the old man's character with a miser's fearfulness or meanness. On the contrary, the apparently unnecessary assistant he employed suggested he was not only generous, but charitable.

This was a young man named Walter Noble. He was about twenty-five, and a cripple. Both his legs dangled uselessly, except when he momentarily touched the ground preparatory to swinging himself forward on his wooden crutches. He was supposed to have served a regular apprenticeship to a City jeweller, but there was little work for him to do at Finkmann's, and the old man told Bateson that he had employed him more for the sake of his company than anything else.

He could not pay much in the way of salary, but as some compensation Finkmann had given the young fellow a partnership agreement and a half-share of the profits. The constable had often seen him about the shop, and had passed the time of day with him. Noble was a very ordinary, colourless type, and there was nothing remarkable about him except his crippled state and the agility with which he got about on his rubber-tipped crutches.

IT was unfortunate that Otto Finkmann had not chosen to explain his burglar trap to the other men on the beat besides Bateson, because on the night that he was murdered, Bateson had gone off duty in the evening, and at 11.45 p.m., when the uproar began, the man who had relieved him lost some valuable time in trying to discover the origin of the ringing of a powerful electric gong.

This policeman had just passed the corner on which stood the jewellery shop, but he hurried back after his first vain speculations when Finkmann's neighbours, either fully dressed in the street or in various types of night attire at upper windows, enlightened him. They watched him with growing excitement as (still to the shrilling of the unseen bell) he burst in the street door.

Had it been Bateson, he would have expected to find a paralysed burglar on the copper plate. But the other constable neither expected nor found one. Instead, he walked on to the trap himself and received a shock that caused him to let out a yell. Luckily, however, the impetus of his rush across the threshold sent him sprawling clear of the plate, and, considerably startled and still tingling, he climbed the stairs.

The first-floor sitting-room door was standing open. In the middle of the floor was Otto Finkmann—dead. He had been killed by a blow on the head—instantaneously, the doctor testified at the inquest, and with "some blunt instrument."

This routine formula covers a multitude of weapons, but none was found that might have been used to strike him down. There was no

blood; merely a fractured area on the right-hand side of his head just above the temple, the result of one clean blow. It might have been caused by a fist. The thinness of the old man's skull and the brittleness of age had made his death from that one stroke possible.

In his hand he held a police whistle, but nobody could be found who had heard the sound of it that night. The doormat was rolled up and propped in one corner; and from the fact that the street door had been shut and nobody had been trapped by the electric plate, it seemed that the front had not been the means of entrance.

As to the back, a window on the ground floor—that of the room behind the shop—was wide open, the lower sash having been raised. It was this which had caused the bell to ring, and it was by this way that the murderer had obviously made his escape. The floor of the yard outside was of concrete, and as the night was dry it showed no footprints. Nor did the earth of the garden beds of the next-door houses on either side, beyond the six-foot walls that divided the properties.

There was but one outlet, the rear wall. This was somewhat lower, and separated the yard from the canal bank. Surprisingly, however, the damp mud of this showed no prints, either. But along nearly all of Finkmann's part of the wall, the caved-in, disused tow-path was under about a foot of water, the bank shelving suddenly about two yards out from the wall into deep water, and on the soft bottom of the submerged tow-path there were confused markings.

An examination in the clear light of next morning showed them to have been made by a man's body and knees when he had apparently thrown himself from the wall. Also could be distinguished the imprint of a clenched hand. The mark of a bent stick or perhaps an iron bar or tube was visible grasped in the hand, and possibly was a clue to the weapon used to strike the blow; but these and the other markings were vague and far from clear-cut, on account of the action of the water on the soft mud.

There was no doubt that this had been the line of retreat, however, specially as a step-ladder from the shop had been propped against the inner side of the rear wall. The fugitive had not escaped by the muddy tow-path, obviously, but must have swum across the canal.

