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"THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLD SHIP!"

This week's Powerful Detective-Thriller!

THE MYSTERY OF



CHAPTER 1.

A Scientific Ally.

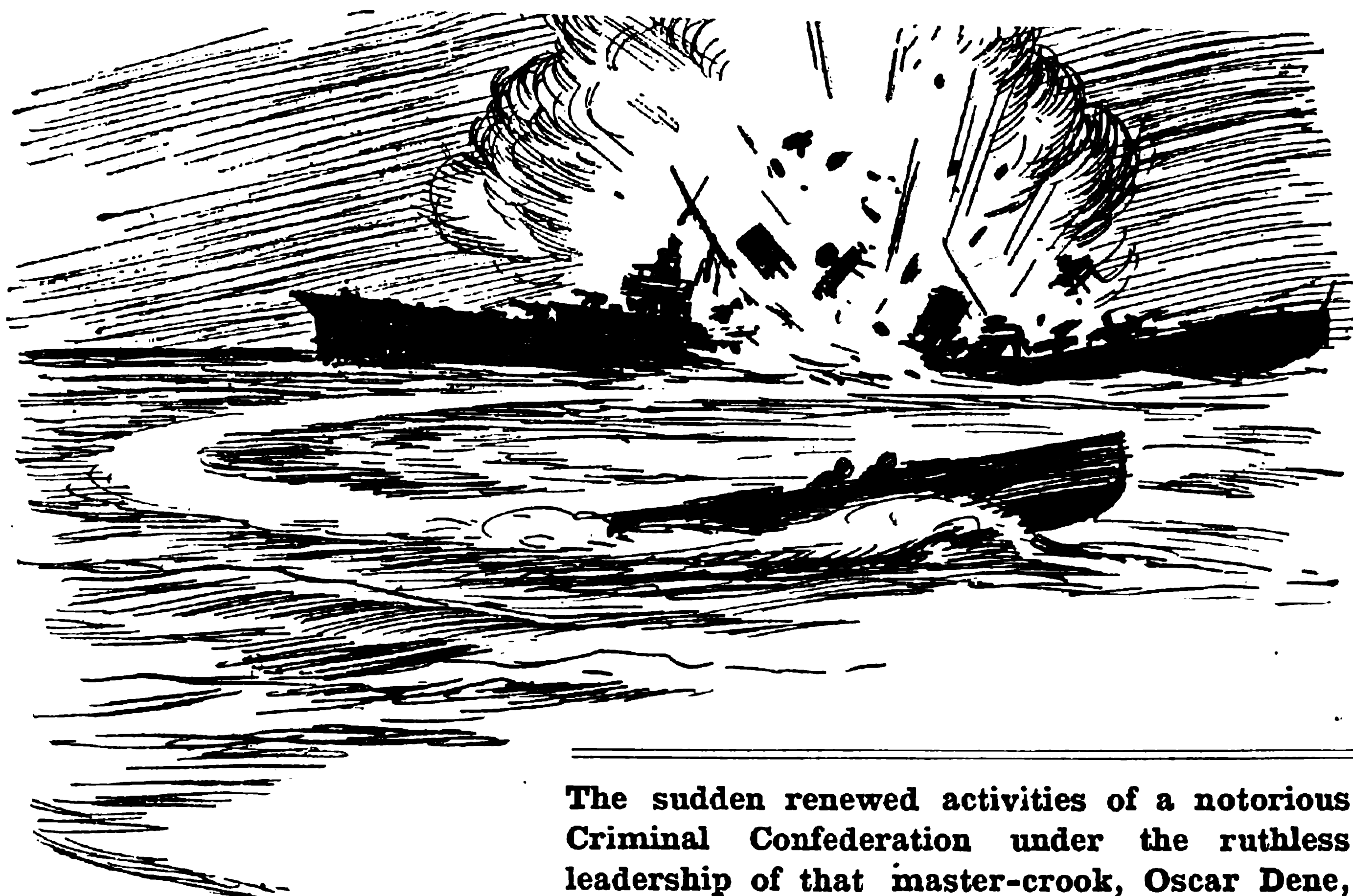
NELSON LEE, the famous detective, sat in his sanctum in the Gray's Inn Road engrossed in something that stood on the table before him—something that looked like a cross between a telephone and a wireless set. It was, in fact, a wireless

telephone. Nipper had a portable set, and with this invention Nelson Lee and his young assistant were able to communicate with one another, wherever they happened to be.

The simple instrument represented the last word in telephonic achievement, and in it Lee knew himself to possess one of the most valuable allies in the cause of justice which science had ever bestowed upon him.

—Starring NELSON LEE, The Famous Detective, And His Assistant NIPPER!

THE GOLD SHIP!



The sudden renewed activities of a notorious Criminal Confederation under the ruthless leadership of that master-crook, Oscar Dene, provides yet another sensational "case" for the famous detective, Nelson Lee. Almost before they realise it, Nelson Lee and Nipper are plunged head-first into a series of perilous adventures and sinister mysteries which tax their powers to the uttermost! This story is a typical "Nelson Lee" Detective-Thriller!

It was not until recently that Lee had found time to interest himself deeply in the problem of wireless telephony, but when he had the subject fascinated him. For weeks during spare hours he had experimented in his laboratory, setting off a separate space and installing electric apparatus which had cost him thousands.

There were great engineers and electricians as well as chemists who were applying themselves to the same problem in its broader aspects. Lee set himself to modify and improve existing instruments, to produce something light and portable, directly suited to the requirements of the detective service.

For a long time he had worked without success, until, as the result of a maze of mathematical deduction, he found the basis of a valve which promised to catch and intensify to audible sound the waves of ether reproduced at the other end by a comparatively low power in transmitting.

That same evening he took his idea to a

man whose name was comparatively unknown except to the initiated—a man who shunned publicity, and cared not a snap for credit or kudos—but whose uncanny knowledge of the functions of wireless amounted to genius.

The result was the perfection in a fortnight of the instrument which Lee and Nipper were now testing practically for the first time, and it answered perfectly.

Carrying something no bigger than a school-boy's satchel, slung over his shoulder just as casually, Nipper had spoken first from the top of a bus while it waited in the maze of traffic by the Mansion House. He had spoken again from the summit of the famous Monument, by London Bridge, and his voice on both occasions had been clear and perfectly distinct.

Such an instrument, even with a limited range of transmission, would be of invaluable assistance to Nelson Lee in his life's work. No one appreciated more than he did the immense possibilities it offered.

Within the precincts of London, at any rate, it rendered time and space negligible quantities. It eliminated barriers—it penetrated walls and passed through obstacles as if they did not exist.

His thoughts turned as he drained his cup to some of those arch enemies against whom this little wonder of telephony would now be formally arrayed. There was the notorious Criminal Confederation headed by the amazingly clever, ex-actor crook, Oscar Dene, who, with his confederates, was hoodwinking and puzzling the Secret Services of half a dozen countries.

Only recently Nelson Lee had been at grips with Oscar Dene, and his gang, that consisted of Manning, the scientist; Sandrez, the Spanish murderer; old Jan van Duren, and his beautiful daughter, Gloria van Duren. Dene and his gang had escaped, but maybe, next time, with the help of the wireless telephone now on the table, the result might be different.

On the instrument on the table a delicate piece of metal flopped over on to a tiny magnet, establishing the circuit between two ordinary wet batteries, and a bell rang sharply. Lee crossed to the table and assumed the headgear.

"Hallo! Is that you, Nipper?"

"Yes. Can you hear me?"

"Quite well. Where are you speaking from?"

"At the moment I am leaning over the parapet of Blackfriars Bridge. You are quite plain. This is a great business, guv'nor."

Nelson was about to reply when there came in lower tones, not so distinct, another voice, breaking in on their own.

"Keep to three thousand," it said, "till you strike the coast. Then bear east a bit till you're over, and come down till you follow the coast. There's a nasty fog-bank on the Havre route."

A voice said, "Right-ho! Thanks," in a matter-of-fact way, and there was silence again, except for a very low musical buzzing, broken occasionally by the dull crackle of distant atmospherics.

"That was Hendon speaking, guv'nor," said Nipper's voice. "Giving a cross-Channel pilot instructions, I suppose. I heard Croydon half an hour ago."

"Yes," said Lee. "It sounds weird. I'd like you to taxi out a bit now and test the radius. I fancy we ought to work up to fifteen miles without—er—just a minute. I'm wanted."

He turned as his housekeeper entered, bearing a card in her hand.

"A lady to see you, sir," she said.

"By appointment?" Lee asked, raising his eyebrows.

"No. But she says she won't keep you a moment. She's quite a lady, sir. I told her you was always busy, but——"

Lee nodded, frowning slightly, and extended his hand for the card.

It was the card of an aristocrat; not too ornate, not too simple. The name upon it was a name honoured in English history.

"Marjorie Cecil," Lee read, and then, glancing up: "Did she state her business?"

"No, sir—except that it's private and urgent."

"H'm! Not collecting for anything?"

"No, sir. She says she won't keep you a few minutes."

"Then you'd better show her up, I suppose. Hallo, Nipper!"

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"I've got a visitor. You say you're on Blackfriars Bridge?"

"Yes."

"Then study the seagulls for ten minutes—and don't ring. I'm disconnecting."

The clear assent came distinctly over the tube, and Lee removed the headgear. For a minute or so he bent almost lovingly over the little instrument, disconnecting the bell temporarily by lifting one of the zinc sticks from a battery. From under the table he took a metal cover and paused before placing it over the instrument.

A slight significant cough caused him to slam down the cover and turn sharply—to see the tall, almost statuesque figure of a girl standing in the doorway. She raised her veil slowly with a gloved hand, and her eyes rested on him placidly for a moment from under lids which dropped strangely.

And recognition came to Nelson Lee in the first instant of amazement. It was Gloria—the adventuress—the inscrutable accomplice of the elusive Oscar Dene—Gloria van Duren!

CHAPTER 2.

Nipper Does Some Shadowing.

GLORIA VAN DUREN, daughter of the old crook, Jan van Duren, actress, adventuress and coquette, smiled as she saw the almost startled look which flitted instantly across the features of the detective, leaving them, a moment later, mask-like and inexpressive.

There was a not unpleasing mockery in the girl's strange eyes as she smiled at him.

"You are astonished to see me, Mr. Lee?"

The detective was, but would not admit it.

"I am astonished at nothing in these times," he said. "Why have you come here? You seem fond of taking risks."

"A little danger is the salt of life," she said. "Besides, I am not entirely unchaperoned."

"You mean that some of your leader's gang of cut-throats are standing guard outside?"

"You were always unsparing in your description of my friends," she said, quite unmoved. And then, looking Lee straight in the eyes, she added doubtfully: "I am afraid you are hopeless, Mr. Lee. You persist in misunderstanding the motives of the Dene Syndicate."

"I am under no illusions about any of you," Lee said sharply. "The syndicate is a gang of murderous outlaws, whom I would give my life to stamp out, as I believe I told you once before. One can only have pity and contempt for any woman who mixes with and helps such a gang of criminals——"

"Thank you, Mr. Lee!" she said sharply, and with a hauteur which was almost ridiculous, considering who she was. "If you wish to be insulting, please don't particularise."

Nelson Lee smiled, unmoved. He had once nearly fallen under the influence of Gloria's subtle beauty—but never again.

"Let us come to the point," he said quietly. "Why have you come here? Are you trying to persuade me to join your gang, or do you want my permission to carry out some nefarious coup?"

"No," she said, with a smile. "It makes little difference to our plans whether we have your permit or not. I came more in the capacity of a friend."

"Then you came in an entirely false capacity," Lee said sharply, although he marvelled inwardly at her audacity.

"Ah, but listen, Mr. Lee. You once saved my life. In defeating the plans of Oscar Dene, you will remember, you cause us, unwittingly, to be thrown from a boat into a foaming river. Instead of going after Oscar, as you might have done, you preferred to let him escape and to save my life. I do not forget things like that, Mr. Lee. In business, if I may say so, we are foes, but—for what you did, I shall always think kindly of you. I want you to accept this little souvenir—this little present—as a thank offering. I think it's unique."

She handed Lee a quaint little talisman beautifully carved in ebony in the form of a boxing-glove, and laced with an inlay of pearl and ivory. As Lee examined it, she rose from the chair into which she had sunk uninvited.

"It is, quite unique," murmured Lee.

"It is quite nice to find one point of agreement between us," she said banteringly. "But I must be going. I promised to keep you only a few minutes. You were about to have a little music, I believe?"—glancing at the table.

"Music?"

"It is a gramophone, isn't it?"

"Possibly," Lee said.

"May I see?"—stepping over.

"Certainly not!" Lee said sharply—and wishing devoutly he was rid of her.

"Ah, something secret," she said, with a laugh. "I am sorry I was curious, Mr. Lee. It is the besetting sin of my sex—or supposed to be. I will say good-bye, Mr. Lee. You will probably not see me again for a long time—perhaps not at all."

The detective heaved a sigh of relief he took no pains to conceal, but she smiled with amusement.

"I am going out of England for an indefinite period," she explained.

"To America?" Lee queried.

"No; to the Continent. I have to be at Waterloo at seven-thirty." She glanced at her watch. "I must be going now."

The cool audacity of the girl was amazing. She disclosed her plans with the casual manner of a week-end tripper.

"You are going to Southampton?" he queried.

"Yes," she said. "Good-bye!"

She put out her hand, and Lee half-turned away affecting not to see it. He had saved her life because he could not stand by and watch a girl drown. But that was in a case now forgotten. He knew her to be treacherous, deceitful and unscrupulous, and one of a notorious gang of crooks, even if he had no direct evidence strong enough to have her arrested. For that reason, he did not want to become too amiable with her. He rang the bell.

"Good-bye!" he said. And then, as the housekeeper came into the room. "Show Miss Cecil downstairs, please!"

She passed out with a dazzling smile, sweeping through the door with the perfect grace and charm of the aristocrat whose name she had assumed for the occasion. When she had gone the detective threw himself down in his chair, muttering angrily to himself.

"By Jupiter, she is a witch—a witch—with the face of a beauty queen. She is more dangerous than Oscar Dene himself. What is the game now?"

He leaned upon the arm of his chair, resting his head on one hand, his brows knit, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the floor. They wandered presently to the table, resting upon the small instrument in which she had shown such a mocking interest. An idea came suddenly, and Lee sprang up, fixing the listeners to his ears and pressing a small button on the transmitter.

He listened intently, pressing the button intermittently. There came, after a minute's pause, a voice over the tube.

"Hallo, guv'nor? Your ringing's strong. You there?"

"Yes. Is that you, young 'un? Still on Blackfriar's Bridge?"

"Yes, guv'nor—and a bit fed up. There are at least three policemen with their eyes on me—besides the men on the fire float. They think I'm waiting a chance to commit suicide gracefully. Who was the visitor, guv'nor?"

"Gloria van Duren," Lee said steadily.

"Good gracious! What did she want?"

"That's what I'm not sure of," Lee said. "Look here, young 'un. We've got an early opportunity of putting this little apparatus to practical use. I want you to get a taxi straight away and cut along to Waterloo Station."

"Yes, guv'nor. What's on?"

"That I don't know. Gloria tells me she is catching the seven-thirty train to Southampton this evening. She is leaving the country, she says—going to the Continent."

"Why on earth did she tell you this, guv'nor?"

"I don't know at all. She merely volunteered the information casually."

"Then she is probably lying—eh?"

"Most probably," Lee said thoughtfully. "But, on the other hand, young 'un, she may not be."

Both the detective and Nipper knew the mysterious ways of Oscar Dene and his accomplices. It was impossible, sometimes, to divine their motives. But there was one characteristic, one trait in the make-up of Oscar Dene, which was also reflected in the strange personality of Gloria van Duren, and which Lee knew well. This was the overweening conceit of the man, the supreme confidence in his own infallibility. Despite the perverted use he made of it, the genius of Dene could not be denied. And he had the most common weakness of genius—a rather trivial vanity.

Thus, there was nothing which Dene liked better than to give little evidences here and there of his utter contempt for the police, for Lee, for the forces, generally, of law and order. On past occasions he had left clues deliberately in order to lead on his pursuers and make fools of them. Many a time he had disclosed his intentions before a crime, given the warning even, and been specific in his details, thus throwing down the gauntlet to the police, challenging them and giving them a good start, as it were, so as to make the race more exciting.

"She may be speaking the truth, guv'nor. One never knows," Nipper's voice said through the valve-like amplifier of the 'phone. "Do you want me to cut along to Waterloo and keep an eye skinned?"

"Yes," Lee said. "Get all the information you can. Gloria is dressed perfectly as usual. She is wearing a small hat and a tailor-made costume of brown—perfectly cut. When you're finished come straight back here. I'll wait dinner till eight."

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" the lad said, as if glad of the mission. "Then you'll cut out the distance trial to-night?"

"Yes. I don't think there's any fear of it not being a success. You'll operate with your batteries up to twenty miles, I fancy. With the special accumulators we can cover hundreds. But get along now. You've no time to waste."

Lee remained at the table with the head-gear still on long after Nipper had departed on his mission to the great terminus. His hands gripped a little vulcanite handle, which he turned slowly—the handle which manipulated the direction and tuning of the instrument.

There was something strange and eerie in the items of conversation which he picked up, which came through space from whence he did not know, like voices from the other world.

He was still experimenting and tinkering with the machine when there came from below a deep bark of welcome from the throat of Wolf. A female voice remarked audibly that the arrival was "just in time,"

and that she was "jest straining the greens." A minute later Nipper stepped into the room, lifting a leather satchel from his shoulder and placing it with care upon the table.

"I went to Waterloo, guv'nor," he said.

"Any luck?"

"Yes. I watched the booking-office carefully. There is a paper stall quite close. I gave a boy half-a-crown to borrow his hat and let me serve his customers for half an hour."

"Good! An excellent notion. And you saw Gloria?"

"Yes; she bought a paper!"

"Really? Which one?"

"A financial paper. The 'Bullionist.'"

"Oh-h! Was she alone?"

"No," Nipper said. "She was with an old man, white haired, and rather tottery. I fancy it was old man Van Duren."

"Her father, perhaps," Lee said thoughtfully. "But it might have been Oscar Dene."

"If it was, then the disguise was perfect. But she was with a clergyman, too, a proper padre. He bought 'The Church Times,' and he was carrying an umbrella and a copy of the Navy List!"

"And they booked for Southampton—or Havre?"

"No. They booked to Portsmouth. The train goes at seven-fifty!"

Nelson Lee looked at Nipper from under knitted brows.

"Portsmouth?" he exclaimed. "That's strange. They can't get to the Continent from there!"

"Yes they can," Nipper said. "The steamers are probably running trips over to Cherbourg. It used to be a favourite excursion from Southsea."

The detective nodded.

"Yes; I had forgotten that. You are quite sure they booked to Portsmouth? Was it the Harbour?"

"No. Portsmouth Town."

For some minutes Lee mused in silence, breaking a roll mechanically and toying with his soup.

Suddenly he rose from the table and crossed to the telephone proper, lifting the receiver and asking for a number, which Nipper knew to be that of Scotland Yard.

"Hallo! Is that the Yard? Can I speak to Inspector Harker, please?"

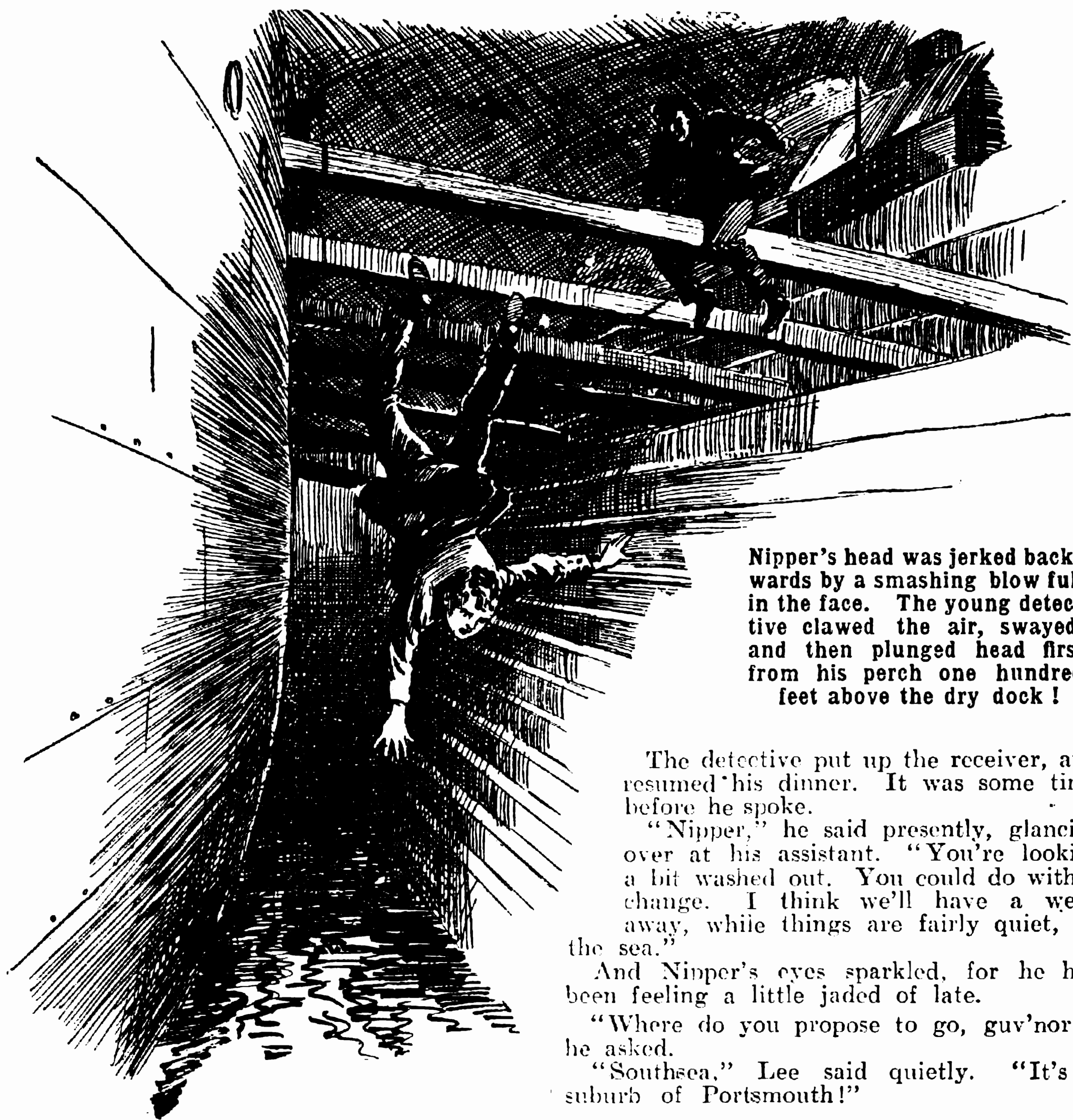
There was a pause of a minute, and then Lee spoke again.

