

The NELSON LEE

2¢

"Gee Whiz!"

A

"SHOOT-STRAIGHT"
CATAPULT

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**NEXT WEEK'S
DANDY**

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"HOME-JAZZ"
KAZOO HUMMER

New Series No. 5.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 22nd, 1930.

The Laughable Larks

of TUBBY and SLIM!

.....
Glue—and the stickiest that's ever been made. Slim invents it, and Tubby helps him to prove its stickiness. These two laughter merchants are at their funniest this week, chums!



Burglars!

TUBBY BOOTLE, a cheerful grin on his round face, entered his den, a room which he shared with his brother Bertie, more familiarly known as Slim. No sooner had he made his entrance than he stopped, gasped, turned suddenly and bolted out again, slamming the door after him.

"Phew! My hat!" Tubby exclaimed, holding his nose tightly and flopping against the wall of the passage as if overcome. "I should think a dead elephant must have climbed in the window and made itself at home there."

"That you, Tubby?" queried a voice from behind the closed door. "Come in, will you?"

"No jolly fear, Slim. At least, not until I've saturated my handkerchief with lavender water. What on earth are you brewing there?"

The door opened from within and the thin figure of Bertie Bootle appeared. A spring clothes-peg was clipped on to his nostrils so that he could shut his nose and yet have both hands free for his experiments. He offered a similar peg to his brother Tubby, who fastened it on his nose and then condescended to follow him into their joint den.

"Glue," exclaimed Slim, waving his hand towards his bench. "Come and stir it for a few moments, old man, while I get a jar to bottle it."

Tubby took two steps in the direction of a pot which was steaming over a lighted bun-

sen burner, and then stood still, a look of horror dawning in his round eyes. He made an effort to walk, but it seemed as if an invisible force held him back.

"Slib," he announced as well as the clothes-peg on his nose would let him. "Slib, I'm paralysed. I can't bove by leg!"

With great consternation he felt gradually down from his thigh to his ankle. The leg seemed all right; there was no pain to be noticed, and yet it was rooted to the ground.

"Stick a pin in by leg and see if I can feel it," implored Tubby desperately.

"Right!" said Slim. And he chose a pin of formidable dimensions and jabbed it in the fleshy part of his brother's leg.

The effect was instantaneous, and it proved right away that Tubby wasn't paralysed, at any rate. With a whoop like that of a wild Indian he leapt high into the air.

Tubby looked at his feet. The right one was booted; the other appeared to be wearing only a spat. No—it wasn't a spat, it was the top of his boot; the sole was still sticking to the floor, wrenched clean away from its upper.

"Ye gods!" he ejaculated dazedly. "What's happened?"

Slim had now removed his gluepot from the burner and opened the window to let the fumes escape. He took off his nasal vice so that he might talk more easily.

"It's all serene," he grinned brightly. "I dare say I dropped a spot of my glue on the

floor and you trod on it. Sticks like fury. I've just invented it. I'll probably make a fortune out of the patent, that is, if I can remember what the ingredients were which made up the formula."

As he spoke, a test tube on his bench fell over. A whitish vapour rose from the spilled contents, and with a yell Slim grabbed his brother's arm and dragged him from the room. Even as he banged the door there was a flash and an explosion, and a sound of falling glass spoke eloquently of the destruction of many of Slim's treasured chemical concoctions.

"Why the dickens didn't I turn out that bunsen burner?" groaned Slim in dismay.

"Thank your luck stars the colonel isn't at home," said Tubby. "As he is not returning until to-morrow morning, we shall have time to clear up the mess."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, Tubby. Let's go in—I think it will be safe now."

They opened the door and peeped in very cautiously. Things looked somewhat awry and glass littered the floor, but on closer inspection they decided that it might have been worse. One thing they couldn't find, and that was Slim's last brew of glue. The first jar was fortunately intact, but the second was nowhere to be seen.

After a vain search in which Tubby joined with some trepidation, it was finally decided that the glue must have been blown out of the window by the force of the explosion, and there the matter was allowed to rest, the inventor of the substance feeling thankful that one jar of the super-powered sticky stuff had been saved for him.

They set to and cleared up the mess, half-filling the dust-bin with broken glass and other debris. By this time their exertions caused them unanimously to long for bed and sweet repose, and, tired but happy, they tucked themselves between the sheets and were soon in the land of nod.

The boys had been asleep for hours. A clock from the neighbouring hamlet tolled the hour of four, and on the last note of its chime Slim awoke with a start.

An unfamiliar sound of light tapping caused him to jerk up in bed and strain his ears in the darkness. He crept out of the sheets and gently opened the door. The tapping sounded louder, and he decided that it came from his guardian's study.

Crossing over to his brother's bed, from the depths of which resonant snores were issuing in unending succession, he shook the occupant, and Tubby's full-moon face appeared above the bed-clothes.

"Whasermatter?" he muttered sleepily, his mouth opening wide in a yawn which almost obliterated the rest of his features.

"Ssh! Burglars!"

"Can't see 'em to-night, old man. Tell 'em I'm out." Tubby turned over and shut his eyes again resolutely.

"There's a jug of icy-cold water over there," threatened Slim in his ear. "I'll give you five seconds——"

"Oh, botheration! Why can't you let a chap sleep when he wants to?"

By the time his bemused senses had grasped the fact that there really were burglars on the premises, he was as eager as Slim to be at them. Slipping on their dressing-gowns, the two lads lightly descended the stairs and found the colonel's study door slightly ajar.

They peeped through the crack, and could discern a dim figure moving about near the open safe. The two brothers burst into the study, and as they did so one of the French windows banged and told of an accomplice who had escaped, leaving his pal to face the music. There was a furious struggle with their captive, and our chums had enough to do to look after him to bother about any other fellows for the moment.

At last, after knocking several pieces of furniture about, they managed to force the man into a chair and Tubby piled on to him.

"Biff him on the boko," shouted Slim, but the man stopped struggling as Tubby brought back his fist to obey.

"S all right," he growled. "You might as well let me go, 'cause I ain't took nothing."

"Let you go, old burglar," said Slim calmly. "Don't you believe it, sonny. We'll hold you here until you tell us where the other chap has gone."

"What other chap?" said the man. "There

isn't no other chap. I'm all alone."

"Next please!" grinned Slim. "He's been and pinched the colonel's silver cup, Tubby. The one that he got for shooting sixteen tigers off the reel. He'll be properly rattled if we don't get it back."

"I should say so," agreed Tubby. He turned to the burglar. "Now then, my friend with the taking ways, where's your pal gone with that cup?"

"I keep telling you there ain't no pal and there ain't no cup."

"No, I can see that. Now, Slim, hand me up that heavy poker so that I can bash him one if he moves, and you go and get some rope to tie him up."

"Righto!" replied Slim. "Mind he don't move while I'm gone."

This Bumper Issue
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Topping Free Gift—
AN INDOOR
CATAPULT.

"He won't move," said Tubby darkly, and he grasped the poker while Slim went upstairs.

A sudden thought fluttered over Slim's head and, with a plop, fell into his brain-box. Glue! That's it! Glue the blighter—much better than string!

Chortling to himself, Slim went to the den and seized the remaining jar of his liquid glue, with which he returned to the study.

"Lie face downward on the floor," he commanded the man. "Bash him if he doesn't, Tubby. We'll fix him."

The man, not liking the look of the poker in Tubby's capable-looking hands, decided to postpone any show of resistance until later. Slim whispered to his brother what he proposed to do, and then poured some of the sticky contents of the jar over the prostrate fellow's coat and trousers.

Then, grasping the captive's legs, and signing to Tubby to collar his arms, Slim gave the signal, and with a heave they tossed the unlucky rogue up to the ceiling, where he stuck, looking the picture of bewilderment.

"Well, ta-ta, old burglar," smiled Slim sweetly. "We're going back to bed now. Perhaps by breakfast-time you will be prepared to tell us where your naughty accomplice has gone with our guardian's prize-pot."

The two boys left the burglar hanging like a pendant from the ceiling, and with his protestations in their ears, they mounted once more to their bed-room, and were soon wrapt again in slumber.

More Trouble!

IN the morning their first thought was to visit the study and see how their captive was faring. Alas! All that was left of him was a portion of his coat and trousers adorning like a ragged star the middle of the ceiling.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" shouted the exasperated Slim. "The glue held right enough, but his blessed togs gave way when he struggled, and let him free."

After breakfast the two boys set out for the station to meet their guardian, who was returning by an early train. They had no sooner got outside than old Crabapple, their neighbour, blundered out of his gate, and without any by-your-leave started to whack Tubby over the shoulders with his walking stick.

"Hi, help! Ow!" yelled Tubby, quickly placing himself out of reach of the old chap's stick. "What are you up to, you dotty old savage?"

"What am I up to, you young scoundrels! Who made that explosion last night, eh? Blew a lot of jars and bottles through my glass-houses. I'll teach you!" And he aimed a blow at Slim, but missed him. You had to aim very straight if you wanted to catch our thin chum: he was only length without breadth. "And what about your roof?" went on the irate man, brandishing his stick. "It's blown off into my chicken-run!"

The brothers gazed up at the top of their own house, and nearly had a fit when they saw that a large chunk of roof was indeed absent from its accustomed position.

"Ye fishes and little gods!" muttered Tubby. "Won't there be a row when the colonel comes back? Yes, there will!"

"Let's get along to the station and break the news gently," advised Slim.

They turned and trotted down the lane, leaving Crabby waltzing round in the road hurling threats of further vengeance after them. As they reached the station the train steamed in, and they spotted their guardian on the platform.

"We've had burglars!" announced Tubby breathlessly, as soon as the colonel came up to them.

"Pinched your silver cup, sir!" added Slim.

"You must be mistaken, my boys," boomed the colonel, in a large whisper. "I have my silver cups with me here." And he indicated a leather bag which he was carrying.

Seeing the boys' looks of astonishment, he felt constrained to offer an explanation.

"I—er—took it to London to have—er—the inscription poshed up a bit," he said somewhat self-consciously.

"Jumping Jeremy!" cried Slim. "Then the jolly old nightbird was right. He said he'd taken nothing."

The broaching of the roof question was made a little easier by the colonel's information, but before they could open the subject, their guardian had strolled out of the station entrance and seated himself in the one and only ramshackle station taxi which was standing at the kerb.

"I'll ride home," he said, and the boys, preferring to roam through the town first, stood back to watch him start.

The decrepit taxi driver turned the handle of his car and started up the box of tricks which performed duty as the engine, and sat himself at the wheel. After fumbling about with the gears and brake lever for a few moments, he got out and opened the bonnet, wondering why the jigger wouldn't start.

Slim opened the door to speak to his guardian, and then goggled his eyes at something on the floor of the cab. It was his missing glue jar, and on end. The cab must have been passing their house when the explosion occurred, and the jar finding a resting-place in the vehicle, had remained there all night.

And now its contents had trickled out on to the road, sticking the car to the highway by the front wheels. No wonder she wouldn't budge.

The colonel, seeing his ward wished to speak to him, attempted to rise from the seat—and failed. He tried again, this time with success—but at what a cost! His tail-coat, glued to the seat, refused to come with him, and with a tearing noise which set his teeth on edge ripped right up the back and fell away from the astounded soldier, leaving him in his shirt-sleeves.

"Good gad!" was all he could muster, and he crouched down in the cab lest the townsfolk should observe him in such undignified attire.

"Sit in," said Tubby to the driver. "We'll give you a shove off."

The man sat at the wheel, and Slim and Tubby pushed at the back of the car with all their might. Needless to say, they kept mum as to the cause of the car's behaviour, not to mention that of their guardian.

Nothing happened as the result of their efforts—the car lurched forward, but the wheels refused to revolve.

"We shall push the body off the chassis," grinned Tubby. "Let's try once more. Now, then—heave-o!"

Exerting all his strength, and this was considerable, Tubby attempted to lift the car from off the ground. Something had to give, and the result was disconcerting, even to our hardened adventurers.

The super-strong glue refused to release the front wheels, but the remainder of the taxi curved into the air, and, after slinging Colonel Squint and the driver into a nearby horse-trough, came to rest again upside-down.

"This is where we scat," howled Slim, bursting with glee as he beheld his guardian rising from the horse-trough like Neptune without his toasting-fork.

Some hours later Tubby and Slim crept silently home. The study door was wide open and the room empty, but in a place of honour on the bookcase the famous tiger-shooting trophy reposed in all its glory. Curiously the pair went over to it to see what actually had been done to the inscription.

"Look!" grinned Slim. "The old bounder! Look what he's done!"

The vanity of the thing so tickled them that they stuffed handkerchiefs into their mouths to stifle their mirth. For, not content with boasting about the sixteen tigers he had shot before breakfast, the colonel had caused the engraver to etch another figure on the inscription so that it read: "one hundred and sixteen tigers."

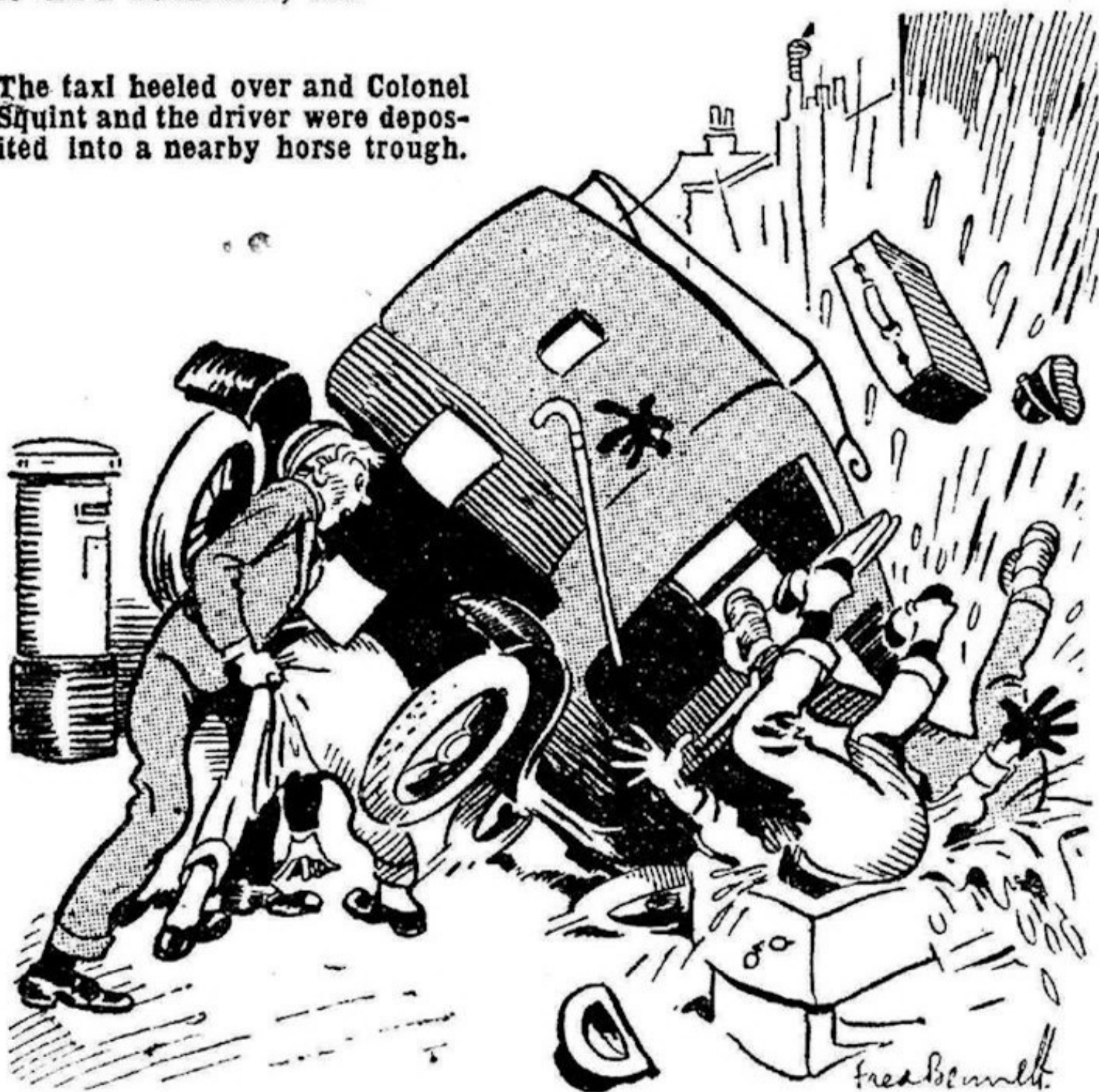
Their guardian's voice shouting to them

from above caused their hilarity to evaporate in double-quick time.

The colonel was in bed recovering from the effects of his cold water bath, and into the bed-room the boys trooped with downcast expression, silently waiting for him to stop snorting and commence his sermon.

When it did come it was like a cataract, words and threats slashing upon them with a

The taxi heeled over and Colonel Squint and the driver were deposited into a nearby horse trough.



fury that only the purple-faced colonel could have been capable of.

"Away, both of you!" roared the irate colonel in conclusion. "I'll pack you off to St. Fluke's to-morrow. Fetch me my pen and ink. I'll write to the principal, Dr. Flybenight, at once."

"Fetch me a pen and ink, too, Tubby," said Slim calmly. "I'm going to write to the papers and tell them what a marvellous shot the colonel is. One hundred and sixteen tigers before breakfast! Ooh, what a lot!"

Their guardian coughed. He looked startled.

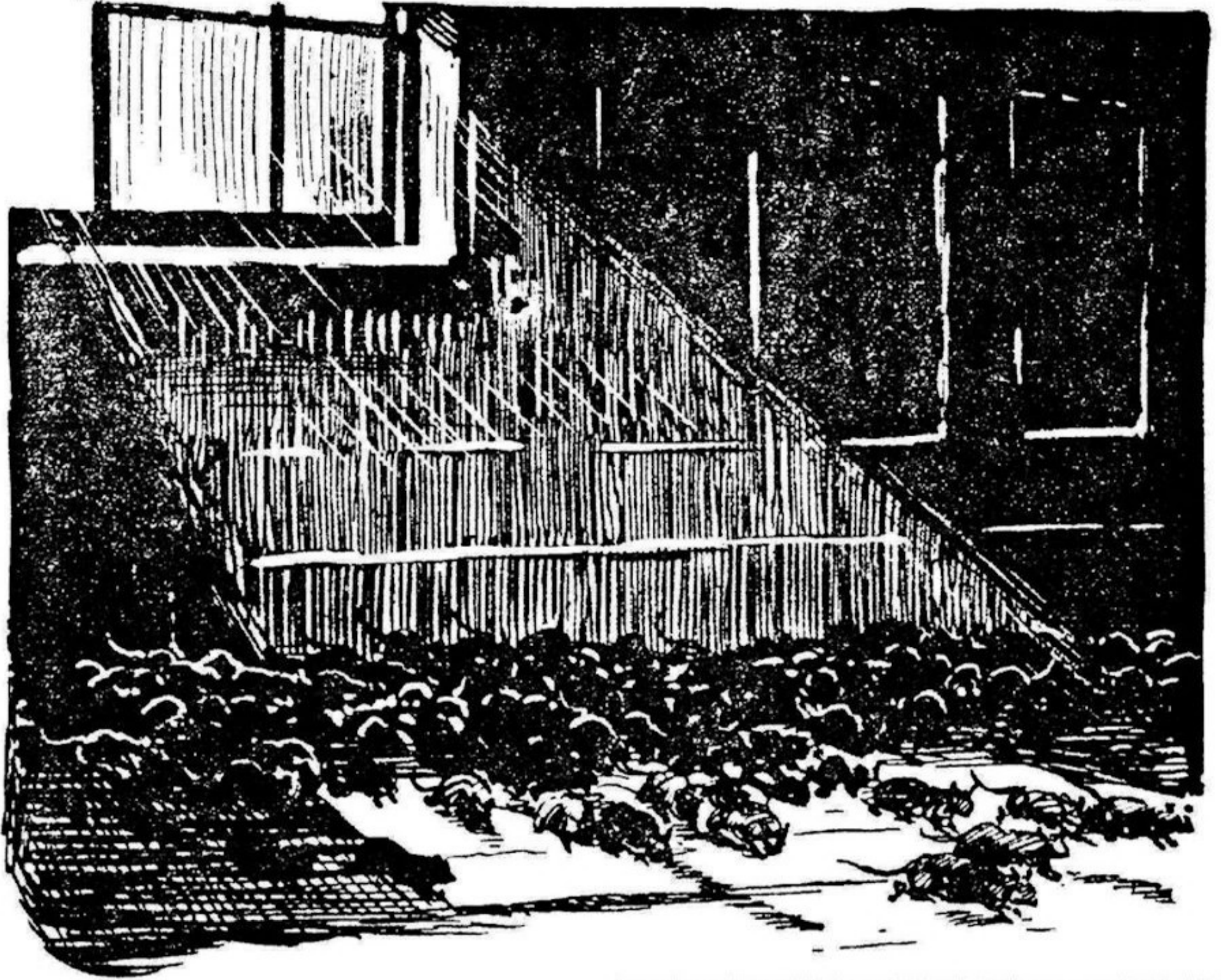
"Perhaps," he said distinctly, "I might overlook your—er—prank this time. Yes, on second thoughts I will not write to Dr. Flybenight now. I'll give you another chance."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" chirruped Tubby and Slim, and then beat a triumphant retreat from the colonel's presence.