A search of the dead man's effects produced two clues that seemed to throw a light on the mystery. One was a looted cash-box; the other a letter, posted at Plymouth, and which ran as follows:

"DEAR FATHER,—Your dear, long-lost son is coming home at last, like a bad penny. I am posting this when my ship calls in at Plymouth, and if I can get away I'll come

up to London by train. If not, she is due to dock at Tilbury in a few days, and then—look out! If you have got any sense you will go to the bank and get my money out that my great-uncle left me, and that you sunk in that cursed, dead-and-alive old junk shop. If you've still got my share, all right. If not, you're for it, and you're going to pay for all these years I have been wandering about broke, done out of my rights. And you won't be paying for it in money, either! That's all for now.—Your loving son,

“FRANZ.”

Inquiries were made, and the writer of this letter, Franz Finkmann, was detained on suspicion of the murder. Identified from a photo in the dead man's rooms, he was picked up in a public house in the East India Dock Road. He had come to Tilbury from a South American port, and had arrived on the morning of the day of the murder. He could give no alibi for the fatal time. He said he had been with a party of his shipmates on a spree that same evening, and had thereafter been intoxicated, and did not know where he spent the night. He awoke next morning, he said, wet through, and lying against a wall in some alley, and his money all gone.

His shipmates had either signed on for fresh trips, or had scattered, for none of them came forward to confirm this story—possibly because they had indeed robbed him, as he claimed.

Franz Finkmann admitted writing the letter, but said he had not meant to suggest a threat of murder in it—merely to create a big row. He had been under age when his inheritance had been invested for him, but he had always resented it.

A publican confirmed his statements about drinking with his shipmates, but said both he and they had been ejected from the house at closing-time, 11 o'clock. In his opinion Finkmann had not been intoxicated, but was certainly in a savage, quarrelsome mood.

In reply to questions connected with the escape by canal, he admitted he could swim, and accounted for the damp state of his clothes at the time he was detained by saying he had a vague recollection of a fight, and of being ducked in a horse-trough by his mates.

Walter Noble, the shop-assistant, told of the father's receiving the letter, and that the threat had been preying on his mind. He (Noble) had offered to stay in the house with him for a few nights, but the offer was declined. The jeweller had been content to rely on the electric alarms, which he tested afresh. The switch operating the circuits was situated upstairs, so that even had anyone known of the electrified plate, or the window wiring, it could not be rendered ineffective from below.

AS if to confuse the issue, a second suspect was brought in. This was a dockside worker named Joseph Furness, a man who had been to the shop on the day preceding the murder, after a visit the day before. He claimed that the old man had swindled him over a deal concerning a camera he had sold him, and demanded redress. When the curio-dealer had refused, he became abusive and threatening, and had only gone away when a policeman had been called. (This policeman was P.-c. Bateson, who remembered the incident and detained the man).

He had no satisfactory alibi for 11.45 on the night of the murder. He stated he had been to a theatre in the West End that evening, and in confirmation of this the counter-foil of his ticket was found on him when he was searched. The show had concluded at 11.5, after which, he said, he had called at a supper bar in the West End, and stayed till midnight. None of the assistants of the place could remember him, however, though it was admitted it was very crowded at that hour, and that he might have been there. Against this, the police put the suggestion that he may have left the theatre before the fall of the curtain in ample time to reach the East End by 11.45.

He could swim a little, but not (he thought) with clothes on. None of his clothes were found to be damp.

The only other “possible” was the dead man's assistant and partner, Walter Noble. He turned up at the shop as usual next morning to begin work, but was detained on the ground that he had a key of the street door and knew of the electrical alarms.

He claimed to have been alone in his lodgings from 8 o'clock the previous evening till that morning. His landlady could not testify to this, however, as she had been out till midnight. When his rooms were searched no damp clothes could be found. Being a cripple, he said, he could not swim.

He did not know the exact amount in the rifled cash-box, but thought it might have been about £10, as amounts over that sum were usually banked. There was not enough spare cash available in the business to give Franz Finkmann any large sum in satisfaction of his legacy, the details of which, or the figure, Noble did not know.