"Is that you, Harker? I have an item of news for you. At Waterloo Station this evening Gloria van Duren, in company with an old man, probably her father, and a man dressed as a clergyman, booked tickets for Portsmouth and joined the seven-fifty train, arriving at Portsmouth Town at ten p.m."

"Ah-h!" exclaimed the Yard man quickly.

"Is that so?"

Nelson Lee described the party just as Nipper had done. Harker repeated the



Nipper's head was jerked backwards by a smashing blow full in the face. The young detective clawed the air, swayed, and then plunged head first from his perch one hundred feet above the dry dock!

The detective put up the receiver, and resumed his dinner. It was some time before he spoke.

"Nipper," he said presently, glancing over at his assistant. "You're looking a bit washed out. You could do with a change. I think we'll have a week away, while things are fairly quiet, by the sea."

And Nipper's eyes sparkled, for he had been feeling a little jaded of late.

"Where do you propose to go, gov'nor?" he asked.

"Southsea," Lee said quietly. "It's a suburb of Portsmouth!"

description in jerks as if he were writing it down.

"Nothing happened, has there?" he asked.

"Nothing particular—no. But I thought you might like to get through to Portsmouth, and——"

"Yes. yes. Many thanks for the tip. I'll get a couple of plain-clothes men on the station. If possible, we'll keep them under observation while they are in Pompey. What's their game there? Any idea?"

"None at all, at present. But I may go down to see!"

"You may?"

"Yes. By the way, don't forget there are three stations at Portsmouth. There are Fratton, and the Harbour, as well as the Town."

"Yes. Right-ho! I guess Pompey will see to that. Thanks for the information, Lee. Good-bye."

CHAPTER 3.

Mysterious Attack!

A MILE or more out from shore a small boat tossed gently upon the Spithead, dragging on the anchor which had been thrown out, vainly striving to break free and move seawards on the swift outward flowing tide.

A man, spare, but muscular, rose presently in the boat, throwing a towel from his shoulders, and clad in bathing costume, already wet from a previous dip.

"A last flip round, young 'un," he said. "before we pull in. Come along!"

He stepped on to the low gunwale of the boat, and with a quick spring cut the water with hardly a splash. Nipper rose languidly to a sitting position, and watched the otter-like evolutions of Nelson Lee. For a few minutes he would streak through the water

with that lightning rapidity of his which hardly disturbed the water, and then he would disappear, appearing again unexpectedly some twenty yards away. When Nelson Lee got in the water he became almost amphibious, distorting himself like a dolphin.

Nipper glanced over his shoulder towards the droning of a fast launch which approached from the direction of the harbour. The slim bows were out of the water as it cut its way along, the low stern seemed to be flying from a froth of angry water. As Nipper watched, the boat turned a degree or two to starboard and headed towards them, and the lad glanced quickly towards the bobbing head of Lee.

"Look out, guv'nor," he shouted. "Motor-boat in the offing."

Lee's head raised and he began to swim leisurely back towards his own boat. Nipper's eyes were fixed upon the launch, which, taking a straight course now with the tide, was travelling at a speed not much less than a mile a minute. A figure in oilskins and goggles—like a racing motorist—crouched down before the wheel, his masked face just showing. Another shorter figure sat beside him.

With his goggles splashed with spray, his mind centred only upon the speedometer of the launch, it would be an easy matter for the driver of the launch to miss the bobbing head of a solitary swimmer.

Nelson Lee was still some distance on the port quarter of the open boat, and Nipper rose and beckoned quickly.

"Move, guv'nor!" he called. "She may not see you."

Lee glanced over his shoulder, and seemed to realise the possibility of danger, for he began to swim swiftly, heading off on a direct course, out of the line of the launch.

But, as he swam away, at a right angle to the original wake of the racing craft, the bows of the launch turned gradually a point to starboard, keeping Lee, it seemed, almost directly ahead. Lee moved even more quickly. He was swimming desperately, but still the launch headed him off, as if by deliberate intent.

Nipper watched, standing in the boat, his face going a little pale, his eyes bright, and fixed. Suddenly he made a trumpet of his hands and let out a megaphonic roar.

"Look out there—swimmer ahead!"

But he knew, as soon as he had shouted, that his voice must have been drowned in the roar of the motor. He raised both arms and waved frantically, but they appeared not to see him.

"By Jupiter!" he cried. "They will run him down!"

As he stood now he could see the wake behind the launch, and it showed distinctly that the course of the boat had been slowly curving to the starboard. It had swerved now right off its original course, and was cutting directly across the stern of the boat in which the lad stood.

The sharp bows, cleaving the water, were heading with fatal accuracy—straight for the head of the detective, as it bobbed and dipped in the small troughs of the waves. The mask-like goggled face appeared to be peering ahead, oblivious.

It wanted now, it seemed, only a matter of fifty yards before they swept down on the helpless swimmer, and Lee leapt up in the water, waving his arms and shouting the alarm. None but a blind man could have helped but see him. The shouts he gave were easily audible above the dull roar of the flying screw.

But the driver of the launch was immutable. He took not the slightest notice, but deflected the course of the craft just sufficient to bear down upon the detective. A hoarse cry broke from the lips of Nipper as he watched. In his agony of mind he danced, almost throwing himself into the water.

"You fool! You fiend!" he cried hoarsely.

His hands were gripped tightly as he stood there, pathetically helpless, as it seemed that Lee was. He watched the bobbing head of the detective until it seemed that the bows of the launch were upon him.

And then the racing, murderous craft swept on, and in the place where a few moments before Lee had been swimming in placid water there was now a swirling wake of maddened foam. And Nelson Lee had disappeared—mown down.

In his agony of mind Nipper beat the air with his hands, shook his fist at the huddled figures in the launch, whilst dry sobs broke from him.

"It was intentional! They meant it!" he cried. "You fiends!"

He stood upright in the swaying boat, a strange, tense figure, his hand raised, his fists clenched, his eyes fixed upon the flying craft, which had not abated its speed, but which was turning now, veering round to the port side.

The huddled figure of the man in oilskins had remained as if carved in stone. He had not even turned to look behind him. He still crouched down, peering ahead, the nose of the launch turning now to the original direction, as if about to pass the small boat on the seaward side.

But was it about to pass? The launch came round steadily, until, as Nipper stood, he saw it only—foreshortened in perspective—heading straight for him. There was something sinister, something deliberate and murderous in the roar of the motor, in the way the launch bore down upon him at top speed, and as he stood there the small boat swung round slightly on the anchor, presenting itself broadside on to the onslaught.

In that instant, Nipper realised the truth to the full. Lee had not been run down by accident. It was deliberate and murderous, done by swift and cold-blooded design. And whoever this oilskinned assassin was in the launch, he meant to make a double job of it—a clean sweep.

"It's Oscar Dene! I'll swear it's Dene," the lad muttered. "But, by—"

He leapt across the boat, and from the pocket of Lee's trousers he snatched the faithful automatic which had served them both in so many emergencies. In an instant he levelled it and fired—once, twice, three times in quick succession. But the speed of the launch, the dip and roll of the small boat, made accuracy almost impossible. On the instant, too, the two men in the launch had crouched down out of view. There was only visible one hand, resting lightly upon the wheel, keeping the course—straight at him.

Nipper stood helpless. It was as if a juggernaut were descending upon him from which there was no escape. It was a matter of seconds now.

Crack! Crack!

Once more the automatic spoke, the report echoing out over the water, sharp and clear above the furious droning of the launch. Nipper stood with one foot drawn back upon the side of the small boat, facing the rushing bows of the motor-boat, as if in defiance. He stuffed the automatic into his trousers-pockets.

For a few moments he waited, erect, his eyes fixed upon the approaching death. The engine roared suddenly faster, the craft seemed literally to leap at him, and in that same instant Nipper sprang backwards with a leap which set the small boat rocking violently. His head went down and his feet came up over it, and then he cleaved the water in an almost vertical dive—just as the side of the small boat crumpled in like an eggshell and the flying launch cleaved its way through it, leaving in the froth of its wake only a few pieces of wreckage to tell the tale.

What followed after that seemed to Nipper like an eternity. He cut the water and struck down, down, the noise of a deafening roar in his ears as the screw approached—a noise which nearly split the drums of his ears. It stunned him for a moment, and consciousness began to drift. It seemed that death had taken him by the hand and was dragging him down into the dark regions, where the air was becoming stifling and insufferable.

He beat and kicked and fought like a tiger for his breath. His head swam, he could hear the terrible thump, thump, of his own heart—growing quicker and more frenzied—and then the pent-up air burst from his lungs, and he fought wildly to keep his head above a swirling lather of foam.

He drew in a deep and grateful breath of pure oxygen, and exhaled again. Then he threw himself back upon the water, closing his eyes, too exhausted almost to keep afloat.

It seemed to Nipper that the infernal roar of the launch's screw was still echoing in his ears, growing farther away and gradually more distant. He realised presently that the noise he heard was not the echo of his own fancy, but the actual droning of the murderous craft. He rolled over, and, treading water, raised his head and peered above the level of the white foam.

He could follow the wake of the launch directly ahead of him, like a path of white blossom across a green and furrowed lawn. The low-set stern of the boat was receding quickly. He saw the squat figure of a man in the boat turning and peering behind him.

Nipper dropped down into the swirling concealment of the froth, and a grim, ironic smile sprang to his thin lips.

"You missed your fish this time, Oscar Dene!" he muttered. "You've still got me to reckon with—and, by Jupiter, you shall!"

He swam until he saw ahead of him a piece of floating wreckage—a part of the dismembered boat in which he had been standing a few minutes ago. He made for this, and reached it, and then there came to Nipper one of the most glorious experiences of his life.

A familiar voice came from close by, speaking calmly, and in a tone which was almost matter of fact.

"Give us a hand, young 'un. I'm tired," it said.

Nipper swung round, to see the rather grey but smiling face of Nelson Lee peering across the water from only a few yards away.

"You, guv'nor!" he cried in wild delight. "Oh, thank Heaven—thank Heaven! I—I thought—"

"I was a goner—eh?" Lee said. "So did I!"

Lee caught hold of the wreckage and looked over grimly.

"This is the worst score up till now we've got to settle with Oscar Dene," he said slowly.

"That's what I was thinking, guv'nor. It was Oscar right enough!"

"Yes," Lee muttered. "And a neat scheme, too. He probably reckoned on running us down out here while we were both in the boat. It would just be put down to another boating fatality—and there's the end."

"But it isn't the end yet, by a long chalk!" growled Nipper grimly.

"We're not out of the wood yet," Lee said, and he peered over at the distant shore, receding swiftly as the tide carried them mercilessly towards the open Channel.

"If we're not picked up before dusk, then the game is up, young 'un!" Lee said grimly.

But for once in a while Nipper was the confirmed optimist. He refused to be dismayed, he would not even consent to regard the worst in a sober, calculating manner.

"Can you break off that loose bit of spar, guv'nor?" he said. "I've got a handkerchief round my waist, and—Hullo! What's this packet looming up?"

Directly ahead of them a squat, long, and powerful little vessel had come up over the horizon, a faint stream of smoke issuing from the two funnels. It was a formidable vessel of its type, and upon the high fo'c'sle just abaft the chain locker there were painted the code and number of her—X04.

Lee peered ahead, a gleam in his grey eyes.

10 CIRCUS CYCLONES. A Whirlwind Tale of two Motor-bike Daredevils.

"She's a new class destroyer, young 'un," he said. "One of the new type. Looks as if we're going to be run down again unless we can give a shout."

"She'll come across our bows, I think, gu'v'nor," Nipper said. "Give the word when you think she's close enough, and we'll shout together. And I'll wave this gadget, too!"

Nipper's teeth were chattering as he spoke, for the water, despite the warmth of the day, had begun to chill him. But he never for a moment allowed his spirits to droop.

The swiftly-moving destroyer, one of the most up-to-date afloat, came on, moving obliquely across their bows to the leeward of them, making considerably less noise than the racing launch which had so nearly spelt doom for both of them.

They could see a figure or two standing on the fo'c'sle, and the head of the officer on the bridge. Lee calculated that it would pass, at the nearest, three hundred yards away.

Get ready for a shout, young 'un," he said quietly. "Your life may depend on your lungs this evening."

He waited, watching, and then he glanced over at the lad.

"Now!"

They bellowed out at the tops of their voices. Lee's voice, deep and stentorian, Nipper's tailing off into a half-maniacal scream, which was, perhaps, more piercing and effective than the detective's. Immediately Nipper trod water with all his force, and waved his handkerchief frantically above his head.

The next instant there came an answering shout from the destroyer, followed by several stentorian orders, and the imperative clang of the bell as the navigation officer rang down to the engine-room.

The X04 slowed up quickly and swung round in a wide sweep, coming close up to where Lee and Nipper clung to the wreckage of their boat.

A bluejacket, clad only in trousers and a flannel vest, stood ready with a lifebelt attached to a rope as the destroyer came up.

"Hold on, there! We're throwing you a line," cried the officer on the bridge. "Are you all right?"

"Quite all right," Lee cried.

The lifebelt came swirling out towards them, accurately thrown, and Lee and Nipper seized it together. Several hands hauled on the line and drew them into the now stationary ship. A rope ladder was thrown over.

A few minutes later, cold and cramped, but quite cheerful, Lee and Nipper stood upon the steel deck of the destroyer, several of

the crew gazing at them with a grin, as though the affair was a joke. The commander of the ship, a lieutenant-commander in rank, descended from the bridge, and there was a humorous twinkle in his blue eyes as he surveyed them. He was clean-shaven, and, like so many men of his class, he looked younger than his years—hardly more than a boy.

"Lucky we saw you," he said laconically. "You'd better come below. Fetch a couple of blankets, petty officer."

A hard-bitten, ruddy-faced P.O. turned to one of the bluejackets and passed on the order in the time-honoured Navy manner. Lee and Nipper followed the officer down the companion-ladder to the ward-room. Almost immediately the ruddy-faced P.O. turned up with the blankets.

"Here, put these round you. You're a bit chilly, I dare say. What were you doing—bathing?"

"Not exactly," said Lee. "We were bathing from a small boat."

"And you capsized—eh?"

"No; we were run down!"

"What!" The lieutenant-commander stared at Lee incredulously. "Run down—who

the deuce ran you down?"

"A motor-launch. Cut right through us. That was the remains of the boat we were hanging on to!"

"Jumping Josephs!" exclaimed the commander. "Is that so? A launch cut through you? And you mean that she didn't pick you up?"

"No," said Lee, with a smile which puzzled the officer.

"And why not, in Mike's name?"

"Because she thought she'd sunk us. Dead men tell no tales and claim no damages," Lee said. And the officer whistled as he stared at him.

"The pig-dog!" he said. "I suppose you didn't notice the tally of this launch? I'll make a report of this. It's murderous!"

"It was!" Lee said significantly.

The officer pursed his lips thoughtfully and took a quick glance out of one of the ports. A figure passed the door of the cabin, and he called the man quickly. It was the steward, and it was not long before the detective and his assistant were partaking of warming and welcome refreshment.

"I suppose your kit went down with the boat—eh?" the commander said.

"Yes. We had been bathing, unfortunately," the detective said.

"I must try to find you something. By the way, what is your name?"

"A familiar one, rather. Lee—Nelson Lee."

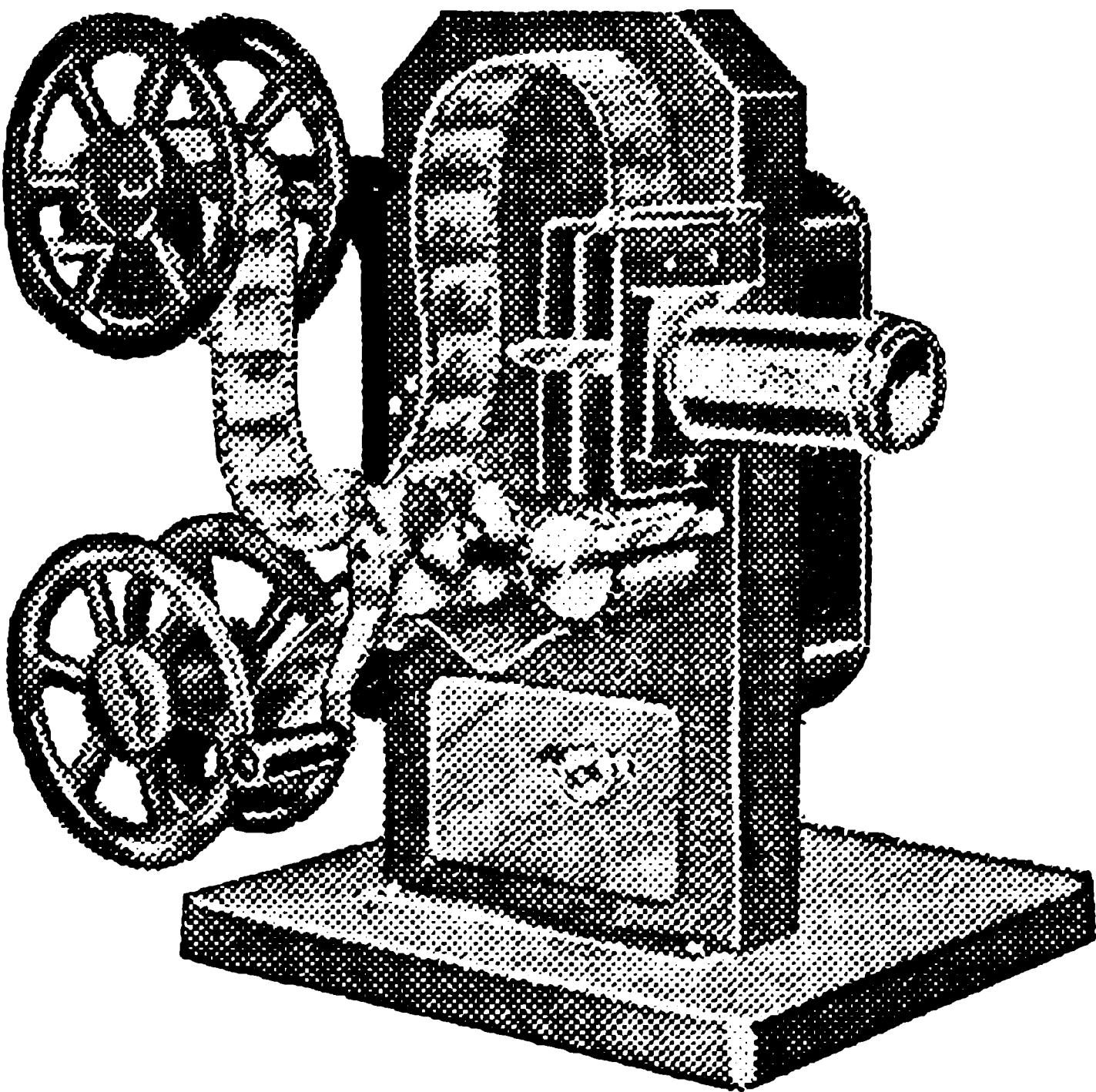
(Continued on page 12.)

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"Home Cinema" Prize,
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.),

so as to reach that address not later than Wednesday, January 18th.

Entries arriving after this closing date cannot be accepted.

SPECIAL NOTE.—KEEP A COPY OF YOUR ENTRY, because as soon as all entries are under seal, the **CORRECT SOLUTION** will appear in our companion paper, the "Gem," issue dated February 11th. All competitors must make sure they watch the "Gem," so that they can check their entries by this solution, and those whose attempts contain six errors or less will have to send in a claim for the prize. Full particulars for claiming will be given with the solution in the "Gem"—remember the date!

RULES (to be strictly adhered to) The Home Cinema will be awarded to the competitor whose solution is correct, or most nearly so; and the 100 Model Planes in order of merit. In the event of more ties, the value of the prizes may be divided.

All solutions must be written IN INK on the "Home Cinema" coupon. Entries mutilated, or which bear alterations or more than one letter in each space, will be disqualified. Responsibility cannot be taken for delay or loss in the post or otherwise. No correspondence will be allowed, and the decision of the Editor will be final and binding. Employees of the proprietors of this paper must not compete. The Correct Solution will appear in the "Gem," issue dated February 11th, 1933, and competitors must get it to check their entries. Failure to claim by the date stated will entail forfeiture of all interest in the competition.

"Home Cinema" Contest					
1	What you are reading now.	P	A	P	R
2	Footballers wear them.	S	H	R	T
3	A bright light.	F	L	A	E
4	Well-known animal.		A	T	
5	To keep.		E	T	A
6	A boy's name.		I	M	
7	Used in cricket.	B	A	L	
8	Something to sit on.	S	E	T	T
9	Tear.	R	E	N	
10	Uneven.		A	C	G
11	A length of wood.	P		L	E
12	Another animal.	B		A	R

I agree to accept the Editor's decision.

SIGNED _____

ADDRESS _____

(Continued from page 10.)

"Not the detective?" exclaimed the officer quickly.

"The same," Lee said with a smile. "This is my assistant."

The officer's manner changed immediately. He stared at them with renewed interest, and his air of slight patronage and admonition vanished like magic.

"Jumping Josephs! And somehow I thought your face was familiar. You were pointed out to me once by a pal of mine in town. Look here, Mr. Lee"—his blue eyes grew suddenly serious—"this puts a new complexion on things, you know. This wasn't foul play, was it?"

"Yes," said Lee simply. "I think it was!"

"My hat! Then what will you do?"

"There is probably very little to do. I must wait and see, Commander—er—"

"Briggs—James Briggs—lieutenant-commander. But I've got some civvies in my cabin. I reckon they ought to fit you passably well." He glanced through the port-hole again. "We're running in now. Come with me."

He led the way out of the ward-room to the beautifully appointed little cabin which was his "den" when he was not on deck. He passed over to a chest of drawers—a fixture—and, opening them quickly, threw out several suits casually.

He had all the open-hearted, free-and-easy manner of the born sailorman, and he had also that shell of reserve, of snobbery, which keeps men at a distance until he has seen his social passports. The social status of a man in a bathing costume is hard to perceive, consequently, with the ingrained habit of his class, Lieutenant-Commander Briggs had been circumspect.

Now, however, that he knew who Lee was, he went almost to the extreme of amiable hospitality.

"Climb into which of those you please, Mr. Lee. Help yourself. And, if you want anything, sing out. I've got to get up topsides. We're running in."

From the wardrobe of Lieutenant-Commander Briggs, of the XO4, they chose a minimum of underclothes, some grey flannels and two thick submarine sweaters of fine wool, which was more effective from the point of view of warmth than the thickest overcoat.

This attire, moreover, whilst being quite passable in a seaside town, dispensed with the unpleasant trimmings of a collar and tie. Lee stood erect and swung his arms and limbs about in the narrow confines of the cabin to stimulate a tardy circulation, for their immersion had been a pretty long one.

He paused suddenly, and Nipper followed his eyes as Lee stared over at the little shelf by the glass, whereon the commander had arrayed a little collection of favourite photographs. Lee's eyes were fixed upon one which bore pride of place in the centre of them all—although it was only small.

"What is it, gov'nor?"