(Another amusing Tubby and Slim story next Wednesday, chums.)

THERE'S NOT A DULL LINE IN THIS FINE YARN!

The HOUSE of



CHAPTER 1

The Midnight Mission.

NIPPER heard the sounds faintly, mysteriously.

He was sitting up in bed, his ears on the stretch, all his senses alert. Midnight had struck, and Gray's Inn Road was now comparatively quiet. Occasionally a late tramcar would drone along on its way, or a taxicab would pass.

Creak!

All doubts were dispelled. Somebody was moving stealthily outside, in the passage. And Nipper, remembering a recent attack upon Nelson Lee's life, was filled with sudden dread.

He was alone in the bedroom. It was his own bedroom, next to Nelson Lee's. All the boys of the Detective Academy had their own quarters in the building next door. The academy was really separate from Nelson Lee's chambers, but could be reached by means of a communicating door. Nipper usually slept in his old bedroom, away from the others.

He didn't wait to put on dressing-gown and slippers. He merely seized an electric torch from the table by the bedside and he padded to the door. Softly, cautiously, he opened it.

Outside, darkness reigned. Inch by inch Nipper opened the door wider. He listened. No sounds came to his ears now. Had his imagination played him false?

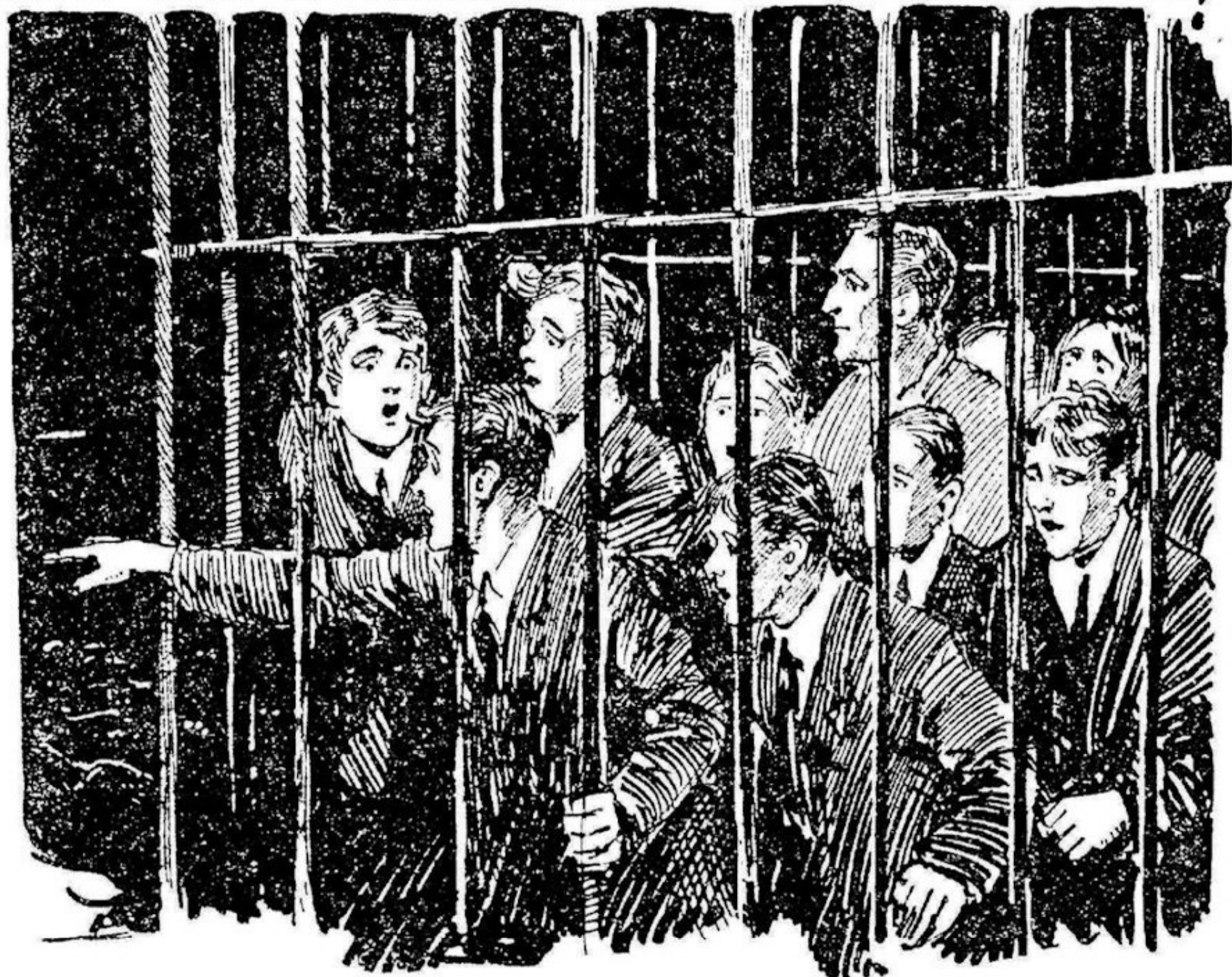
He pressed the switch suddenly and a wide beam of white light slashed the darkness. A cry of startled astonishment arose in Nipper's throat, but he held it in check.

Standing in the full glare of the light, revealed by its sudden brilliance, was the figure of a man. An ugly-looking customer—disreputable, coarse-featured, unshaven, grimy. His clothing

Trapped in a cage; attacked by a huge horde of rats. A horrible fate awaits Nelson Lee and his young assistants. Dacca the Dwarf has played his trump card—but does he win?

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By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

was greasy and tattered and threadbare, and there was a knotted scarf round his throat. All this Nipper took in in the first glance.

"Guv'nor!" shouted Nipper urgently.

A half-smothered exclamation came from the stranger, and he leapt forward at the same second. Nipper tried to dodge, but the other was too quick for him. In a flash Nipper was held in a vice-like grip, and a strong, grimy hand was held over his mouth.

"Steady, young 'un—steady!" whispered

a voice in his ear. "It doesn't suit my plans to have the household awakened by your shouts!"

Nipper nearly collapsed.

"Guv'nor!" he breathed faintly.

NELSON LEE chuckled.

He had released Nipper, and the latter was standing back surveying the disreputable, uncouth figure with such an expression of blank astonishment on his face that Lee chuckled.

"Do I pass?" he asked dryly.

"But, guv'nor," whispered Nipper, "what's the idea? You—you awful bounder! You gave me a fearful fright."

"Nonsense!" laughed the great detective. "You weren't frightened. I'm sorry you came out of your bedroom and spotted me. I was hoping to get out without your knowledge. Sometimes, Nipper, you are a little too alert."

Nipper was just getting over the shock of surprise. It was impossible for him to recognise Nelson Lee in this ugly, unshaven tramp. It was a masterly make-up, and Nipper now looked at Lee with reproach in his eyes.

"What's the game, gov'nor?" he asked. "Something that I mustn't know anything about?"

Lee eyed him amusedly.

"It pleases me to go off on a little night jaunt," he said lightly. "I get these fancies occasionally, Nipper. What you've got to do is to go back to bed, and to sleep soundly."

"Yes, that's all very well, gov'nor——"

"There is no reason why you should lose any of your night's slumber, my lad," continued Lee. "If I choose to go off on a little ramble, it is entirely my own concern."

"You can't fool me like this, gov'nor," said Nipper grimly. "You're going on a dangerous job, aren't you? Where to? And why can't I come?"

"You'll catch cold if you stand out here, clad only in your pyjamas."

"Cheese it, gov'nor!" protested Nipper. "Are you going somewhere in connection with that horrible dwarf?"

"Perhaps."

"That means that you are," said Nipper. "He's the rotter who murdered Mr. Harding, the inventor; and he attacked Lord Dovercourt, too."

"If it will satisfy you, Nipper, I will admit that my mission is, indeed, connected with the hideous dwarf who attacked the Air Minister," said Nelson Lee. "But it is really impossible for you to accompany me. It is essentially a task that must be undertaken singlehanded. I merely wish to satisfy my curiosity on a certain point."

"I wish you'd let me come, too, sir," said Nipper earnestly. "There's almost certain to be some danger. What about when you went to see Lord Dovercourt the other day? That dwarf followed you and jumped on you—yes, and would have killed you if we hadn't been shadowing you. Supposing the same thing happens again?"

"I shall be more on my guard now," replied Nelson Lee. "You undoubtedly saved my life on that occasion, Nipper, and I shall not forget it."

They were silent for some moments, and Nipper was looking uneasy and worried.

"I feel scared, gov'nor, when I think of that dwarf," he said, at length. "No other crook has ever affected me in the same way. Even that rotter, Professor Zingrave, never really put the wind up me. But that dwarf——"

He broke off, shivering.

And Nelson Lee did not blame him. For Lee, too, had encountered that hideous, evil, mysterious figure of ill-omen.

IT wasn't many days since Mr. Robert Harding, the eminent engineer, had been murdered. Mr. Harding had been missing for some weeks, and the boys of the Detective Academy, listening-in one evening on a special short-wave set that Browne had constructed, had heard an appeal for help dramatically issuing from the loud speaker.

They had hastened to an old farmhouse near Romford, in Essex, and had arrived just before the farmhouse had been blown skywards. And Mr. Harding had been found in a dying condition.

But before he could tell his would-be rescuers what had happened to him or who had kept him prisoner, a bullet had hissed out of the darkness, ending his earthly career. That bullet had been fired by the mysterious hunchback.

Mr. Harding had, however, managed to gasp out that the Air Minister was in some sort of danger. And later, when Nelson Lee went to the Air Minister, he found him just getting over a serious shock. The dwarf had attacked him and had stolen the specifications of an invention which Mr. Harding had submitted to the Air Ministry some weeks earlier—papers which had not yet been examined.

Sir Akbar Laldhi, the Balghhanistan Ambassador, too, had been attacked by that hideous dwarf, and there were some curious features in the case which had aroused Nelson Lee's keenest detective instincts.

All this had come on top of the startling and dramatic news from the East. Of late, many great all-metal air liners had vanished whilst flying between Bushire and Karachi—whilst flying, indeed, over Balghhanistan territory.

Several of the great Indian Air Mail liners had disappeared as completely as though they had disintegrated into powder. They had started from Bushire, or from Karachi, and they had never reached their destination. Somewhere in the wilds they had vanished.

Other machines—privately owned aeroplanes, and even some R.A.F. machines—had met with a similar fate. And in practically every case a frantic S.O.S. call had come out of the ether, vivid and strong at first, but rapidly becoming weaker and finally fading away.

Always the S.O.S.—and always a complete disappearance.

The matter was a great sensation in all the newspapers. The whole world was discussing the mystery and eagerly watching the developments. No solution had been arrived at—no satisfactory explanation could be reached. Not an atom of wreckage had been seen or heard of.

And Lord Dorrimore, the famous sporting peer, had recently flown back to England, and had seen Nelson Lee. Dorrie—as he was affectionately called by his friends—had escorted one of those ill-fated Air Mail liners—he had seen it soaring upwards into the infinite blue of the sky. It had apparently been drawn right into outer space, beyond the earth's atmosphere.

But Lord Dorrimore could not be certain of this, for he had had trouble with his own machine. It had suddenly reared, and he had been affected by a queer kind of semi-paralysis. Only with

difficulty had he switched off his engine, plunging several thousand feet earthwards before he could regain control. And by then the air liner had gone.

It was significant that Mr. Robert Harding, the engineer, should have submitted plans for an anti-aircraft device to the Air Ministry—a new invention for the destruction of enemy aeroplanes during wartime. And that strange dwarf had stolen those plans, although there was every reason to believe that he had been fully aware of their nature before the theft. He had only stolen them, it seemed, so that the Government officials should not learn the secret.

There were many features in this remarkable case which interested Nelson Lee keenly. In his own mind he was convinced that there was a deeply laid plot afoot—a world-wide plot of gargantuan dimensions.

What of the secret broadcasting stations? Lee knew for a fact that there was more than one—stations which sent out queer, guttural signals. No known language was used, but an extraordinary series of guttural utterances, impossible to decipher.

That old farmhouse near Romford, where Mr. Harding had met his death, had been one of those broadcasting stations. But there was one other, at least—probably several.

And Nelson Lee could not lose sight of the fact that the Ambassador for Balghanistan, Sir Akbar Laldhi, had been in Lord Dovercourt's library at the very moment those vital documents were stolen. And within half an hour the demon dwarf had attempted to take Nelson Lee's life.

What was behind all this intrigue and mystery?

“**Y**OU'RE not playing the game, gov'nor,” said Nipper earnestly. “Even if you won't let any of the other fellows in on this, I'm different. You ought to let me come with you.”

The disguised Lee shook his head.

“It's a one-man job, Nipper,” he replied.

“Well, let me shadow you, then,” urged Nipper. “I shadowed you before, with some of the other chaps—and we were pretty useful, too.”

“I don't deny that,” agreed Lee. “But, really, I'm not anticipating any danger to-night—at least, not any danger that I cannot cope with single-handed. Now, Nipper, you mustn't worry yourself. Go back to bed and get to sleep. Upon my word, can't you trust me?”

“You know I can, sir,” growled Nipper. “But if you think I shall sleep, you've made a bloomer. I shall worry like the dickens until you come back. You're going off on a job in connection with those Harding papers, aren't you?”

“Well, yes,” admitted Lee. “Lord Dovercourt has commissioned me to recover those papers, and I must do all I can to earn my fee.”

He patted Nipper on the shoulder.

“Now then, go to bed, young 'un,” he added kindly. “And you'll promise me, won't you, that you won't follow?”

“I'm blowed if I will, gov'nor,” said Nipper rebelliously.

“Now, look here, I don't want to give you any stern, schoolmasterly orders,” said Lee. “I'm putting it to you nicely, Nipper. Will you promise me that you won't follow, or must I issue a command?”

Nipper grunted.

“You win, gov'nor,” he said. “All the same, I'm beastly disappointed.”

CHAPTER 2.

The House in Regent's Park.

NELSON LEE went off immediately afterwards, and he looked a sorry figure indeed as he shuffled down Gray's Inn Road with his hands driven deeply into his trousers pockets. He looked a genuine down-and-outer. More than one policeman eyed him suspiciously as he went on his way.

Lee's direction lay towards Oxford Circus. And when he arrived in that vicinity he turned off and slouched through Langham Place, towards Regent's Park. His objective was the house of Sir Akbar Laldhi, the Balghanistan Ambassador.

Nelson Lee was not altogether satisfied that Sir Akbar was genuine. But the situation was very delicate. Diplomatic relations between Balghanistan and Great Britain were in a somewhat strained condition just now. There had been a great deal of intrigue and political unrest. Balghanistan was a kind of buffer State, and any serious trouble with that country would gravely affect British interests in India.

The Ameer of Balghanistan was a mysterious personage, who seldom came into the open. His representative in London—Sir Akbar Laldhi—was a diplomat of some distinction, and he had succeeded in smoothing out many ticklish problems.

But it was generally felt that serious trouble was brewing in Balghan, that great, mysterious city, the capital of the State, which was known as the “Secret City.” And any attempt on Nelson Lee's part to discredit Sir Akbar Laldhi would undoubtedly lead to grave international complications.

It was essential, therefore, for Lee to tread warily.

He had conceived a startling theory—a theory, indeed, which was bewildering in its possibilities. Lee could not forget that the mysterious dwarf was a brown man. Why not a native of Balghanistan? Neither could Lee forget that Sir Akbar had been openly admitted into

Lord Dovercourt's library on the night of the robbery. The dwarf had appeared as though from nowhere, and had disappeared just as strangely. Yet Sir Akbar had been there all the time—presumably unconscious, after being attacked by the dwarf.

It was Nelson Lee's theory that Sir Akbar Laldhi and the hideous dwarf were one and the same! And it was such a revolutionary theory that Nelson Lee could not possibly breathe a word of it to anybody in authority. He would only be laughed at for his pains. Indeed, he would be more than laughed at—he would be severely censured. For it was not a light thing to voice such allegations against a friendly Ambassador.

And it was Lee's object to-night to make a few private investigations. For some days experts had been working hard to locate the position of the secret broadcasting station which had been sending out the queer, guttural messages. Every scientific device had been utilised, and the experts had declared that the broadcasting station was located in one certain area. They had narrowed down the search to a square mile or so in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park.

And Sir Akbar Laldhi's house was in this very region!

Perhaps a coincidence—perhaps something more. Nelson Lee was anxious to verify his suspicions.

SIR AKBAR'S house in Regent's Park was unpretentious. It was a quiet, detached dwelling, standing in its own grounds. There was only a comparatively small garden, and along one side there was a high wall.

Lee examined the position with some care before taking any action. No lights were showing anywhere. The household, it seemed, had gone to bed.

The park stretched dark and silent on the other side of the road. Occasionally, a taxi or a private car would hum along, but there were no pedestrians. The February night was cold and bitter. As Lee paused under the wall, taking a last look up and down, he heard the wind ~~soughing~~ round the house and through the leafless trees.

With one light spring he reached the top of the wall, slithered over, and dropped like a cat into the garden. Here he paused for a full minute, taking stock of his surroundings.

He could dimly see a small lawn, and some neatly-kept flower beds. He particularly wished to avoid leaving any footprints—for although they would not be his own footprints, since he was wearing dilapidated shoes two sizes too large for him, he nevertheless had no desire to leave any marks of his coming and going.

He moved out from the shadow of the bushes which grew against the wall, and he took particular stock of the house roof. So far as he could see, there was no wireless aerial of any kind. Not that this signified anything in these days of powerful indoor aerials, and cunningly camouflaged outdoor aerials.

If this house was occupied by a respectable ambassador, there was not much to fear in the way of burglar alarms or traps. But if, on the other hand, Sir Akbar Laldhi was something more than he professed to be, this house, innocent though it looked, might contain a few surprises.

Nelson Lee crossed the strip of lawn swiftly. He reached the wall of the house without a sound. Lee's movements when he went on a mission of this kind were as stealthy and as silent as those of a Red Indian.

He edged his way round until he came opposite one of the windows. The darkness was not absolute; above, the moon was shining fitfully through a film of clouds. Lee could faintly see the strong catch of the window. A modern catch, of the burglar-proof type.

He went along the house to another window. Just the same. Finally, he edged his way round to the rear. There was a porch here over the French windows, which presumably led out of the drawing-room. The French windows were very heavily secured, and there were drawn curtains just behind the glass, inside. Lee came to the conclusion that he would stand more chance with an upper window.

With infinite skill he climbed the porch over the French windows, and within a few moments he was standing on a stone ledge on the first floor. He found himself near a small window with glazed glass. The bathroom, apparently.

Crouching on the sill, he collected one or two steel instruments from his pocket. Three minutes' work, and the window yielded gently. He cautiously pushed it open, and slid through into the blackness of the apartment.

"Well, we're in," Lee told himself complacently.

He softly closed the window. One hand on his automatic, he pulled out a small electric torch with the other. Silently he moved a little slide over the bulb, so that only a tiny beam emerged when he switched on. The beam was sufficient. As he had expected, he was in the bathroom. Releasing his finger from the torch switch, Nelson Lee tip-toed to the door and gently opened it. Solemnly, from somewhere below, came the steady "tick-tock" of a grandfather clock. Otherwise, everything was silent.

Lee ventured to press the torch switch again. He saw a richly carpeted landing, with an ornamental pot of ferns near the balustrade of the stairs. There was an Oriental touch about the pictures and the decorations. Just the type of thing that one would expect to see in the house of the Balghanistan Ambassador.

Lee was pleased that he had been so cautious. Already he was beginning to feel a little doubt creeping into his mind. Perhaps, after all, Sir Akbar was above suspicion. In political circles he was accepted as a man of singular charm—a man of rare intelligence and culture. And as a diplomat his name was famous.



Nipper switched on his torch. A disreputable, tough-looking man was revealed creeping about in the corridor.

Lee was like a shadow as he advanced along the corridor. He had hardly taken half a dozen steps, however, before he paused. He was aware that his heart had suddenly started thumping—and it took a lot to cause Nelson Lee's heart to alter the regularity of its beat.

In that second, he knew that his suspicions had been well founded.

Faintly, dimly, mysteriously, he heard sounds. A mutter of talk, queer and guttural. It was coming, unmistakably, from one of the rooms up this corridor!

The detective gripped his automatic more tightly, and even withdrew it from his pocket. More like a shadow than ever, he advanced. He located the door. He placed his ear to it.

"Ug-ug-zat-zot-z-zug!" came the uncouth sounds.

The same as before—and always beginning and ending with the "ug-ug." Those unfathomable, meaningless sounds! Meaningless to Lee, but doubtless a vocal code of some kind.

And here, in the home of the Balghanistan Ambassador, these sounds were being made! And, moreover, Lee felt convinced that this was not a receiving station—but a broadcasting station! He was listening to the real voice, and not to the electrical reproductions of a loud speaker.

Here was the proof he had sought!