The solution of this mystery was discovered by P.-c. Bateson through a cute piece of detective reasoning. All the facts which he had to go upon are given here, and you know as much as he did. One of the three men named was the murderer. Which one was it—and why?

Summarised, this is the case for and against each man:

P-C. BATESON'S first clue was the step-ladder in the backyard of the curio shop. It had been used to enable the fugitive murderer to climb the wall, which was less than six feet in height—an unnecessary aid for an able-bodied man, and especially one escaping after a murder. The only one of the three suspects who was not able-bodied was Walter Noble, the cripple.

With Noble under suspicion on this point, it was soon evident he would fit other factors in the case. The five-feet long electrically-charged metal plate would have been impassable to an ordinary walker, but a cripple could easily pass it, and, in fact, was at an advantage. By resting his crutches in the middle of the plate he could swing himself over without touching it with his feet, and the crutches, being rubber-tipped and therefore non-conducting, would prevent a shock. Not only would Noble be able to do this, but, knowing of the trap's existence, he would have carefully avoided it while he shut the door behind him, instead of stepping on to it and being rendered powerless at once, as would a person ignorant of its existence. The street door he had, of course, unlocked with his key.

Pressure on the plate would, however, ring the small bell upstairs; and here was another pointer which indicated Noble. The dead man was found with a police whistle in his hand, and the probability was that he was about to go to the window and blow it, having been alarmed by the bell, but that he was stopped from doing it. The only way to stop him was to reassure him, and this must have been done by Noble calling up to him so that he would recognise his voice. (When eventually arrested, Noble confirmed this, and other matters.)

He said he had not come there to murder the old man, but to try and urge him not to give any money to the son who had returned; or, alternatively, to make over the business to him (Noble) entirely, so that the son could have no claim. The old man refused, and there was a quarrel. Finkmann threatened to blow the police whistle and call back the policeman they had both seen pass the window a moment previously. Acting on impulse, and with the realisation that the son would be suspected, Noble struck him down with his crutch. He was appalled to see that he was dead, and only pausing to empty the cash-box so as to further implicate the son—Noble, of course, knew of the demands for money made in the letter that the old man had received—he fled.

He could not risk emerging into the street in sight of the policeman, so he made for the back way, forgetting, in his panic, the gong that the opened window would set ringing. He had to use the step-ladder to scale the wall, and flung himself over into the shallow water, making a mark with his hand and the crutch which he grasped in it.

Being a cripple, it was too easily assumed that he could not swim. He did, in fact, struggle across the canal, using his hands only, and being kept afloat with the crutches. Being alone in his lodgings, he was able to dispose of his damp clothes, which he did first by drying, and then by burning them to destroy the mud-stains.