Lee did not answer. He moved instead with a quick step across the cabin and peered eagerly at the photograph. In the strange eyes, which seemed vividly to return his scrutiny from the mantel, there was an expression at once familiar and inscrutable, imparted by a slight droop to the eyelids. A fascinating smile which held a suggestion of mockery played about the exquisite lips of the girl who had sat for the portrait.

Nipper had followed Lee, and now he bent, peering over his shoulder. And an exclamation of sheer amazement broke from his lips in the same instant.

"Great Scott, gov'nor!" he gasped. "How did that get here? It—it is Gloria!"

But Nelson Lee had already taken the portrait from the shelf and was studying it closely, his brows knit, and his mouth drawn in a firm line.

It was Gloria van Duren! It was the girl—the accomplice of Oscar Dene, whom Lee had interviewed a few days previously. There seemed to be about this beautiful adventuress some subtle witchery which haunted them wherever they found themselves!

CHAPTER 4.

The Dockyard.

IN the private room which Nelson Lee and Nipper had engaged at the famous Fleet Hotel, at Portsmouth, the detective, clad now in a suit of tweeds, sat back in his easy-chair and surveyed Nipper through a blue haze of tobacco smoke.

They had just been discussing their adventures, and setting down what few facts were in their possession. Gloria, with two disguised accomplices, had travelled down from Waterloo, but despite the men set by Inspector Harker at Fratton, and the Town and Harbour stations, they had not been seen again. But they might easily have changed their disguises en route. They were all expert at such tricks.

But one thing had been established beyond all doubt. Somehow Gloria van Duren had become engaged to Lieutenant-Commander Briggs, of the XO4. They could not tell what the game was, but it was evidently something big that Oscar Dene was planning, for on seeing the detective and his assistant in the neighbourhood, he had deliberately tried to sweep them from his path by murdering them.

"It is instinct with us," said Lee, "that makes us look for trouble whenever a member of Oscar's gang turns up, and, you see, young 'un, we're dead right!"

He glanced up as the waiter entered the room.

"You are wanted on the 'phone, sir," he said.

"Who is it?"

"Harker is the name, sir."

The detective shot a quick glance at Nipper and passed into the small box containing the hotel 'phone. He recognised the voice of Harker at the other end.

"Hallo, Lee," the Yard man said cheerily. "Having a good time?"

"Excellent," said Lee, smiling.

"Boating and bathing, eh?"

"Yes," said Lee, smiling grimly. "We had a nice long swim yesterday. There's plenty down here to relieve the monotony."

"Good!" said the Yard man, not detecting the note of irony in Lee's tone. "Good! You'll feel better for the change, Lee. By the way, I don't want to worry you unduly, but have you seen anything of our—our friends?"

"Nothing to speak of," Lee said vaguely.

"Have you seen them at all?"

"I'm—well, not certain," the detective said.

"You have not even seen the girl?"

"No!"

"Then I thought I'd ring you. She has been seen by one of our own men. He is on holidays at Waterlooville—over the Ports-down Hills. You know the spot?"

"Quite well," said Lee. "Who is the man?"

"Castor. His parents live thereabouts. He rung through to-day to say he had seen a girl whom he believes to be Gloria van Duren. He knows her. You may remember he helped us in a former case with Oscar Dene's crowd. He says she was with a naval officer."

"Ah-h!" exclaimed Lee. "What rank?"

"Lieutenant-Commander," Harker said. "Mind you, Castor might have been mistaken, but I thought I'd just ring—"

"Yes. Thanks. He isn't mistaken. Give my compliments to Castor, will you? It was good of him!"

"How do you know he isn't mistaken?" Harker asked quickly.

"Several reasons," the detective said shortly. "I'll let you know later on, perhaps. Nothing special at the Yard, I suppose?"

"No new cases. But some of the old ones hanging fire. I wish you could spare time to get busy on one or two. Still, we're not worrying. So-long!"

Lee bade him good-bye, and put up the receiver. He did not return to Nipper in the small room they used as a private lounge.

Instead he passed through into the bedroom, and from the wardrobe withdrew a small suitcase containing the clothes which had been so kindly lent them by the commander of the X04. He looked through into the next room.

"Nipper!"

"Yes, guv'nor?"

"I don't think I'll send this bag back to the dockyard after all. We'll take it."

"Take it, guv'nor? When?"

"Now, young 'un. We may find Commander Briggs aboard his packet. If not, I'll leave a note for him. Are you ready?"

In a few moments they were outside the hotel, and a taxi bore them quickly down by

the tram route and around by the famous yard, to the dockyard gates.

As they alighted and approached the gate a stalwart policeman moved up to them. He was a man who had been drafted from the Metropolitan Police, and had a trained memory for faces—one of the qualifications of his post. He stared hard at the detective. Then he muttered:

"Is it Mr. Lee, the detective?"

"That's so, constable. I've got a bag here belonging to Commander Briggs. I want to return it."

"Briggs, sir?" he said thoughtfully. "Briggs? Ah! You mean Lieutenant-Commander Briggs of the destroyer X04. Don't you trouble, sir. I'll drop it to one of his hands as he is coming aboard."

"No; I think I'll take it myself, thanks, constable. Has the X04 shifted into dock yet?"

"No. I don't think she's going, either, sir. She's still off the pontoon there, abaft the jetty. Shall I get someone to—"

"No, thanks. We can find it," the detective said, and he moved forward, with Nipper following, into the huge dockyard. They crossed a line of rails, stepped carefully over a wire hawser or two, and came presently to the jetty where a couple of destroyers were berthed. Upon the bows of the farther one they saw plainly the inscription: "X04."

The tide was out, and Lee and Nipper made their way down the wall-ladder, stepping over to the iron deck of the nearer craft. The patrol awaited them curiously.

"X04, sir? Yes. Do you want the skipper, sir?"

"Yes. Lieutenant-Commander Briggs."

"I believe I saw him go ashore, sir; But you can inquire. I believe the lieutenant is aboard, sir."

Lee and Nipper stepped across the ship and on to the X04. An officer, looking very fed-up, was reclining in a deck-chair, smoking, a book in his hand.

He rose as Lee stepped aboard.

"Briggs?" he said in reply to Lee's inquiry. "He's ashore. But, no. I'm wrong. He isn't. He is on the Ulysses."

"Is that the four-funnel battle-cruiser?"

"Yes, the big fellow—in dry dock. You'd pass her coming along from the main gates. She's to be broken up."

"Finished with?"

"That's it. Been a fine old packet in her time, but her days are numbered, now."

"Have they got some festivities aboard her?" Lee asked, for his keen eyes and ears had missed nothing. "I heard the music of a very fine string band aboard as I came by."

"Yes, for sure. There's a dance aboard her. I was going myself, but I've got this con-founded watch to do. Are you a friend of—of Briggs?"

"No," Lee said. "Just an acquaintance. But that is my misfortune. I believe he is a very good chap."

"One of the best," the lieutenant said. "He's a good fellow. Between you and me,

he ought to be aboard now. We've got special instructions to stand by. Something special in the offing. But, of course, if any word comes through I know where to find him."

Lee nodded and smiled.

"I've just returned a bit of gear Commander Briggs was good enough to lend us," Lee said. "We were run down a day or two ago by a motor-launch in Spithead, and the X04 picked us up. It was not a very pleasant experience."

"Oh! You're the couple?" the officer exclaimed, looking at them with added interest. "Of course, Briggs told me! I have just returned off a week's leave. I was not aboard. Gee, but it was not very pleasant for you. I've been in the 'ditch' myself for three hours—one Boxing Day morning—so I know. And you've returned the slops, eh? Right-o, I'll tell Briggs when he comes aboard—which," he added, with a wink, "won't be before the early hours."

"Is he keen on dancing?" Lee asked, smiling.

"He can't dance," the lieutenant said, laughing. "A rhinoceros is a faun compared with him. He takes a partner round about as gracefully as a porter takes a milk-churn. But it isn't only the dance he's going for."

"A special attraction?" laughed Lee, although Nipper could see how discreetly he was pumping.

"Yes. He's taking a certain little craft in tow. She's been aboard to tea once or twice. A perfect peach. Poor old Briggs is water-logged and derelict—head over heels in love! But he'll survive it."

"Sailors usually do," laughed Lee, taking his leave, and presently he and Nipper made their way back up the iron ladder to the quay, and threaded their way back towards the huge dry dock, the colossal dimensions of which gave one a proper conception of the huge size of the ship which lay there.

The Ulysses stood, her keel resting upon great timbers of oak, her balance maintained by huge timbers and stays connecting, like horizontal scaffolds, the sides of the ship with the walls of the basin.

After long and trying service in war and peace, the Ulysses was at last going out of commission. She had already passed into the hands of the dockyard maties, and there was in progress a farewell dance—a few more hours of merriment tinged with the sadness of parting from that best of friends—an old ship.

Nelson Lee noticed as he approached the basin that the broad after-deck of the Ulysses—a perfect place for a dance—had been freely littered with pieces of old machinery and various perquisites of the workmen. Thus, perforce, the festivities were being held on the broad "flat" immediately below, from which the lights streamed garishly, and every now and then through one of the open ports the detective and Nipper caught sight of a piece of swiftly moving colour as one of the dancers passed rhythmically by.

"I guess if Gloria is here, guv'nor," Nipper muttered, "she will be moving among some of the élite."

"Which she can do with perfect ease," Lee said, pursing his lips as he paused by the step of the gangway.

Against the dark background of superstructure at the other end he saw the vague watching shadow of the quartermaster.

"What are you going to do, guv'nor?" Nipper asked.

Lee shrugged his shoulders, his own mind not yet made up. Of all times, this was assuredly the most unpropitious in which to speak a few plain truths to the rather unbalanced commander. But a certain curiosity made Lee very disinclined to go away without taking a certain modest peep, at least, at the festivities. Yet he hardly knew what pretext to use in order to get aboard.

For some minutes he stood silently, then he turned to Nipper.

"Remain here a few minutes, young 'un. I think I'll have a nose round."

This was the sort of duty which Nipper found it hardest of all to fulfil with a good spirit. There was nothing he detested more than the stagnation of mere waiting. He had not even received the injunction to watch. So he moved a little farther along, sank down upon a bollard, and stared at the flitting shadows as they passed an open port in the vessel beyond.

Lee moved up the gangway, and the quartermaster stepped forward.

"Is Lieutenant-Commander Briggs aboard from the X04?"

"Yes, sir. Are you his guest, sir?"

"No. I was wondering if I could see him!"

"Is it important, sir? If so, I'll send a messenger down."

"Don't trouble to do that. I dare say I can find him myself. I just wanted a word with him. That was all. May I go down?"

"Yes, sir. I dare say you can. Down the second 'atch, sir. Turn astern when you get down, sir. It's on the after gun flat."

Nelson Lee nodded his thanks and passed below.

Meanwhile, Nipper remained and watched, and waited, rather fed-up. For some minutes after he had seen Lee's figure pass up the gangway and disappear he had sat silently upon the bollard, his eyes fixed upon the maze of motley which moved constantly by the open porthole at which he gazed.

He could see enough colour and drapery to know that the setting of the dance was not lacking in picturesqueness. The naval man is a past-master at arranging jollifications, at conjuring bright scenes of revelry by night out of the limited articles of ships stores.

"I guess Gloria is tripping around all right in there," the lad mused, "with Commander Briggs dangling on a ropes' end. I'd like to take a quiz at her. If she ain't got up to kill to-night, I reckon she never will be."

He remained sitting on the bollard staring thoughtfully. After a few minutes he voiced his thoughts aloud.

"I would like to take a quiz at her," he murmured.

As the lad sat there the wish grew from an idle curiosity into a positive desire. From a positive desire it became soon enough a minor craving. That illuminated port held him fascinated. He wanted to peer through it.

He rose to his feet and stepped to the edge of the deck. A light hanging out above the after gangway found a dim reflection in the dark water a hundred feet below. The supporting stays showed faintly, like protruding ribs from the ship.

One of these stays entered a socket in the quayside three or four feet below the point where Nipper stood. He followed it with his eyes and saw that it met the ship's side a couple of feet below and a foot or so forward of the porthole he had been watching.

"If I slithered along there," he muttered to himself, "I could take a good look at the merriment."

Without further ado he leaned the suit-case against the bollard and sat down upon the edge of the dry dock. He lowered himself cautiously until his feet rested upon the scaffold, and then, gripping the stonework with his fingers he stooped until he slid down astride of the stay.

He glanced down into the depths below—dark and forbidding, and for a moment he wondered if he were not a prize fool for taking the risk. But adventure and risk were the breath of life to the lad.

In the darkness it was not easy to preserve a sense of balance on the narrow scaffold. He slid his way along, carefully covering the short distance to the ship's side in a few minutes. He was able to reach up and clutch the open window of the port and pull himself up.

The port was draped with bunting, which he thrust a little aside, and he peered into the flat, gazing at the same scene of rhythmic merriment which Lee had gazed at. His sharp eyes wandered round among the many couples, scanning the faces of the ladies especially.

He could not see the couple he was searching for. His gaze wandered away over towards the orchestra, and away from that to the other end of the flat—and then the lad's lips came together in tight compression.

He saw the figure of Gloria, her arm resting upon that of Lieutenant-Commander Briggs, and their attitude was that of two dancers who had paused for a moment to exchange a few pleasantries with a friend.

This friend was Nelson Lee. The youngster detected the tall, slim, well-knit figure standing back in the shadows. Nipper fixed his eye upon the trio, and he saw Lee speak. Then the girl laughed and drew her partner gently, but firmly, back into the dance-room, throwing a smiling glance over her shoulder

at the detective, upon whose face was a look of half grim, half of mockery.

"Hallo!" Nipper muttered. "So he's seen them—both! I—I wonder what the guv'nor has said to them?"

He peered through the port watching as the couple moved round on the flank of the dancers and came towards him. Looking from the outer darkness he could see their faces in every detail.

"I wonder if the guv'nor has put the commander wise about her?" he muttered. "Don't look as if he had. Briggs wouldn't be smiling quite so much like a Cheshire cat if he had any idea that Gloria was—Gloria van Duren!"

He watched the young commander as he led the girl over towards the port, and for a moment, as they stopped and he glanced up, Nipper shrank back, for the officer seemed to be staring straight at him.

"My Christian uncle," he muttered. "I hope he hasn't spotted me!"

But the naval commander had not seen. He merely indicated an easy-chair for his partner and sank into another beside her, under the porthole, half secluded by a broad palm, the leaves of which formed slats, as it were, through which Nipper had peered a moment before.

The lad edged forward farther along the stay, craning his neck to peer easier into the port. He did not see a crouching figure steal silently up the quayside, and with the agility of a cat lower itself to the very stay upon which he stood.

He was too engrossed with the scene of revelry inside to glance about him—though had he done so it is doubtful whether he would have seen the figure now—crouching like the sinister shape of an animal—at the end of the scaffold—a shadow hardly visible against the deep black of the quayside.

Nipper craned his neck and peered farther into the port. Beyond he could still see the vague figure of Lee standing. Below, he could still see the slight movement of a fan as it moved backwards and forwards.

Suddenly, as a hush came in the orchestra, the sound of a name came up to him distinctly, and he stiffened, listening.

"Lee is his name. Of course, I don't know anything about him except that he is a wonderful fellow professionally."

"I always think it takes a thief to catch a thief," the girl said with conviction.

"You mean the detective is as bad as the criminal?" he laughed.

"Worse, sometimes," she said vehemently.

"Yes, but they're necessary sort of fellows, old girl. Anyway, I'm sorry I introduced him to you. You see, it was almost impossible not to. I was speaking to him when you came and claimed me, and it would have been so infernally rude to—"

"Of course, Jimmy, don't think I mind in the least," she said quickly. "It is not you I am finding fault with. I judge a great deal by first impressions. And, in my opinion,

Mr. Lee had the face of a cad. I would not trust him if I were you."

"A cad?" exclaimed Briggs, genuinely surprised. "Fancy that! He never struck me that way."

"I have made a study of certain types of men—and cads," the girl added significantly. "I have a certain faculty for reading faces. I said this man—this detective—is a cad. So he is. He is the worst kind of a cad—a black-mailer."

"A what?" cried Briggs quickly.

"A blackmailer," she said quietly, and the expression upon the face of Nipper became more wry than ever.

"A blackmailer? Is that so? The pig-dog! But how do you know, old lady?"

"I don't know," she said, with a woman's artlessness. "How can I know if I have never seen the man before? But I tell you, Jimmy, I study faces. I know his type of face! That's all."

"H'm!" The young lieutenant-commander looked serious and stroked his chin, accepting as a proved fact a statement which, in his normal mind, he would have wanted proof before accepting.

The band struck up again in the merry cadence of a popular fox-trot, drowning, for Nipper's ears, any further conversation. But he had heard enough.

"So that's the way she is poisoning Briggs' mind against us," he muttered to himself. "So long as we know——"

He stopped. The clutch of his fingers tightened automatically upon the window of the port. A sudden, iron-like grip had come silently and without warning upon his ankle, dragging him down as he stood there.

The lad did not cry out; he seldom did in an emergency. But a swift and terrible vision came to him of the death which lay a hundred feet below. In a flash he pictured himself pitching down headlong, crashing mercilessly from stay to stay till he plunged smashed and broken, into the brackish water at the bottom of the dock.

A cold chill ran down his spine; he had to fight against a numbing of the joints—a sudden unnerving which left him momentarily powerless, impotent.

And then his nerve returned, his will to fight—the tiger spirit which never failed the lad. He allowed his foot to go slowly, crouching as he lowered it—and then suddenly he kicked—kicked like a mule.

A snarl came from below, the first indication by any sound of his assailant. He stood upon one leg—the other kicking in the air. And then, swiftly and murderously, the other leg of Nipper's was swept from under him. He gasped as he fell, tearing at the lip of the port—but failing to grasp it. He came down astride the stay and swung round quickly, just as a small figure leapt upon him like a tiger. He felt a pair of sinuous hands tighten about his throat.

"Now, you die!" a voice hissed in broken English, and even in the fleeting terror of that moment it flashed in upon the mind of

the lad who his assailant was. It was Sandrez, the Spanish thug, the accomplice of Oscar Dene. He had, perhaps, been the secret bodyguard of Gloria—the silent watcher!

Seated astride the narrow scaffold, Nipper clung with his thighs as he had never even clung to the flanks of a bucking horse. The fiendish nails of the murderous Spaniard bit into his throat. He was forced back against the ship's side, and for this he was glad. Had he not had this support he would have fallen. He could not have saved himself.

He lay back against the steel plates, and then, holding his breath, he shot out his hand and seized the rather Semitic nose of his assailant. He gripped the protuberance like a vice, and, with the base of the thumb pressing underneath it he thrust it back with all his energy.

A stifled scream of sheer agony broke from the lips of the Spaniard; his hold upon Nipper's throat relaxed noticeably. And, in the moment of relaxation the lad exerted what reserve of energy he had kept in hand. He put all his weight into a final thrust, and the Spaniard reeled back, unable to resist, to endure the agonies of the ju-jitsu hold.

Sandrez shook his head wildly to shake off the hold, and Nipper leaned forward, forgetting for a moment the peril of his position upon the scaffold. But he remembered a moment later as the Spaniard shook him free and he pitched forward, closing with him, fighting like a man demented. It was like two drunken men fighting upon the girder of a skyscraper. It was only a question of moments before one came crashing to his doom.

As Nipper fell forward he met a smashing blow in the face from the Spaniard. A hoarse laugh broke from Sandrez as Nipper fell.

The youngster's foot slipped outwards; he swayed, and then, with a low gasp, he fell, plunging feet downwards—down with ever-increasing momentum—down into the abyss.

No scream or cry broke the hollow silence of the basin. There came only a low, diabolical laugh from the beam above, as a panther-like figure darted along, hauled himself up on to the quay, and was lost in the shadows!

CHAPTER 5.

The Folly of Commander Briggs.

PROPPED up by pillows, his face still white as alabaster, but with something of the old mischievous brightness returning to his eyes, Nipper lay in the Fleet Hotel.

A doctor had diagnosed his case as one of violent shock and minor concussion, and upon hearing, more or less, what had happened to the young lad, he informed Nipper that he had no logical right to be alive.

For anyone to escape death in such a fall was almost unbelievable, but as it happened, he had fallen on an enormous heap of wood shavings and rubbish at the bottom of the dock.

Nelson Lee had missed him when he had left the *Ulysses*. He had found the suit-case, and sensing danger had looked around and found feet marks on the stay—not only Nipper's marks but also the marks left by a small pair of feet—marks he had seen before—the trail left by Sandrez, Oscar Dene's hired Spanish murderer.

senger entered, bearing a card. Lee glanced at it and handed it to Nipper. The lad looked rather astonished.

"Lieutenant-Commander Briggs, gov'nor. Were you expecting him?"

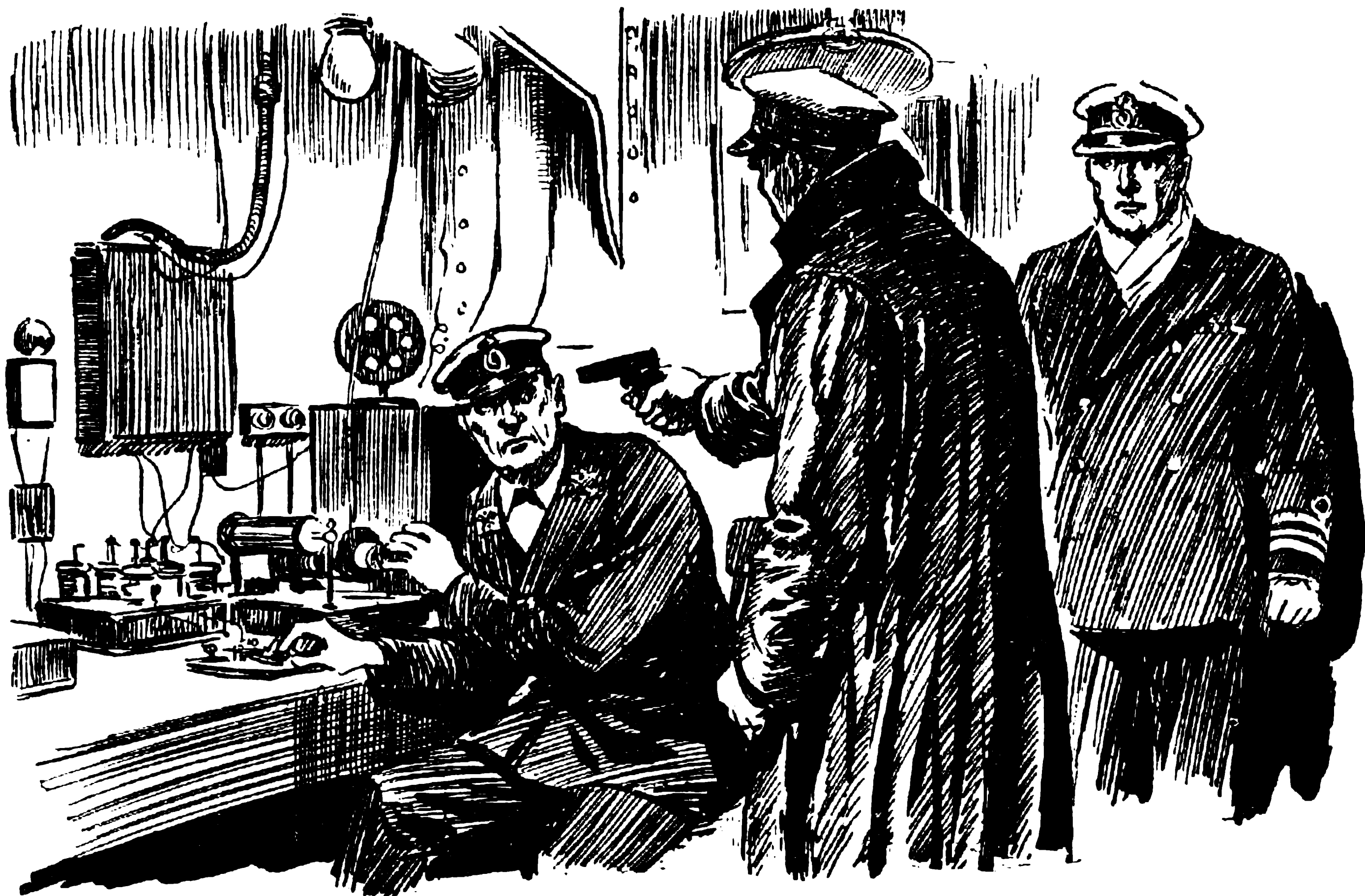
"I was not sure."