The experts had tracked down the mystery broadcaster to this region—but never had they suspected Sir Akbar Laldhi's home. It was a far-reaching discovery on Lee's part—a staggering, stupendous revelation. For, at one and the same time, it involved Sir Akbar in the murder of Mr. Robert Harding and the theft of the Harding specifications—and it associated him with the hideous hunchback! Was it possible that Nelson Lee's theory was right? Were Sir Akbar Laldhi and the hunchback one and the same person? This, however, was no time for fresh theorising. Nelson Lee decided that he would take no action. That would be too risky. On his own initiative, he could do nothing. He knew the vital nature of the issues which were at stake.

No; he would make haste to inform the Air Minister—and, perhaps, the Home Secretary and the Scotland Yard authorities. This house must be raided, and with as little delay as possible!

Nelson Lee glowed with a triumphant satisfaction. It was good to discover that his theory, incredible as it had seemed, was well-founded.

But Nelson Lee had not the slightest inkling, as he stood listening to those guttural sounds, that somewhere in the darkness at the end of the corridor two evil, burning eyes were watching his every movement.

Dacca the dwarf . . .

CHAPTER 3.

Dacca Defeated!

NELSON LEE was a man of sense. Having discovered what he had come into this house to discover, he lost no time in departing.

There was nothing to be gained by remaining now—and a good deal to be lost. He had escaped discovery, and yet every minute he spent within these walls was fraught with risk.

He was intrigued by the tricky nature of the situation. A secret, forbidden broadcasting station within the premises of a friendly ambassador! This was an offence of the gravest possible character—and it would have to be dealt with carefully. Nelson Lee could picture the consternation in government circles when he made his disclosure. Sir Akbar Laldhi was looked upon as a man of the strictest integrity; it would come as a great blow for many diplomats to realise that he was really a snake in the grass—a cunning, treacherous secret enemy.

For had he not possessed himself—either personally or through an agent—of the Harding specifications? A thief—a murderer! A man who did not hesitate to rob the Air Minister of secret plans.

This would be no ordinary charge, and Nelson Lee, as he made his way cautiously towards the bathroom, fully understood the enormity of the secret that he carried in his heart.

He even wondered if the authorities would take the drastic action necessary. Many politicians, he knew, were anxious about the Balghanistan situation. Yet this matter could not be shelved; it could not be ignored. The presence of this secret broadcasting station, in Sir Akbar Laldhi's house, conclusively proved that he was a cunning enemy of Britain.

Lee reached the bathroom, and climbed through the window. He moved noiselessly across the strip of garden, dropped over the wall, and walked away.

And behind him, unsuspected, trailed Dacca the dwarf!



NELSON LEE was calm and thoughtful as he slouched off down one of the quiet, unfrequented thoroughfares. Never for an instant did he forget his rôle; he played the part, even though it was not now necessary for him to do so.

His thoughts were centred upon Lord Dovercourt as he walked. He remembered that the Air Minister had been attending some big function this evening. It was just about one a.m. now—and his lordship would hardly have arrived home yet. It was a late function. And the circumstances were so exceptional that Lee felt that he was justified in approaching the Air Minister without delay—even without taking the trouble to remove his disguise. Lord Dovercourt lived in Devonshire Street—quite close by. It was not more than five minutes' walk, at the most.

A shadowy figure leapt over an adjacent wall—a monstrous figure of menace. It came over without touching the wall itself—a vile thing which leapt with a kangaroo-like action.

Dacca had acted.

His object was clear. He was springing on Nelson Lee from behind—his claw-like hands ready to clutch Lee by the throat. His idea was to pull Lee down, to choke the life out of him before he could utter a single cry.

But quick as Dacca was, Nelson Lee was quicker.

His mission over, he was none the less alert. His every sense was keenly on the stretch; and he heard the faintest of sounds as that figure leapt over the wall. With the instinct of self-preservation, Lee twirled round, leaping sideways at the same moment. He saw the thing in mid-air, and up came Nelson Lee's right fist, his fingers clenched.

Crash!

It was one of the neatest uppercuts imaginable. It was not so easy to catch Nelson Lee napping. And Dacca, the dwarf, in spite of his animal-like strength, was conquered. That one blow was sufficient.

It had all the power of Nelson Lee's shoulder behind it: in addition, Dacca himself had been dropping, thus doubling the effect of the mighty punch. His ugly, repulsive head went back,

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a gurgling grunt came from his throat. He thudded violently to the hard pavement, and sprawled there in a horrid heap.

"Phew! Rather hotter than I like," muttered Nelson Lee.

He rubbed his knuckles, for they ached. His whole arm had been jarred. He wondered if he had broken the dwarf's neck. He rather believed he had. Lee bent down to examine his attacker, but paused. Footsteps sounded close at hand.

"What's all this?" demanded a stern, gruff voice.

A beam from an electric lantern shot out, and hovered over Lee's disguised, unshaven face. The light descended to the face and figure of the fallen dwarf.

"Gosh!" ejaculated the startled constable.

"Not exactly an oil-painting, is he?" asked Lee.

"What's your game?" demanded the constable, taking a firm hold on Lee's shoulder. "No monkey-tricks, mind! I'm going to charge you with assault——"

"Not this time, constable," broke in Nelson Lee. "You need to hold that man on the ground—not me. He is a very dangerous criminal——"

"A dangerous criminal, eh?" interrupted the constable. "And what do you think you are? What's the idea of talking like Lord Tom Noddy?"

"Have a look at this," said Lee quietly.

He took out a wallet from a secret inner pocket, and the constable's eyes bulged when he beheld a little official badge, one that had been especially granted to Nelson Lee by the authorities. At the same moment Lee pulled off his tousled wig.

"Why, Mr. Lee, I never dreamed it was you!" said the policeman, startled and awed. "Sorry, sir."

"Don't apologise," smiled Nelson Lee. "You were only doing your duty."

"I ought to have recognised your voice, sir—I've met you before," said the policeman, with self-reproach.

"This man tried to kill me just now, and I was lucky enough to get home a blow that knocked him out," went on Lee. "I fancy he'll be a valuable prisoner, so you'd better hold him tightly. I'd advise you to whistle for another constable, too. When this fellow recovers, he'll give you some trouble. He's got the strength of five ordinary men."

"Right you are, sir," nodded the constable, blowing his whistle.

He pulled out some handcuffs, and snapped them over Dacca's wrists.

"If I'm wanted during the next half-hour, you'll probably find me with Lord Dovercourt, at his home in Devonshire Street," said Lee. "However, I don't think you'll need me. All I want you to do is to put this man in the cells, and hold him. In the morning we shall know better what to charge him with. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Two other constables arrived a moment later, puffing and breathless. And within a very short time Dacca the dwarf, secure in the grip of the law, was carried off.

CHAPTER 4

Murder I

DACCA was deposited in a cell at a near-by police-station.

The case was an exceptional one, and there was no formal charge against this prisoner. In the first place, Nelson Lee was not there to make any charge, and in the second place, Dacca was unconscious.

"Better lock him up for the night," said the station-sergeant, when he had heard the surprising story. "Wonder what Mr. Lee will do next? I dare say we shall know all about it in the morning."

"Think this bird needs a doctor?" asked one of the constables.

"He needs a beauty specialist more than a doctor," grunted the sergeant, as he looked at the unconscious prisoner. "Glory! What a dial! Take him away before I lose my appetite!"

So Dacca found himself in a cell. The handcuffs had been removed, and as the policeman's heavy footfalls faded away down the stone passage, Dacca sat upright on the hard little bed.

Consciousness had fully returned to him.

Indeed, he had been more or less conscious ever since his arrest. There had been no mistake about that blow of Lee's—it had completely knocked the dwarf out—but although his senses had trickled back to him nearly from the first, he had feigned unconsciousness. He could never have got away from those policemen in his partially-recovered state.

Now it was different.

He was himself again—and he remembered, with a growing sense of fear, that Nelson Lee had gone to see the Air Minister! He had overheard that remark of Lee's and he knew that there was no time to be lost.

Hideous though he had been in the charge-room, he now became positively demoniac. His misshaped frame shook and quivered as he got to the floor from the bed. The intensity of his fury was awe-inspiring. And with that fury came an additional strength—a frenzy of strength.

He went over to the cell window, with its strong iron bars. He seized one of the bars, his ugly brown face became more contorted than ever; his muscles rippled and stood out like whipcord. One of the bars twisted, bent, and came away like thin wire. Another followed.

The powers of this man were stupendous. This was not human strength—but superhuman. It was phenomenal—terrible.

He wormed his way up, squeezed through, and saw that there was an alley down below—a drop of ten feet. He hung on to the windowsill and dropped. Almost as lightly as an animal he landed, and recovered his balance. A swift glance up and down the alley showed him that he was alone and unobserved.

A change came over him.

A staggering, unbelievable change. First of all, he seemed to twist himself into a knot; then, gradually, he unwound, becoming taller and slimmer, and upright. The hump smoothed itself out from his back, his features lost their hideous repulsiveness, and became normal. The deep brown colour, caused by the folding and wrinkling of the skin changed to a much lighter brown. Even his very clothing altered. A pull here, and a tug there, and he was dressed in a commonplace lounge suit. But it only looked commonplace—actually, it was a cunningly-devised suit.

Thus, within a minute, the transformation was complete. This hideous dwarf had changed himself into a handsome, well-set-up man!

But the effort had cost him a great deal. He leaned against the wall, utterly unable to move for some moments. He breathed heavily, as though with complete exhaustion. The effort of "changing back" was evidently a supreme one.

He walked unsteadily for a few yards, and then became more firm. When he emerged from the alley, he was calm and collected. He had not dared to venture forth into the open street as Dacca the dwarf. He never did do so. That character was only reserved for very special occasions. And he was furious with himself for having blundered so badly. He—Dacca—had allowed Nelson Lee to best him!

He turned into one of the busier thoroughfares, and immediately beheld a belated taxi-cab. He hailed it.

"Devonshire Street," he said sharply.

He was there within a few minutes, and he called the cab to a halt fifty yards from Lord Dovercourt's house. He waited until the cab had turned the corner, and then he advanced.

He knew the library window. He went down a narrow side street. It was empty. Ordinarily, he would never have risked a move of this kind; but the need was vital. He leapt up to the windowsill, pulled himself up, and crouched there. He placed his ear to the cold window pane, and voices reached him.

"It is almost incredible, Mr. Lee," Lord Dovercourt was saying. "Forgive me for casting a doubt on your story, but what am I to say? Sir Akbar Laldhi is an honourable gentleman: he is the most charming Ambassador that Balghanistan has ever sent us. He is a man of the utmost——"

"I have already told you, Lord Dovercourt, what I found in Sir Akbar's house," said Lee quietly. "I urge you to take immediate action. There is a secret broadcasting station in that house—and need I point out the significance of that? It was because my boys picked up one of these secret broadcasting stations that we got on the track of Mr. Harding. Immediately afterwards, you were robbed of the Harding specifications. Sir Akbar himself was here at the time. I tell you, he is hand in glove with these murderers and robbers."

"I don't know what to do, Mr. Lee," ejaculated the Air Minister. "Frankly, I am absolutely at my wits' end. This thing is—is stupendous! I dare not take any action without consulting the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. If only you had some definite proof, Mr. Lee, it would be different. While I do not doubt your word——"

"I do not ask you to accept my word," broke in Lee. "You have only to examine Sir Akbar's house, and you will find the necessary evidence. I would like to add that I have a strong conviction that Sir Akbar Laldhi and this dwarf are one and the same."

"Good heavens, Mr. Lee!"

"It sounds far-fetched and impossible, but the facts are exceedingly significant," continued Lee grimly. "I shall be most interested to know if Sir Akbar is at home to-night—and we can know this if a raid is made."

"A raid!" said the Air Minister, in horror.

"If Sir Akbar proves to be missing, the inference will be significant—if not entirely conclusive," continued Lee. "I will grant that the whole problem is ticklish——"

"A mild word, Mr. Lee—an utterly inadequate word," broke in the Air Minister. "When you talk of a raid, you terrify me. It simply cannot be done! You forget that this man is the Balghanistan Ambassador. We cannot raid his premises—such a thing would be an international outrage."

"I am not suggesting that Sir Akbar's house should be raided as a night-club is raided," said Lee. "There are other ways."

"I will telephone to the Chief Commissioner of Police," said Lord Dovercourt hastily. "He will be able to advise me. Wait, Mr. Lee."

He went to the telephone; he lifted the receiver from its hook, and placed it to his ear. Not a sound could he hear. He jabbed the hook up and down, but the line was dead.

"The telephone is out of order," he said testily. "Upon my word! Whenever the telephone is urgently needed——"

"Let me come!" interrupted Lee sharply.

He took the instrument, and listened for a moment.

"I wonder!" he muttered.

"You—you mean——"

Lord Dovercourt paused, hardly knowing what he did mean. Nelson Lee was grim. Was this a coincidence, or had the enemy already taken action? If so, how? Lee did not know it, but the telephone wire ran down the wall, outside, fairly close to the library window.

"I will go straight to Scotland Yard," said Lee abruptly.

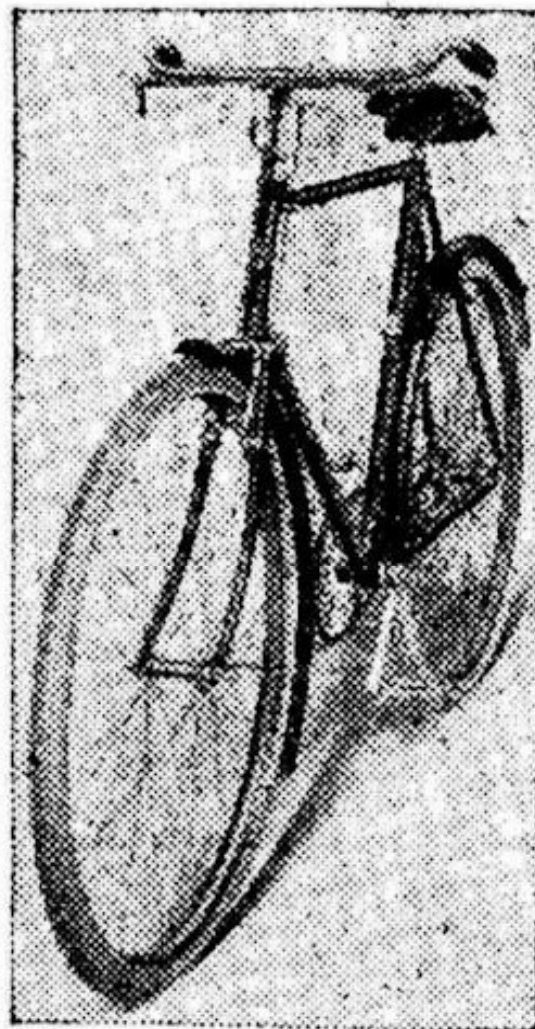
He was out of patience with the Air Minister. Lord Dovercourt was a member of the Cabinet, and, no doubt, a brilliant man, but he was not capable of dealing with a situation like this.

"You cannot do better, Mr. Lee," he said huskily. "Go to Scotland Yard—and see what they say. I shall not rest until I hear something further."

Lee went off at once, and as Benson was letting him out through the front door, Dacca the dwarf forced open the library window, and got in.

And now he was Dacca again—he had shrunken, the hump had appeared on his back, and his face was leathery and wrinkled and hideous. With one movement he whisked the heavy curtains aside, and he saw Lord Dovercourt standing with his back to him. One spring took the

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hideous dwarf on to his victim. He landed on the unfortunate Air Minister's back—like some clinging, clawing beast. Lord Dovercourt gave one choking cry—but only one. Then he was borne to the floor, with Dacca's fingers round his throat.

BENSON closed the door after Nelson Lee had gone, and as he did so he thought he heard a cry from the library.

He hurried there, hesitated for a moment outside the door, and then tapped. No reply came. He tapped again, a fear gripping at his heart. Then he opened the door—and was just in time to catch a glimpse of a shadowy figure vanishing through the curtains by the window.

And there, stretched on the floor, was the crumpled, purple-faced figure of Lord Dovercourt—dead!

CHAPTER 5

The Double Transformation!

THE whole thing was so horribly quick.

Dacca had accomplished his dread work even while Nelson Lee was being shown out of the house. And by the time the detective had progressed only a short way down Devonshire Street, Dacca was out again, bent upon further mischief.

If he had had any doubts regarding the identity of that frowzy, down-at-heel stranger, those doubts were now set at rest. He knew that he was dealing with Nelson Lee!

He knew, moreover, that swift, drastic action was necessary. The situation was desperate. That Dacca realised the vital nature of it was proved by the fact that he had so ruthlessly murdered Lord Dovercourt.

Now he loped down the dark street like some horrid animal. He was only a short distance behind Nelson Lee.

Lee knew nothing of his impending danger. His one thought, just now, was to find a taxi.

He would probably get one in the more frequented thoroughfares. Alert as he was, he saw no reason why he should be afraid of any fresh attack from the rear. He believed that Dacca was safely in a police-station cell.

The slightest of sounds behind him made Lee half-turn. He was just in time to see a black figure hurtling out of the darkness. He threw up his hands to protect himself—but he was a shade too late.

Dacca was on his back, and Lee stumbled forward, tripped, and fell upon his knees. Claw-like fingers were round his throat. The detective did not cry aloud for help. He was unable to make any sounds, except a few choking gasps. And the strength of his assailant was prodigious. Lee was held down, with Dacca's knees pressed against his arms. He caught a momentary glimpse of the hideous face over him, but already his senses were beginning to reel. The pressure increased until finally the detective became limp and inert. The dwarf relaxed his fingers a trifle, half suspecting a trick. He placed his own face close to Lee's, and he was satisfied that his victim had really lapsed into unconsciousness.

"So, my friend!" muttered Dacca. "Not twice can you evade me!"

He twisted round, swinging Nelson Lee's limp body across his own shoulders. Then he slid off into the darkness.

"Safe!" he breathed exultantly. "Dovercourt is dead, and this interfering dog is in my hands! Not another soul knows of what has happened. Yes, I'm safe now!"

It was Dacca who had cut the telephone wires. He had been in time to avert any real catastrophe. Nelson Lee had made discoveries at the house in Regent's Park, and Lee had spoken to nobody of those discoveries except Lord Dovercourt.

The Air Minister was dead—and Lee himself was a prisoner. There would be no raid now, no inquiry. The murder of Lord Dovercourt would be a baffling mystery to the police; and as for Nelson Lee—Dacca had certain plans with regard to Nelson Lee!



Dacca's cunning, evil brain had been at work whilst his fingers had encircled Nelson Lee's throat. This brown man was no ordinary criminal. In his way, he was a genius.

He guessed what would happen if Nelson Lee failed to return to the Detective Academy. There was Nipper. And there were the other boys. Dacca did not make the mistake of dismissing them with contempt. It was these boys who had started the whole investigation; they had been the first to arrive at that old house in Romford; they had witnessed the murder of Harding. It would never do to ignore them.

And Dacca, with his quick brain, saw a means, here, of settling not only with Nelson Lee but with every other member of the Detective Academy! He would make one clean sweep. And he would do it in a manner after his own heart. He would enjoy himself to-night—he would gain some measure of revenge for that devastating blow which Lee had dealt him!

Nelson Lee's right fist came up in a devastating upper-cut. Dacca, the dwarf, took the blow on his chin, and he staggered back with a gurgling grunt.



LIKE some ghoul of the darkness, Dacca loped towards Regent's Park. His burden might have been a sack of straw, for all the effort it cost him to carry it.

No other man living, perhaps, could have dealt with Nelson Lee as Dacca had dealt with him. Lee was one of the most difficult men to tackle—and certainly one of the most difficult men to conquer.

But there was something inhuman about this ugly dwarf. He was a phenomenon. Not only was he capable of changing his whole appearance by that extraordinary muscular twisting and contorting, but he was possessed of an agility and a brute strength which were most terrifying and awe-inspiring. Added to these gifts, Dacca possessed an abnormal brain—a master brain.

Having reached Regent's Park, the dwarf turned into the gateway of one of the houses. It was the house of Sir Akbar Laldhi, the Balghistan Ambassador!

By this time, Nelson Lee was showing signs of returning to consciousness. The famous detective was feeling decidedly groggy. His throat felt as though a steel band was gripping it. It was bruised and swollen.

Dacca saw that his prisoner was recovering; and he was taking no chances. The first thing he did after getting indoors was to use a little spraying instrument. With this he projected a fine, pungent spray over Nelson Lee's face, and within a few moments the great detective lapsed again into complete oblivion.

Nelson Lee had been taken into a room on the ground floor. It was an ordinarily-furnished living-room—sumptuous and comfortable.

Dacca gazed upon his victim with burning, glowing eyes after he had set the spraying instrument aside. He regarded Lee's tattered clothing—his wig—his unkempt figure.

'Yes' he muttered. 'It will be easy.'

He nodded as though he had come to some sudden decision. And gradually, painfully, he "untwisted" himself. Once again he went through those ghastly contortions—his hump vanished, his limbs straightened, his face smoothed itself out. He became—Sir Akbar Laldhi! The Balghanistan Ambassador and Dacca the dwarf were indeed one and the same. Nelson Lee's suspicion that such was the case had not been so wildly fantastic, after all!

The transformation process took some seconds, and when it was over this extraordinary man sank into a chair, breathing hard. Apparently, it was easy enough for him to become Dacca; but it cost him a supreme effort to return to Sir Laldhi. He seemed utterly worn out.