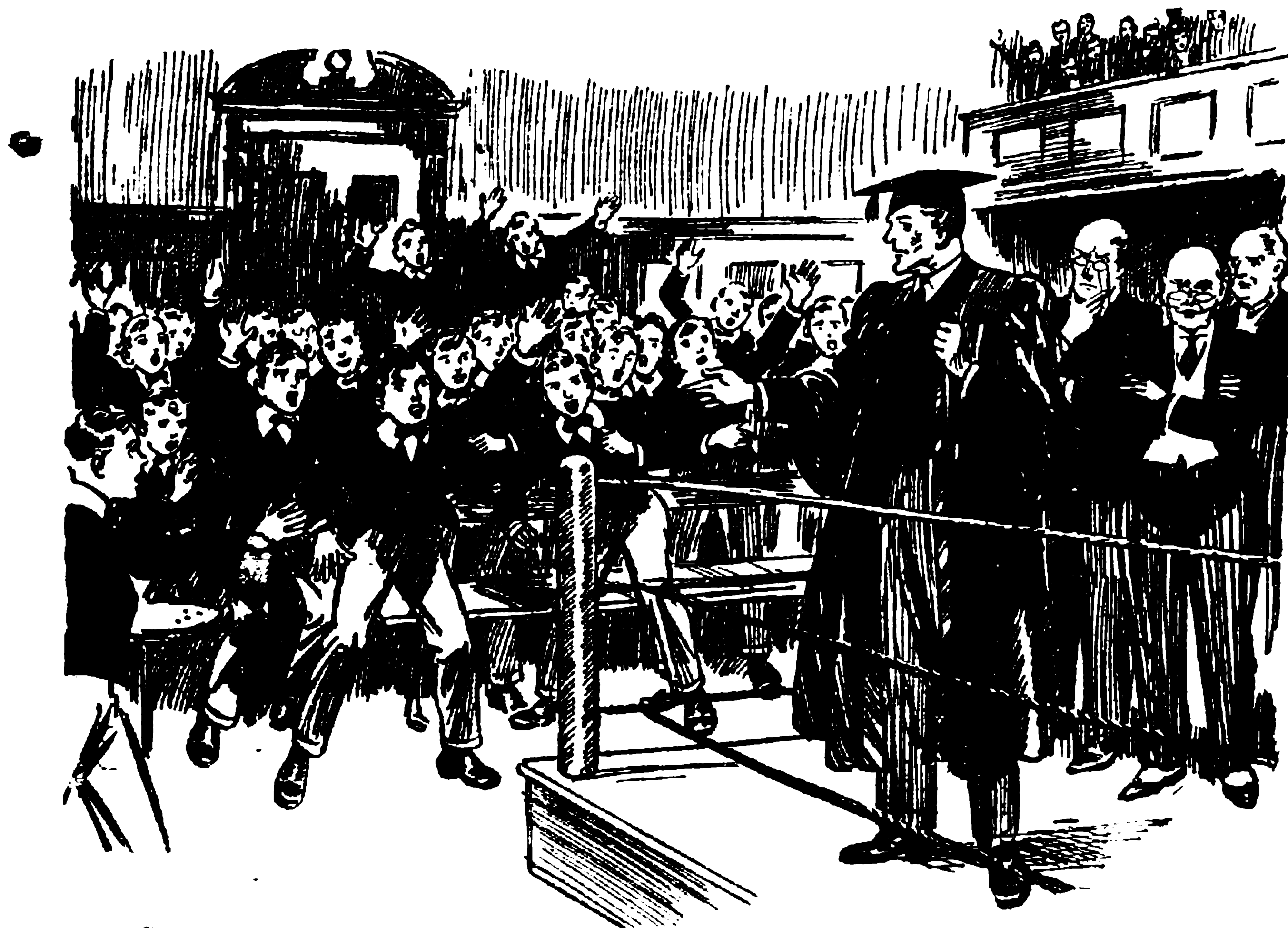
These minor points were cleared up by Noble's ultimate confession; but it was the police-constable's logical reasoning concerning the step-ladder and the method of passing the electric plate that put him on the right track.

“The Junk Shop Mystery” THE SOLUTION TO

FOR		AGAINST	
FRANZ FINKMANN.		The threatening letter.	
He had very little money in his possession the day after the murder; though he may have had time to hide it.		Hostility towards his father.	
WALTER NOBLE.		Quarrelsome after drinking.	
He was a cripple.		No alibi.	
Knew of the alarms, and would have avoided ringing the bell.		No alibi.	
No damp clothes.		Stood to benefit by the old man's death (except for return of his heir) by succeeding to the business.	
JOSEPH FURNESS.		Used threats.	
No damp clothes.		Uncertain alibi.	
		Could swim a little.	
Use your own detective powers! The clues to the correct solution, which point plainly to the guilty man, are contained in this story. Read it over again carefully and see whether you can spot him. Then check up your deductions with the answer given below.			

Our Sensational School Story By E. S. Brooks.

FIGHTING JIM DOES IT!