"You had asked him to call."

"Yes. But after what you told me this morning about the conversation you overheard——"

"You mean Gloria saying you were a black-mailer?"

"Yes. After that I hardly expected him



The pirate turned his revolver on the wireless operator. "Now call up the Admiralty," he said, "and send what I dictate to you. Let me warn you, I can understand morse, so be careful!"

It had been easy after that to guess what had happened, and a search-party armed with electric torches had soon found the unconscious lad.

Nipper had been scared enough at the time. He admitted that. But he had cheated death once more, and could now laugh at his own folly in taking such a risk.

As for Nelson Lee, all he had to report to Nipper was that Gloria van Duren was posing as a charming young lady named Miss Poppy Dulieu, and that she had pretended not to recognise the famous detective, having treated him as if she had never set eyes on him before in her life.

And now Lee had written to the commander asking him to call at the hotel to hear something of advantage to himself. Briggs had to be warned of his lady friend.

There came a tap on the door of the bedroom at that moment, and an hotel mes-

senger entered, bearing a card. Lee glanced at it and handed it to Nipper. The lad looked rather astonished.

"Lieutenant-Commander Briggs, gov'nor. Were you expecting him?"

"I was not sure."

"You had asked him to call."

"Yes. But after what you told me this morning about the conversation you overheard——"

"You mean Gloria saying you were a black-mailer?"

"Yes. After that I hardly expected him

tive's credentials had already been seriously discredited.

And there was some reflection of this on the face of Commander Briggs when he entered the bed-room. The air of genial good-fellowship had entirely disappeared; his manner was coldly formal.

When Lee offered him his hand he took it with an obvious reluctance, and dropped it with an equally obvious haste. At Nipper in the sick bed he merely nodded curtly.

Evidently the soft-spoken calumny of "Miss Poppy Dulieu," one more romantic assumed name of the adventuress—had had its effect.

"You wish to see me urgently, Mr. Lee, I believe," the young officer said quickly. "I am rather in haste. If you could hurry through as soon as possible——"

It was a very near approach to a snub, but Lee preferred to ignore it. His manner towards the young officer was formal and earnest.

"I should not have brought you here, Commander Briggs, if the matter had not been serious—and urgent. You remember, when you picked up my assistant and I from the water that I related how we had been deliberately rammed by a fast launch. The launch came upon me while I was swimming, and did its best to put me under. After that it charged on the small boat in which my assistant was, and cut it through. He escaped narrowly with his life, as I did. It was murder—deliberate, cold-blooded murder."

"Yes," said the commander quickly. "I—I remember, of course. I did what—what was necessary. I logged the matter fully, and I made a special report to the C.-in-C. The powers rung me up afterwards, and I had to go down to the flag captain. I told him exactly what you told me, and he pooh-poohed it. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'Rubbish! Launches don't charge down small boats for the purpose. Some fool probably lost control. That's the size of it. Like cows with a musket. One Brixton pirate ramming another, and the fool didn't stop because he didn't know how to. 'Lucky you picked 'em up, Briggs.' That was all I got out of it, Mr. Lee. I think they thought I was a bit gullible to make such a report!" And he added, rather cuttingly: "Perhaps I was!"

Lee flushed a little under the gibe. Knowing what he did, it tried his patience to the utmost to endure the thinly-veiled insult of this officer. The detective and Nipper had had too much experience themselves of the type of amateur yachtsmen, popularly known as the "Brixton pirate," to wish to be classed in the same category.

"In the matter of gullibility, Commander Briggs," he said meaningly, "there are some naval officers who have a distinct gift that way."

"What do you mean?" Briggs said quickly.

"They will swallow most things—except the truth," Lee said.

"I haven't time to listen to generalisations about the Navy, Mr. Lee. Perhaps you will come to the point."

"Willingly, since it was you who strayed from it. Despite the C.-in-C. and the flag-captain and all the officials in this historic port, Commander Briggs," Lee said quietly. "I assert once again that two desperadoes in a motor-launch made a deliberate attempt to murder my assistant and myself the other evening. I have a very fair suspicion who they were."

"Ah, you have?"

"Yes. One of them was a man named Oscar Dene. Have you heard of him?"

"I believe I have—a stealer of State secrets."

"Exactly. He is acknowledged by the police of two continents to be the most dangerous criminal in the world," Lee said quietly. "He is the master-mind of a syndicate which has had no equals in the annals of crime."

The naval officer smiled a little sceptically.

"This sounds like a detective story, Mr. Lee!"

"So it is," Lee said grimly, "in many ways. If you want confirmation, Scotland Yard or the C.I.D. will give it you."

"I don't doubt your word, but——"

"It is more or less immaterial to me what you believe or disbelieve," Lee said shortly.

LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER NEXT WEEK!



"I think it is my duty to give you a statement of fact. After that"—he shrugged his shoulders—"the responsibility rests with you."

"But supposing this is Oscar Dene—or whatever you call him—how does it affect me?" he demanded. "I am not a policeman."

"No. But you have a duty to the State higher than that."

"But what are you driving at?" the officer said rather irritably.

Lee jerked his thumb towards his assistant in the bed.

"You see Nipper there?"

"Yes."

"You are not aware that while I was speaking to you last night on the *Ulysses*, he was murderously assaulted and thrown into the dry-dock?"

"What? Your assistant? Last night?" Commander Briggs exclaimed, staring over at Nipper's pallid features.

"During the few minutes I was speaking to you and Miss—er—Miss Dulieu!"

"He was thrown into the dock? Who by?"

"By a member of the same gang, the Oscar Dene Syndicate," Lee said. "He fell from the top to the bottom of the basin in which the *Ulysses* is lying. He had a miraculous escape from death!"

The naval officer stared at Nipper in-

credulously. Then once more he turned to Lee, slightly puzzled, more than a little irritable.

"This is very strange—damnable! But it's a matter for the dock policeman—the proper authorities. I completely fail to see how it can affect me."

"It does, in this respect," Lee said quietly. "Its affects you seriously to be compromised."

"Compromised?" he cried angrily. "I don't follow you."

"You are prepared for a shock?" Lee asked.

"Go on! What are you driving at? Mouth it out—"

"Kindly be civil, Mr. Briggs. You don't imagine I get any pleasure out of this? I refer to this lady with whom you are on such terms of friendship."

The face of the young officer changed colour. He went very pale, and his eyes blazed dangerously as he gazed at Lee. But the detective's expression remained grim and earnest.

"Do you refer to my fiancée?"

"Yes."

"Miss Dulieu?"

"No. Certainly not!" Lee said. "In the capacity of a detective, I cannot accept an alias. I refer to Miss Gloria van Duren, a dangerous criminal and adventuress, Commander Briggs. The chief and most valued accomplice of the arch-criminal, Oscar Dene!"

The naval officer stared at Lee, and he was too much aghast to be suddenly angry. He laughed bitterly, ironically.

"You are a fool, man!" he cried. "You are drunk—drunk!"

"Perhaps I am as drunk as you are gentlemanly," Lee said caustically. "I'll trouble you not to be abusive."

"But you are mad, man! You can't know what you're saying. Poppy an adventuress—the criminal accomplice of a murderer! It is silly—just that! Imbecile!"

"So it may appear to you in your present state of mental balance," Lee said dryly. "I can only repeat what I say. She is a dangerous character."

The young officer threw back his head and laughed raucously. Then his face became serious; his eyes blazed anger.

"You lie! You lie! This is blackmail!" the officer cried.

He seemed to have been waiting, hoping for this. His faith—his blind faith in the girl who had captivated him—clutched eagerly at this straw—this straw of blackmail. Lee smiled grimly.

"Please refrain from being a fool," he muttered. "I have no sentiment in this matter. You cannot expect me to have. I am simply making a statement of fact. If you want proof of that statement, then send to Scotland Yard the portrait you have in the middle of your mantel in your cabin, and ask them to identify it."

Anger, wild fury, blazed in the eyes of the young commander. He took a step forward,

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his fists clenched, his teeth hard together. Lee had, perforce, wounded his pride as it had never before been hurt.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered between his teeth. "I have a mind to thrash you for this!"

"It will be in your best interest not to try anything so silly," Lee said earnestly.

Lieutenant-Commander Briggs glared at him and then at the lad in the bed. Then, almost speechless with rage, he swung out of the room and stamped down the stairs of the hotel.

Lee glanced over at Nipper and shrugged his shoulders, smiling rather grimly.

"I somehow feared that he would take it like that," he said. "He is a decent fellow, but a fool. Heaven help you, young 'un, if ever you fall in love. When Cupid comes in at the door, common sense does a fox-trot up the chimney."

Nipper smiled.

"It seems to me that Mr. Briggs has been too well primed with lies to believe anything you told him, guv'nor."

"It is not difficult to disbelieve anything which you dearly want to be untrue," Lee said. "But what I have told Briggs may bear fruit. It will make him rather restless, anyhow."

He moved over to the window, and gazed thoughtfully down into the street, watching the passers-by absently. He turned presently.

"I'd like to get some clue as to Dene's motive in all this," he muttered.

"In trying to kill us?" Nipper queried.

"No. That is merely because he finds our presence here a bit awkward. I mean that I'd like to see through this game he has set Gloria to play."

"With Commander Briggs?"

"Yes. There is some deep-laid scheme in which Briggs probably will be the principal dupe," Lee said.

Nipper gazed thoughtfully towards the window.

"Is he a chap with large means, guv'nor?" he asked presently.

"No. I have made a few inquiries. I believe he has about two hundred a year on top of his pay. That is not enough to attract Oscar Dene and Gloria."

"Good lor', no!"

"I can get no clue at all. That is why I am going up to town."

"To town? When?"

"Now. It will take me two hours, not more, in the car."

"And I've got to lie here like an idiot?"

"No, like a wise man."

The lad made a comical grimace. Then he said:

"Where are you going, guv'nor?"

"To the Admiralty—to see Jeannod."

Apparently Lee had made up his mind swiftly in these few minutes of gazing out of the window. Now, his mind made up, he acted quickly.

In a few minutes his big car was brought round from the garage, and less than fifteen

minutes later he was speeding out along the London Road, through the North End and Cosham, over the famous gun-lined hills of Portsdown, through Petersfield and Haslemere, on to Guildford, and the metropolis.

While others were kept waiting—chivvied here and there by pensioners and porters—Lee's card secured him entry without delay to the small office where sat the man with whom Lee had been to school—a rather wizened, inscrutable-faced little man, who carried more State secrets in his large bald head than many a Cabinet Minister.

For a man of his knowledge and responsibility he had the faculty of looking blandly innocent of everything, and the look he directed at Lee was almost inane.

"Well, Lee, old fellow," he said, "what trouble are you making for yourself now?"

"I'm busy trying to save some for your people, Jeannod," the detective said with a smile.

"Good—good! Sit down. Now, what is it?"

"I want you to do me a special favour," Lee said, and the little man put up both hands in protest.

"Impossible! Impossible!" And then he smiled slowly.

"I want a little information—inside," Lee said in a low tone.

"I am bound to secrecy," said Jeannod firmly.

"So am I," said Lee. "I am just angling round on what may be a big catch, Jeannod. There are a few items of information I think you could supply me with."

"But, my dear Lee!"

"Look here," Lee said, with a smile. "If I go and fetch the Chief Commissioner, and he brings along the First Lord, would you be disposed to part with the information?"

"Yes, yes! Carry on! I am only joking, old fellow. I know you are as safe as the bank. But it's always better for me to have these things officially."

"Quite. I appreciate that," Lee said. "But I want it all unofficially—just at present. There may be nothing in it."

"What is it?"

"It concerns a certain destroyer—the XO4, of Portsmouth. Is there anything special about her?"

"What do you mean—anything special?"

"Has she carried any important dispatches, or is she going to—or anything like that?" Lee asked.

Jeannod looked at Lee blandly through his spectacles. His expression did not alter, but he leaned a little closer to the detective.

"Who's been talking to you about the XO4?"

"Not a soul, Jeannod."

"Then why this question?"

"Because Nipper and I were picked up by her during this week," he said, "and my curiosity has been aroused."

The ghost of a smile flitted across the face of Jeannod.

"I see," he muttered, "you are not going to give away any details yet—eh?"

"I prefer not to for the moment, Jeannie," Lee said, calling him by the nickname he had always held at school. "I just wanted to know whether——"

"Yes. Well, between you and me and the post. Lee, your surmise is correct. The XO4 is being sent across to Hamburg in a day or two on a special commission."

"Very special?"

"Of very great importance," the other emphasised, and Lee tapped reflectively with his fingers upon the desk for some moments.

"Am I too much out of order in asking what this commission is, Jeannie? I need not assure you that it is in the interests of the State that I want to know."

Jeannod shrugged his shoulders and pouted. It was rather a big thing to ask.

"I don't mind telling you, Jeannie," Lee added, "that I will have this information if I have to ask the Chief Commissioner to get the First Lord and see the Home Office chief——"

Jeannod smiled enigmatically. He paused thoughtfully for a moment; then he leaned farther forward still. He muttered one word.

"Bullion!" he whispered, and Lee sprang up from his chair like a man stung.

"Vale of Jehos! Is that so?" he cried.

"Yes. What's the matter, Lee?"

"Nothing, yet," the detective said. "You are certain of this, Jeannod?"

"Quite," said the other in a low tone. "It was decided some time ago. But, naturally, we've had to take extreme care."

And the detective nodded grimly as he stood, his hands behind him, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the traffic which passed slowly along the historic Whitehall.

He was thinking rapidly. He had no need to seek further for the motives that lay behind the extraordinary activities of Oscar Dene and Gloria van Duren. This matter of the bullion shipment might have been kept very secret, but somehow the arch-criminal had heard of it, and was laying his plans to steal the cargo from under the nose of the British Navy!

Lee suddenly turned and sat down close to Jeannod. They conversed for some time almost in whispers. Lee told all he knew, and made suggestions.

"I should like Nipper to be aboard the XO4 when she sails," he said eventually, "with a chart of the fixed course, so that if the destroyer deviates from that course I shall know at once."

"But how could Nipper communicate with you from the destroyer without the help of the wireless rating and the skipper?" asked Jeannod.

"Leave that to me," replied Lee. "I want a free hand in this, Jeannie, and I don't want the officers of the XO4 to know what is going on. Believe me, my way is better for all concerned."

And, in the end, Lee got his way, and Jeannod pulled the wires behind the scenes in the Admiralty to some purpose!

CHAPTER 6.

On Board the XO4.

THE victualling petty officer of the XO4 sat on one of the bins in the small store-room where he reigned supreme, and he eyed Nipper with a look which was half quizzical, half suspicious.

The V.P.O. was a comparatively young man, but he was old in stewardship, having graduated for that distinction in Greenwich School—the cradle of the lower deck.

"Look here," he said, "how often is a mess allowed to put their traps up for survey, cockie?"

"What sort of traps?" asked Nipper, with a smile, for he was not familiar with nautical parlance. "Rat-traps?"

"No. Nor potato traps," grinned the V.P.O. "Don't you know that, in the Navy, plates and spoons and knives and forks and kettles and fannies, and all that lot are called mess traps?"

"I'm afraid I don't," said Nipper, who was never backward in admitting his ignorance—realising that it was the best way to avoid remaining ignorant.

"And what do you issue if you run short of bread when you're at sea?" the senior asked, with knitted brows.

"Heaven knows," muttered Nipper, smiling. "I suppose you—you have to go without?"

"Do you?" exclaimed the steward. "You try it—with this ship's company, my boy—and see what happens. They'll have you before the old man in once. Biscuit, that's what you issue in lieu of bread, cockie. Biscuit. Bee-eye-double-skay-i-double-t—biscuit!"

"Oh-h!" exclaimed Nipper, to whom the theory of Navy rationing was a closed book, and the V.P.O. eyed him narrowly.

"Look here," he said presently. "I can see you don't know anything about this job, my lad, and I can't quite reckon out why you've been put 'aboard. It's something special, ain't it?"

"They gave you instructions, didn't they?"

"Oh, yes! Called me into barracks just when I was getting victualled up. Had to sit up till the early hours last night checking my stores. I've got my orders. I've got to carry on with you best I can and keep mum. I can do all that all right if you can."

"How do you mean?" Nipper asked.

"What I says, cockie. There's one or two little things you may see aboard this packet in this store which you've got to shut your eyes to. I mean, you don't want to open your gate about it. Get me? Look innocent, and if anyone asks any questions, act green. That's the best way. I don't want to go

blowing it round the ship that you know as much about this work as I know about snipe shooting, and you want to keep yourself to yourself—see? That's the best way to wangle it—get me?"

Nipper smiled and intimated that he had "got him," and the V.P.O. emitted a half sigh of satisfaction and began to make up that supremest of Naval documents, the rum book.

Within half an hour the X04 was due to put off, and the various units of the ship's company were busy to a man, from the engine-room to the galley. Steam in the powerful, oil-heated boilers had been brought up to the necessary gauge. The first lieutenant, who was also the navigator, was studying a map carefully in the chart-house.

He looked up presently as, from the corner of his eyes, he caught the flutter of a cotton dress, and a girlish figure stepped from the quay on to the iron deck of the destroyer. He rose immediately, saluting as he came out.

The commander of the X04 stood there, a little unsteadily, his face almost ashen in its pallor. Gloria—for it was she—had her arm linked in his, and he seemed to lean upon her somewhat for support.

"Jimmy—Jimmy, it isn't right," the first lieutenant heard her whisper in a tense voice, and he shot a quick, searching glance at his commander.

He had never seen Lieutenant Commander Briggs the worse for drink, although they had been together on many a festive occasion. He was not the man to forget himself in the company of a lady—still less to come on duty intoxicated.

But he seemed to sway now as he stood, and the navigator stepped forward quickly.

"Can I help you, sir? What is the matter?"

The girl Gloria directed a glance of melting appeal at him.

"Commander Briggs is ill," she said. "He was taken ill on the way down to the ship. I insisted upon coming all the way with him."

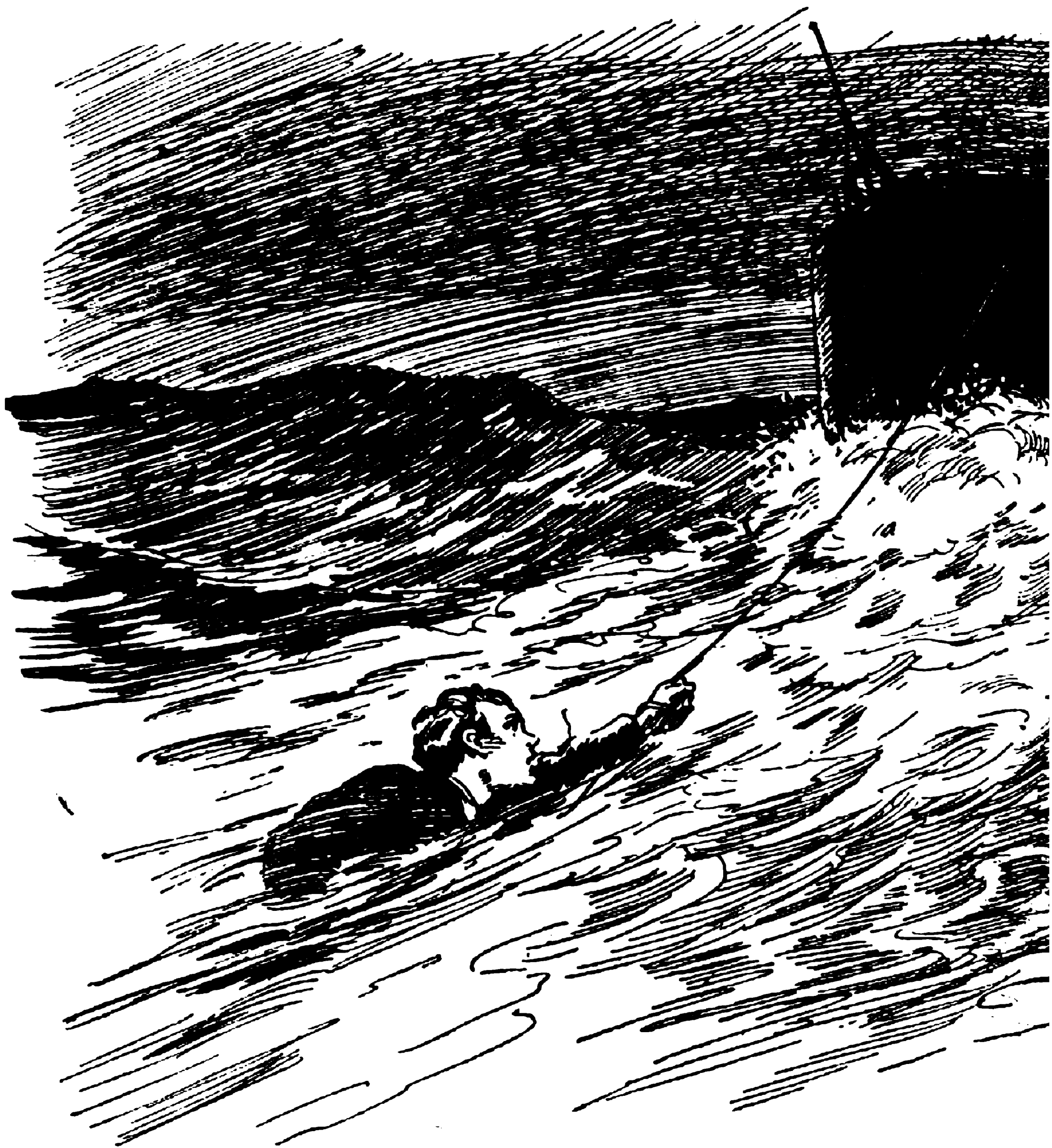
"I—I am all right. It is nothing," Briggs said, though with an effort.