At length he rose to his feet, and, walking across the room, he touched a bell. Within a minute two men appeared. They were brown men, like himself—only darker in colour. They were men of Balghanistan.

Sir Akbar pointed to the prisoner, giving some instructions in his own language. Then he sat down and waited. The two men obeyed their orders. They removed Nelson Lee's wig, and then they proceeded to strip him of all his outer clothing. These articles were placed on a chair, handy, and Lee was wrapped in an old bath robe, propped in a chair, and bound to it with ropes.

Sir Akbar dismissed his assistants.

There was no secrecy here. Indeed, it was evident that every one of the ambassador's staff was in the know. They were all hand-in-glove with their Chief; they were part and parcel of that same grim organisation which was mixed up in the secret broadcasting signals, the murders of Mr. Harding and the Air Minister, and, perhaps, the mysterious disappearances of the Indian mail air liners.

In this big conspiracy, Sir Akbar Laldhi had many helpers. He could trust every man who served under him. They, perhaps, knew that if they failed in their duty they would be put to death immediately.

'Now!' muttered Sir Akbar.

He quickly undressed, and then he donned the clothing that had been taken from Nelson Lee. His figure was upright and slim. Now that he was Sir Akbar again, his figure was very similar to Nelson Lee's.

Once dressed, he unlocked a cupboard, and took out a box. This box contained everything for use in the art of make-up. Sir Akbar now proved himself to be an artist of consummate skill.



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to: "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

Did He Do It?

"Tell your boss that I have come to see him," said the huge six-footer, bursting open the door of the clerk's office. "My name's Daniels."

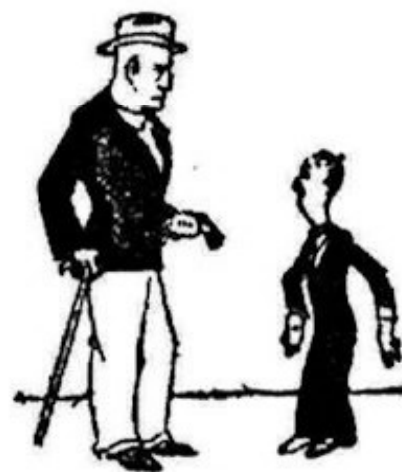
The clerk, a puny little fellow of five feet nothing, gazed in alarm at the visitor.

"You're Mr. Daniels?" he exclaimed. "How very awkward!"

"Awkward? What do you mean? Isn't the boss in?"

"Yes, but I've got orders to throw you out!"

(A handsome gilt watch has been awarded to H. Lockley, 41, Kirkby Road Barwell, Leicester.)



An Excellent Suggestion!

Jones: "You know, I'm a wonderful fellow. If ever I undertake to do a job, I always throw myself into it; hence my success in all things."

Jenkins (bored at the other's swank): "Is that so? Well, why not dig a well?"

(A pocket wallet has been awarded to E. S. Milne, 9, Coulties Wynd, Forfar, Scotland.)

Foughtful Fellow!

A little boy was sent down to buy a haddock. The fishmonger asked the youngster if he would like a finnan.

"No," said the boy; "I fink I'd better take a fick 'un, 'cos there's a lot of us."

(A penknife has been awarded to F. Dawkins, 94 Crosscliffe Street, Manchester.)

And That Pulled Him Up!

The Accused: "I was not going thirty miles an hour. Not even twenty, nor ten. In fact, when the officer came up I was almost at a standstill."

Magistrate: "Oh, well, I must stop this, or you'll be backing into something. Forty shillings."

(A penknife has been awarded to C. Pilcher, 129, New Street, Ashford, Kent.)

With the unconscious Lee in front of him as a model, he proceeded to make himself into an exact replica. Skilfully, cleverly, he treated his face until it was precisely the right colouring; then he manufactured, inch by inch, an unkempt, stubbly beard. He counterfeited the eyebrows, the shape of the nose—everything. Finally, he took the wig which Nelson Lee had been wearing, and donned it himself.

The effect was startling.

Sir Akbar Laldhi had become Nelson Lee. Not Nelson Lee himself, but Nelson Lee in the character of the unkempt tramp! The detective had played right into his enemy's hands—unconsciously. For it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Sir Laldhi to impersonate Nelson Lee in his own personality. But it was a comparatively simple matter for him to duplicate this uncouth ragamuffin.

There was only one possible flaw in the plan which Sir Akbar now proposed to put into effect. Had any of the boys of the Detective Academy seen Nelson Lee in his disguise? If not, matters might be awkward.

But Sir Akbar was optimistic. He felt certain that Nipper, at least, would know of Nelson Lee's proposed jaunt. In any case, it was a matter which could only be decided by a personal visit.

Again Sir Akbar called in his servants. He gave them fresh instructions, indicating Nelson Lee once or twice. These men were impassive and calm: they expressed no surprise at seeing their master in such a strange get-up. They proceeded to carry out their orders, and they removed Nelson Lee from the room.

Sir Akbar let himself out through a side door, crossed the garden, and climbed the wall. He did not risk taking a taxi, but walked, slouchingly and yet swiftly. And his footsteps took him in the direction of Gray's Inn Road.

It was not a long walk, and when he arrived at Nelson Lee's chambers he calmly inserted a latch-key, and let himself in. It was all remarkably simple. Luck was with him to-night.

CHAPTER 6.

The Trap!

NIPPER abruptly sat up in bed.

He had heard a faint creak from the corridor, and he was alert on the instant. He had been dozing, on and off, but since Nelson Lee's departure he had not had any sound sleep. Although he had not worried about his "guv'nor," he had certainly felt a twinge or two of uneasiness.

Some Cake!

Housewife (to tramp): "Well, my man, and how did you like that cake I gave you yesterday?"

Tramp: "All right, but it brought back old memories."

Housewife: "Of your home?"

Tramp: "No, breaking stones at Dartmoor."

(A pocket wallet has been awarded to J. H. Weaver, 62, Farmer Road, Leyton.)

He Sure Said a Mouthful!

The omnibus was just crossing London Bridge, and an American who was travelling on it turned to the conductor and said:

"What's the name of this stream, bo?"

The conductor looked first surprised and then indignant.

"Why, darn me if the blessed radiator hasn't sprung a leak again!" he replied.

(A pocket wallet has been awarded to H. Russell, 8, Constitution Hill, Gravesend.)

Misunderstood!

The regiment was marching over a bridge which spanned a deep river. Pat, the Irishman, fell out of the ranks to look over.

"Fall in, Pat!" roared the officer.

"Too deep, sir!" replied Pat.

(A penknife has been awarded to G. Adcock, 25, Arbury Road, Cambridge.)



Too True!

Boss (to Coalman): "Did you take the coal round to Mr. Jones?"

Coalman: "Yes, sir; but when I got there his house was on fire."

Boss: "That's unfortunate. I suppose he told you to bring the coal back here?"

Coalman: "No; he said if it was anything like the last lot, I'd better throw it on to the fire."

(A pocket wallet has been awarded to R. Hardy, Nelson Hotel, Salisbury.)

His Chief Concern!

Mother (anxiously watching her little boy eating at dinner): "My dear child, you must not eat your pudding so quickly."

Small Child: "Why not, mummy?"

Mother: "Because it's dangerous. I once knew a little boy about your age who was eating his pudding quickly, like you, and he became ill and died before he had finished it."

Small Child (with much concern): "And what did they do with the rest of his pudding, mummy?"

(A pocket wallet has been awarded to M. Israel, 31, Pandora Road, Hampstead, London.)

He slipped out of bed, donned his dressing-gown, which he had left handy, and pulled on his slippers. He went to the door, softly opened it, and passed out. Nobody was within sight, but a chink of light was coming from the door of Nelson Lee's bedroom, which was ajar.

"Oh, good egg!" muttered Nipper, with relief.

He went to Lee's bedroom, pushed the door open, and beheld a frowsy, unsavoury figure over by the dressing-table. The figure turned, and for a moment the pair stood, looking at one another.

"You got back all right, then, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "Everything all serene?"

Sir Akbar Laldhi smiled. That one remark of Nipper's had told him all that he wanted to know. For it was obvious to him that Nipper had seen Nelson Lee in disguise before the detective had gone out upon his mission. Nipper, seeing Sir Akbar, immediately mistook him for Nelson Lee.

Indeed, it would have been difficult for Nipper to avoid making this mistake. Only a single shaded light was glowing, and he would probably have been deceived even if all the lights of the room had been switched on. For Sir Akbar's impersonation of the disguised Lee was well nigh perfect. Nipper had been expecting Lee to come back like this, so everything was as it should be.

"You ought to be asleep, young 'un," said Sir Akbar sternly.

"I've had one or two naps, guv'nor, but I couldn't sleep properly until you got back," said Nipper. "What's happened? You might be a pal, you know, and tell me where you went, and what you did."

Sir Akbar was freshly gratified. Nipper hadn't even known the exact nature of Nelson Lee's enterprise. This made the impostor's task all the easier. His voice was an astoundingly clever imitation of Nelson Lee's.

"I'll tell you this, Nipper," he said briskly. "I've met with success to-night—undreamed-of success."

"By Jove! What have you found out, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"I won't tell you now, but if you are in the mood for work, young 'un, I've got plenty for you to do," said Sir Akbar.

"I'm your man!" said Nipper promptly.

The intruder chuckled.

"I knew that I could rely upon you, Nipper," he said pleasantly. "Well, I not only need you, but all the others, as well."

"You mean the lot—Fenton and Browne, and Handforth and Pitt, and everybody?"

"Everybody," said Sir Akbar, nodding.

"My hat! Then it must be something big!"

"You can take my word for it that it is," said Sir Akbar. "I'll go along and awaken all the youngsters."

"You'd better not, guv'nor," said Nipper, shaking his head. "They'll probably jump on you at sight."

"What on earth——"

"They haven't seen you in that get-up," grinned Nipper. "Nobody on earth would recognise you—and Handforth, in particular, would land you one on the nose before you could even put your hands up. Better let me go and rouse them, sir."

"All right, perhaps it would be as well," agreed the false Nelson Lee.

He was pleased. He had learned another point. Only Nipper had seen the disguised Lee. Easier and easier! The rest would naturally be warned of "Lee's" appearance, by Nipper, and thus they would take Sir Akbar for granted as soon as they saw him. This thing was really ridiculously easy.

"Where are we going, sir, anyhow?" asked Nipper, without a suspicion of the truth.

"Never mind that now," replied the other. "I have made certain discoveries which lead me to suspect a certain house on the outskirts of London. I can give you details later. I am determined to raid this house; but it will be entirely unofficial, and the police must not be brought into it."

"So you are going to use the academy?"

"Exactly."

"That's the stuff, guv'nor!"—enthusiastically. "That's just what we're here for!"

"Hurry and tell the boys," said Sir Akbar. "They must get dressed as quickly as possible, and then congregate in the Common Room. I will join them as soon as you let me know that all are present."

"I suppose you'll take off that disguise in the meantime, guv'nor?"

"No, I shall go just as I am," replied Sir Akbar. "It will suit my purpose better."

"How shall we journey out?"

"By car," said Sir Akbar. "We shall need three——"

"Yours and Browne's and Handforth's ought to be enough," interrupted Nipper. "I say, this is going to be exciting."



ALL ABOUT THIS WEEK'S FREE GIFT!

Strong and reliable—those are the two most important factors where a catapult is concerned. The splendid indoor catapult which is presented to all readers of the NELSON LEE this week possesses both these qualities. The elastic is particularly strong, giving the catapult a really long range. You'll be able to have heaps of sport with it. Challenge all your pals to a contest—and the NELSON LEE catapult will do its part towards making you the victor!

And now don't forget that there's another splendid Free Gift coming along with next week's issue of the Old Paper. Order your copy now and so make sure of getting your

"KAZOO" HUMMER.

"You really haven't any idea exactly how exciting it will be," said the other, with an irony which was lost upon Nipper.

SO Nipper went off, eager and thrilled. Not only had he fallen into the trap, but he was going to lead all the other boys of the Detective Academy into the same trap! And who was to blame him? Nipper was a smart youngster, but he would have needed to be a magician and a thought-reader to see through this cunning trick.

There wasn't a single false note to reveal to him the real truth. He had seen Lee go out, and—so he thought—he had seen Lee when he had got back. And this supposed raid was quite a natural outcome of Lee's first mission. It was all logical.

Nipper went from bedroom to bedroom. He aroused Edward Oswald Handforth—bluff, excitable, ever ready for a scrap—and his two faithful chums, Church and McClure. Then Nipper roused Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, Reggie Pitt, Vivian Travers, Archie Glenthorne, Waldo, Trotwood, Browne, and Fenton. All of them were quickly awakened and told to dress.

Within seven minutes everybody was collected in the comfortable Common Room. Even young Willy Handforth and his two chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, were there. Everybody had turned out. Some were carelessly dressed, but this was a minor point.

There was a hush as "Nelson Lee" entered the Common Room.

"Great Scott! Who's this?" breathed Handforth, in a startled voice.

"Don't be an ass, Handy," said Nipper. "I told you that Mr. Lee was in disguise, didn't I?"

"By George! I'd forgotten!" said Handforth, with relief.

Sir Akbar advanced a few steps into the room, and for a moment he stood looking at the semi-circle of youthful figures.

"All here?" he asked crisply.

"Yes, sir," went up a chorus.

"Good!" said Sir Akbar. "Well, boys, there's some important work for you to-night. You may judge the importance of it by the fact that I have called you out of your beds at this unearthly hour."

"We don't care, sir!" said Reggie Pitt. "Only too pleased."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, with enthusiasm. "On the trail of the blighting crooks, what? Odds thrills and hazards! This is decidedly the stuff to give them!"

Nobody noticed anything different in "Nelson Lee's" voice. Nobody suspected that they were talking to anybody but the famous detective. Sir Akbar's acting was perfect.

"There is no need for me to tell you much now," said the impostor crisply. "The sooner we can get off, the better. I will take my place in the leading car, and direct you to the scene of action. It is an old house, well on the outskirts of London, lonely and isolated. This raid of ours must be undertaken in secret."

Sir Akbar gave no details, he did not even say where the "lonely old house" was situated. Five minutes later the party was off.

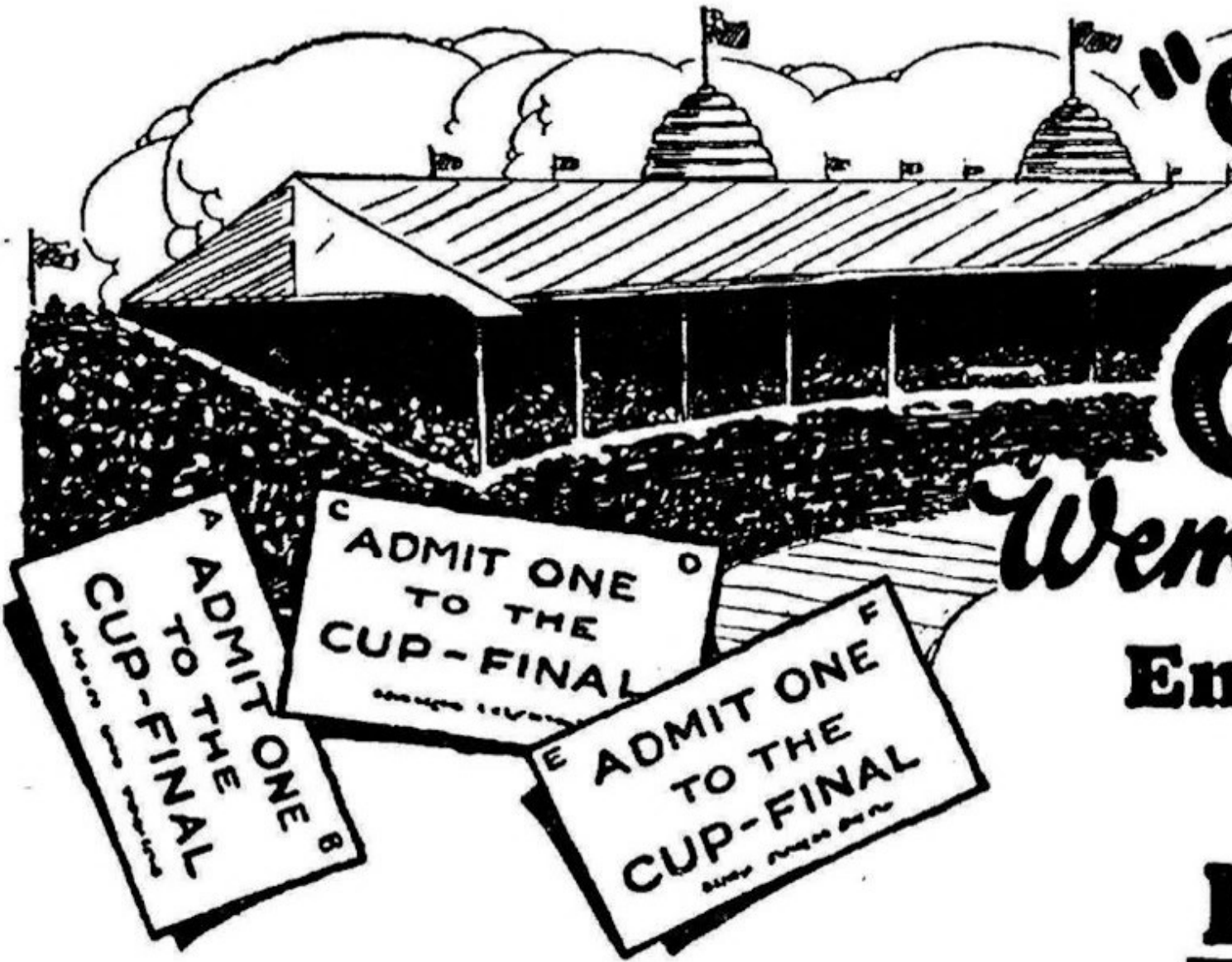
It was divided into three sections. Nelson Lee's own car led the way, with "Lee" and Nipper aboard and several others. Then came William Napoleon Browne's Morris-Oxford, fully packed. And Handforth's faithful Austin-Seven brought up the rear, equally overloaded.

The entire Detective Academy was off on this secret mission—or, to be more exact, the entire Detective Academy was being driven blindly into Sir Akbar Laldhi's trap!

SIR AKBAR himself was at the wheel of the leading car, and he drove through Islington, Stoke Newington, and left London by means of Stamford Hill and Tottenham. Then the route led out in the direction of Woodford and Epping Forest.

Sir Akbar did not keep to the main road for long. After leaving Woodford behind, he turned into a comparatively quiet lane which led, apparently, into the heart of Epping Forest.

(Continued on page 24.)



**"Who's
A S...
O' TOPPI...
Wembley Cup**

**Enter Now
It's
FREE!**

SET 2

"Who Kicked Them?"



Scored those Goals?

Simple 4-Week Competition

Using "MEAD" CYCLES and

5-Final Tickets OFFERED



Here, lads, have you seen the stunning new competition offer we are making YOU? Just think of it—six first-class bicycles, all ready for the road! And then there are twelve tickets for the Wembley Cup Final—which every boy wants to see! These are the grand prizes we offer you and I am sure you will all agree that this is far too good an opportunity to pass over. So if you missed the opening set of puzzles, ask your newsagent to get last week's "Nelson Lee" (dated February 15th) so that you can start in right away.

All you have to do to win one of the prizes is to solve four sets of easy puzzles. Here is the second set. In the goal, as you can see, are eight circles, and in each of them is a picture-puzzle representing the name of a well-known footballer. Now, what are those names?

So as to make the contest absolutely fair and equal for everybody, we give below a list of footballers' names which contains the answers to *all this week's puzzles*.

As you find the answers, write them IN INK, against the corresponding numbers on the entry form given here, which you should then sign, also in ink. Now cut out the coupon and keep it by you, together with the one given last week—until next week, when the third set of puzzles and the list of names belonging to them will appear.

The competition will last for four weeks only, and with the final set we shall give you full instructions for the sending in of your entries. The competition rules were given last week, and will be reprinted later.

You can Find the Answers HERE!

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| ARMITAGE | GOODWIN | PAYNE |
| ARMSTRONG | GRIMSDALL | PHILLIPS |
| ASTLEY | GROZIER | PIERCE |
| | | PORTER |
| BARKAS | HARKUS | ROBINSON |
| BASTIN | HICKS | ROBSON |
| BELL | HOAR | ROUSE |
| BESTALL | HOUGHTON | |
| BRIGGS | HUNTER | SEDDON |
| BRYANT | | SEED |
| | JAMES | STAGE |
| CARR | JAMIESON | |
| COX | | TATE |
| CROOKS | KNOX | TEMPLE |
| CURTIS | | TROUP |
| | LAMBERT | TUNSTALL |
| DAVIES | LANGFORD | |
| DIMMOCK | LENNOX | VARCO |
| DOMINY | LOW | VIALS |
| DUNCAN | | VIDLER |
| | MEE | |
| EARLE | MESSER | WAKE |
| ENGLAND | MILLER | WALLACE |
| EYRES | MILLS | WALTERS |
| | MUNRO | WARING |
| FITTON | MURRAY | WEALE |
| FORBES | | WESTON |
| FOSTER | NAIRN | |
| FRASER | NAYLOR | YEWS |

"Who Kicked Them?"

FREE ENTRY FORM No. 2.