★ Fighting James Kingswood, the new headmaster, is asked to resign from St. Frank's by the Governors, who do not agree with his original ideas of conducting a school. But Kingswood informs them that he would rather put it to the boys who are waiting for him in the Big Hall. "Let them have their say in the matter," he says; and walks out of the study. ★

The Verdict of the School.

EXCITEMENT ran high in Big Hall. It was nearly time for the great contest. The juniors, in solid masses, were in their places. The seniors were present, too—to a man. And the whole affair was being conducted on carefully organised lines. Prefects and masters were there to keep order. In fact, the masters had come along to see the match itself—for the interest in the contest was universal throughout the school.

Then, just before the boxers and their seconds were about to enter the ring, Mr. James Kingswood made his appearance—and behind him, three very agitated-looking Governors.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for the Head!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

This was not very sweet music for the Governors' ears—considering that they had just demanded the resignation of this headmaster who appeared to be so enormously popular.

"Just a minute, you fellows, before you do any more cheering," said the Head, entering the ring. "There's something I've got to tell you."

His friendly manner was welcomed by all. No Headmaster could have been more respected than Mr. Kingswood—and it was a real, honest, friendly respect.

"First of all, I'm going to tell you that I have resigned the headmastership," said Mr. Kingswood quietly.

There was an absolute silence for some seconds; then a murmur of astonishment, rising to an absolute buzz of consternation.

"No, no!"

"Don't resign, sir!"

"We won't let you, sir!"

"If you will give me a few minutes of your attention, I will tell you just why I have thought it necessary to resign," continued the Head. "All of you junior boys will remember a mysterious practical joke which was played upon the Fourth. Some humourist entered the Modern House and the East House in the dead of night and daubed all sorts of insulting messages on the junior study doors."

"Rather, sir!" shouted Buster Boots. "We've never been able to catch that chap!"

"What would you do to him if you did catch him?" asked Mr. Kingswood.

"Scrag him, sir!" yelled Boots.

"Then you'd better start scragging me," said the Head coolly. "It was I who played that joke."

"Whaaaaaat!" gasped the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove.

And within a few moments everybody else within the school was shouting with joyous laughter. Even the Fourth-Formers themselves joined in. The Governors listened in agony.

"I intended to reserve this little revelation until the end of term," pursued Mr. Kingswood. "But, as I am resigning, it might as well come out now. I think you fellows are shrewd enough to understand why I did it."

"Rather, sir!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "To put some pep into the Fourth!"

"Exactly—and the Fourth is now a fine, spirited Form," said Mr. Kingswood. "I am proud of the Fourth. It has done wonders during these past few weeks."

The Fourth was duly gratified, and cheered lustily. Mr. Pycraft, who was standing in one of the gangways, was looking pale and uneasy. He did not like the way in which the school was taking Mr. Kingswood's revelations.

"There are one or two other little points which need clearing up," said the Head, when he could make himself heard again. "For instance, the entry of our mutual friend, Mr. Kid Williams, into the school."

And he briefly explained how he had "plotted" with Phipps to arouse Archie Glenthorne to a fit and proper sense of his indolence. The school chuckled gleefully. Archie Glenthorne was overjoyed.

"A dashed priceless old wheeze, old thing—that is to say, sir," he said, beaming. "I mean to say, I was really a frightful loafer. Good gad! And I thought that the Kid had drifted in quite by chance."

"I'm not defending myself—because I don't feel that any defence is necessary," said Mr. Kingswood. "Everything I have done, I have done for the good of the school. My methods may not be orthodox, but I somehow manage to 'get there.' And that's the thing that really matters."

He suddenly became grave.

"Some of you may have seen me going out for long rambles," he said quietly. "I

will openly admit that I have been secretive in my movements. Not because I had anything of a guilty nature to conceal, but because I have a hobby which is scarcely in keeping with my character as a fighting man. I thought it might be detrimental to my standing as a 'strong man' if you all knew of my little weakness. So I kept it dark. Perhaps I was wrong. Anyhow, there is no reason why you should not know just why I have been rambling here, there, and everywhere across the countryside."