"But you are not, Jimmy. He is not!" she cried, turning to the navigator. "He is not fit to go to sea."

But Commander Briggs seemed to pull himself together with an effort, and he turned to Gloria, bending over her affectionately, taking her oval face for a moment between his two hands.

"Don't you worry, little woman. I shall be right as rain in an hour or two. I will get below and lie down for a bit. Good-bye, old girl!"

It was with a certain naive simplicity that he kissed her on the cheek before his fellow-officer, and he stood watching while the navigator escorted her, reluctant, from the ship to the dockside. He remained standing, gazing and waving his hand, as she turned, and, with a rather wistful smile, disappeared across a bridge back towards the gate. Then the commander of the X04 swayed so much



that he would have fallen had not his senior lieutenant caught him and supported him.

"You're really ill, sir." For now he knew positively that it was not alcohol.

"Yes; I feel rotten, putrid, old chap. Just help me below. Perhaps I shall feel better after a bit. I would not let on to—to Poppy all how I felt. The girl would have worried unduly."

"But—but if you feel like this, you ought not to go afloat."

"I would not, had I been taken ill earlier. I can't now, old chap. I dare not. I'll see it through if I have to give orders from my bunk. Just let me lean on you, old chap. Thanks."

The navigator escorted him down to his cabin, and when the X04 put out from its

berth and slipped swiftly through the deep but narrow entrance of the famous harbour, it was with her commander lying like a dying man, flat upon his bunk.

Out in the channel the high bows were turned eastward, when the navigator, having set his course and entrusted the wheel to the coxswain, came swiftly below to the steward's cabin.

He looked sharply at Nipper, who was busy with a hammer and cold chisel opening a case of milk.

"H'm." The navigator scratched his curly head. He was no medicine-man and he did not know which of the assortment would be best for the sick commander. He looked rather appealingly at the steward.

"I don't know, steward. Which do you think he had better have?"

As the proprietor and dispenser of the medicines, and in virtue of the fact that his own father was a sick-berth steward on pension, the victualling petty officer pursed his lips with a doubtful suggestion of wisdom.

"I should like to see him, sir, before I prescribed," he said.

"Very well. Go along to his cabin. Tell him I sent you. Perhaps there is something he fancies. I'll give you an order to expend anything you've got."

The victualling petty officer assumed a tidy uniform coat, and made his way along to the commander's cabin, in a hopeful frame of mind, knowing that he had several bottles of what the commander likes stowed away for just such an emergency as this.

But he returned amazed and disgruntled by his reception. He had had his head bitten off and ordered out, in a way that Briggs had never done before.

"He's either tin-hats or light-headed," he muttered to himself. "If that's his nasty temper he don't get a tot out of me this trip, and I'll see him sunk first!"

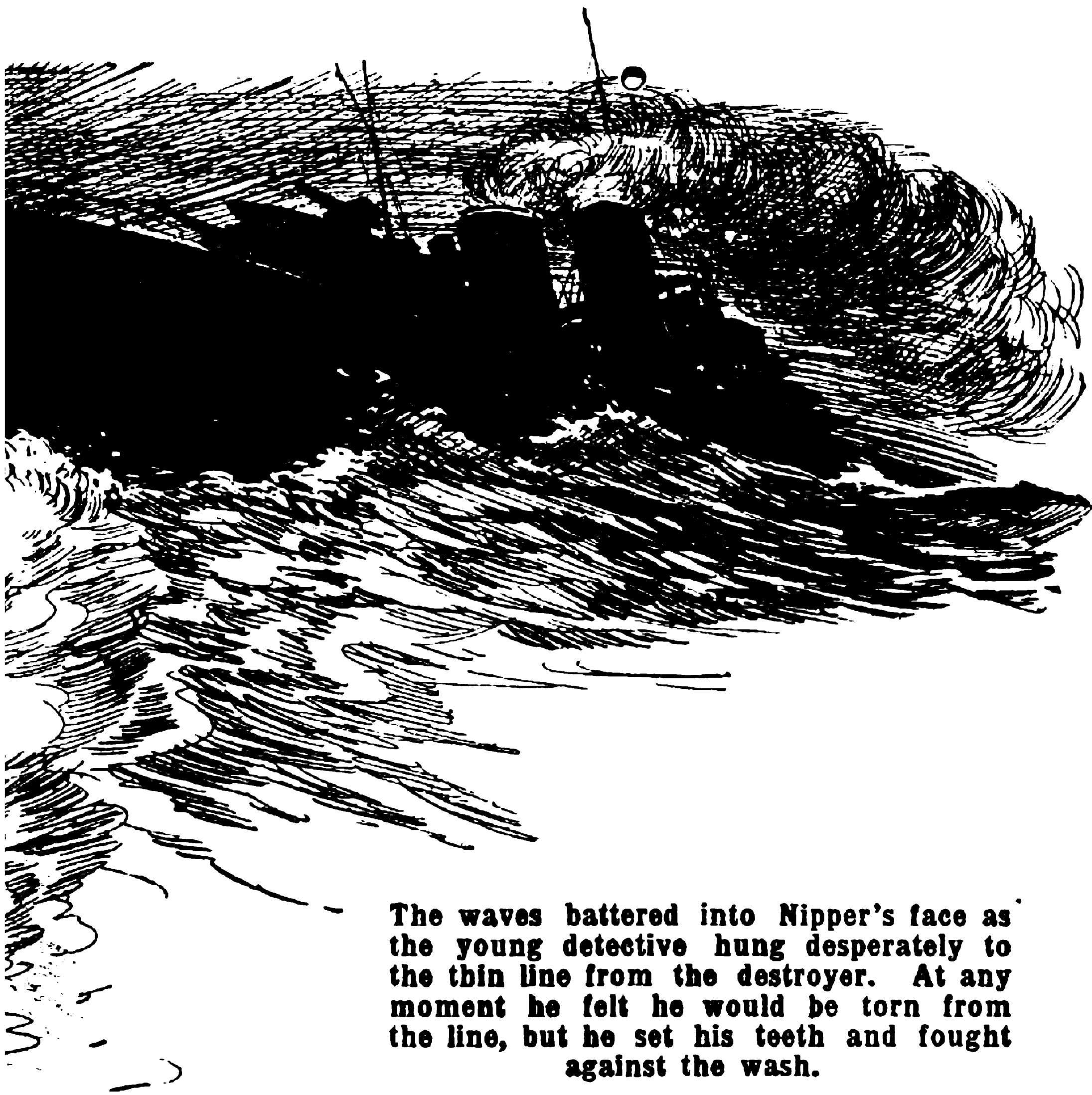
"Who's that?" asked Nipper, who was arranging some tins on the shelves.

"The skipper. He's come aboard with noises in his canister, or something. He's lying like a seasick Maltee in his kip, and because I offered him a tonic he cursed me for everything!"

Sharper than a serpent's tooth is man's ingratitude, and the steward rebelled against this unjust treatment. It was not till the next day that he regained his temper entirely, when the X04 was long through the strait and was heading northwards up through the North Sea, the sand-green waters of which were choppy and ill-tempered as ever.

By that time the navigator and the whole ship's company were becoming reconciled to the absence of the commander. He lay in his bunk like a half-dead man, taking only a little food, his spirit seeming to chafe unnecessarily under his illness, for he was bad-tempered, and freely insulted everybody who betrayed a solicitous interest in his condition.

"I reckon poor old Briggs is devilishly ill," the navigator said to the others in the ward-



The waves battered into Nipper's face as the young detective hung desperately to the thin line from the destroyer. At any moment he felt he would be torn from the line, but he set his teeth and fought against the wash.

"What rating is this, steward?" he asked quickly.

"Victualling assistant, sir."

"I did not know we had applied for one. We don't bear two victualling ratings on this ship."

"No, sir; we didn't apply," said the V.P.O. glibly. "Supernoomary rating, sir. Put aboard by the purser-in-chief at the depot. Special instruction."

"H'm," muttered the navigator. "I don't know what he'll find to do here. By the way, Commander Briggs is ill, Smith."

"Ill, sir?"

"Yes; very unwell. What medical comforts do you carry?"

"The usual, sir—port wine, beef tea and jellies, sir."

room. "I would like to make a signal and get a doctor aboard at Hamburg. But if I suggested it he would bite my head off."

"He must be in pain," suggested the engineer-lieutenant. "I've never known him like this before. But I reckon he'll shake it off. He's hard as iron."

So the X04 ploughed its way up off the Dutch coast and round the isle girt north of the flat little country, turning her nose in towards the great port of Hamburg.

Several times during the trip Nipper had made his way quietly on to the deck, and from behind the cover of a winch had made a few swift observations, going down below to get out his chart and make the calculations necessary to divine the exact position on the ocean of the speeding destroyer.

There was a small pencilled chart which Lee had given him, which he consulted frequently—the official course of the ship. From that course, by Nipper's reckoning the navigator had not deviated half a league.

Thus it happened that once or twice in the comfortable consulting-room of Nelson Lee, in the Gray's Inn Road, there came a small ring from the small table—a ring, gentle but insistent.

On each occasion he moved over immediately, affixing the receiver and listening, the mouthpiece held an inch from his lips.

"Hallo! Hallo! Is that you, guv'nor?"

The voice was clear, though faint, like the echo of a voice, like the whisper of some ethereal spirit.

"Yes—yes. Is that you, young 'un?"

"Yes. Good. I can hear you perfectly."

"That's fine. What news?"

"Nothing to report. Everything all Sir Garnet! We are following the dead course. Nothing exceptional."

On the first occasion Nipper had mentioned the illness of Commander Briggs, and Lee's face—though, of course, Nipper could not see it—had become a study in bewilderment.

"She came off to see him," he told Lee. "He was ill then. She seemed distressed."

"Umphs!" muttered Lee, the voice, through its long travel through the ether degenerating into what sounded like a half-bark, half-growl.

"What's the matter with him, do you know?"

"No," said Nipper. "I hope they're not trying to poison him off. I'll ring through again to-morrow. You will be available, I suppose, guv'nor?"

"I shall not leave the house, young 'un."

And then, the next time Nipper had reported their position once again.

"We're just running into port. The commander is better to-day. Came on deck for half an hour. But he's wrapped up like a sick man."

But whatever Lee expected to hear, he was doomed to more bewilderment, for the X04 arrived at Hamburg and took the bullion aboard without anything going awry. Lee had arranged for a Dutch detective to be on the watch at Hamburg. Nipper saw the man,

but there was nothing at which anyone could take exception, nothing to cause the slightest suspicion, all of which Nipper duly reported over the secret wireless 'phone.

The V.P.O. heard what he thought was Nipper mumbling to himself in a corner of the store-room, and thought the lad was going mad, or something. But that was the only suspicious sign Nipper had, and that was nothing to worry about. He pretended he was addicted to stuttering and was trying to cure himself, and with that the V.P.O. seemed to rest content.

And the X04 left Hamburg, heading for Harwich, according to orders, with her valuable cargo.

CHAPTER 7.

The Fatal Message.

THE grey twilight had fallen over the broad expanse of the North Sea, and the darkness was creeping up slowly as Nipper crouched down behind the winch on the fo'c'sle of the X04.

The stars were beginning to peep through, and low down on the northern arc the lad marked the tail of the Plough, and picked out the north star. He carried a small instrument which he adjusted quickly, taking a careful but rapid observation of the elevation, making a note of it upon a piece of paper.

From his pocket he took a small "log"—the apparatus by the revolutions of which he could measure the speed of the ship—and making his way aft he dropped it quietly overboard. The speed taken, he returned to the steward's cabin, finding the V.P.O. puffing contentedly at a pipe, while he made up his books for the next day.

"Switch on the light, son," he said, glancing over his shoulder at Nipper. "I can't see to hear myself touch. Thanks!"

He had hardly spoken when there came a sharp tap on the door, and the leading seaman—who was for the trip, "captain of the hold"—poked his head round.

"Skipper's coming for'ard, steward!"

"What!" snapped the V.P.O., knocking his pipe out with guilty celerity, for there was an order against smoking between decks. "What the deuce is he coming for'ard for at this time?"

"Nelson knows," said the leading rate. "but he's coming now."

The V.P.O. turned to Nipper quickly.

"Here," he said, "look slippy! Be doing something. Be making up that mess list."

He tossed Nipper a book, and the lad seized a pencil, and took an uncomfortable seat in the corner, for there was little enough accommodation for writing.

He kept himself as much in obscurity as possible, for he had his own reason for not being observed by the skipper.

It was without the knowledge of Commander Briggs that he had been put aboard. If the officer recognised him, as he might easily do, there would perhaps be awkward

inquiries. After the heated words he had had with Lee, Briggs might be excessively annoyed to find Nipper there. He would very possibly take his presence as indicating espionage, which, after all, was not very far from the truth.

So Nipper bent over his book, and when a moment later the door swung open and Commander Briggs strode inside he bent his head a little lower still.

There was a piece of broken mirror just in front of where the lad sat. Through this he could see the reflection of the skipper plainly. He still seemed far from well. What could be seen of his face, for he was very much wrapped up against the cold, was very pallid. There seemed to be lacking, too, the general appearance of muscularity. Commander Briggs seemed to have been more ill than he himself admitted.

He swept the cabin with a piercing glance, and the steward sprang up from his seat and stood to attention.

"Shun, there!" he bawled at Nipper.

The order disconcerted the lad. He had not anticipated this. He slid round and stood up, keeping his face as much as possible in the shadows.

The commander took one searching gaze at him, and then looked at the steward.

"All correct?" he asked.

"All correct, sir," the V.P.O. said.

"You have assistance now?"

"Yes, sir. Supernumerary put aboard last minute. Special instruction, sir."

"H'm! Very good! Carry on!"

Commanded Briggs directed another sharp glance at Nipper as he went out, and the lad's spirits sank a few degrees. Whether in the half-light of the cabin, and in the nautical attire, the skipper had recognised him, he did not know. Perhaps not. Perhaps his curiosity was aroused only by the unusual fact that the ship was bearing two victualling ratings.

The steward resumed his seat and began to refill his pipe from a tin of Navy issue.

"I suppose he thought he better come the rounds for once, seeing as he's been in sick bay most of the trip," he grumbled. "I wonder if he smelt the smoke?"

But Commander Briggs was not worrying about the smoke. He went out of his way to grumble to the first lieutenant about the powers saddling his ship with an extra rating for whom there was not proper accommodation.

Meanwhile, the steward put away his books and took a novel from his drawer. Nipper made a few swift reckonings by the chart. He took some measurements to scale upon it, regarding them in relation to the speed of the vessel which he had tested at intervals, and found about the same. The X04 was not going anything like all out. She was making only a little more than twelve knots.

As Nipper marked off his position on the chart and compared it with the course which Lee had given him, his lips were pursed noticeably, his brows knitted.

"That's funny," he muttered. "We're heading down the Dutch coast!"

He revised his calculations, and found them correct. The X04, instead of taking a course pretty well W.S.W. as instructions had specified, was heading S.S.W.

"I'd better ring up the guv'nor straight away," he muttered to himself. "We're off our course—or I can't calculate."

In a ship with such small space and so few quiet corners the lad found it increasingly difficult to talk to Lee without arousing someone's curiosity. Had the steward been in the secret it would have been all right, but it was better, if possible, to keep him in the dark. And already the V.P.O. had called him over the coals for talking to himself and acting batchy.

But the steward was so engrossed in his novel that it was easy to creep away to a corner of the store-room, smuggling his apparatus with him, and shut the bulkhead. In a few minutes the instrument was adjusted, and he pressed the button, and waited. After the lapse of a minute and another sustained ring, the voice came faint but clear:

"Hallo, young 'un. Hallo!"

"Is that you, guv'nor?" Nipper said in a voice as low as he dared to use. "We're off the course, guv'nor. I'll give you our position."

He read out the exact position, and he heard a low whistle come from Nelson Lee the other end.

"Gee! I should think you are, Nipper! You're heading down the coast of Holland. You are right off the course. When did you take your bearings?"

"To-night, by the Pole Star."

"You're certain they are correct?"

"Yes; I tested them."

A grunt from Lee.

"And you're running only at half-speed?"

"According to my log," Nipper said.

"Then you won't make Harwich at the proper time. Who's at the wheel?"

"The coxs'n," said Nipper.

"And who's given him the course?" the detective asked quickly.

"Commander Briggs himself, I think. The first lieutenant is resting."

There was a silence broken only by a slight tapping, which Nipper knew was the thoughtful drumming of the detective's fingers on the table.

"Have you taken a sounding, young 'un?" Lee asked.

"No."

"Can't you do so?"

"I could—yes, guv'nor."

"Then I should do so if I were you," the detective said. "Take your depths and see what the bottom is. It will prove pretty well whether you're right or not. When you've done that ring me through again. I've got your wave-length and your direction on my finder. When you ring again I'll take the direction again and strike your position myself. It will be a double check."

It had not occurred to Nipper that Lee with his direction-finding apparatus could also make an estimate of the position of the X04. Now, he closed up the instrument quietly, and, stowing it away, passed through into the cabin, taking with him from his trunk a sounding lead and line.

He went up on deck, making his way silently aft. He stood for some moments in the stern, by the chain which answered for a taffrail, gazing down into the swirl of dark waters, churned into a froth astern by the propellers. The sea was fairly calm, but there was a fair swell which now and then reared up and flopped against the sides of the ship.

For some moments Nipper stood, a motionless figure. Then he took the sounding lead from his pocket, and quickly lashed one end of the line to the chain. The lead dropped over with a short gulp, the line playing through the lad's fingers lightly. It touched bottom much more quickly than he had anticipated, and he began to wind it up again,

counting as he wound, for the line was knotted in fathom lengths. He peered also at the deposit from the sea-bed picked up by the lead.

"It's deucedly shallow," he muttered to himself, "and sandy mud. Looks as if we're running into a sandbank."

There came a step behind him, and turning Nipper saw the muffled figure of an officer coming from amidships. He finished winding the line quickly and dropped the lead into his pocket. The last thing he wanted to be caught doing was taking private observations.

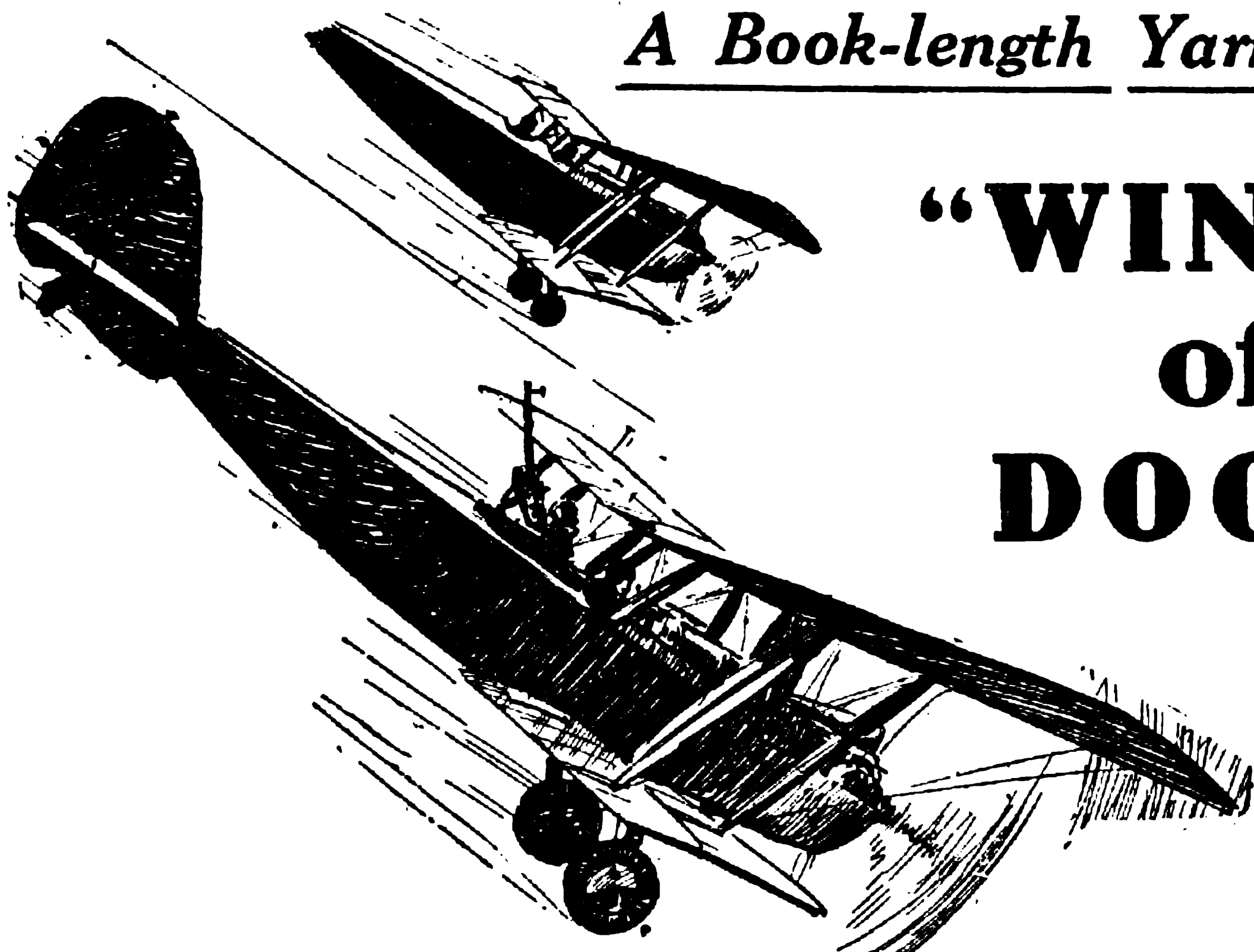
He turned again, and the figure of the officer disappeared again. He heaved a sigh of relief.

"I don't reckon I've made any mistake in my reckonings," he muttered to himself. "Sandy mud and only five fathoms. I reckon that's the Dutch coast all right."

He bent to unlash the line from the lower chain, and as he did so something closed about him from behind. His hands and

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arms were pinioned as in a vice. A gasp broke from him, and he struggled violently.

The attack had been so sudden, so totally unexpected that he did not think to cry out. He just fought to regain the freedom of his arms. He felt an overwhelming impulse to turn and see who was his assailant.

He could feel the hot breath of the man behind him upon his neck—his breathing was becoming short and staccato. The lad struggled and fought in mad silence.

And then, with a sudden access of murderous strength, his assailant bent and raised him off his feet. He kicked. A hoarse cry broke from the lad's lips, he felt the weight of his body upon the chain, which rattled and clanged, like a knell, tolling his doom.

He clung like a cat to the arms which now sought to disengage him. One arm was wrenched away, but the lad clung wildly to the other.

Then there came a sudden vicious blow in the face which made him wince with pain. Once more the blow came, stunning and murderous.

Nipper toppled back, and then, losing his balance, fell, stumbling athwart the chain, plunging, with a hoarse cry, into the swirl of waters below.

A moment later the afterdeck of the X04 stood once more silent and deserted, and there seemed to be a laughing and sinister mockery in the quick throbbing of the screws.