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Competitor's Name **2**

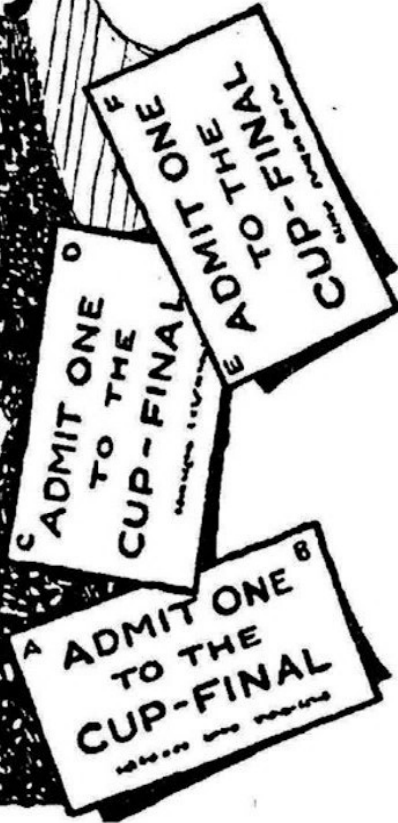
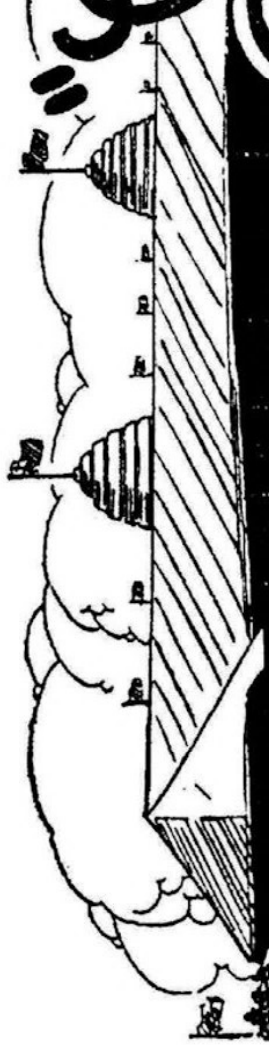
"NELSON LEE."

"Who Scored those Goals?"

A Simple 4 Week Competition

O'TOPPING "MEAD" CYCLES and

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"Who Kicked Them?"



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You can Find the Answers HERE!

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| ARMITAGE | GOODWIN | PAYNE |
| ARMSTRONG | GRIMSDELL | PHILLIPS |
| ASTLEY | GROZIER | PIERCE |
| BARKAS | HARKUS | PORTER |
| BASTIN | HICKS | ROBINSON |
| BELL | HOAR | ROBSON |
| BESTALL | HOUGHTON | ROUSE |
| BRIGGS | HUNTER | SEDDON |
| BRYANT | JAMES | SEED |
| CARR | JAMIESON | STAGE |
| COX | KNOX | TATE |
| CROOKS | LAMBERT | TEMPLE |
| GURTIS | LANGFORD | TROUP |
| DAVIES | LENNOX | TUNSTALL |
| DIMMOCK | LOW | VARCO |
| DOMINY | MHE | VIALS |
| DUNCAN | MESSE | VIDUER |
| EARLE | MILLER | WAKE |
| ENGLAND | MILLS | WALLACE |
| EYRES | MUNRO | WALTERS |
| FULTON | MURRAY | WARING |
| FORBES | NAIRN | WEALE |
| FOSTER | NAYLOR | WESTON |
| FRASER | | YEWS |

"Who Kicked Them?"

FREE ENTRY FORM No. 2.

9

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Competitor's Name **2**

"NELSON LEE."

THE HOUSE OF PATTERNING FEET!

(Continued from page 21.)

The countryside was silent and dark on every hand. The forest was a great expanse of silent, brooding mystery.

After several miles Sir Akbar brought his car to a standstill and switched off the engine. The other two cars came up behind, and their drivers followed Sir Akbar's example. All the lights were switched off, too.

"What next, gov'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Fetch all the others round," said Sir Akbar. "I want to give my final instructions."

Nipper noticed a tiny quivering note in the other's voice, a note which Sir Akbar could not control. It was not exactly like Nelson Lee's and, for a second, Nipper wondered. Perhaps he detected a false note there; but, if so, he was so excited at the prospect that he did not give it the consideration it deserved.

He subconsciously concluded that Nelson Lee himself was agog at the thought of this raid. It accounted for the slight discrepancy in the voice and the tone. None of the other boys had the slightest doubt of anything being wrong.

They gathered round breathlessly, their hearts beating more rapidly than usual. This was the kind of thing they had always hoped for. They were being used in one of the Chief's big cases!

"Now, boys, listen carefully," said Sir Akbar, controlling his voice with an effort. "A hundred yards along this lane you will find a high wall. Behind that high wall there is a big, sprawling, rambling garden. That garden surrounds an old mansion, one that has been allowed to drift into decay of late years. You will see no lights, and you will think that the house is empty. But it isn't empty."

"Who's there, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"The murderer of Mr. Robert Harding!" replied Sir Akbar grimly. "He and his two associates. There are three of them altogether—three desperate rogues."

"By George! Let's get at 'em!" said Handforth, clenching his fists.

"Is that dwarf in the house, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I fancy so; in fact, I am certain of it," replied the impostor. "I want you all to realise, boys, that this is a desperate mission. These men are armed, they are dangerous. Any noisy rush would be fraught with peril. This raid must be undertaken with extreme caution."

"Wouldn't it be a frightfully good idea to leave Handy in charge of the cars?" murmured Archie Glenthorne.

"You silly idiot!" fumed Handforth.

"Well, I mean, old boy, aren't you inclined to be a bit excitable?" said Archie. "You'll give the whole dashed show away before the balloon is due to go up."

"I fancy we can trust Handy on this occasion," said Sir Akbar smoothly—much to Handforth's gratification. "He, like the rest of you, realises that there must be no preliminary noise. You must all climb over this wall, and advance upon the house in absolute silence. The main thing is to get in."

CHAPTER 7.

The Unmasking!

THE old house stood gaunt and mysterious in the middle of its wilderness garden.

It was a typical old English mansion of the Elizabethan type—a half-timbered structure, picturesque and quaint. In full daylight, no doubt, there was a certain charm about the place, but at night it seemed sinister. It was mouldering into decay; in one or two places the red tiles had gone, revealing the rafters. And some of the upper windows were boarded up.

Inside the house Nelson Lee was a prisoner.

He had been brought here post-haste by Sir Akbar's men; he had arrived half an hour before Sir Akbar and the boys. And now, after a period of unconsciousness, he was in full possession of his wits.

He had awakened to find himself lying full length on a hard floor. He was not bound in any way. There were no shoes on his feet, and he was dressed only in his underclothes and an old bath-robe.

Fitful moonbeams were drifting in from some high, slit-like windows.

Nelson Lee did not feel annoyed with himself for having been captured by Dacca. What was the good? That second attack by the dwarf had been unexpected, and Lee had been taken unawares. His chief emotion was one of surprise. How was it that he still lived? Why had Dacca spared him?

He found himself becoming curious. As his brain cleared he took more interest in his surroundings. And he now noticed that something intervened between him and those slit-like windows, high up in the walls.

Bars! Stout metal bars!

Not on one side only, but on every side. And then, in a moment, Nelson Lee understood. He was standing in a huge cage, which had been erected in the centre of a vast apartment, evidently old, for he could dimly see the great oaken beams overhead. It was the great hall, apparently, of some old country mansion.



Dacca swung Nelson Lee's limp body across his shoulder and then slid off into the darkness.

The cage was an extraordinary contrivance. All four sides were constructed of thick iron bars—and these extended overhead. It was low, for Lee could easily grip the overhead bars by reaching up. The cage door was made of iron bars, like the rest of the ugly structure, and there was a heavy lock fitted.

"Very remarkable," muttered Lee, as he walked round, inspecting his queer prison. "Significant, too. I am beginning to understand why my life was spared!"

He was in no way cheered. He felt, perhaps, that it would be better if Dacca had strangled him out of hand. Why had Dacca allowed him to live? There could be only one answer. He was to be tortured!

He suddenly found himself listening. Was it his imagination, or could he hear a curious kind of shuffling? Or was it a vague rustling sound? Perhaps it was only the wind, or— No, not the wind. It was something nearer—something within the house itself. He listened more carefully. The sounds seemed to be coming from behind the walls—perhaps behind the wainscoting. The pattering of little feet—

Yes, that was it! The pattering of tiny feet. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them! That was what these queer sounds were like. But on the face of it this explanation seemed preposterous. Mice? Rats? Ridiculous!

Leo shook himself. He must not allow his imagination to get the better of him like this. Yet—he could not get the idea out of his head. These sounds were caused by the pattering of thousands of tiny feet. He stood there, gripping the bars of the cage, listening tensely.

What devil's work was this?

AND outside Sir Akbar Laldhi was getting ready to lead the rest of his victims into the same trap. He had arranged things cunningly. His final words of instruction were significant.

"You will approach the house in twos and threes," he said to the eagerly-listening boys. "I have already examined this house, and I have found many windows which can be easily forced. Our quarry is down in the cellar, so there is very little chance of our movements being seen or heard. The main object is to get inside."

"What are we to do, once we're in, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Go towards the big central hall," replied Sir Akbar. "You cannot miss it. You are to collect there and wait for me."

And thinking that Nelson Lee had given these instructions, the boys did not hesitate to carry them out. It was further arranged that the boys should go in relays—two or three at a time. Not one of them had the faintest suspicion of the trap.

Nipper and Handforth and Archie Glenthorne were the first three to get in. They found one of the lower windows broken and dilapidated. They crept through, one after the other, and they found themselves in a dank-smelling passage. They crept down it. Then, suddenly, there was a soft thud behind them. Nipper twirled round in the darkness, and Handforth and Archie Glenthorne knocked against him.

"What was that?" breathed Nipper.

"Sounded like a door closing," muttered Handforth, with a catch in his voice.

"Good gad!" came from Archie. "It is a door! Absolutely across the good old passage! I mean to say, a bit frightfully rotten, what?"

Before they could make any move to examine this mysterious door which had so suddenly closed upon them, a heavy object that felt like a blanket billowed over them and settled down over their heads and shoulders.

"Look out!" gasped Handforth. "What the—— Quick, you chaps——"

There was a curious sensation in his throat. That great blanket, it seemed, was impregnated with something. It caused the boys to choke and gasp, and within ten seconds they were helpless. Not unconscious, but dazed. They were easily seized by unseen figures. They found it difficult to breathe, as though some noxious gas had entered their lungs.

They were lifted and carried swiftly in the darkness.

NELSON LEE found himself listening with strained ears.

One or two slight sounds had come to him—sounds which were different from the everlasting shuffling and rustling. The faint creak of a board—the half-smothered cry of some human being. Remarkably enough, the pattering sounds, after developing into a wild scuffle, now almost ceased. There was a loud "thud-thud" as two bolts were shot back. The noise was so unexpected that it seemed like the double explosion of a gun.

Lee saw a door opening in one of those walls, some distance from the cage. He was not sorry. His captor, no doubt, had come to taunt him—or perhaps to finish him off. Well, anything was better than suspense.

Not one figure appeared, however, but many. One man hurried across with a big key in his hand. He inserted it in the lock of the cage door.

"Get to the other side!" he said, looking at Nelson Lee. "Stay there, or you will be shot."

The English was not perfect. Lee, peering forward, could see that this man was brown—a native of Balghanistan. In one hand he held a pistol, and it was pointed at Lee.

If the detective had felt that any good could come of making a sudden dash for the doorway as soon as the key turned in the lock, he would have taken a risk. But he was convinced that any move on his part would, indeed, mean instant death. And although he felt certain that death was to come to him later—and perhaps in a horrible form—he was not the kind of man to commit suicide deliberately.

"Go ahead," he said steadily, moving to the other side of the cage.

"Remember!" muttered the man. "If you move, I shoot."

He unlocked the door, and Lee now allowed his attention to drift towards the other figures. There were three of them—three men. And each man was dragging something. These "somethings" were thrust through into the cage, and the door was clanged to.

Lee stared in astonishment. He had three fellow prisoners now—smallish men, by the look of them. They were breathing painfully, and they seemed unable to rise.

"Odds horrors and mysteries!" gurgled a familiar voice. "I mean to say——"

"Glenthorne!" shouted Lee, in horror.

He leapt forward, and in a moment he found that the three prisoners were Nipper, Handforth, and Archie! He stood over them, aghast.

"What has happened?" he asked hoarsely. "What are you boys doing here?"

Nipper, still dazed and confused, was shocked into sudden sensibility. It was difficult for him to breathe, but he pulled himself to his feet and stared at Lee as though he stared at a ghost.

"Guv'nor!" he ejaculated, stupefied.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Lee, his voice sharp with anger and acute anxiety.

"What madness is this?"

Nipper shook himself.

"Is—is it really you, guv'nor?" he asked, gripping Lee's arm.

"What do you mean? Can't you see that it is I?" demanded Lee sharply. "Good heavens! What have you boys been up to? What insanity is this?"

Before Nipper or the others could reply there came a fresh batch of prisoners. The door was unlocked again, and Reggie Pitt and Church and McClure were bundled in—to fall to the floor, gasping and spluttering like the others. Nelson Lee looked at them with fresh consternation.

Six! How many more?

"We've been trapped, you chaps!" panted Nipper wildly. "The guv'nor's here—a prisoner! That man outside is a fraud!"

"My only sainted aunt!" babbled Handforth.

"The man outside?" repeated Lee. "What man?"

"Guv'nor, we've been hoodwinked!" said Nipper, gripping Lee more tightly than ever. "You remember when you went out in that disguise?"

"Yes, of course! I told you to go to bed."

"I couldn't sleep, sir—I only dozed," said Nipper. "Well, I heard somebody moving in your room, and I went in—and I thought it was you. That same disguise——"

"The cunning of it!" interrupted Lee, as a flood of understanding came to him. "I was foolish enough to get captured, Nipper. My assailant was that hideous dwarf. He must have got one of his associates to impersonate me—or, rather, to impersonate the tramp disguise that I was wearing. Naturally, you were easily victimised."

"And I never guessed!" groaned Nipper. "Ten minutes ago, outside this old house, I had a vague sort of suspicion, but it was so trivial that it didn't make any impression. We all thought that you were with us, guv'nor."

"All!" echoed Lee. "How many of you are here, then?"

"All of us, sir—the whole academy."

"Good heavens!" breathed Lee. "So this hunchback is making a clean sweep!"

It was an appalling revelation.

Even as Lee stood there, dumbfounded by the shock of this blow, other prisoners arrived. They were bundled in just the same as the others.

Five minutes later, the rest of the captives were in the cage. All had fallen victims, just as Sir Akbar had planned. Entering in twos and threes, they had been seized, just as Nipper and Handforth and Archie had been seized. Not one of them had been able to elude the lurking figures in the darkness.

They were now in various stages of recovery. Nipper and Handforth and Archie were quite themselves, and so were Reggie Pitt and Church and McClure. The latest comers were still dazed and fuddled.

The captors had gone. Nobody remained in this great hall of the old house except the prisoners in the cage. Nelson Lee was about to speak, but he checked. A door had opened, and a figure appeared. It advanced towards the cage.

"Well, boys, our little venture has been a success," said the newcomer pleasantly. "Well done! And now we will take a little well-earned rest."

Nelson Lee experienced a shock. It was as though his own voice was coming from that other figure—the tone, the inflection, every quality of the voice was the same. He could not blame any of these boys for having obeyed the orders of this impostor.

"You will be quite comfortable in this—er—peaceful spot," continued Sir Akbar. "Unfortunately, I am not in a position to deal with you personally. It will be for my master to decide your fate. I am but an underling."

He wanted to give the impression that he was a mere pawn in the game.

"Fortunately, my master is at hand," he continued smoothly. "I will inform him that you are ready, and he, no doubt, will come and have a few words with you."

He turned, glided off, and the door closed after him.

DACCA, the dwarf, stood outside.

It had only taken Sir Akbar a few moments to remove his disguise, and then he quickly transformed himself into his dwarf shape. He opened the door, slid through, and advanced towards the big cage. He heard the sharp exclamations of surprise and fear, and he chuckled.

"Come, come! What is there to be afraid of?" he asked, coming close to the cage and peering at his captives. "Splendid! My subordinates have done well. I shall have to reward them richly."

"You tricky rotter!" shouted Handforth furiously. "What have you brought us here for? What are you going to do with us?"

"It is for the very purpose of telling you that I have come," replied the hunchback, his eyes burning with evil. "Yes, my dear Mr. Lee, I could not resist the temptation to come here and gloat. A very human weakness. I do not generally succumb to such paltry temptations."

He chuckled with sudden frenzy.

"You did not think that Dacca could be so clever, eh?" he went on mockingly. "Yes, Mr. Lee, I am Dacca—Dacca, the Dwarf! You don't tremble. But you will tremble yet! White scum! Scum! Scum!"

His voice rose higher and higher, and he fairly screamed at his victims. As his own self—as Sir Akbar Laldhi—he was a man of refinement and culture; but as soon as he turned into Dacca he lost control; he became a wild, fanatical madman. His two identities were utterly and absolutely different.

"Do you hear me?" he shouted frantically. "Scum! Do you realise your position? Nobody knows where you went to—you, Lee, or any of your boys! In the morning you will just have disappeared! The police will search and search—but they will never find you! There will be no clues—no evidence of any kind!"

"Great Scott!" muttered Forrest uneasily. "Is he going to keep us prisoners for ever?"

"Prisoners!" echoed Dacca, with a wild laugh. "Oh, no! I don't want prisoners! Prisoners are dangerous—they might escape! I do not believe in taking chances of that sort. Before the dawn comes you will all be dead!"

"Dead!" breathed Church. "Oh, crumbs!"

"And before you die, you will suffer!" continued Dacca gloatingly. "You will suffer tortures unbelievable! Lord Dovercourt died quickly; but I can afford to take my time over you!"

Nelson Lee started.

"You say that Lord Dovercourt is dead?" he asked sharply.

"He died by my hands," snarled Dacca. "A minute after you left him, Lee, I killed him! I strangled him! Scum! White Scum! You're going to be treated in the way that I'll treat all white scum when my hour strikes!"

His listeners were dumbfounded; Dacca's very fury silenced them. There was something vile and unspeakably loathsome about this raving dwarf.

"But I'm not ready yet!" went on Dacca, his voice becoming more normal. "Not yet! But soon I shall be in a position to strike. Very, very soon!"

He loped off towards the door, and paused when he reached it.

"I won't keep you waiting long," he promised, with another of his maniacal laughs. "Not long! Soon you will hear the footsteps of your murderers. You will hear them softly at first—pattering, pattering, pattering! Then you will see them. Such small murderers—but none the less deadly!"

He gave an insane laugh, and passed through the doorway.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Handforth huskily. "Clean off his rocker!"

"That's about the only explanation," said Morrow, breathing hard. "And what did he mean about hearing the footsteps of our murderers? Pattering footsteps?"

"Oh, he was just raving," said Waldo.

Nelson Lee could have denied this, but he didn't. He was filled with horror. He was beginning to get a glimpse of the tortures Dacca had decided upon.

"Things can't be so bad as they seem," growled Handforth, who was always an optimist. "There must be some way out of this rotten place!"

"Listen! What's that?" asked somebody suddenly.

They all remained tense, and they could hear the queer shuffling and rustling.

"The pattering feet!" breathed Handforth. "Oh, crumbs! It's—it's what that awful dwarf said! Pattering feet!"

They could hear the sounds from all sides—like evil, ghostly whispers in the darkness. One of the prisoners pointed, his finger quivering visibly.

"Look!" he panted. "Over there—in that patch of moonlight! Something's moving!"