The school listened, breathless. Handforth felt suddenly guilty, and he found the gaze of his two chums upon him. Mr. Pycraft made a curious gulping sound in his throat.

"I am a naturalist," explained Fighting Jim gently. "In other words, a 'bug hunter.' I have a passion for collecting rare insects, and such-like. And it is my boast that my collection is second to none."

"Certain people, I fancy, have had an idea that I was a desperate criminal of some kind," went on Mr. Kingswood dryly. "I have made friends with certain members of the tramping fraternity—quite decent fellows, mostly. But they know a awful lot about woodcraft—and about the woods. I have paid them good money to obtain specimens for me, and I have sometimes met these men at dead of night."

"Sometimes I have buried boxes, in certain spots—known to me and my helpers—but such matters have been perfectly innocent. I had an arrangement with these men to place any specimens they might secure in these boxes. These men are honest enough, and only too ready to earn a clean penny. I felt it only right that this little mystery—if it actually was a mystery—should be cleared up."

He looked round at the eager, intent faces, and there was a rather wistful, sad expression in his own rugged face.

"I shall be sorry to leave you all," he said. "But I have felt it incumbent upon me to tender my resignation——"

"No, sir!" shouted Handforth, jumping up. "You're only resigning because the Governors have complained against your unusual methods. You haven't said so, but we're not dense. We won't let you resign, sir!"

"No!" went up a tremendous roar. "No!"

And at this the entire school leapt to its feet, and pandemonium reigned for some minutes. Never before had there been such a demonstration. The Governors, helpless, looked on. They could not help feeling that they had blundered badly. A headmaster who could arouse such enthusiasm as this was, without question, a very successful headmaster.

"We're not going to let you go, sir!" shouted Fenton, of the Sixth. "I am the captain of the school, and if you go away I shall resign the captaincy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fenton!"

"You can't do this, Mr. Kingswood," said Old Wilkey, coming forward. "There is no adequate reason why you should resign. Everybody in this school wants you."

"Yes, yes!" yelled the school.

Mr. Alington Wilkes, during these past few moments, had been talking earnestly with his fellow Housemasters—Mr. Stokes, Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Goole. All four gentlemen were now bunched together.

"I will just add this," continued Old Wilkey. "If you resign, Mr. Kingswood, my fellow Housemasters and myself will resign with you."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Old Wilkey!"

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" urged Sir John Brent, coming forward. "I fear that there has been a grave misunderstanding. This singular scene cannot be allowed to continue. I wish to make it quite clear to everybody in this school that if Mr. Kingswood tenders his resignation, we, the Governors, will not accept it."

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Sir John!"

"Spoken like a man, sir!"

And that, as the school gleefully murmured to his ears, was that. The Governors were thoroughly startled, and they realised that they had made a colossal blunder. Thereupon they retired—and it was noted by quite a few that they took Mr. Horace Pycraft with them.

Exactly what happened to Mr. Pycraft nobody knew, but he went through such a very bad quarter of an hour that for some days afterwards he went about the school looking more like a ghost than a human being.

The Champion.

"SECONDS out of the ring!"

After all that preliminary excitement, the school was in a right mood for the great boxing match. And Fighting Jim Kingswood himself, supremely happy, was acting as referee.

"Time!"

A ripple of excitement ran through the crowded Big Hall.

"Come on, Remove!"

"Rats! This is the Fourth's triumph!"

Mr. Kingswood frowned half-smilingly at these interrupters. And Archie Glenthorne and Ernest Lawrence set the ball rolling. Lawrence was very active. Brilliantly, skilfully, he pinned Archie up in one of the corners of the ring. He was forcing the pace.

And the suddenness of it rather upset Archie. He was thrown off his balance. A whirl of blows descended upon him. But his guard was perfect, and not one of those vital blows got home.

After a few seconds, however, he warmed up to the work. Side-stepping as Lawrence came on, he turned with the speed of lightning, and Lawrence went staggering past, his balance lost by the force of his wasted blow.