A minute after that the mocking laughter grew louder, and it seemed more demoniacal. The screws were revolving at a greater pace. The X04 was putting on speed—as though rushing in guilty haste from the scene of a crime.

While in the Gray's Inn Road, Nelson Lee waited with growing anxiety for the ring on the wireless telephone that never came.

For several hours he waited, pacing up and down the room, his anxiety rendered worse because he could do nothing. And then Jeannod 'phoned from the Admiralty. They had received a wireless message from the X04.

"I'm awfully sorry, Lee. Your assistant, Nipper," he stammered. "He—he has been drowned. Lost overboard!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Stowaway.

IT is strange how, now and then, in the history of man's recklessness, some kindly spirit seems to step in at the eleventh hour and stay the hand of death.

Nipper felt the waters close over his head, he fought with hands and feet to make the surface, and then, in that instant, he felt something tugging at his pocket—as a fish tugs at a bait. It seems as if fate were clutching desperately at him, reluctant to

let go—as if some grim tug of war were going on between life and death.

And in that moment the lad remembered the sounding lead and line he had dropped quickly into his pocket when he first saw the figure of the officer moving aft. It flashed across his mind that he had lashed one end of the line to an upright—to the chain stay. The jerking at his pocket was the jerking of the line as it unwound.

The recollection came to Nipper like a sudden gleam of hope, fanning, as it were, the dying embers of the lad's spirit. He clutched at his pocket desperately, and in the moment that he clutched the lead was jerked out of his pocket.

A fraction later he would have been too late. But now Nipper held the lead clutched tightly—desperately. The line was still running out, and throwing himself forward upon his face, so as to offer the least resistance, Nipper groped for the line and found it.

As he gripped, his arm was jerked almost out of its socket. He winced with pain—but held on. He felt himself gaining speed. The crests of the waves seemed to rush at him now and batter him in the face. He had a vague sensation of movement, and then Nipper's heart beat quickly. He was being towed. The lashing of the sounding-line on the chain stay was holding fast.

Nipper drew a slack yard or two of the line, and with difficulty he twined it round his waist, twisted the lead over to form a knot.

For some minutes after that he lay still, turning over on his back, his head forced back, his face turned upwards. The sensation was wonderfully unique. Above him now was the dark vault of the heavens pricked with a myriad points of light—with some more bright than others.

Then, having rested, Nipper began to haul on the line slowly, foot by foot, drawing himself nearer.

He wondered if he should shout for help, after what had happened—whether his voice would be heard above the rhythmic throb of the powerful propellers.

He drew himself nearer and nearer. He was being towed now directly astern of the ship, although the line was lashed some yards from the stern on the port side. To draw himself up now would be to draw himself over that white treacherous froth of water, to run the terrible risk of being caught under the screws.

He decided to shout. He drew in a breath for one frantic effort, and then something happened which made him expel the breath again and gasp with a sudden hope. The stern of the X04 seemed to be leaving him, drifting away quickly to starboard. He seemed somehow to be moving athwart her, and then to be overtaking her, drawing level on the port side.

For the moment the lad's heart stopped; he became momentarily sick with apprehension.

"By Jupiter, the line's given!" he muttered. "I'm adrift! No—she's still fast! What——"

He dragged on the rope quickly, and it was still lashed tightly. He peered ahead, and saw now instead of the low stern of the X04, the length of her foreshortened as if he stood in the port quarter and looked across the starboard bows. He could see now the line of her high fo'c'sle.

And then the truth flashed upon the lad.

"She's turning," he muttered quickly, and his voice was hoarse with hope. "My heavens, she's turning!"

The X04 seemed to be taking a sharp turn to port, so that, as the stern of the destroyer swung round, Nipper lay off almost at right angle until she made way again, and he drifted back once more by force of gravity over the stern sheets.

In that moment, Nipper saw his chance. He hauled on the line, frantically, drawing himself closer and closer towards the ship's side. He was only a few yards away now, as he heard the bell ring in the engine-room, and the screws, which had slackened in the turn, began to revolve more rapidly, and the X04 darted ahead.

As she went Nipper felt a jerk, and then he swung round, pulling as he went, and he came with a nasty bump into the side of the vessel.

But he could have shouted with joy at the pain of that jolt. The worst danger was over. He had successfully negotiated the screws. He drew breath, and, reaching up, hauled on the line which now rose taut above him, lashed tightly to the chain stay. It was a thin line, and not the easiest thing to mount hand over hand, especially when the hands are soddened with salt water.

But the task of Nipper was simple enough. He drew himself up foot by foot up the lowside of the destroyer until he was able to reach up and clutch the support of the chain. He hauled up his dripping weight silently and carefully, and the next moment anyone on the after deck would have seen a strange figure rise, drenched and exhausted from the sea and drop, more like a seal than a human being, upon the deck.

For some moments he lay there motionless, exhausted. Then, recovered somewhat, he rose, and unlashed the line from the chain stay. He raised the line to his lips as he did so and touched it, passionately. It was only an ordinary round turn and a clove hitch he had put on the line. But, thank Heaven, it had held fast—it had not failed him.

He rewound the line and put the lead back in his pocket, and then, dripping wet and with a strange nerveless sensation in the big joints, he half walked, half swayed, his way for'ard to the stewards' cabin.

The V.P.O. was reading, and caught the reflection of Nipper in a small mirror.

"Hallo!" he muttered. "Where you been, cockie? Haven't been playing crown and anchor, have you?"

"Me. No," said Nipper. "Who's got one aboard?"

"There's one of the dustmen got one, I hear," the V.P.O. said. "Don't you be caught having a gamble on it, else you'll be luffed in for a big—Nelson's whiskers! Where the——" He had turned and was staring agape at Nipper. "Where the West Indies have you been?"

He stared aghast at Nipper's blanched face, his dripping clothes had already formed a pool in the cabin.

"In the ditch," Nipper said shortly. "I'm—I'm——" He swayed. "I'm a bit done up. Have you—got anything——"

He tottered, and the steward sprang forward quickly, catching him.

"Good lor', son, what have you been up to? Here, sit here a moment. I'll give you a nip of quinine and tonic water."

He dived down into a bin of tea, and groping around with his hand he unearthed a quartern bottle of ship's rum, drawing the cork with his teeth. He gave it to Nipper, and the stimulant pulled the lad round magically.

The nerveless feeling began to go from his limbs, replaced by a welcome glow. He began to feel happy, absurdly, inordinately happy, to think that once more he had eluded death. He smiled, and the steward looked puzzled.

"What's the matter? What's happened, son?" he asked again.

"I've been overboard," Nipper said quietly.

"What! You don't mean——"

"I do," Nipper said.

"And they fished you out? I didn't hear any warning. The ship hasn't slackened up at all. What——"

"No. I fished myself out!"

"What?" gasped the steward. "Are you spinning me a ditty, or have you got an albatross up your mizzen? You fell overboard and fished yourself out?"

Nipper realised that the situation needed special handling.

"Look here!" he said, coming forward and looking at his senior in a strange way which the V.P.O. had not seen before. "Can you keep a still tongue?"

"Sure," the other gasped. "What's up?"

"I'll tell you something," Nipper said. "But don't breathe a word to anyone."

"I promise."

The lad sat, drenched as he was, down upon a packing-case, and talked quickly in low, earnest tones to the victualling petty-officer. The man's face changed colour several times as the lad told his story. Now and again he gazed at the lad with mingled incredibility and awe.

At the end of the narrative he knew a good many things. He knew who Nipper was, and, to some extent, why he had been

put aboard. He knew something of the terrible risks which the lad and Nelson Lee underwent in the pursuit of their hazardous profession.

The simple story of the lad fired the imagination of the petty-officer. He gazed at Nipper open-mouthed.

"Blue me!" he muttered. "I did not dream this."

"And nor does anyone else aboard the ship," the kid said, "except one."

"Who's that?"

"The person who heaved me overboard to-night."

The steward's eyes flashed.

"Have you no idea who it was, son?"

"No, I couldn't see. I got no chance. But there is at least one criminal agent on this packet. That I know for sure."

The V.P.O. stared at the lad thoughtfully for some minutes, and then his brow grew troubled. He was beginning to wonder what was the proper official thing to do under the circumstances. As Nipper's chief, it was his duty to report the incident.

"Look here," he said quickly. "I'm going aft now—to the commander. There will be Hades to pay over this lot. Old Briggy will raise the depths about it."

He rose determinedly, but Nipper sprang up and barred the way.

"No," he said. "Don't. Look here, I want to ask a favour. I've gone overboard. No one knows that I've escaped—not even the johnny who tried to murder me. I think I'd better be reported drowned—or missing. Can you stow me away?"

"What?" The steward stared at him. "Stow you away and say you're missing? Good lor', no! Do you want to ruin me? I should dip everything if I was rumbled—and I should be sure to be rumbled. I should go in clink for ninety days, and a stripped arm."

But Nipper crossed and put a hand on his arm.

"Look here," he said. "I'll promise you you won't lose anything. There are people at the Admiralty who wouldn't let you suffer. What's more— Look here, Smith, if we do any good, I'll promise you that you'll pick up a chief's rating because of it."

The steward stared at him, still only half-believing. Nipper, upon entering the cabin, had slipped the bolt, and there came now a sharp knocking on the door.

Immediately the lad slipped through the bulkhead to the inner store-room, and as he went he shot a significant glance at the steward, putting his finger to his lips to enjoin silence. The V.P.O. looked a little worried as he rose and slipped the bolt.

It was a C.P.O. who entered with orders—all hands to assemble on the stokers' mess deck. Someone gone overboard. The steward obeyed, but had made up his mind what to do. He stood in with Nipper and said nothing, and a wireless message to the Admiralty reported the loss of Nipper—drowned at sea!

CHAPTER 9.

Scuttled!

THE coxswain of the X04 peered over the windscreen on the bridge, his grey eyes narrowed, his brows puckered by the tensity of his gaze. The wheel rested lightly in his horny hands, and he pursed his lips in the way he had as he turned and shot a glance at the muffled figure of the commander beside him.

"Looks like a small packet cutting across our bows, there, sir."

"What? Where?" exclaimed the commander sharply, peering ahead with sudden interest.

The grey dawn had just risen gradually from the east. The sun was obscured in a heavy morning mist. The morning was drab and a little sombre, but as is often the case when there are no high lights, visibility was good.

"I can see nothing," the commander said quickly.

"Just a point to starb's, sir—'cross the bows." He gave the wheel a half-turn, and the ship responded. "Now she's dead ahead. See her? It is a packet, sir."

Commander Briggs raised his prism glasses and peered carefully ahead.

"You're right, coxs'n. She's a small motor-boat, it looks like."

"A launch, sir?"

"No. Not so big as that. Take a quiz at her."

He handed the coxs'n his glasses and took the wheel while the sailor took a careful scrutiny. His lips became pursed more tightly as he gazed.

"She's making no way at all, sir," he said. "Looks like one of these fast submarine-chasers."

"That's what I thought. What is she doing out here? A bit of a swell would swamp her."

"That it would," said the coxs'n with a grunt. "She's a coastal motor-boat all right, and making no way. Looks as if her gear was jammed."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir. Her screw ain't turning a tall. There's—— Hallo, she's just shoved up a jury mast! Gee, she's flying the distress signal, sir!"

The X04 forged ahead and presently less than a quarter of a mile away they saw distinctly the frail shape of a small motor-boat. Her stern was sunk low in the water, all flush with the water-line, and her slim cut bows rose well out.

She looked to be exactly one of the type which the coxs'n had described—the fast, mosquito-like craft which, during the war, scurried after the submarine and dropped a couple of "pills" on her.

Now, apparently, in the hands of pleasure-seeking amateurs, the boat was drifting helplessly in the North Sea, waiting for rescue, or for a little foul weather to add one more tragedy to the long list.

Commander Briggs put out his hand and rung down to dead slow, and then half-speed astern. The destroyer slowed down and stopped, and the propellers ceased to beat. The motor-boat lay off now not more than twenty yards away. There were two men in her in yachting rig, oilskins over flannels.

"I told you they were seaside pirates," muttered the commander. "Where's the megaphone?"

He raised the speaking trumpet to his lips and his voice boomed across.

"What are you?"

"Private motor-boat out of Scarborough!"

"You're a deuce of a way from your base, then. What's the matter?"

"Magneto trouble. Can you take us in tow?"

"Tow be durned!" roared the commander irritably. "This isn't a tarnation tug! Can't you repair?"

"No. We're derelict and frozen. Can you take us aboard?"

The commander lowered the megaphone and had a few words with the cox's'n. The navigator came up on deck, too, at that moment, and looked askance at his senior officer.

"There's another pair of Brixton buccaneers to nurse," Commander Briggs said; and then, raising the megaphone again: "We'll lower a boat."

The thanks of the men adrift came across the water fervently. In response to the first-lieutenant's sharp order a boat was hoisted

outboard and lowered, with three men. They drew alongside the launch, and two men in flannels, thick woollen sweaters, and swathed in oilskins, climbed into the boat, evidently cramped and suffering from exposure.

They had to be helped up the rope ladder on to the deck of the X04, and the commander waited on the deck to receive them, the navigator standing beside him. The cox'n remained at the wheel.

Briggs smiled as the men came up the ladder, but his face was stern and inhospitable when he received them.

"You ought to have better sense than get far out in an oil-can like that, gentlemen," he said.

"We've drifted a long way," one of the men said apologetically. "We are glad we saw you—er—captain. Could you take us in tow?"

"I don't know. I suppose I shall have to," Briggs said, rather ungraciously. "Who are you?"

"I've my licence here," the taller of the men said, groping in his pocket. "It's not a recognised licence, but I think it will do for this occasion."

He stepped back, and the two officers found themselves looking down the barrel of an automatic. The face of the man had changed. There was a nasty glitter in his eyes.

"Good heavens!" gasped the first lieutenant, and the cry was echoed by the commander. For a moment he could not speak. Then he smiled, though mirthlessly.

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And then the first lieutenant realised that the men who had come aboard were levelling revolvers grimly, as if they did not mind shooting in the least.

The coxswain on the bridge stared down as though he could not believe his eyes. His eyes had gone grey—ashen grey.

"This is my licence," the man in oilskins said quickly, jerking the revolver threateningly.

A strange look came into the faces of the British officers. The commander looked about him, as if to weigh up the chances, and the man with the revolver threatened.

"Don't try any monkey tricks, please. You're a dead man if you do, and this ship goes down like a plummet. You see that little 'oil-can,' as you call it?"

The commander glanced involuntarily across at the motor-boat, floating unattended, apparently, astern on to the destroyer.

"We've left one aboard there," the German said. "We know what your cargo is. We know exactly what you've got aboard, and we're going to see that it never reaches England."

Commander Briggs had remained mute, too amazed, too utterly astonished. Now he apparently spoke to retain his calm.

"I don't know what you're driving at, sir," he said.

"Yes, you do. Don't lie, and don't attempt to resist, else you go up with the ship and every man Jack aboard her! Up and down! That packet is one of your own fleet. It's only a canoe, but it's got a torpedo tube astern and a 'tin fish' trained at this moment on your water-line amidships. It would sink a battleship. This steam ditty-box it would blow out of the durned water. I've only got to press this trigger as a signal, and up you go! Now you know the worst!"

"My Heaven!" The words came from between the teeth of the navigator. His fists were clenched—as were the jaws of the coxswain. The hard-faced sailor at the wheel began to look round to see what he could use with which to hit this outlaw over the head. He began to wonder if it were worth risking.

Commander Briggs' face had grown very tense, but he betrayed no motion. He seemed to be thinking—thinking hard.

"I see," he said with contempt. "So you're playing pirates, eh?"

"Yes—if you like. But we've learned to take our game seriously. We advise you, now—if you value your skin, and your crew's—to do the same."

"What's your game, then?"

"To scuttle this ship, and everything aboard her!"

"I'll see you sunk first!"

"Then we'll watch one another," said the other grimly, and there was a devilish gleam in his eyes.

The first lieutenant stepped forward, and his face was pale, though his eyes blazed with rage.

"Do your worst, you cur!" he hissed. He turned to his senior officer. "By heavens, Briggs, don't let them best us. I can't stand here and——"

"I'm commanding this ship," Briggs said sharply. "I can't have the crew murdered. There are married men aboard—don't forget that." He spoke in a low tone—calm and purposeful, as if he had made up his mind. "I haven't finished yet—myself."

"I don't want to scuttle the lot of you," cried the man in the oilskins. "But I'm not standing much longer to argue."

"What do you want?" snapped Briggs.

"Get out of the ship, every rat of you! Order your crew off. We don't want to scuttle them if we can help it."

The commander of the XO4 seemed to pause thoughtfully. Then, as if accepting the worst, he turned and looked up at the coxswain.

"Order everyone on deck! Hoist out the boats!"

The coxswain descended from the bridge, a nasty look in his eyes. He was passing towards the hatch when the second man stopped him, putting a revolver close to his neck.

"Wait! No, you don't. Shout your order below. Every man on deck—at the double. We'll give them two minutes."

It was a strange, gaping crew which came up the hatches. Begrimed artificers and stokers; a few watchkeepers, turned out of their hammocks; and the victualling petty officer, agape with wonder.

"Into the boats—all of you!" roared the commander. He turned and detailed the officers to take charge of each. The navigator, cursing roundly, moved off.

The boats were swung out on the davits and lowered to the water. Within a few minutes the crew had pushed off from the side. The XO4 was deserted except for the commander and two others.

There was a certain young fellow stowed away in the spare store-room whose presence nobody suspected but the steward. Now the V.P.O. was pale with sickening apprehension. He did not know what to say or do. He was bewildered, utterly confused—speechless with dismay—and he took the oar given him mechanically, plying it in the same way.

It was a motley throng. Some of the men were singing—a little hysterically. A great many were cursing roundly. The officers and the C.P.O.'s seemed to be struck all of a heap. They could not make it out.

The other rating who had remained on board had been detained by the commander—at the demand of the man with the revolver. It was a chief petty officer, the yeoman of signals. He stood beside his commander, grim but calm, not knowing why he, of all the ship's company, should have been

chosen to stay. He knew a minute or so later.

The chief of the pirate pair—the man who acted as spokesman—watched the boats put off, then he turned to the commander and the yeoman.

"I want you to send a signal—to your Admiralty."

"What about? I tell no lie! Remember that!"

"We don't want you to tell lies. We wish to impeach the honour of no one—not even a Britisher. We simply want you to report what has happened. Where is your wireless?"

The commander nodded to the yeoman who led the way to the wireless cabin amidships. The chief signaller sat down at the table, the commander behind him—the man with the revolver covering them both.

"Now, you know your position, I suppose?"

"Yes I logged it just before seeing you."

"Where is it?"

"In my cabin."

"Come and get it!"

The commander bit his lip, turned obediently. The yeoman remained, a gleam of hope springing up suddenly within him. In his drawer at the back he had a service revolver. Once with that in his hand, he would fight to the—

"You, too, yeoman. We can't afford to leave you."

The chief signalman groaned under his breath and accompanied the pair to the commander's cabin. Position was noted, and they returned to the wireless cabin.

"Now! Call the Admiralty, yeoman."

The signalman switched on the motor and pressed the key sharply. The crackle of the call sounded at the aerial. For some minutes he called, listening; then he looked up.

"I've got them."

"Send your position. Be careful; I know morse!"

The yeoman of signals tapped off the name of the ship and the position. The man with the revolver nodded.

"Now, send this," he said, "as I dictate."

The yeoman tapped off the words as the man slowly dictated—his English was perfect, except for that now unmistakable accent:

"Held up by motor-boat, armed torpedo. Threat blow up. No chance. Turned adrift in small boats. X04 sunk torpedo.—S O S."

He paused, and the yeoman removed his trembling hand from the key.

"That will do!"

The voice was sharp and imperative. They made their way on deck again. Commander Briggs turned to the yeoman and handed him a lifebelt which he had picked from the deck.

"Here, take this, yeoman. Get off the ship, now. The boats will pick you up."

"What about you, sir?"

"I have not finished, yet."

"But I don't like leaving you here, sir. If I can——"

"You have your orders, yeoman!" the commander said sharply.

"Do you want me to get in the 'Ditch,' sir?"

"Yes. Put on the belt and jump! Get clear as soon as you can. Quick!"

The yeoman of signals assumed the lifebelt as reluctantly as a man could who had been used for years to the implicit obedience of orders. He shot a glance at the commander, whose face was stern and set, and then moved over the deck and climbed the chain.

He waved an arm and shouted to the nearest boat.

"Hi, there! Pick me up, boys!"

He leaped out and down into the water, the belt keeping his head and shoulders out, and as he paddled forward a boat shot quickly to meet him.

As he got clear of the ship the yeoman turned in the water and peered back. The commander stood erect and defiant now in full view. He stared at the two men who covered him, smiling contemptuously.

"And now, you curs," he cried, and his voice rang out clearly, "I've got the blood of no other men on my head. The crew has gone, and you've still me to reckon with."

He took a step forward, and the voice of the man in the oilskins rasped out sharply:

"Stop where you are, or you are dead meat!"

"And do you think I take orders from you, you scum?" cried the commander.

With an access of fury, he leaped like a wild cat at the two men, and in the same moment there rang out the sharp reports of two shots, followed immediately by an agonised cry. Smoke issued from the barrels of both revolvers.

The yeoman of signals raised himself in the water, and as he saw the still motionless figure of his late commander prone upon the deck, he raised both arms and poured a torrent of abuse at the men.

"You curs! You foul, murderous curs!"

He raved until the boat picked him up, and he still continued to rave, despite the remonstrance of a few aboard who were scared at what might happen.

"Shut up, Jim. They'll ditch us if they hear you. Put a sock in it!"

"Let 'em ditch us, the cowardly curs! Let me get at 'em!"

He continued to rave as the boat pulled off, and the first lieutenant sat in the stern like a sick man, his face in his hands, cursing his helplessness, his utter impotence.

Following the shots there came from the motor-boat the gentle purr of an engine. It moved forward, and the crew adrift saw it draw alongside the X04. The men in oilskins had lashed a rope about the body of the dead commander, and now the men in the small boats had the mortification of seeing the body

lowered, irreverently, like a sack of flour into the well of the motor-boat.

After that, the pirates swarmed down into the boat, and the motor purred again, cutting its way through the water until it paused once more, and about fifty yards to the port beam of the floating destroyer it lay for a moment, stern on.

The men in the boats watched fascinated, until suddenly from under the stern of the motor-boat there darted something which looked like the smooth back of a playful porpoise, leaving a little furrowed wake as it made swiftly and truly towards the X04.

"My heaven! They've put a tin fish into her! The fiends!" cried the yeoman.

And then, as the engine of the motor-boat rose to a roar, the late steward of the destroyer rose in the stern of the boat.

"The lad's aboard!" he cried wildly. "He wasn't drowned. He's aboard in the store-room. Oh, my heaven! He's bolted in—he——"

"Sit down, Jack! Sit down! It's all right, boy. Keep calm," said several about him. They did not take him seriously. They thought the excitement of the affair had unnerved him.

But he still stood up, refusing to be dragged down—dropping his oar and nearly losing it.