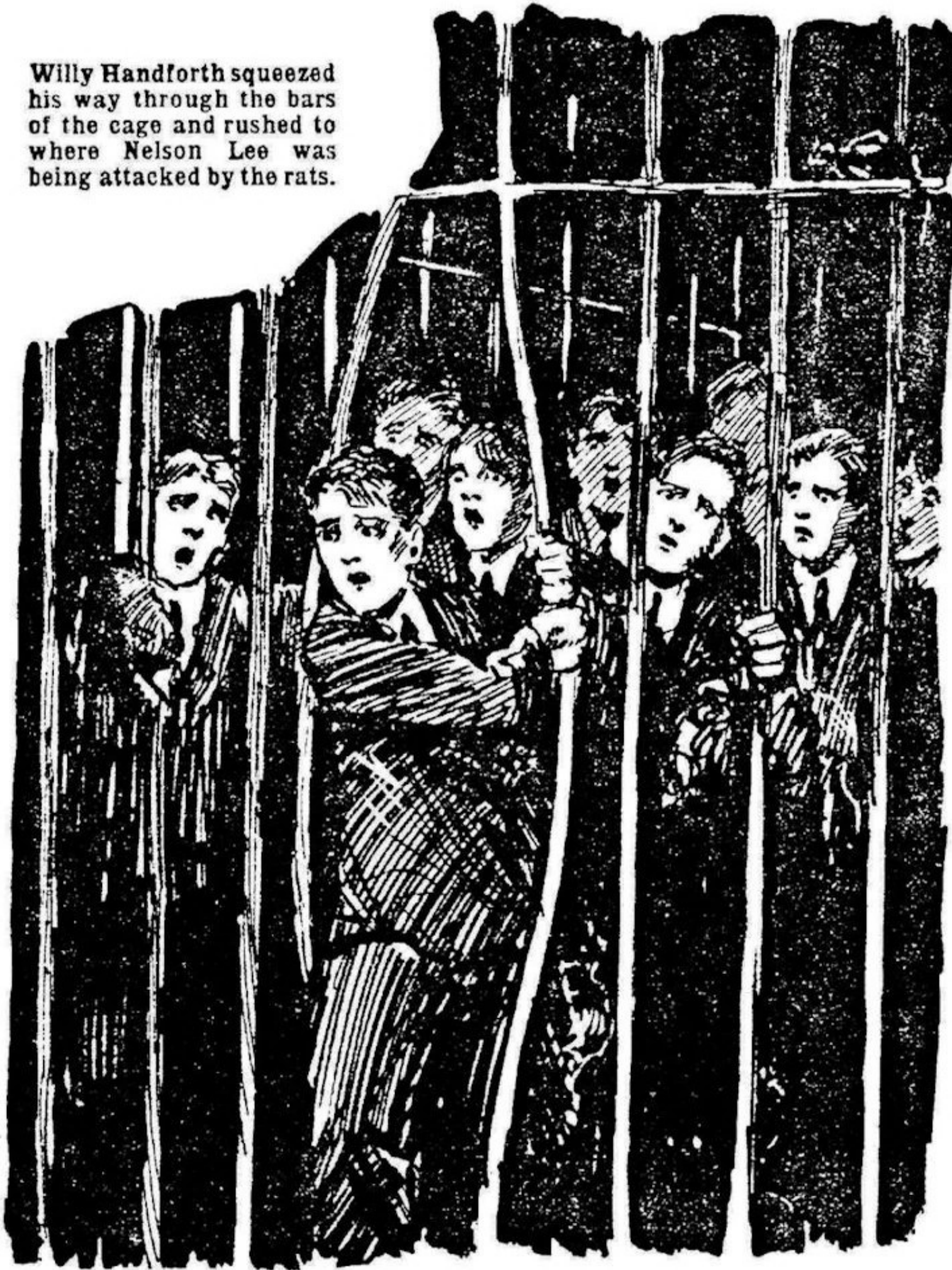
Nelson Lee had already seen, and he was staring with sombre eyes. The measure of his helplessness was brought home to him with overwhelming force.

"Rats!" whispered Willy Handforth, with a whistle. "Phew! Look at them! Dozens of rats—hundreds of 'em!"

They could see them in that moonbeam—black little shapes, scuttling about. There were holes all round the skirting of the great hall—holes that had just been opened, apparently by secret springs.

And out of these holes the rats were pouring—hundreds, thousands of them!

Willy Handforth squeezed his way through the bars of the cage and rushed to where Nelson Lee was being attacked by the rats.



CHAPTER 8.

The Black Horde!

CURIOSITY, rather than fear, was the chief emotion of the trapped "cub" detectives. They did not realise, at that early stage, that there could be any danger from these swarms of rats.

"Just a wheeze to put the wind up us, dear old fellows," said Travers, with disdain. "For the love of Samson! These Eastern beggars have queer ideas!"

"That rotten dwarf must take us for a lot of girls!" said Watson. "We're not afraid of rats!"

"Well, I should hope not!" said Handforth sourly. "My only hat! What a dud wheeze!"

They watched the rats fascinatedly. Some of the boys were beginning to feel frightened. It wasn't so bad to watch the rats in the moonbeam; but what of the hundreds of others

who were prowling about in the darkness? These rats were all round. Some were venturing near to the cage. Tiny, bead-like eyes were twinkling and burning in every direction—even where it seemed to be quite dark.

Eyes everywhere—eyes of menace.

"By Jove, you know, some of these beggars are whoppers," remarked Pitt, after a short silence. "Look at 'em! Nearly a foot long!"

Nelson Lee was nearly sick with apprehension. He did not fear so much for himself—although he was honest enough to tell himself that he was as nearly frightened as he had ever been in his life. It was the indifference of these boys that appalled him. They did not appreciate the peril—but Lee knew that it was deadly. It was horrible—ghastly.

He now understood the reason for this cage. The rats were all round—hundreds and thousands of them. A vile, creeping multitude. And whilst the prisoners could not escape from the cage, yet the rats had perfect freedom to get into it!

That was the dreadful situation.

The air was now full of the sounds of the rats—a great, ever-increasing shuffling, with occasionally a squeak or a squeal. And a pungent, revolting odour was rising into the air.

“Still they come!” said Nipper hoarsely. “Look! They’re pouring out of the holes all the time!”

“I’ve noticed it,” said Browne. “Brothers, I have no desire to alarm you unduly, but we must confess that this situation is not without its ugly side.”

“But these rats won’t hurt us,” said Fullwood. “They’re only here to——”

“Look! Some of them are getting into the cage now!” yelled Gulliver, in sudden fear. “Oh, my hat! Two of them ran over one of my feet just then!”

His shout had a startling effect. The rats twirled round madly, squealing and squeaking. Many of them tore through the cage, running over the feet of the boys. The boys danced about, horrified by the contact.

“One of them’s on me—crawling on my leg!” screamed Forrest. “Take it off—take it off!”

“For Heaven’s sake, control yourself, Forrest!” snapped Nelson Lee. “If we excite these rats too much, they will become dangerous.”

A sound came from above—a new sound. It was a creak of wood, and the prisoners, looking up, saw a trap-door open in the ceiling, far above the top of the cage.

“What is it?” breathed Watson. “Is—is somebody coming to rescue us?”

A miniature searchlight was suddenly switched on, blazing into the eyes of the boys. It was dazzling in its intensity, and they were compelled to look aside.

And now they could see the rats distinctly. The sight made them forget everything else. They had imagined that the rats were numerous, but in their wildest moments they had not guessed the full truth.

The entire floor of the great hall was solidly black with the ugly brutes. There was not a bare inch anywhere. In places the rats were swarming over one another’s backs. It was a swirling multitude of foulness.

“They are hungry—my rats!” came Dacca’s voice, from above.

“You inhuman devil!” shouted Nelson Lee. “Do what you like with me—but let these boys go!”

“After I have been to so much trouble to capture them?” asked Dacca mockingly. “I am afraid I cannot oblige you, Mr. Lee. As I have said, my rats are hungry—and they are not particular with regard to their food. At the moment, perhaps, they are a little shy. But they will soon overcome this tendency.”

It was only a voice. Dacca himself was nowhere to be seen. It was a voice coming from behind that all-revealing searchlight.

“Before I go, I feel that I must give you a few words of explanation,” continued the voice. “This is just a sample of what the world will soon be talking about, to the exclusion of every other subject. Have you ever heard of the Black Plague, Mr. Lee?”

“The Black Plague!” repeated Lee, beside himself with horror.

“Your tone reveals to me that you are fully alive to the possibilities,” came Dacca’s voice. “It will interest you to know that my rats are being bred in tens of thousands. All of them will be carriers of the dreaded Black Plague. Do you understand? Do you realise what I meant when I said that all the white scum would be wiped out? My rats will be released in hundreds. In batches, they will be set at liberty in every part of London. And all on the same night!”

“You—you monster!” shouted Lee.

“What chance will there be to stamp out the epidemic?” gloated Dacca. “In hundreds of places, on the same night, the germ-laden rats will be set at liberty. Your great Capital—north, east, south, and west—will be in the grip of the Black Plague within twenty-four hours of the release of my rats. Good-night, Mr. Lee—good-night, my poor boys! You must thank Mr. Lee for this predicament. My rats will have quite an excellent meal to-night!”

Peal after peal of fiendish laughter rang out, and then the trap-door was abruptly closed, shutting out the searchlight.

NELSON LEE was under no illusion.

Dacca the dwarf had already proved himself to be a man of his word. Lee saw no reason to doubt that this appalling scheme for spreading the Black Plague would be put into execution. It was a diabolical plan, and it could only have been conceived in the brain of a fanatic.

More and more, Nelson Lee was becoming convinced that Dacca was out for world power. He was somebody bigger than he pretended to be—somebody who held enormous sway out in the East. No doubt he was the Chief—the Supreme Leader—of a great anti-white movement.

Something was happening out in Balghistan—something sensational. That was why the Indian Air Mail liners had been destroyed—or captured. It was impossible to say which.

The master-stroke would come out in the East. When the coup was made, it would take place somewhere on the borders of India. And it was Dacca’s fiendish plan to spread the Black Plague in England at the same time—at the identical period of the coup in the East.

With what object?

Obviously, to keep the British Government busy at home. With the Black Plague killing tens of thousands of people in London, and spreading all over the country, the disaster would be of such national size that England would need all her resources to save herself from destruction.

Thus, the situation out in the East would be trivial by comparison. England would be able to do nothing to cope with that Eastern situation. She would be fighting to save her own life.

The possibilities were dreadful.

England would naturally be cut off from the world. No ships would leave her ports, no ships would enter. She would be shunned. She would be a plague-spot of death. Fighting the deadly plague would be her one task. And during this battle Dacca and his fellow-conspirators would strike in Balghanistan—or in India!

NELSON LEE was brought back to the immediate situation by the grasp of Nipper's hand on his arm.

"Guv'nor!" Nipper was saying. "What are we going to do?"

Lee started. That was the question. What were they going to do? What could they do?

"I don't know, young 'un," said the great detective, in a low voice. "Heaven help me! That infernal dwarf was right! You boys must blame me for this predicament!"

"Oh, rot, sir!" said Handforth, who was near by. "How could we blame you? It wasn't your fault!"

"I should have taken greater precautions," muttered Lee. "I should have had you protected and guarded."

"Never mind that now, guv'nor," said Nipper. "What about these rotten rats? Do you think they're infected with the Black Plague? It's—it's horrible! Even now we might be catching the germs——"

"Not one of these rats is carrying the disease," interrupted Lee quickly.

"How do you know that, sir?"

"Dacca himself would not have dared to come amongst them if there had been any such danger," replied Lee. "The dwarf was in this room—and he was up there, at that trap-door, too. No, boys, these rats are not Plague carriers."

"Then we're safe?" asked Handforth, with relief.

"Safe!" repeated Lee hoarsely. "You don't seem to realise——"

He broke off, swallowing hard. Safe! Plague or no plague, these rats were a terrible, deadly menace. Lee guessed that they had been bred for the special purpose that Dacca had outlined. They were to be infected with the Plague later—before they were distributed all over the great Metropolis.

But what of that? Lee and the boys had to fight their own battle now. And what chance was there for them?

"Oh!" screamed one of the boys suddenly. "I'm bitten!"

There was immediately a minor panic. One of the rats, growing more venturesome, had attacked. Others would soon follow its example. Over in one corner of the cage two or three boys were struggling, fighting, and shouting. The rat horde was swarming in now—it was beginning to understand, perhaps, that these human beings were helpless.

Some of the boys had leapt up and were clinging to the bars at the top of the cage.

"Come on—let's all do this!" shouted Fullwood hoarsely. "If we hang on to these bars we're safe from the rats! That dwarf isn't as clever as he thinks he is—or he would have made this cage higher."

In a moment they were all leaping up to the bars. But Nelson Lee groaned. Only he realised that Dacca the dwarf had deliberately made that cage low, so that the tortures of his victims would be prolonged!

CHAPTER 9.

Willy . The Rescue :

NELSON LEE was right.

The cage was low and so the victims could hang there—but for how long? Sooner or later they would grow wearied, and they would drop. Their tortures were only being prolonged.

There was another peril, too. One of the boys suddenly screamed, and dropped.

"My hand!" he gasped. "My hand's bitten!"

The rats were climbing all over the cage—up the sides, over the top. And, encountering those fingers clutching at the bars, the rats were biting. It was worse clinging to the bars than to remain on the floor.

"We shall go mad—mad!" croaked Forrest, in abject fear. "Gad! I'm not a tunk, but this is too horrible for words!"

Gulliver and Bell were nearly fainting with fear. Some of the other juniors were almost as frightened, but they were keeping a grip on themselves. They dared not allow their imaginations to have full play. What was all this leading to? Even Nelson Lee himself was afraid to think. Within half an hour many of the boys would be so badly bitten that they would lose consciousness. They would drop, and the rats—— No, no, it was too ghastly. It was too revolting.

"Look at Willy!" breathed Handforth abruptly. "Great Scott!"

They could faintly see Willy in one corner of the cage. The former St. Frank's fag was making curious little whistling noises, and he was absolutely smothered with rats. They were crawling up his arms, his legs, his body. They were perched on his shoulders. And, uncannily enough, they were not attacking him. They seemed to be attracted in some extraordinary way

"Upon my soul!" said Nelson Lee, staring. "We have always known that young Handforth had a remarkable influence over animals, but I never suspected that it was as great as this! These rats are attacking the rest of us, but they are not attacking Willy!"

It was true. Willy was immune. In the old days, at St. Frank's, Willy had kept many pets—indeed, most of his pets were still in his possession, at the Detective Academy. His influence over animals was uncannily marvellous. He could make them do almost anything. And now he was standing over in that corner of the cage, oblivious of his surroundings. He was concentrating all his energies upon the rats.

"Let's all try it!" urged Forrest. "If we kick these brutes they'll probably turn on us, but if we're friendly they might——"

"No, no, Forrest," interrupted Lee. "Young Handforth is the only one of us who possesses this strange power. We cannot hope to make friends as he is doing."

Stanley Waldo now clutched at Lee's arm.

"These bars, sir!" he panted. "They're strong enough—but I'm strong, too! You know that, sir! You know that I've inherited my father's strength! Supposing we could bend the bars?"

"Impossible, Waldo!" said Lee. "The bars are of enormous thickness——"

"Let's try, sir!" urged young Waldo.

He seized one of the bars and, careless of the rats, he exerted his strength. His face became contorted, and beads of perspiration sprang out upon his skin. Nelson Lee, watching, was amazed to see the bar bending slightly.

"Let me help!" muttered the detective.

He grabbed the bar just below the point where Waldo was holding, and he, too exerted all his strength.

"It's moving—it's moving!" yelled Nipper.

DACCA THE DWARF had over-reached himself. He had reckoned without Willy Handforth and Stanley Waldo!

By bringing all these boys into the House of Rats he had aimed to annihilate them all. But by his very action in bringing the whole crowd he was defeating his own object.

One of those iron bars was already bent—iron bars which had seemed utterly immovable. And now Waldo was exerting his enormous strength on the next one—pulling in the opposite direction. The idea was to make a gap big enough for all the prisoners to squeeze through. Lee was helping—and others, too, were pulling. And this second bar succumbed as the first had done. When Waldo was finished he almost collapsed. He had used his strength freely, and exhaustion followed. But the trick was done.

"We can get through!" panted Fullwood. "Look! It's big enough!"

"You go first, gov'nor!" urged Nipper. "If it's big enough for you, all the rest of us can escape!"

Nelson Lee did not hesitate. He wanted to get through first—because he had an idea that the rats would attack the first one to get out of the cage. If he could draw the rats on to him, and keep them concentrated upon him, the boys might escape. Lee did not think of himself now.

He proceeded to squeeze through the gap. It was a hard job. It was as much as he could do to force his body through, and while he was engaged in this operation the rats sprang upon him in scores. The din was now tremendous. The squeaking and squealing filled the air in an abominable hubbub.

But at last Lee managed to squeeze out, and as he staggered into the open part of the great hall, the rats attacked in real earnest. Those on the floor immediately below him swarmed up his clothing. Others leaped from a distance, landing on his shoulders, on his head, and all over his person. They licked his hands, his neck, his face.

Nelson Lee reeled blindly, holding one hand over his eyes. He realised, in that moment, that although he had escaped from the cage, there was very little chance of life: and no doubt the boys were being similarly attacked at this moment.

Then a voice rang out above the terrific din—it was the voice of Willy Handforth.

"Hold still, everybody!" he shouted. "Let me get through next! Quick! There's a chance for us!"

He fought his way to the gap in the cage, where some of the boys were struggling madly to get through. It was a real panic now, and none of these youngsters could be blamed for being so terror-stricken. Willy got through, and he fought his way to Nelson Lee's side.

And now he made those strange noises with his mouth—queer little coaxing sounds. The rats came round him as if by magic. Many of them leapt from Nelson Lee's shoulders on to Willy's. Slowly, Willy backed away, over towards one of the walls. The rats followed him—swarms and droves of them. They were attracted in that same remarkable way. They were squealing and twittering—understanding, perhaps, in their own way, that Willy was their master. They obeyed his summons. They smothered him from head to foot, and those who could not get near swarmed round, actually fighting among themselves to get closer.

Nelson Lee, to his dazed amazement, found himself left practically alone. The rats had deserted him—for Willy. And the other boys were now getting through the gap in the cage. They were finding the floor comparatively clear. All the rats were concentrating on Willy—who was nearly obliterated by that revolting horde. Yet, miraculously enough, Willy was not harmed in any way. Not one of the rats attempted to bite him.

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"This way, boys!" muttered Lee hoarsely.

He had reached that door—the door through which Dacca had vanished. It was locked, and when Lee charged against it he found that his strength was of no avail. A battering-ram would have been necessary to break that door down. It was of solid oak, and it was locked and bolted. And there was no other door.

"We can't get out even now!" shouted one of the boys, in panic. "We're trapped, just the same!"

"Wait!" said Lee. "What of the trap-door, above the cage?"

"By George, yes!" shouted Handforth.

Lee ran to the cage, treading on some of the rats as he did so. Like a monkey, he climbed up the cage, reached the top, and found, to his infinite relief, that by standing on the bars he could just reach that trap-door.

All the boys were following his example—climbing up to the top of the cage. Up there, too, they felt safer. The rats could not follow them in great numbers. Those that did come were kicked off the bars.

"Can you do anything, gov'nor?" asked Nipper desperately.

"I'm afraid I can't reach," replied Lee. "I can only just touch the trap-door——"

"Let me get on your shoulders, sir!" urged Nipper.

He climbed up, and the others gathered round, holding Lee steady. The top of the cage was quivering and bending under its human weight. Nipper, on Lee's shoulders, was able to force his back against that trap-door. He could feel it giving. It was not a particularly strong one, and there appeared to be only one bolt holding it. Crash!

At last, when Nipper gave an extra effort, the door succumbed. It flew upwards, and there was a black gap over Nipper's head.

"Climb through, young 'un!" said Lee. "Quickly, for Heaven's sake!"

Nipper swarmed up, and found himself in complete darkness. He had half expected that an attack would come—that Dacca was up there, perhaps. But he was not harmed. And then the other boys, one after the other, climbed up, aided by Lee. One or two of them switched on electric torches, and they saw that they were in a room, empty and dusty. The door was standing ajar. No doubt Dacca and his men had gone—fully convinced that their victims were helpless.

"Safe—safe!" babbled Church as he sank to the floor. "Oh, my hat!"

Two or three of the others actually fainted. As soon as the tension was over they collapsed. Nelson Lee was filled with concern for Willy. Was Willy safe? Or had he sacrificed his own life for the sake of the others?

"Willy—Willy!" called Lee. "Come, my boy! We are safe!"

"O.K., Chief!" came Willy's cool voice. "I'm safe, too! These rats aren't so bad—they haven't even nibbled at me."

"Good Heavens!" muttered Lee. "This is the most amazing thing I have ever known!"

He was quite awed by Willy's phenomenal influence over dumb animals. He could understand Willy affecting one rat, or two or three. But this multitude! It was a revelation.

Standing at the trap-door, flashing his torchlight down, Handforth saw his minor on the floor of the great hall. Willy was nearly invisible. The rats were smothering him like an enormous cloak—a squirming, wriggling, squealing mass.

It was revolting in the extreme. But Willy did not seem to mind. As he climbed the cage the rats jumped off him. When Willy reached the top bars he shook himself. Like rain, the rats fell. And when, at last, Willy gave a jump upwards, he had shaken the last of the rats off. Nelson Lee slammed the trap-door down, and wedged it.

Five minutes later he and the boys all were outside in the clear, sweet, night air.

The House of the Rats stood silent and black, deserted save for its hideous rodent occupants.

CHAPTER 10.

The Last of the Rats!

THERE were many casualties.

Nelson Lee had been bitten in a score of places, and he was bleeding from many of these tiny punctures. Most of the boys, too, had been bitten about the ankles and hands and wrists. They were horrified at the possibilities. Were they infected with the Black Plague?

It was a strange procession which struck the main road soon afterwards. Nelson Lee was at the head, and the boys followed him. Their footsteps were weary, but they kept on. Even now they could hardly believe that all danger was over.

"Where are you taking us to, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, after a while.

"To the nearest hospital," replied Lee grimly.

They found one half-an-hour later. In the small hours of the morning, it was a dramatic entry. Lee marched all the boys in, and he demanded an immediate interview with the house-surgeon in charge. This gentleman, when he heard Nelson Lee's tale, believed at first that he was listening to the ravings of a madman.

"But it is utterly incredible!" he protested. "Rats? The Black Plague? Man alive, do you expect me to believe this?"

"Whether you credit my story or not, I insist that you make an immediate examination," replied Nelson Lee. "Personally, I do not believe that these rats were plague-carriers. But you must see, doctor, that it is vitally urgent that we should all be immediately treated."