"Go it, Archie!"

"You've got him now!"

The Removites were yelling hoarsely.

Archie was suddenly attacking—coolly, cleverly, hotly.

He got in three clipped hits, one following the other in bewildering succession. Lawrence turned and rushed. There was little science during the next hectic seconds. Both young boxers were excited inwardly. Archie was beginning to feel that Lawrence was unbeatable; Lawrence, for his part, was realising for the first time that Archie was a foeman worthy of his own steel. This match was not going to be easy.

The pace was terrific. With a sense of acute dismay, Archie felt that he could not keep it up. Instead of hitting, he was just pushing his gloves into the Fourth-Former's face. And Lawrence was getting into close quarters; his right was deadly.

But Archie did not know that Lawrence himself was experiencing very much the same sensations. Lawrence was feeling that his own strength was going, too.

Suddenly Archie got in a straight left, and it took the Fourth-Former on the neck, and back he went. But again he came on—and once more Archie punched.

But he knew that it could not last. Everything was going queer. He'd got his back against the ropes, and his breath was coming in great gulps. There had been nothing of this sort in those other matches.

"Time!"

A long-drawn-out breath came from the audience. Not many of those juniors would forget that first round. Archie swayed as he went to his corner.

"Well done, sir!" said a soft, encouraging voice.

"Good gad, I didn't know you were here, Phipps!" mumbled Archie. "And, I mean to say, what rot! I was utterly frightful!"

"Don't you believe it, sir," said the Kid, energetically flapping the towel. "You're all right. Master Lawrence can't stand that pace any more than you can. You won the round on points."

"Odds rot and piffle!" said Archie. "You know dashed well that I was absolutely out-boxed."

He leaned back in his chair luxuriously.

To the Remove's delight, Archie came up from the second round as fresh as paint. Lawrence, who knew what lay before him, lost no time in dashing in. Archie met him with a left to the face, and gave way a foot. Again Lawrence came in, and Archie adroitly slipped him. The Fourth-Former paused, and for a brief moment he lost his guard.

Crash!

Archie's left shot out and found its mark.

"Oh!" gasped the crowd.

Lawrence swung his right determinedly—but without any effect. For Archie was not there. And a swift counter added another point to the elegant Removite's score.

Amid growing excitement, the Removites were noticing a change. Archie's blows were

becoming more frequent—and the force behind them was greater than Lawrence's. Archie was driving at the body—then—

Slam!

Archie's left got through, and he tried again. It was a double lead, and although Lawrence guarded the first blow, the second got home heavily to the body, and the Fourth-Former gave way a step.

The Kid was signalling—and Archie took a deep breath.

He dashed, and rather to his dismay, Lawrence met him with a fierce, grim determination. And for some moments the exchanges were even.

Then, suddenly, as though by magic, Lawrence's blows began to weaken. He got home a punch to the head, but Archie scarcely felt it. And with a sudden sense of exultation, the Removite knew that the fight was his.

He was winning!

He hammered in: he drove Lawrence all round the ring, and suddenly he saw Lawrence on the canvas. And Lawrence was not rising.

Just how it happened Archie did not know. He was dazed, bewildered, and he found Mr. Kingswood holding up his arm; and Mr. Kingswood was saying that he was the winner. Big Hall was swaying backward and forward. Hundreds and thousands and millions of fellows were attempting to climb into the ring. Thunderstorms were breaking. There was noise—noise—

"Hurrah!"

"Well fought, Archie!"

"Remove wins!"

"By Jove!" said Fenton, of the Sixth. "The finest Junior Match I have ever seen. The luck to witness!"

And it was many a long day before the school forgot that eventful evening. Archie Glenthorne, the slacker, the joke of the Remove, had won the Kingswood Belt. And Mr. James Kingswood himself—Fighting Jim—remained Headmaster of St. Frank's.

THE END.

(The opening chapters of a Great long story of the Chums of St. Frank's next week. Look out for:—**COCK O' THE WALK!**)

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