"I tell you that my assistant is aboard her. He didn't come in the boats. He——"

"Look! Look!" cried a sudden voice, as a figure appeared on the fo'c'sle.

"It's him! It's him!" screamed the V.P.O. "Jump, quick! For the love of——"

The slight figure of the lad looked more slight on the deserted deck of the destroyer. He carried something as if he had packed his belongings quickly into a square box.

In the instant that the steward screamed he leaped into the water—just as the gleaming back of the torpedo became lost in the shadow of the ship.

There was a moment's pause—a dead hush fell over the men, broken only by the droning of the motor-boat, scurrying away at top speed. And then a huge and muffled roar seemed almost to shake the small boats out of the water.

The X04 had split in two—a column of fire and steam issuing like a small volcano from her. The morning air was black with smoke and grime, and sooted with pieces of twisted iron and falling wreckage.

The dense smoke cleared for a moment, revealing the two pieces of the ill-fated ship—the fore part settling swiftly, the after part listing over more slowly.

The crew gazed fascinated for a few minutes, and then the fo'c'sle dived, and the after-deck turned turtle and sunk, the screws being the last part of her to pass out of vision.

And all that remained of the X04 were a few fragments of floating wreckage—amid which the head of a youth bobbed up and down in the swell of the waters, a hand raised feebly to signal for assistance.

Death had cast lots for the third time for Nipper—and a third time he had drawn a blank!

CHAPTER 10.

Lee Gets Busy!

NELSON LEE soon heard what had happened on the high seas. Jeannod 'phoned the news from the Admiralty five minutes after the wireless message had been received. The detective hastened to Whitehall.

"I can tell you this much," he declared. "The position given you of the destroyer, according to the commander's log, is not the spot where the vessel was sunk. I have the correct position—many miles to the south of the fixed course and on the Dutch coast."

There was a heated argument over it until Lee explained how he knew.

"This is the work of Oscar Dene, and he is trying to throw dust in everyone's eyes. He has sunk the destroyer in very shallow water, and it will be child's play to fish up the bullion off that sandbank, unless we get there first."

Jeannod, at any rate, saw eye to eye with Lee, and a fast destroyer was ordered out from Harwich, but even that vessel could not possibly get there soon enough, according to Lee. He had his ideas and made his own plans.

He 'phoned Harker, and then arranged for a fast aeroplane to be held in readiness for him at Hendon. He hastened back to Gray's Inn Road to prepare for the trip.

He got there in time to hear the ringing—insistent ringing—of a bell. The wireless 'phone! But Nipper had been drowned!

He seized the receivers and clamped them over his head. When he spoke into the mouthpiece he was hoarse.

"Yes—yes!" he cried.

"Is that you, guv'nor?" came the voice of Nipper.

And Lee cried out in an access of delight, of joy, and relief he made no effort to restrain.

"Yes—yes, I am here! Thank Heaven, young 'un! They told me you were drowned! Lost overboard! Where are you now?"

"I've been very nearly drowned twice, guv'nor, but I guess I'm web-footed, or something," the faint voice of the lad came. "But there's still a chance of a watery grave. Things are blowing up for a storm."

"Gad! Where are you now, then? What has happened?"

"I'm adrift in a small boat along with the rest of the crew of the X04. There are two boats, and we're keeping together. But the wind is freshening, and one or two of the men are pretty bad from exposure. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, faintly," Lee said. "By Jupiter, Nipper, I've had a night of agony! I was told you were lost overboard. I have been

hoping against hope. Why didn't you ring before?"

"The apparatus went wrong. I've been trying to get it right. There is a stoker-mechanic here in the boat. With his help, I've just managed it. I'm going to call for assistance now. But we've no idea of our position. My sextant went with the ship."

"Don't worry," Lee said quickly. "I'll see you are picked up. What has happened, young 'un? Has the ship really been scuttled?"

"Yes—torpedoed. Split in halves," the lad's voice said faintly. "I just got clear in time."

"But how was it done? Were you held up?"

"Yes. The gang made out they were in league with the German Imperialists. Don't cotton to that myself. Still, that's what they said they were. Just after dawn we picked up a coastal motor-boat flying the distress signal. The commander——"

"Briggs?"

"Yes. And, by the way, he reckons someone tried to poison him. Anyhow, he got over the illness. The commander lowered a boat to them and brought the two men aboard. These two suddenly showed their hands, and held up the whole ship's company at the point of their revolvers. Some of 'em wanted to make a fight of it, but they threatened if they did they would torpedo the X04 and blow the lot of us sky-high. So they would have done, too, by all accounts!"

"What sort of motor-boat was it?" Lee asked.

"One of the type they used for chasing submarines during the war. Mosquito craft—and deadly at that. They can travel a mile in a minute and blow up a battleship."

"And what happened?" Lee asked. And he was not conscious of the strange nature of this dramatic conversation with a lad who was adrift in the open sea.

"The commander ordered everyone to the boats. It was the only thing to do. He was not going to sacrifice the whole ship's company, he said. He stayed behind."

"He did?" cried Lee quickly.

"Yes, with the yeoman of signals, who we picked out of the Ditch. Poor Briggs died like a sailor and man, guv'nor."

"What? Is he dead?" Lee's face went a shade paler.

"Yes. When all the crew were off I believe he turned on the two of them and told them to do their worse. The yeoman heard a little of what happened. Briggs laughed in their faces and then went for them like a wolf. And they shot him dead—like a dog—the curs!"

"Shot him dead!"

"Yes. As he rushed for them they both fired, and after that they slung him overboard on a rope and hauled him into their own launch. I could have throttled them as we watched them. Poor Briggs! He made an error, guv'nor, over Gloria, but he's made up for all that, I reckon!"

There was something fervent in the voice of the lad. The dramatic happenings of that red dawn had probably stamped themselves upon his mind indelibly.

"There is a nasty sea springing up, guv'nor," he said. "We could not live long in a stiff sea."

"I'm coming now, young 'un!" Lee cried out quickly. "So long!"

He put up the receiver, then dashed from the flat down to the road where his big car was waiting, and sprang to the wheel. As he pressed over the electric starter and the engine began to purr silently, his thoughts were still with Nipper. Lee pictured the dramatic episode on the high sea when the skipper of the X04 had maintained nobly the proud traditions of his glorious service.

It was perhaps typical of Briggs, characteristic of his type of manhood. Headstrong, perhaps in love, yet he could still be indomitable in duty. What folly he had been led into by the subtle arts of a beautiful adventuress, he had, as Nipper had whispered, atoned and paid in full.

Lee put in the clutch, and the big car moved off from the kerb. And then, suddenly, as the detective put in the accelerator, a short, thick-set figure bounded across the path and sprang in one vault upon the footboard.

A hoarse voice came in the detective's ear.

"Lee! Lee!"

And as Lee turned he shut off and jammed on the brakes with a cry of sheer amazement.

"You!" he cried, gazing into the face of the man upon the footboard. "Briggs!"

It was the commander of the X04!

CHAPTER 11.

A Race to the Rescue!

IN the face of the detective, as he gazed at the other man, was written sheer blank astonishment.

It was as much as his lips could do to frame the name of the naval officer. Yet in the moment following when the two men gazed into one another's eyes, Lee noticed that the face of Commander Briggs was drawn and white, as if by suffering.

"Mr. Lee, can you spare me a minute? I must see you! Will you wait?"

The detective had not a moment to spare, yet his mind moved quickly in that instant. As he stared at this man a sudden sinister possibility occurred to him.

He backed the car, withdrew the clutch, and sprang out, stepping once more to the door of his chambers.

"Come inside," he said quickly.

The man followed him quickly, breathing like a man who is intensely relieved. As the door closed the detective swung round on him.

"What do you want?" he rapped out.

"I must see you. I dare not go to the Admiralty!"

"How did you get here from your ship?" Lee asked.

"I have not been near my ship," the man said. And then the detective, without warning, gripped him by the throat.

"You lie! You lie, man!" He spoke fiercely. "You think I am unable to see through you!"

The man fought feebly, as though his strength were ebbing, and then, as Lee peered closely into his face, he relaxed his hold, a strange, set look upon his face.

"My Heaven!" he muttered. "You are Briggs! I guessed when I saw you there was a false Briggs, but you are not the one."

The detective knew the uncanny powers of Oscar Dene in the matter of impersonation. In that first moment it had flashed upon him that this was a trap—a clever trap—and he had been prepared. When he gripped the throat of the man in the hall of his chambers, Lee felt convinced that it was the throat of Oscar Dene he grappled.

But he could see now that the man was not disguised—and the realisation of the truth left Lee for a moment baffled and wondering.

The naval commander held his throat tenderly and stared at Lee. The man was weak but his eyes flashed with rage.

"Of course! Who the dickens did you think I was?" he gasped.

"Someone else," said Lee shortly.

"Have I changed so much, then?" the naval officer said.

"No. But that is immaterial. How do you come to be here?"

Commander Briggs' eyes dwelt for a moment upon the keen face of the detective. He looked a little ashamed, reluctant to speak. A shadow passed visibly across his face.

"I've been let in, Lee—duped—by the most beautiful woman in creation!" he said, in a low tone.

"I warned you," Lee said grimly, and the other's eyes flashed.

"I know. I knew before—instinctively. I have a penchant for danger. Recklessness is the ally of courage and the perquisite of a fool. Do you know what has happened?"

"Not in detail," Lee said.

"I have been shanghaied—kidnapped—stolen!" he laughed bitterly.

And Lee stared at him amazedly. A fresh vista of possibility was suddenly opened up.

"Great heavens! When?"

"Two days ago."

"By whom?"

"This gang, of whom Poppy was the chief. I escaped last night and came to you."

Lee stared at the commander. A hundred questions rose to his lips, yet time was too precious then to spend in asking them. For an instant he paused. Then he rapped out:

"You have not been on the X04?"

"No. I have been boxed up—liked a durned dummy."

"But the ship sailed. You know that?"

"I guessed they did not skewer me for nothing," he said grimly.

"Do you know what has happened?"

"No, what? Has she picked up—what she went for?"

"Yes," Lee said. "And she has been scuttled with it in the North Sea."

"What! Scuttled?"

"Yes. Blown up! I was going by 'plane to the spot. The crew are adrift in open boats. I am going now."

"Great heavens. Then I just caught you?"

"Another moment, and you would have been too late," Lee said. "I have room for a second passenger. If you would care to risk the journey—"

"Lee, I'm with you—through Hades. Let's get away, now!"

The pair did not pause for further discussion. They passed out once more to the big car, and a few minutes later it drew up on the corner of Scotland Yard, where a tall powerfully-built man was waiting patiently.

"Jump in, Harker," Lee said quickly.

"This is Commander Briggs, R.N. Mr. Briggs, Detective-inspector Harker of Scotland Yard. Can you drive, Briggs?"

"Yes!"

"Then will you take the wheel while I talk to Harker. He hasn't the slightest idea where we're going to take him. You know our destination—Hendon aerodrome. Don't be afraid of driving dangerously, if you have to, but don't waste a second."

The naval officer nodded grimly, and he took Lee at his word very literally. Briggs handled a car with the skill that he handled a destroyer, and the present temper of the man seemed to revel in the high speed of which the long powerful car was capable.

The big car simply fled to the aerodrome, and once or twice Lee looked up sharply as the car tilted on its off-side wheels as it took a corner without slackening in the least.

And that journey and the ensuing flight, remained always with Harker and the commander as the vivid memory of an orgy of speed. They flashed round into the aerodrome and came up like a flash beside an amphibian machine which could land on land or water—a bi-plane—that stood in readiness.

The commander of the station was there waiting for them. He had left nothing to chance. Even as the big car flashed up to the standing 'plane a mechanic standing by the propeller began to swing it and start the engine.

Lee and his companions soon struggled into flying kit. The detective made several inquiries.

"There's a wireless receiving and sending set in her?"

"Yes. She's up to date in every respect."

"Good! I've my map and chart here. What's the weather report over the North Sea?"

"Depression forming," said the 'drome commander, pursing his lips. "None too favourable. I should fly high if I were you. You'll find it easier."

Lee nodded and climbed into the fuselage, taking up position on the pilot's seat. Behind him Briggs and the Yard man made themselves comfortable; and before starting they connected up to one another the speaking apparatus which enabled them to converse without shouting themselves hoarse.

As they flew eastward over London, then on over Essex to the grey North Sea, Commander Briggs told his story.

Grimly he described how, the night before he was due to sail, he had gone to say good-bye to the girl he believed to be Miss Poppy Dulieu. He had several drinks there, and they must have been doped in some way, for he simply fell asleep and did not come to himself until far on into the following day, after the X04 had left her berth.

He was then bound hand and foot, and his uniform had been taken from him and he had been dressed in civvies. The strange part of it was that Poppy came to him, and asked his forgiveness for what, she said, was her job. She hated hurting his feelings, but what she had done had been forced upon her—so she said.

He raved, of course, and wanted to know what was happening aboard ship. She told him that a Commander Briggs would turn up and take the ship to Hamburg, officially, and would, just as officially, disappear out of the Royal Navy, as mysteriously as he had entered it.

All this he could not understand, but Lee understood, now. The commander aboard the destroyer had not been killed. That piece of play-acting with the firing of revolvers was the way in which the bogus commander had left the Navy. That commander had been Oscar Dene himself!

And then another man, who, from the description, Lee knew to be Sandrez, the Spanish murderer, had wanted to get rid of the job of looking after Briggs by murdering him out of hand, but the girl herself had objected to this course, and had stood between the captive and his would-be assassin.

"I could not see her face," said Briggs, "and I am rather glad. Such beauty as hers I would not like to see marred by such rage as hers. I may be a strange man, Lee, but I shall always think kindly of her. 'If anything happens to him,' she cried, 'I am finished. You understand? You do not dictate to me, as you know yourself, and you never will. Whatever there is at stake, I do not forget that he is a man—a real man. I do not decoy a man to his death, and if anything happens, then I become your enemy.'"

"Did she say that?" Lee asked; and he could not help thinking how characteristic this was of the girl and her strange temperament, her queer mixture of wildness and restraint, of good and evil.

"She said that—and more," Briggs said. "And he argued cleverly. The end justifies the means—and all that. But she would not have it. I was to be kept prisoner—just that—until the coast was clear. That was all!"

"And how is it you are here now?" Lee asked.

"By a ruse," said Briggs, "I was in a hut up on the hills behind Cosham, in charge of an old man, and I feigned a fit. We fought, and I had to knock him down, and then I got clear and took the first train to town—to you."

"Why did you not report to Portsmouth?"

"I wanted to see you first. I wanted your advice. What you had warned me against had recoiled upon me a dozen times. I could have killed myself. I was in a terrible quandary. I am now!"

"Perhaps not," Lee said hopefully. "I think we may win out now, Briggs. This ship is lost, but the stuff may be recovered."

He told the commander all that had transpired—how he had been cleverly impersonated, and how the boats from Harwich were even now scouring about a hundred miles adrift, owing to the false position which had been sent.

"Magnificent! Lee, what a tactician you would have been if the Navy had claimed you! And you say you know the exact position where the old packet went down?"

"We are nearing it now," Lee said, peering down at his chart.

As he spoke he inclined his planes, and the nose of the biplane dropped. At a tremendous speed they plunged down towards the green expanse below them.

At a few hundred feet a hoarse cry broke from Briggs. He pointed ecstatically at two specks upon the horizon.

"The boats—the boats!" he cried.

Lee snatched a pair of prism glasses from his pocket and peered ahead. He could see distinctly two small boats pitching and tossing about on a sea which was growing greyer and more sullen every moment.

Out on the horizon Lee saw a tiny stream of smoke as a square-set tramp out of Rotterdam for Hull forged her way through the breaking waters. She was a long way off, but for the biplane it was just a semi-vertical climb against the wind and then a volplane.

Up went the 'plane again, and the twin engines roared as she rose swiftly up until she was almost lost to sight among the upper clouds.

Then in one wild swoop she came down like an eagle upon the tramp, and the little vessel shrieked protest on her siren as Lee swept in narrow circles round her very rigging and landed on the water beside her. She slowed down her engines, and Lee cleared his throat for a shout.

"Hallo! Where are you bound for?"

"Van Guyten! Out of Rotterdam for Hull!" roared a voice in response.

"Then tell your look-out. There are two small boats adrift five miles on your port beam. Hurry along and pick them up before they founder, please."

"Yes! Very goot! Ve vill!" roared the Dutchman quickly, and as the biplane rose again into the air, the nose of the old tramp

(Continued on page 44.)

The Opening Chapters Of A Powerful Story Of The Great War!

The GREEN BUTTON!



The Masked Man!

IT was the year 1915. The Great War was in its most crucial stage, and things were looking serious for Great Britain and her allies. The nation was fighting with its back to the wall, calling on all its resources and seeking desperately for some means of gaining a decisive advantage over the enemy.

And on one pitch black night a young man drove a small car along a Surrey Lane at breakneck speed. He showed no lights, and saw none, for all lights were naturally forbidden on account of enemy aircraft.

High over enemy territory the British 'plane droned. Suddenly a figure climbed out of the cockpit, gave one look at the ground below, then jumped, his parachute bellowing out above him. Lord Monty Merriman, a daring British spy in the Secret Service, was setting forth on the most perilous mission of his life!

The blackness was easily understood. The presence of a young man in civvies was not so easily understood. He was well-built, clean-shaven, something of a dude, perhaps, in his dress. His features were sharp and keen.

He was obviously in a tearing hurry, yet when the black shape of a house loomed against the dark sky, he throttled down, shut off his engine, and guided the car on to the grassy verge beside the narrow road. He alighted and went forward on foot.

He made scarcely a sound. His gaze was fixed on the house ahead. With every sense alert he paused a moment, then hastily crouched under the hedge. All he had heard was the sharp crack of a twig, as if under someone's foot. But it was enough!

He parted the twigs of the hedge and peered through. He saw a dark shape that

moved uneasily. It was the figure of a man!

The newcomer drew in his breath. Had he come too late?

He crawled onward on all fours, then paused just long enough to take a black mask from his pocket and fasten it over his eyes.

The night wind was cold and treacherous, but he paid it no heed. There was desperate work on hand. He reached the gate of a humble villa and paused again, peering through the bars. His gaze was at once directed on a dense shadow by a tall privet. A man stood there. Any ordinary person might never have seen him, but this strange newcomer had expected him to be somewhere about.

Then, strangely enough, he rose to his feet, and with his velour hat pulled well down over his eyes to conceal the mask he wore, he calmly opened the gate and proceeded up the path towards the house.

He had to do something. He was sorry now he had come alone, but there had been so little time in which to arrange things. He knew he was walking slap into danger—possibly sudden death. But someone had to do the job.

He had not gone half a dozen paces when that dark figure by the privet suddenly moved, barring his way, and a gruff, guttural voice reached his ears.

"Wait! What do you want here?"

The man's hand was in his jacket-pocket. The newcomer guessed it grasped a revolver, but he didn't hesitate.

"Why, dash it, old man," he replied in a rather high-pitched, aristocratic voice, "can't a fellow call on a friend without—"

The fact that he had spoken at all disarmed the watcher. The newcomer suddenly sprang into action. One hand grabbed the fellow's right wrist. One fist came up in a savage blow to the point, well aimed, and with surprising force behind it. The watcher grunted, reeled, and the arms of the newcomer caught him and lowered him almost without a sound to the gravel of the path and rolled him under the privet.

"A near thing!" muttered the masked man. "But who's inside?"

He went on up to the house, walking on the grass of the lawn to deaden his steps. He came to the door. There was no light showing on the ground floor, but at an upstairs window he saw a tiny point of light through a chink of the blind.

But the masked man ignored the front door. He made his way to the back of the house and busied himself at the kitchen window. He seemed expert. Without a sound he forced back the catch and raised the sash, then clambered over the sill into the room.

The beam of an electric torch flashed round the room and was focussed on the figure of a servant, gagged and bound to a chair. Her eyes were rolling with terror.

The newcomer said nothing, but the torch clicked out. He moved silently across the room and out into the passage. Upstairs the

light from a room shone out on to the landing, and he heard voices. He listened as he crept up the stairs. One voice was that of a woman, half in terror, half in defiance. The other was the guttural voice of a man—and not a Britisher, either!

"It is the truth, I tell you!" said the man almost with a snarl. "A week ago your husband, Captain Richard Seton, was taken prisoner on the Flanders front. That means he is in our hands. By speaking, madam, you can save him much suffering."

The woman answered shrilly, angrily.

"He—he would despise me if I told you," she retorted. "For one thing, I know nothing, and if I did I would rather die than tell you!"

The masked man reached the landing without so much as a creak of the stairs. He peered through the chink of the door. He saw a library, a pretty young woman in a green coat-frock of the period, trimmed with innumerable small green, cloth-covered buttons. She stood by the bookcase, fear and defiance mingled on her pale face.

Before her stood a burly, clean-shaven, bullet-headed man, sneering in a menacing manner.

"I think I can make you speak!" he snapped. "We have copies of the formula as possessed by the British Government. But the important part of the formula is missing. Your Government has it not, madam. We mean to get it. Who gets that missing part first will make the new explosive. You shall tell me where it is!"

The man's English was very good, but it was faulty in places and betrayed his foreign origin.

"I will not speak!" said the woman hoarsely.

"I make you, then. I——"

But the masked man slammed the door back and stood on the threshold, one hand in his jacket-pocket, thrusting his electric torch forward as if it were a gun. He had come unarmed. It was very unfortunate, but there had been no time to prepare for this picnic.

"No, you won't Heinrich!" he said pleasantly. "You'll put your hands up—quickly!"

That last word was almost spat out. The woman screamed, and her hands went to her pale cheeks. The German spun round, his hand shot out, gripping a revolver. Lieutenant Heinrich Kahn might be brutal in his methods, but, to do him justice, he was not lacking in pluck or resource.

The masked man ducked and the bullet shaved the doorpost behind him. Then he hurled himself forward as in a Rugby tackle. His arms coiled round Kahn's legs and brought him down with a thud, the revolver flying from his hand.

They struggled there, locked in a deadly embrace. The table went over, they scattered the fireirons and smashed the glass front of a bookcase, fighting madly, both trying to get hold of the revolver.

The masked man got his fingers round it, but could not use it because Heinrich held

him so tightly. They came to their feet, somehow, still grasping each other. The masked man tossed the gun away, hoping the woman would get hold of it. But Heinrich jerked his arm, and the weapon shot across the room and slid through the doorway out into the shadows of the landing.

Then down they thudded again, but this time the masked man was on top, and had a hold on the German's throat.

"Better give in, Heinrich, old chap!" he said with a grim smile playing round his firm lips.

But another man suddenly burst into the room, having crept up the stairs. He wielded a clubbed revolver. The butt crashed down on the head of the masked man, and he rolled off Heinrich with a moan and lay still in the fireplace.

"Quickly, lieutenant," growled the newcomer in German. "The police are coming!"

Heinrich came to his feet with a growling curse.

"Put out that light!" he snapped.

It clicked out, and the room was in blackness.

The woman heard the blind go up with a whir, heard the sash of the window raised, and saw dimly the bulky figures of the men as they clambered up on the sill. The voice of Heinrich sounded in a harsh whisper.