"Yes, I see that," replied the doctor gravely.

To Nelson Lee's untold relief he soon discovered that there were no plague germs in any of them.

Their many wounds were treated—cauterized by a quick modern process—and then all the boys, at Lee's orders, were packed to bed. Sleep was what they needed—immediate sleep—to drive away the horrors of that ghastly experience.

There were not sufficient beds for them in that comparatively small hospital, but that did not matter. The boys were provided with blankets and pillows, and they stretched themselves on a carpeted floor and were asleep within a couple of minutes.

NELSON LEE was convinced that all those rats had been bred for the purpose of carrying the Black Plague—exactly as Dacca the dwarf had stated. At a later stage, no doubt, plague-ridden rats would have been mixed with that terrible horde. All of them would have become infected—and then, as Dacca had said, they would have been distributed over every corner of London on the same night. Never for a moment did Lee doubt the truth of Dacca's statement. The man was a fiend, fully capable of such an atrocity.

Nelson Lee acted with promptitude.

He had 'phoned to Scotland Yard even before his many little wounds had been cauterized, and by the time he was changed into a suit of clothes which the house surgeon lent him, two tenders of Flying Squad men from the Yard had arrived. Lee had no difficulty in also obtaining the services of a big detachment of the military, and then an organised raid on the House of the Rats was made.

The house stood silent and deserted, as before. The soldiers and the police surrounded the place. An entry was forced. No living human being was found inside—nothing but the rats. They were still in that big hall, for the most part, but it was ascertained that there were secret runs constructed in the cellars, and through the walls, and even in the ordinary rooms. The whole place was a veritable warren.

It was dealt with drastically.

The police retired, and the military, donning gas masks, took great cylinders of poison-gas to the house. The entire building was filled with the deadly, poisonous fumes. Every rat was exterminated.

AND when daylight came another move was made.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, acting upon Nelson Lee's advice, sent a detachment of Special Branch men to the private house of the Balghistan Ambassador.

It was all done very diplomatically.

While the whole of England, over breakfast, was discussing the sensational murder of Lord

Dovercourt, the Air Minister, Sir Akbar Laldhi's home was being raided. It did not seem like a raid—but it was a raid.

The Scotland Yard men, in the politest possible terms, informed Sir Akbar that information had come into their possession to the effect that traitors were at work. Sir Akbar himself was in no way implicated, but he was requested to allow the Yard men full scope. Unknown to him, no doubt, Britain's enemies were at work. Not for one moment was Sir Akbar himself accused. It was impossible to accuse him, since there was no proof.

Sir Akbar, suave and polite, was only too ready to do everything in his power to assist in the search. What his private feelings were it was impossible to know. But there could be no doubt that Sir Akbar, alias Dacca the dwarf, was inwardly burning with rage and mortification and fear. He had failed! Nelson Lee and all those boys had escaped—and his precious rats were exterminated.

Sir Akbar's feelings must have been maniacal, but he controlled himself with that stoicism for which the Easterners are noted. Never by a word or a sign did he betray himself.

And the raid, incidentally, was a dismal failure.

Nothing whatever of an incriminating nature was found. No secret rooms—no hidden broadcasting apparatus—no incriminating documents. In fact, nothing. Sir Akbar Laldhi's home was a model of everything that it should be.

Nelson Lee was disappointed—but not surprised.

Sir Akbar's espionage system, no doubt, was as perfect as it could be. He had learned in the early hours of the morning that the House of the Rats had been visited by the police and the military. He had known that Nelson Lee and the boys had escaped.

So he had taken immediate measures to prepare himself for any possible action on the part of the authorities. He had removed his secret broadcasting station—he had obliterated all traces of his treachery.

THE situation was delicate.

The Prime Minister himself found it necessary to apologise humbly to the Balghanistan Ambassador. And Sir Akbar was gracious enough to accept that apology in the spirit in which it was tendered.

Nelson Lee, summoned to Downing Street, found the Premier boiling with rage.

"On your information, Mr. Lee, we took action!" said the great man. "Only by abjectly humbling myself have I averted a grave international crisis. What have you to say?"

"I say that Sir Akbar Laldhi is a very clever man," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "He has tricked us, sir—that is all."

"The whole position is fraught with peril," said the Prime Minister agitatedly. "Good Heavens, Mr. Lee, if the Balghanistan Government takes offence——"

"Is Britain afraid of Balghanistan?" broke in Lee curtly.

"No, certainly not—but this is not a moment for any Eastern complications," said the Premier. "The political situation at home is serious enough. We are not in a position to send armies to India."

"You know all the facts—and you know that Lord Dovercourt was murdered," said Nelson Lee. "The man who calls himself Dacca is the murderer; and this man attempted to kill me and all my boys during the night. Feeling certain that we were doomed, he even gave us some details of his future plans."

"The plague? Rendering Britain helpless whilst a *coup* is made in the East?" said the Prime Minister, pursing his lips. "A tall story, Mr. Lee—an incredible story. Frankly, I cannot believe it."

"And yet I am certain that there is a great conspiracy afoot—and that Sir Akbar Laldhi is involved in it," said Nelson Lee gravely.

"There is no evidence against Sir Akbar Laldhi—there is nothing whatever that we can seize upon," said the Premier. "I am sorry, now, that I took any action. I believe, of course, that there is some evil influence at work—but I do not believe that there is any such conspiracy as you imagine."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Time will show," he said curtly.

LATER on that day all the members of the Detective Academy arrived back at Gray's Inn Road.

They were little the worse for their experience—and within a few days, perhaps, they would be quite normal. And most of the boys were keen enough to have another fight with the enemy.

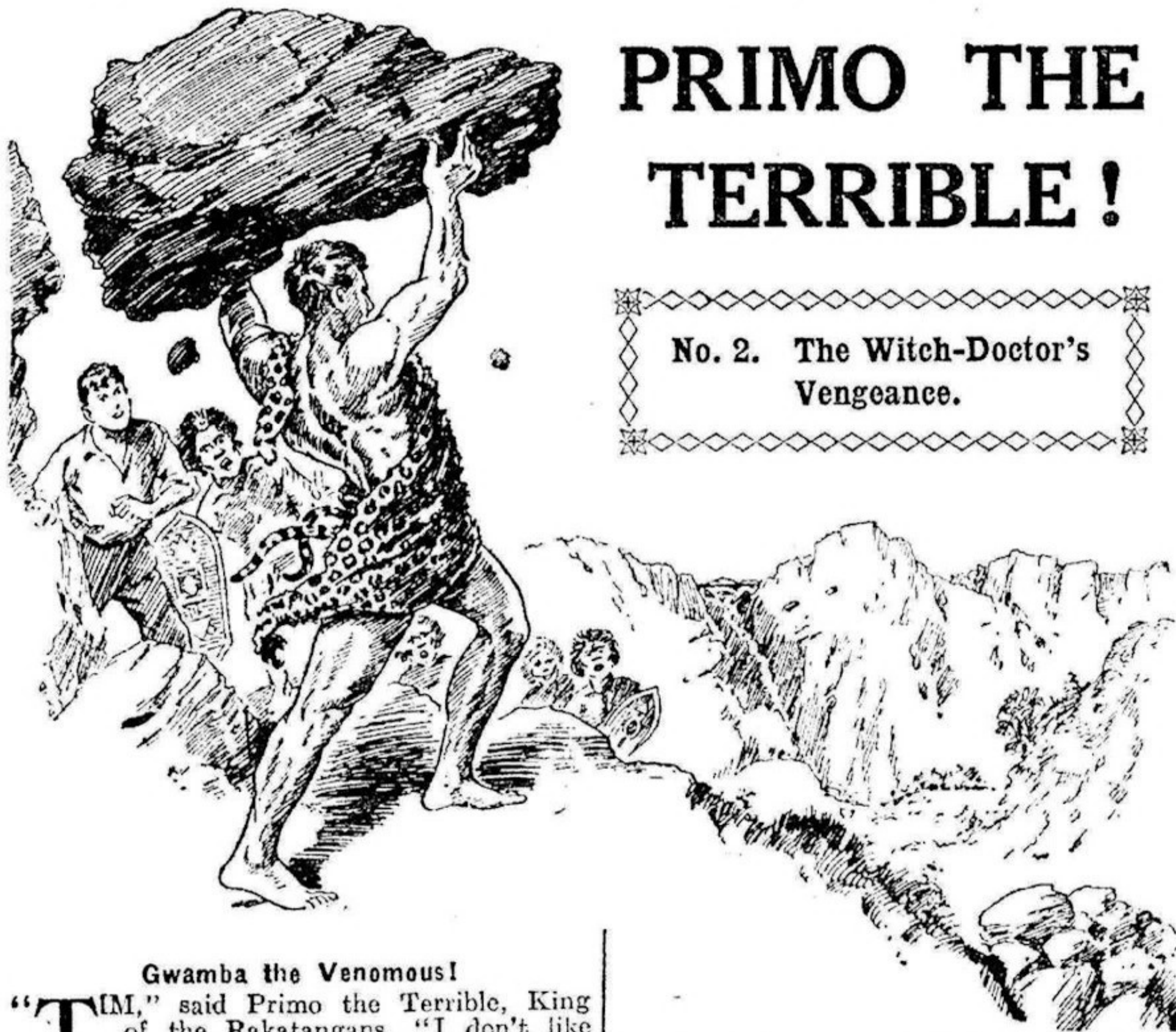
There was little doubt that they would get that fight!

And perhaps the next round would take them further afield—perhaps it would even take them into the East, into Balghanistan itself!

THE END

"*Dacca the Devil-Dwarf!*" is the title of the next enthralling yarn in this grand series, chums. It's coming next Wednesday—along with the third dandy Free Gift, a "*Kazoo Hummer.*" Make sure you don't miss them—order your NELSON LEE now!

MUSCLE AND GRIT! Primo the Terrible, king of the Rakatangans, won his way to that position by his enormous strength; by his strength he retains it!



PRIMO THE TERRIBLE!

No. 2. The Witch-Doctor's Vengeance.

Gwamba the Venomous!

"TIM," said Primo the Terrible, King of the Rakatangans, "I don't like that fellow!"

"Gwamba, the witch-doctor?" asked Tim Murphy, and Primo nodded. "Nor do I. He's hated you ever since you smashed up his pet idol and made yourself king. He needs watching."

Primo nodded, and he and Tim walked out of the hut which had previously housed the idol of the head-hunting Rakatangans, and which was now the royal "palace" of Primo, the strongest man in the world. A number of warriors of the tribe had set out the midday meal which they had prepared for the giant Australian and the British boy who was his fellow-adventurer. Gwamba, the witch-doctor, had superintended them, and as Primo appeared he prostrated himself and held out a steaming dish of roast wild boar.

Primo's eyes glittered as he gazed at the witch-doctor with suspicion.

"Eat!" he commanded, motioning to the roast boar, and a look of alarm came into the eyes of Gwamba.

He went off into a string of words, none of which either Primo or Tim understood,

for they had not established themselves long enough on the island of Rakatanga to understand the language. Primo, however, understood that the witch-doctor was refusing to eat, and his brawny hand went out and seized Gwamba by the scruff of the neck, while he gritted his teeth in anger.

The next moment Gwamba was whirled off his feet, swung round the head of Primo three times, and pitched like a stone from a catapult through the air. There was a crash as he landed in a tree, and as Primo stepped forward to pursue him, the witch-doctor dropped to the ground and hastily vanished into the surrounding forest. Primo did not follow him.

"Let him go!" he said. "As I thought, the food is poisoned. Tim, you must eat or drink nothing until it has first been tasted by those who prepare it."

He turned and bade the natives take away the poisoned food. They did so, glad to escape with their lives from the wrath of the dreaded Primo. In a remarkably short space of time another meal was prepared, and when the head men of the tribe had

eaten of it and shown no ill-effects, Primo and Tim refreshed themselves.

Tim had no doubts whatever as to Primo's ability to make the tribe obey him, for a man who could—as Primo had done—split a giant idol completely in two, could achieve miracles. But Tim could not help thinking that Gwamba would strike again, and in this he was not mistaken. Primo's strength prevented Gwamba from moving openly against the primitive giant—but there were other means.

Primo and Tim slept on heaps of rushes in the long, wide hut, and at night the hut was illuminated by the flickering light of a native lamp.

That night Primo and Tim were soon asleep. Tim slept soundly, but suddenly awakened. What had caused him to do so he did not know, but he had a feeling that he and Primo were not alone in the hut. Then he heard a shuffling noise, and he rose to a sitting position. The next moment he cowered back—for two green, evil eyes were staring at him, and he beheld, by the flickering light of the lamp, the cat-like form of a mighty tiger, crouching for a spring!

For a moment Tim was spell-bound, and then, finding his tongue, he sent out a cry for help. At the same moment the tiger leaped! Tim tried to throw himself aside, but every second he expected to feel the cruel claws of the beast rending his flesh.

Crash!

Tim staggered and fell heavily as the beast caught him a glancing blow. Snarling savagely, the tiger wheeled around and again leapt for the breathless Tim!

Peril!

PRIMO awoke with a start. He was just in time to see the tiger as it leapt at the recumbent Tim.

Like a flash of lightning Primo sprang forward. He met the mighty brute in mid-air, and there was a sickening crash as it dashed against Primo's stalwart chest. The giant's hands shot out and seized the tiger by the throat, and the beast clawed madly at him again and again.

Crash! Down they went on the hard floor of the hut. The tiger was spitting and roaring, and striving to wrench itself free from the terrible grip of this formidable human opponent. Its claws dug deep into the flesh of Primo, and the blood spurted from the weals which were torn up on his skin.

But Primo did not relax his hold. Backward and forward man and beast swayed. Now Primo would exert all his amazing strength and throw the animal to the ground, getting astride it and striving to choke the breath from its body.

With sinuous cat-like movements the beast twisted and turned, wrenching its throat from the grip of the formidable giant. But 'ere it could plunge its gleaming fangs into Primo's throat, the strong man had gripped it again. They staggered and rolled towards



Primo's steel-like arms encircled the tiger — and then began the greatest battle that had ever been witnessed between man and beast!

the open door of the hut, and the next moment were outside.

The village, by that time, was in an uproar, and crowds of natives, bearing flaming torches, gathered around in a wide ring while the fearful battle went on, the torchlight lending an additional air of awe to the scene.

Suddenly, with a snarl, the tiger tore itself free from the choking hands which held it in a grip of steel. Primo staggered to his feet, almost blinded by the perspiration which poured down his forehead, and the blood which spurted from his wounds. He dashed his hand across his eyes—and beheld the tiger making a spring at him.

He was ready for it. He did not even attempt to avoid it, but met it with open arms. Crash! The tiger thundered against Primo's breast, and the steel-like arms of the giant encircled it, crushing it to him. Then began the greatest battle that had ever been witnessed between man and beast!

Primo hung on grimly. His muscles rippled beneath his tanned skin; the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcord. The air was alive with noise. Primo seemed no longer to be a man; he seemed to be an animal—an animal that was more powerful even than the greatest tiger that roamed the jungle!

Tim held his breath as he gazed at the scene, and then, suddenly, he darted forward as the two combatants fell heavily to the ground. So closely interlocked were they, and so covered with blood, that he could not see who was the victor. Then a glad cry came to his lips as he saw Primo rise unsteadily to his feet.

The tiger lay there—motionless, and as some of the natives ran to it and turned it over, all saw, by the manner in which the head dropped limply, that the redoubtable Primo had completely broken the neck of the huge beast!

A hush fell on the natives—a hush that was instantly changed to a chant of victory as they thronged around the tiger with wondering eyes, and then fell upon it and carried it off to be stuffed and preserved as a warning to all who might seek to cross the path of the terrible Primo!

Primo took a deep breath, and the animal side of his nature seemed to vanish as he turned to Tim, that curious schoolboyish smile on his face once more.

"That was Gwamba's doing, Tim," he said. "To-morrow he must pay for his treachery."

And then, as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, he walked back into the hut, and threw himself upon his rush bed, to fall asleep instantly.

In the fastness of the forest which surrounded the village, Gwamba had beheld the mighty combat—for he it was who, with the aid of some of the men who were still loyal to him, had captured the mighty tiger and carried it in a cage to be released at the entrance to the hut.

Now, as he saw the manner in which his plans had been brought to nothing, he slunk

away, filled with terror. Would nothing beat this mighty primeval man who was capable of a strength that was almost unbelievable?

Yet, as Gwamba made his way to the little camp which he had established with the men who had joined him, he remembered something, and his eyes glittered as he thought of a manner in which, even yet, he might turn the tables on the terrible Primo!

There was no time to lose—and Gwamba did not lose any. He aroused his followers and led them, in single file, along the ravine which was at the top of the valley in which the village of Rakatanga nestled. Then, working by the fitful light of the moon, Gwamba and his men began to construct a dam across a swift-flowing mountain stream.

When dawn appeared in the East, Gwamba and his men ceased from their labours. If all went well, in a few hours Primo and the members of the tribe who remained loyal to him would find themselves scattered by a force which, surely, even Primo could not resist. And Gwamba chuckled.

With the coming of daylight, Primo and Tim left their hut, and proceeded to make a round of the village. They had not gone far before a native, in evident excitement, ran to them and prostrated himself. Then he broke into a torrent of words, and pointed up the valley to the ravine.

Neither Primo nor Tim could understand his words, so Primo motioned him to guide them to the scene which had caused his excitement. Quickly the native faced about, and, with the two adventurers following him, led the way to the ravine.

The village of the Rakatanga lay in a fertile valley. So far Primo and Tim had not been able to take an opportunity of surveying the surrounding neighbourhood. Now, however, as they entered a rocky ravine, they perceived that a thin stream of water was beginning to pour down it. It was that which had excited the native, and from his gestures it was evident that this betokened a great catastrophe.

Primo and Tim hurried on, and were guided to a rocky eminence which overlooked the ravine—and also a depression in the hills beyond it. The native chattered and gesticulated, and Tim, casting his eyes across the depression, gave a cry.

"My hat!" he cried. "Look—someone has built a dam across a river, and the depression is filling with water! If it overflows—the water will pour down the ravine and flood the valley, carrying away the village!"

It was true, and Primo's gaze hardened, while a look that was terrible to behold came into his eyes.

"More of Gwamba's work!" he growled, and then he started violently.

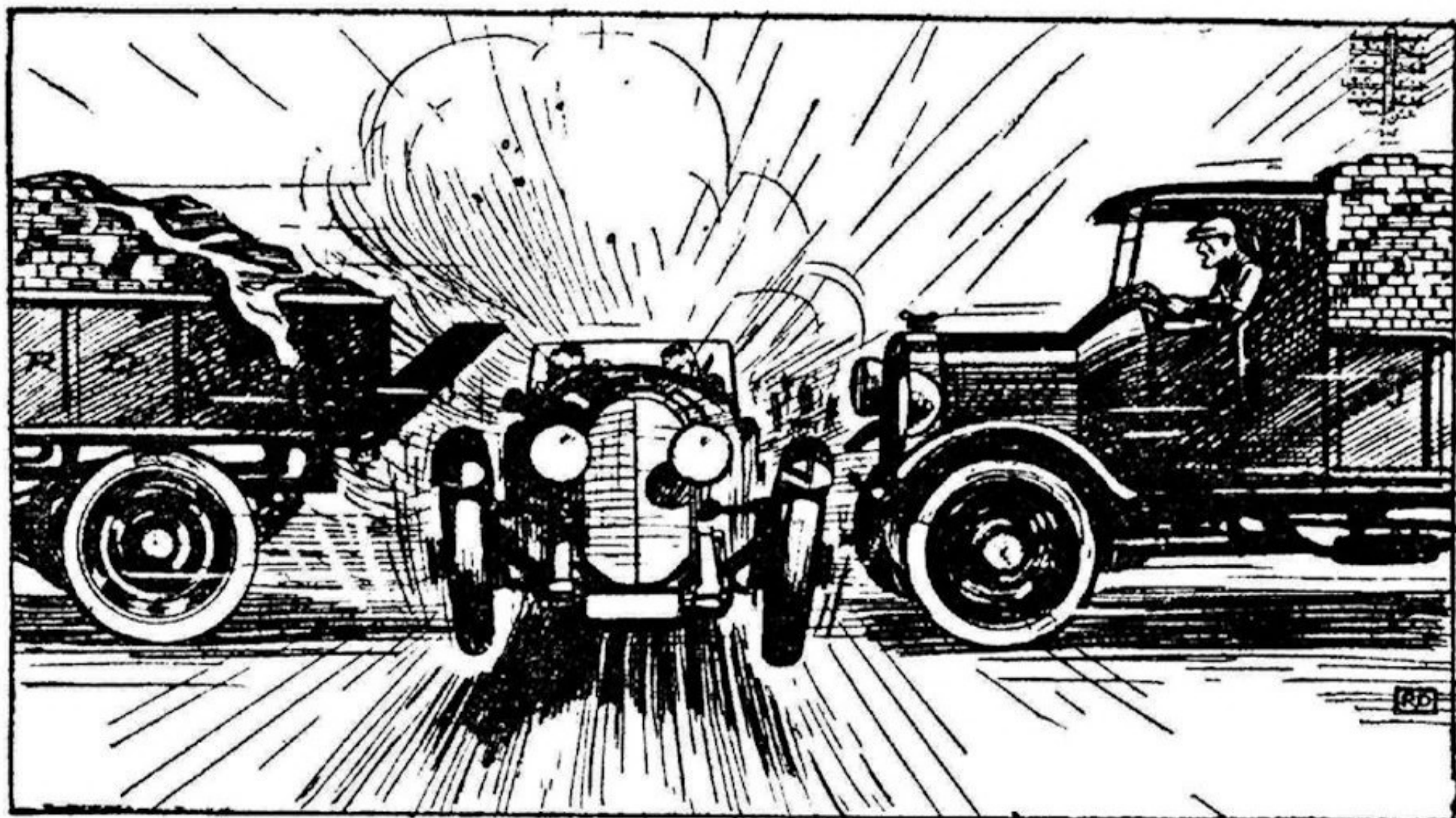
For several hours had passed, and the depression was already filled almost to the top. In a matter almost of moments, a vast flood of water would burst through the ravine, bearing death and destruction to the valley below!