"You have refused, madam. But your husband—we make him speak!"

The next moment both of the men had jumped to the lawn below.

The Manacled Daredevil!

THE silence in the room was broken only by the heavy breathing of the startled, amazed woman. But not for long.

The masked man stirred, struggled to his feet, reached the electric switch and flooded the room with brilliance.

He scarcely looked at the woman. One glance told him where his birds had flown, and he followed them, clambering over the sill and leaping down to the lawn, floundering for a second in the bushes, then regaining his balance and rushing madly to the road. He heard the roar of a motor, but it was receding in the distance, heading south. From the north came another car. He waited for it.

Stern-faced men leaned out, and he spoke to them.

"They're getting away!" he panted. "Kahn and two others. You follow them, if you can."

The police car shot off in pursuit, but the masked man knew it was hopeless. The Germans would abandon their car and get away in different directions. But they would not dare return to the Surrey villa.

Rather wearily, he went back into the house, and switched on all the lights, releasing the bound servant in the kitchen and going up to the library to find the woman in green seated at the table.

"They've escaped, I suppose?" she said huskily. "Who are you?"

"Names do not matter," he replied, with a smile. "Secret Service—British. You are Mrs. Seton—the wife of Captain Richard Seton?"

"Yes. Did you expect those—those Germans to call here to-night?"

"We had word of it—never mind how—half an hour ago. I came here in a hurry to protect you—hadn't even time to grab a gun. But, listen—time is valuable, Mrs. Seton. Your husband has invented a new explosive. He sent the papers to the War Office. They were copied by a German spy. That was unfortunate, but your husband had guarded against that by not enclosing the last sheet—the vital part. The War Office had enough sense to realise the importance of the invention, but could not make use of it until they had the last sheet. For that same reason the copies are of little use to the Germans. Arrangements were made to bring your husband back home from the front to go into the matter, but an hour or two before the news arrived at the base out there, Captain Seton was taken prisoner by the enemy. But we want the last page—the missing formula, Mrs. Seton. Do you know where it is?"

She was smiling proudly.

"No," she said. "I'm glad I do not know. I cannot betray the secret. Yet I am sorry, for England's sake. There is no missing formula. My husband burnt it before going to the front. But he memorised it. He is the only living man who can supply the missing formula, and he will do that from memory."

The masked man stared, then fell to pacing the room.

"Fortunate—yet unfortunate, now that the Germans hold him prisoner. It means that there is only one thing to do. We must find out what camp he is in—but the Germans will hold him fast, and even hide him from us after this."

"What will you do?" asked Mrs. Seton.

"Go and find him, and smuggle him out of Germany," said the masked man grimly. "But we must get word to him somehow to look out for me."

"How can you do that if the Germans will hide him? Besides, his letters will be censored."

"You can write to him," said the masked man. "And you can send him something. Let me see, now—we've got to be careful. Has he seen you in that green frock?"

The woman stared at him.

"Yes—of course. I wore it the night I saw him off to the front."

"Then I have it. Bring me a cake of soap—and a piece of paper—part of an ordinary story—not a newspaper—they'll destroy that."

She could not understand, but she obeyed quickly. The masked man sat down at the table. He was dirty, dusty, dishevelled, bruised, but these things mattered nothing beside the job in hand.

At his directions she brought a basin of warm water. He cut open the cake of soap, scooped out a hole in one part, asked her to cut one of the green buttons from her frock, which he placed in the hole he had scooped out of the soap.

She watched his deft fingers as they worked. He placed the two halves of the cake of soap together again, then worked his hands over the surface, this way and that, until he had them secure again. He tossed the soap up in the air, flung it down on the table roughly, but it did not break, and there was no sign on the outside that it had been tampered with in any way, although the green button lay unseen inside it.

"Now for the paper," he said.

He took the magazine page from her and studied it, then, with a pin taken from the lapel of his jacket he pricked holes under certain letters. She peered over his shoulder, watching him in amazement, and spelling out the words framed by the letters so marked.

"Watch for contents," she said, mystified. "What do you mean?"

"We dare not warn him more directly. He may not even notice those pinholes," said the masked man. "But he will eventually find the green button. To-night you must write to him—mention the green frock, casually—say you will wear it in memory of him—something like that. It will all help. And now, please give me some of those green buttons. When he sees one in my hand he will know I have come to rescue him. You understand?"

She nodded and reached for her scissors. She cut off all the ornamental buttons, and he gathered them up in his strong hand and dropped them into his pocket.

"Thank you!" he said simply. "This is for England——"

"And Dick," she added. "But—please—cannot I be told the name of a brave man?"

"A loyal man," he said, with a smile. "But really, I'm an awful funk at times. I will tell you—in secret."

"I will never mention it to a soul," she promised solemnly.

"I am Lord Montague Merriman—Monty, to my friends."

She held out her hand to him.

"Good-bye, then—and good luck—Monty," she said.

The next moment he had gone, and she was busy writing the letter that would go to Germany with the cake of soap—and the green button.

Heinrich Gets a Shock.

IT was an immaculate Lord Monty Merriman who called at the War Office attired in the uniform of a staff-major, complete with red tabs. There was not a button out of place on his uniform, and a gleaming monocle was screwed in one eye. Except for the fact that his face was bronzed and there was a remarkably resolute set to his firm lips, folks reckoned he was a fireside lancer.

But it was a strange figure that rose from the cramped seat in the tiny aeroplane that flew at a tremendous height over Germany forty-eight hours later. The night was dark—no moon, no stars—just dense clouds and a drizzle of rain falling steadily. The conditions could not have been better.

"Where are we?" Monty had asked, a few moments before.

"Five miles over the frontier," the pilot had announced.

"Right. I'll drop off here."

There were queer bundles tied round his body. His parachute was on his back, and his clothes were those of a German peasant, rough, sombre and nondescript.

The pilot shouted his good wishes, but Monty could not hear now that he had discarded the telephones. He went out on the wing, drew a deep breath and leapt off into nothing. Below there was only darkness—above was darkness—all around just blackness. He jerked the ring of his harness at the right moment, and the parachute billowed out over his head.

He was taking tremendous risks. He might land slap in a town, or a camp, or even a farmstead, and it would take a deal of explaining to make anyone believe that German peasants drop out of the skies on a dark night during wartime. The 'plane had been forced to fly high to avoid being observed, and it was impossible to see the ground through the veiling curtain of cloud below.

The pilot had done his utmost to ensure that his daring passenger should drop in a lonely spot, and Monty's luck was in that night. He came sailing down through the blanketing clouds and saw the earth beneath him. The flickering lights of a village showed about five miles away to the east, but immediately below was darkness, and he struck earth in a desolate stretch of moorland.

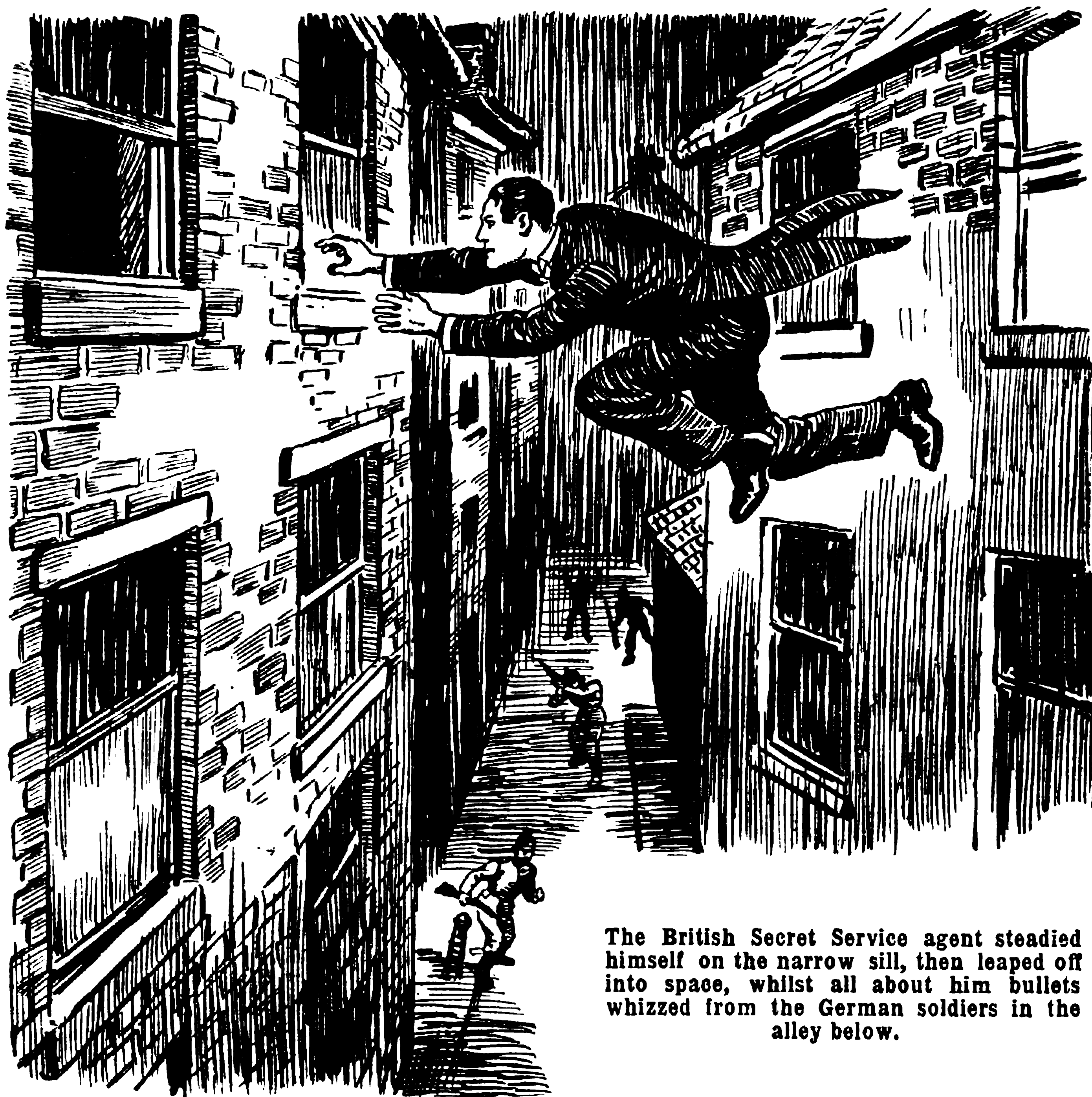
Hastily disengaging himself from his flapping parachute, he set to work to hack the thing to shreds with a claspknife. It took valuable time, but it was necessary. He found a pond close at hand, and weighting the debris with stones he sank the lot out of sight. Then he set off, found a road, turned his face westward and headed for a frontier town.

His bundles were now on his back, in a sack, like potatoes. He trudged steadily while the night gave way to dawn, and the sun tinged the sky in the east. Then he came on a ramshackle farm-cart drawn by a half-starved horse. A dirty, ragged man sat on the shafts smoking an ancient meerschau pipe.

"Do you think it will be a fine day?" asked this scarecrow.

Monty eyed him up and down before he replied, carefully.

"Yes, I think it will be a fine day," he said, then he glanced cautiously up and down the road, to make quite sure not a soul was in sight, then dived into the cart and wriggled his way under a pile of sacking.



The British Secret Service agent steadied himself on the narrow sill, then leaped off into space, whilst all about him bullets whizzed from the German soldiers in the alley below.

The human scarecrow on the shafts seemed in no way surprised. He puffed stolidly at his queer pipe, whipped up his lean horse and drove on into the town.

There was a lot of wriggling going on under the sacking as the cart rumbled along the country road. Monty was getting rid of his peasant's dress and assuming the disguise of an elderly German business man.

That job completed, he lay doggo. The approaches to the frontier were guarded, and no one left or entered that frontier town without careful scrutiny. Monty had a hundredweight of potatoes on top of him, and sacks of half mouldy cabbages all round him, when the soldiers in field grey, yawning and cursing in the cold dawn, poked about in the cart with their bayonets, while the human scarecrow allowed the sergeant to slap his dirty smock all over to make sure he had no concealed weapons.

It was the early hour that saved him. A bayonet prodded the potatoes within a foot

of Monty's head, but he never batted an eyelid. The sergeant jerked a thumb, the soldiers returned to the guard hut, and the cart rumbled on into the town.

In the Market Square the human scarecrow, who was really a member of the British Secret Service, unloaded his garden produce, but was not surprised to find that his passenger had dropped off somewhere. As a matter of fact, the elderly German business man was boarding the train that stood with steam up in the station.

"Papers, mein herr," growled the official.

The papers were produced, examined and passed, duly stamped, and Monty, with grey hair and bristling moustache passed on into the train and sat down opposite two military officers. They sneered at him, ignoring him otherwise. Monty snuggled into a corner of the compartment hoping for the best, for one of those officers was Heinrich Kahn, with whom he had fought on the floor of Mrs. Seton's drawing-room in the Surrey villa.

"So, you get here safely," said Kahn's companion.

"It is so easy to fool these Britishers," replied Kahn.

But, if he had only known it, he could have been captured scores of times since he left Surrey. He had been allowed to escape so that Monty could follow him. Monty was already on the job. He reckoned that Kahn would eventually lead him to the camp where Captain Dick Seton was held prisoner.

It was a slow journey. The railway never was good in that part of the world, and now, with military traffic going first, ordinary trains had to wait for hours in the sidings. They travelled wearily south-east, and it was getting towards evening when the train came to a standstill at Dahlborg. Kahn alighted here. So did Monty. Kahn went with his companion along the main street. So did Monty. The place was chock full of soldiers, and the best hotel in the place was obviously some sort of headquarters. Sentries paced outside, cars waited at the kerb, officers rushed hither and thither, and Kahn went in looking very important.

It was check for Monty. He was a civilian to all intents and purposes. That big door was barred to him, so he walked past it as if he had an urgent appointment in the next block. He swung round the corner along by the side of the hotel and eyed the lofty wall.

THE dusk was settling over Dahlborg, and all lights were shaded against enemy aircraft. Few people were about in that side street. The sentry plodded past him and on to the corner, with scarcely a glance. The man paused on the distant corner, grounded his rifle and stood with his back to Monty.

It was the speed and audacity of the thing that won success. If the sentry had turned his head he would have seen a grey and grizzled German nimbly shinning up a stack pipe. But he didn't turn his head. There was too much to attract his idle thoughts in the main street. Monty had banked on that, and he won.

He came to the fourth floor, opened the window of a vacant room and clambered in. The door of the room was locked, but his skeleton keys soon overcame that difficulty. He discarded his overcoat here, and his muffler. He was in swallow tails—just a waiter, to all appearances. It was sure disguise in Germany, anywhere, and at any old time.

He went out into the passage and down the stairs—down to the first floor. He wanted to find Kahn. There would be bound to be some sort of mess where the officers met and discussed things. He might hear something there.

But suddenly he saw Kahn coming towards him, at the far end of the passage, with two officers of high rank—generals, probably. Monty turned back the way he had come round the corner of the passage. He had to

escape somehow. This was getting hot. The slightest mistake would spoil everything, and mean death to him. He tried one door. It was locked. No time to tamper with it. He listened at the next and heard voices. He tried the third. It opened. The room was empty. He went in and glanced about him. It was a sort of office, a pile carpet on the floor, a big desk, one or two chairs, and a 'phone.

Monty had moved as silently as a mouse. A snort made him start. By the door on a chair sat a sergeant, sound asleep. If Monty tried to get out of that room he would be collared. Only one thing to do. He moved like a cat across the room, and disappeared into a cupboard on the far side.

He was only just in time. Others came into the room. Kahn's voice sounded in hot protest, and there was a crash as he kicked the sleeping sergeant off his chair. The man pleaded for mercy, the officers swore. Then the door closed with a crash, and as far as Monty could see through the keyhole of the cupboard there was only Kahn and the general in the room. They began to talk—or rather, to continue their conversation.

"This Captain Seton must be made to tell where the missing formula is to be found," said Kahn.

"He shall be made to speak," vowed the general.

"Of course, his wife may have told."

"She was not told," declared the general. "Word came through by code wireless after you left—the British Government do not know where the missing formula is. What we have is the copy of the papers they have."

"Richard Seton must be made to talk," growled Kahn. "Where is he?"

"Arnstein Castle," said the general.

"Ach, he will not enjoy life there, where we keep the most troublesome of our prisoners of war," chuckled Kahn. "And the other papers—you have them?"

"In the cupboard," said the general.

Monty stiffened, but he was helpless. He heard the jingle of spurs as Kahn strode across the pile carpet. The latch clicked, the cupboard door opened—and Kahn gasped as he stared at the man inside.

"Good evening, Heinrich," said Monty. After all, what was the use of making out he was anything else but a spy.

Action was needed. Monty applied it. His fist crashed full on Kahn's jaw and dropped him in a heap on the carpet.

"Himmel!" roared the general, grabbing a revolver from the drawer of his desk.

But Monty was there with a bound. He knocked the gun aside and tilted the high officer out of his chair, and hit him on the head with an ebony ruler.

So much gained, but men were running in the passage. Monty leapt at the door and turned the key in the lock. Then he rushed at the window. Kahn was dizzy, but conscious enough to reach out with one hand and seize Monty by the ankle, bringing him down with a crash. There was a scuffle on

the floor, punctuated by men banging on the door. Monty squirmed round and drove his fist hard to Kahn's solar plexus, and doubled him up in agony.

The general was still snorting in the corner not sure what had hit him. Monty ignored him and went to the window, flinging it open. It was the only way. Outside was a narrow roadway, and there were men below, and soldiers at the corner.

Opposite was a tall house. Monty fixed his eyes on a window-sill and jumped for it. His body crashed against the wall, but his fingers found the sill and hung on like grim death. He slithered a bit, then with an effort got one hand over the edge. The window was open. It was that chance that had given him the idea.

As if from far away he heard men shouting in the streets. Rifles blared and bullets spattered against the wall. With a heave Monty forced himself over the sill into the room, and scarcely paused to take breath. He crossed the room and went out into the passage and up the creaking stairs, two at a time. A man came from one room, but Monty thrust him back as he passed.

At the top was a skylight. He had to break the glass to get through, and he cut his hand, but that was nothing. He clambered out on to the roof and passed along, keeping the coping between him and any possible observation in the street below, where the soldiers were parading, where bugles sounded and officers yelled hoarse orders. The hue and cry was on, with a vengeance.

He selected the last but one skylight in that row of houses, forced it and went down into the house. He went no lower than the attics. He wanted another disguise. It was essential. The room he found himself in was empty. One of the old servants slept there—a woman. He saw a voluminous skirt draped over the back of a chair, a blouse and a wide brimmed hat on the nail behind the door.

It was dark now, and growing darker. This would have to do. He donned the blouse and skirt over his swallow-tailed jacket and black trousers, he put on the wide-brimmed hat, and descended the stairs. If anyone caught him in the house it would be the end. He heard someone coming up the stairs and dived into another room. It was the bathroom. Whoever it was shuffled on past that door—on up to the attic.

Monty didn't wait. He came out and ran down the stairs to the ground floor. From the front-room came a private soldier without his service cap, with no rifle—just a bayonet at his side. He was home on leave, presumably. He stared at Monty. He thought it was his mother's servant, yet could not be sure about it.

"Do not go out yet, Hilde," he said gruffly. "There is trouble out—"

A stifled scream sounded from the attic. Monty had to drop that inquisitive soldier with a straight left and dash to the front. He was out in flash, and had closed the door behind him. But folks in the dimly lit

street only saw an old servant walk sedately down the steps and along the street.

BUT round the corner, the old servant broke into a run, dashing madly along dark, deserted side streets, then walking quietly again into the main road, and away to the other end of the town. She was looking for a certain road. It was some time before she found it, and came to a halt at a door. The locality was poor and did not smell any too good. An aged woman answered the knock on the door.

"Do you think it will be a fine day?" asked the old servant in a whisper.

"Yes, I think it will be a fine day," mumbled the old woman.

The servant darted into the house and the door closed on her. That skirt, blouse and wide-brimmed hat were never seen again. They were nothing but ashes on the hearth within ten minutes.

It was a German soldier, wounded, an arm in a sling, and a bandage on his face, going home from the hospital to his mother's place at Arnstein, beyond Berlin, who came out of that house. His papers were all in order, although he had several sets on him. He left that town on the midnight train for Arnstein.

While in the hotel Heinrich Kahn stood in the general's room, his uniform awry, staring at something he had picked up off the pile carpet.

"I cannot understand it," he growled.

"It is only a green button," snarled the general. "Throw it away, you fool! This man has got away, somehow. What does that button matter to us?"

"It matters a lot, general!" said Kahn, his eyes goggling with amazement. "I have seen buttons like this one before—on the frock of Richard Seton's wife—in her house—in Surrey! Himmel! What is it doing here in Dahlborg?"

*Look Out For Further Chapters Of This
Great War Story—*

'THE GREEN BUTTON!'

in next week's issue

also

"THE FELLOWSHIP OF FEAR!"

By E. S. BROOKS

*a Long Complete Story of School
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ORDER YOUR NELSON LEE EARLY!

"The Mystery Of The Gold Ship!"

(Continued from page 36.)

was turned round almost at right angles, and an increased froth at the stern and a heavier wake indicated that she was making speed at her fullest capacity of nine knots.

Briggs face, despite his own troubles and anxieties, beamed to think that his crew were safe.

"Old one-and-an-onion will make them in half an hour," he said. "By Jove, some of the chaps look done up!"

The plane rose and then swooped down upon the drifting boats, and above the roar of the engines the three men heard the glad cries of the tired crew as they hailed them. They saw arms waving joyously, caps and handkerchiefs fluttering.

Then the plane came down to the water, and such men as still had the strength to pull an oar turned the boats towards them.

Lee saw a slight figure rise in the stern of the foremost boat and peer towards him, and his heart warmed at the sight.

And then as the boats drew near, the officer with the detective rose in his seat in the plane and waved frenziedly, his eyes bright with unconcealed joy.

"Good luck to you, boys!" he cried. "Keep your peckers up! The old tank is coming to pick you up!"

There is little more to tell of "The Mystery

of the Gold Ship." Knowing the position in which the destroyer, X04, sunk, it was a simple matter for Nelson Lee to put the Admiralty right. A fast destroyer went to the spot, and stood by on guard, making it impossible for Oscar Dene to attempt to salvage the treasure as he had originally intended to do. Later, not only was the gold successfully raised and taken in safety to the great vaults for which it was originally intended, but the X04 herself was hauled up and floated, and towed into the historic dockyard of Portsmouth, where her two halves were grafted together into a united whole again.

Commander Briggs lost nothing by the misadventure, but was wont to say often that he had gained a lot—the friendship of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

Nelson Lee's only disappointment in the whole case was that he had been unsuccessful in running Oscar Dene and his Confederation to earth. But, at least, the famous detective had scored a great triumph in frustrating the master-crook once again.

THE END.

(Next week's Grand Long Complete Story is entitled: "THE FELLOWSHIP OF FEAR!" and deals with the amazing adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper at St. Frank's.)

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