(Continued on page 44.)

THIS GRAND SERIAL HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN—START READING IT NOW!

THE IRON SPEEDMAN

By ALFRED EDGAR



JIM ROSS: strong, no nerves, daring—and what a driver, too

Lon Stargie!

FOR the first time, Sniff seemed to notice that Jim was a big and powerful lad for his age. He noted Jim's clenched fists. Sniff wasn't a man possessed with a great amount of courage, and so he drew back. His bunched fists dropped to his side. He scowled.

"You led me into this smash on purpose," he growled. "You made me go fast!"

"And I suppose we had those five-ton lorries put across the road specially for you?" asked Joe. "Why didn't you nip in between 'em like Jim did?"

"There was—Jim got through! You couldn't drive well enough, that's about the size

"There wasn't room."

of it!" the mechanic grinned.

"I could drive his head off!" Sniff snarled. "Anywhere—any time!"

"That's why you've just crashed, being the better driver." And Jim smiled as he pushed his hands deep in his trouser pockets and walked around the shattered machine.

"Your front axle's under the gear-box," he commented, "and if you picked the car up the engine 'ud drop out. It's a——"

"It's your fault!" Sniff ripped.

"Don't keep on saying that!" Jim grinned. "I signalled you to slow up."

"You didn't signal me at all!"

"And I say I did," Jim answered.

"He's wild because you passed him with a bunch of junk like an Arvin," Joe cut in. "First time an Ace Sports has ever been passed by one of those cars. That's what made it commit suicide on the telegraph pole, I expect!"

"Look here, you two, don't be so funny about it!" Sniff stepped towards them, his thin face set. "You'll have to pay for all this damage——"

"I never did it!" Jim exclaimed.

"It's your fault, though!"

"And I say it isn't!" Joe cut in then. "We passed you, and if you like to go so fast that you can't hold your car when——"

"That's got nothing to do with it! You made me go through the hedge and wreck the car!"

"And I say we didn't," Jim said. "But I'll tell you what, just to stop all argument, I'll fight you for it—the one who loses takes the blame!"

The Ace tester stepped back and sniffed, a habit which had got him his nickname. More than ever he didn't like the look of Jim's leather-hard fists and bulky frame.

"That's different, ain't it?" Joe grinned. "You've got to stand the racket for this, Sniff, but we'll help you out. We'll go on to the Ace works and ask them to send out a break-down van, with a brush and dustpan to sweep up the bits. Come on, Jim!"

The racing mechanic glared at them as they turned away, his features twisted and his lips distorted. His pride had been hurt by the way the two had passed him; in his heart, he knew that he himself would never have had the nerve—or the strength—to hold a tuned-up Arvin at over 100 m.p.h.

He had never liked Jim and Joe. The two had a habit of putting things across him. He couldn't forget the time that they had brought out what looked like a battered old Ford, when he was demonstrating a de luxe model Ace to a special customer.

In that rusty, rattling Ford, the two had passed him when he was doing nearly seventy miles an hour! Of course, he knew that the boys must have done something to the engine of the flivver, or might have put in a new one altogether, but it had made him look a fool.

"He'll have it in for us after this," Joe said, as the two tumbled over the side of the Arvin, and Jim sent the machine off again.

"I signalled him to slow," Jim said. "I was too near the lorries to have a chance of stopping, that's why I went between 'em. He could have got through as well." He added: "I wonder if he'll have to pay for that telegraph pole?"

"He's insured against all accidents," Joe said. "This little affair doesn't make any difference to him—what's got up his nose is the way we put it across him. Strike, you didn't half make this bus shift!"

The Ace works were three miles on along the road. Jim hooted furiously as he approached the entrance gates at eighty miles an hour, braked and skidded, then sent the machine zooming through, with the man on the gate leaping for his life as he came out to ask them what they wanted.

Jim sent the machine on along the road between the buildings to where, at the far end, was a sign: "Experimental Department." Under this name was disguised the Ace racing shed, and Jim pulled up outside it, then dismounted with Joe and walked to the entrance.

It was the first time either of them had been in the Ace works. When they looked

through the doorway they saw a high-roofed shed, lit only by skylights. On trestles in the middle of the floor were the wheelless chassis of a team of three Ace racing cars, being made ready for the big event at Brooklands.

Some mechanics were working on them, and to one side stood a tall, dark, hard-bitten fellow dressed in well-tailored clothes, whom the two instantly recognised as Lon Stargie, the racing crack.

He glanced at the boys as they appeared in the doorway, his two narrowed eyes, under dark and bushy brows, seeming to bore at them. His expression was grim and dour and ruthless, and he was built as though he was all steely sinew and tense muscle.

His frown deepened as he sighted Jim's features. He bent forward a shade, peering at him as though he could hardly believe his eyes. Then he came striding up to the pair.

"Who are you?" he asked Jim.

SNIFF DIX. An ugly customer is Sniff. He's not too particular in his methods of fighting, either—as Jim and Joe are to discover to their cost.

"We've just looked in to tell you to send out a breakdown truck for Sniff Dix," Jim answered. "He's taken his car through a hedge."

"An' he collected a telegraph pole on the way," Joe added.

"Crashed, eh? Hurt himself?" the speed crack asked.

"No," answered Jim. "But he was pretty bad-tempered."

"Thanks for bringing the news," and the corners of Lon Stargie's lips curved downwards as he smiled faintly. "What's your name?"

"That's all right, it was no trouble," Jim answered. "And we don't belong to these works, anyhow."

"What's your name, just the same?" Stargie's hand shot out and gripped Jim's arm, while his smile died and his eyes narrowed until they gazed out between lids from which speed-born gales had torn most of the eyelashes.

His fingers bit like ribs of steel into the muscles of Jim's arm, gripping more tightly than any clamp he had ever known. Jim looked down at the tense fingers, then, with a



swift, sweeping jerk of his arm, broke the speedman's hold. Only Stargie knew how much strength was needed to do that.

"My name's Ross," Jim said, "if that means anything to you."

"Ross? Not the son of Big Ross?" Stargie asked slowly and with an odd menace.

"He was my dad," Jim said.

He stood, for just a moment, meeting the speedman's gaze, eye to eye. Into Stargie's look came something like amazement, with an expression akin to fear deep down in his eyes. He turned abruptly on his heels and walked away, leaving the boys staring after him.

The others glanced at one another, then Jim jerked his head towards their car and they returned to it.

"He didn't like the look o' you, Jim!" Joe commented, as the car rolled off.

"And I'm dashed if I like the look of him!" Jim said. "He's one of the men Steve will be racing against at Brooklands!"

Steve Springs a Surprise!

AS Jim was quite satisfied with the performance of the Arvin, he headed for the garage. This was a tin-roofed building at one end of Woodburn village. The back of it was connected to what had once been stables, and in the rooms over this the brothers and Joe lived, Joe doing most of the cooking.

There were half a dozen petrol pumps at the front of the place, with oil-containers between them. The garage itself was very clean and neat, because Steve insisted on every tool being kept in its proper place.

Half a dozen cars were in the garage for repair, but Steve was not in sight when the Arvin rolled into the building.

"He's working on the racer," Joe said, as they dropped to the ground, and hurried to the end of the garage, where it joined up to the stables.

In a stall which had once been the stable for a horse was now a far different steed—a Ross-Eight racing car. The body stood where the manger had been, and the chassis showed stripped and glittering in the sun which struck through a window at the end of the stall.

The machine looked as slim and as sleek as a thoroughbred, with everything in proportion and perfectly balanced. The aluminium of the engine had been polished speckless, so that it was like silver. Even the four carburettors which served it were shining, and the fluting of the heavy supercharger at the front was as clean as a mirror.

This racer had been half-finished when Big Ross met his death on a Continental racing circuit. Steve had all but completed the car, working from drawings and plans his father had left.

Jim's elder brother was very little taller, but he was much slimmer. His forehead was high, and about his clear-cut face resolution and courage was graven. But he was not extra strong. He had the slender fingers of an artist, and a way of speaking very quickly which showed that he was highly strung.

Neither Jim nor Joe doubted anything that Steve ever told them. Both were convinced that Steve would pilot this machine to victory in the big race at Brooklands.

He was working on the car, and he nodded to them as they came in.



JIM AND JOE whose stirring adventures will enthral readers from week to week.

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, daring, is a born racing driver. His father was a star speedman, and Jim is following in his footsteps. Big Ross, as his father was known, is dead—killed in a race—but he left behind him the plans of a special racing car, which is called the Ross Eight. Jim's brother, Steve, is building up the car, and it is entered for a big event at Brooklands. Jim's chum is

JOE COOPER, who acts as a mechanic at the small garage owned by the two brothers. One day Jim and Joe are out testing an Arvin car, when they are passed by a Super Sports Ace, driven by a surly fellow named

"**SNIFF**" **DIX**. Jim chases him, beats him, and, unable to pull up at some cross-roads, hurtles between two lorries. "Sniff" also unable to pull up, crashes into a telegraph pole, wrecking his machine. In a towering rage, he accuses Jim of being responsible, and a fight seems imminent!

(Now read on.)

"What did you get out of the Arvin?" he asked.

"Well over a hundred," Jim said. "But she wants a steering damper fixed before the customer takes her over—she's a beast to hold at speed. We nearly got wrecked."

"Oh?" Steve raised his brows and his lips tightened. He hadn't forgotten the day when his father had crashed. "Jim, you take too many chances—"

"But it was only 'nearly,'" Jim said. "I had to cut between a couple of big lorries—it was all right. Her acceleration's great, and her brakes are fine. She's O.K."

"We saw Sniff Dix," Joe cut in quietly.

"Oh, where?" asked Steve.

"Well, last time we noticed him he was standing beside a car that'll never run on its own wheels again, with a busted telegraph pole near it and a hole in the hedge!" Jim told him, and the boys related what had happened.

"We went on to the Ace works and told them," Jim added.

"You went—where?" Steve dropped the tool he held and stared hard at the pair.

"All right, wasn't it?" Jim asked. "We saw Lon Stargie, too—that was worth going for!"

"What!" Steve's eyes suddenly blazed, while the boys stared in amazement. "Let me catch you near the Ace works again, and you'll remember it for the rest of your life, Jim!"

"Well, what's wrong with 'em?" Joe wanted to know. "We just went in and came out again. Stargie asked Jim who he was—"

"You bet he'd want to know that!" Steve blazed. "Jim's more like his dad than I am. Jim, your father worked for Ace's until he had the dickens of a row with them and Stargie, and left to work on his own!"

The boys glanced at one another, and Steve went on:

"This car"—he pointed to the unfinished racer—"would have beat anything they could ever have turned out, and it's going to yet! And Lon Stargie, he— You don't know about Lon Stargie, do you?"

Jim shook his head. Steve's voice was low-pitched and vibrant. Jim had never seen his brother like this before.

"He's the man who killed your dad—made him crash deliberately! How he did it, I don't know—but he did it! That man's got a heart as black as oil in a drip pan. You boys steer clear of him—and of Sniff Dix—he's Stargie's mechanic in the big races!"

Steve remained looking at Jim with his eyes glittering. Then, suddenly, he strode from the stall and left them standing there, staring blankly at one another.

"Gosh, I never knew about that!" Jim gasped. "If I had, I'd have gone for Stargie just now!"

He turned and glanced at the wall to one side of the place. It was covered with racing photographs stuck to the woodwork, pictures of speed incidents and speedmen. Famous features were pictured on that wall: Segrave and Dario Resta, Campbell and Vizcaya, Lockhart and Kaye Don—and right in the centre of them all was a portrait of Big Ross.

Cleaning up the racer, Jim had often raised his eyes to look at his father's face, telling himself that he'd make an effort to be as skilful with a car and as fine a man.

"Lon Stargie!" he breathed as he stared.

"Yes—and don't start getting any wild ideas about having your revenge, either!" Joe grunted at him. "I mean, Steve might be wrong. He admits he doesn't know how Stargie did it, but—"

"If Steve said it, then it's true!" Jim growled. "Now I know why Steve's so keen about running this car at Brooklands. He wants to put it across the Aces—and beat Stargie!"

"And he's going to do it!" Joe grinned.

They stood together, looking at the sleek lines of the car. It had never been tested yet, but Steve said that it should lap Brooklands at something like 140 m.p.h.

"I wonder if he'll give me a chance of driving it?" Jim said presently. "After the race, I mean!"

"Why not before the race?" Joe asked. "You're as good a driver as Steve—better in some ways!"

"Don't talk rot!" Jim grunted. "Steve's a marvel on a car! He can take a corner in exactly the same place every time, and I've never seen him skid a machine."

"Yes, but will he stick the race out?" Joe asked. "He's good, but he's not so strong as you, even if he is older. You've got to be tough to drive a racing car for five hundred miles at over 100 m.p.h., and Steve ain't tough!"

"He'll do it!" Jim said.

"You ought to be the one to drive," Joe told him. "You're as hard as nails—an' look at the way you went between those lorries! I bet there wasn't a couple of inches to spare, but you never touched either of 'em! Steve couldn't beat that for judgment at high speed!"

"Steve would never have had to take the risk!"—and Jim grinned. "He'd have been watching the road and seen 'em before there was any danger. Clever bloke, Steve!"

(Continued on opposite page.)

A WORD FROM YOUR EDITOR

Tell Your Pals!

HALLO, chums! Have you tried out the catapult which is presented free with this week's copy of the Old Paper? But I'll bet you have! And having tried it out, I think I can guess what your opinion of this Free Gift is, too—"Jolly fine!"

Trust the NELSON LEE to deliver the "goods." It has done so in previous years; this year it has lived up to its reputation by once more giving to its readers a series of useful Free Gifts which cannot fail to appeal to everybody.

A catapult certainly comes within that category—surely there are very few boys who, at one time or another, have not felt a desire to possess a catapult—and so I think I am justified in feeling that this week's gift will prove amazingly popular with you all.

And I hope my chums will not keep this good thing to themselves. Your pals who are not readers of the Old Paper will be extremely interested to hear all about these gifts, and it is up to you to give them the tip. You'll be doing them a good turn; they'll thank you. And just think of the fine times you'll be able to have if everybody in your circle of friends possesses one of these catapults!

New Readers Please Note!

THIS week's Free Gift is, of course, the second in the series. New readers who missed the topping Boomerang-thrower which was presented with last week's NELSON LEE, or those of you who were unlucky enough not to secure one, should note that they can still obtain it by asking their newsagents to get them the required copy, or they can apply direct to the Back Number Department of the NELSON LEE, at Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. In the latter case, applicants should send threepence in stamps, and the issue will be forwarded to them post free.

And now for a few words about the third dandy Free Gift—a "Home-Jazz" Kazoo Hummer—which is coming along next Wednesday. Take my word for it, chums—this is something not to be missed. The Kazoo Hummer is a dispeller of gloom! There will be no more of those dull hours, wondering what to do with yourself. Instead, a musical period, with the Hummer melodiously producing any tune you like—dance "hits," well-known songs, selections from the classics. You and your friends will be able to entertain yourselves ad lib!

Look out for your Kazoo Hummer next Wednesday, chums. And to make sure you don't miss this really dandy Free Gift, order your copy of the Old Paper NOW!

THE EDITOR.

The Midnight Marauder!

THE three worked late after the garage had been closed that night, and by the time they turned in the racing body was clamped on the Ross-Eight and the machine was almost ready to go down to Brooklands for her trials, and for racing practice.

Jim and Joe slept in a room immediately above the stall which sheltered the speed machine, and the two chums, tired out after the day's activities, were soon asleep.

Jim was never certain about what awakened him, but he suddenly found himself lying on his side, with his eyes wide open, staring to where broad moonbeams, coming through the window, flooded half the room with light and left the remainder in shadow.

He could see Joe's hunched figure in the bed opposite and could hear his breathing, a little more definite than usual—almost a snore.

Jim did not move. His every sense was alert. He lay in shadow and he tried to pierce the darkness beyond. Then, by the door, he sighted something which was solid in the blackness, and which moved.

Jim made no sound as he watched it. Gradually he picked out the figure of a man moving past the foot of Joe's bed. Joe's breathing continued uninterruptedly, drowning any faint sound which the intruder made.

Jim saw the man's tense hand caught by the moonlight. He saw bony knuckles and taut sinew, then the crouching figure came full into the light.

It was Lon Stargie!

His face was thrust forward, and he was peering at Jim, his jaw set rock-like and his lips a thin line.

Nearer came Stargie. Jim saw that he had no weapon. The boy tensed every muscle, ready to leap as the man came above him. Then he saw the racing driver's lips move; heard his cold voice in a whisper: "Are you awake?"

"I've come to warn you! Don't—"

From Joe's bed there was a sudden eruption of sheets and blankets. The mechanic's pyjama-clad figure came from the mattress in a single swift, tiger-like leap.

He landed on Stargie's shoulders, dragging the man backwards.

"Jim, I've got him!" he yelled.

What is the reason for Stargie's midnight visit? And what will Jim do now—knowing that it was this man who caused the death of his father? There will be another exciting instalment of this fine serial in next week's Free Gift issue of the NELSON LEE.

PRIMO THE TERRIBLE!*(Continued from page 38.)***The End of Gwamba.**

LOOK!" cried Tim, and pointed across to where the dam had been constructed to prevent the escape of the mountain torrent which thundered down into the depression.

A number of natives were engaged in a wild dance of triumph. It needed no second glance to recognise them as Gwamba and his men.

Primo was a match for twenty men, but even the redoubtable Primo could not stay the onrush of a mighty mountain torrent. Thus thought Gwamba.

Primo sent a quick glance round. It was impossible for him to reach the dam which Gwamba had constructed. The only hope was to block up the ravine and stop the waters in that manner!

Like a wild beast Primo flung himself forward. For one moment Tim imagined that the giant had taken leave of his senses, but as Primo began to tug at the side of the ravine, Tim gained an idea of what he intended to do.

A mighty mass of rock jutted out from the side, firmly embedded. Primo's hope was a desperate one. If he could release the tremendous mass, it would thunder down the side of the ravine like a landslide, carrying other rocks and earth with it. But surely Primo could not manage, unaided, to shift that mighty mass!

Primo had astounded Tim on many occasions, but never so much as he astounded him now. The young giant heaved and fugged at the recalcitrant mass of rock, and his chest muscles stood out in mighty lumps beneath his skin.

Crash!

A piece of rock had been dislodged from the side of the ravine. It went hurtling below, ricocheting from side to side, and tearing away other lumps of rock and carrying them down with it. Tim heard a terrific roar as the rocky mass crashed downwards. Primo, heartened by this success, made a fresh onslaught upon the other out-jutting rocks with which the ravine was strewn. Panting and straining, he worked like a madman!

Crash!

Another rock went hurtling down, and then another, and another.

Primo was working feverishly. The waters were lapping at the entrance of the ravine, but he was keeping pace with them, and the masses of rock which he was sending down were piling up the entrance.

The pressure of water was now tremendous. Held in check by the dam on one side and the blocked ravine on the other, the mountain torrent seemed to gather up its force for a final effort.

Something had to go—and something did! There came a thunderous crash, and a roar. The waters had found a means of escape.

But the roar did not come from the ravine. It came, instead, from the dam which Gwamba and his men had constructed!

Primo ceased his efforts, and, wiping away the perspiration which threatened to blind him, looked over the mighty water-filled depression to the other side. He saw the water force its way through the breach in the dam, saw it smash the dam as a giant would strike down a tree which stood in his way.

He saw more, too!

Gwamba and his men, confident that their dam would hold, had been too busily engaged in their dance of triumph to heed what Primo was doing. And they had been dancing right in the course of the oncoming torrent!

The water was upon them before they could realise the fullness of what had happened. They were caught up by the water and flung high into the air. For a moment they were visible, and the next moment they fell back into the seething torrent, to be swallowed up by it—never more to re-appear!

Tim gave a great intake of breath and turned to Primo. The giant was grinning widely, and he gave a bellow of satisfaction.

"Did I not say that we would settle with Gwamba to-day?" he cried, triumph in his great voice. "I have stemmed the flood and Gwamba has been swept away by the torrent. I, Primo, have done this! Woe to anyone who sets himself up against me—I am Primo the Terrible!"

And the giant beat his hands upon his mighty chest so that the villagers shrank from him in terror, and even Tim was awed by the mighty power of this primitive man.

(Look out for another thrilling story of Primo the Terrible in next week's NELSON LEE.)

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