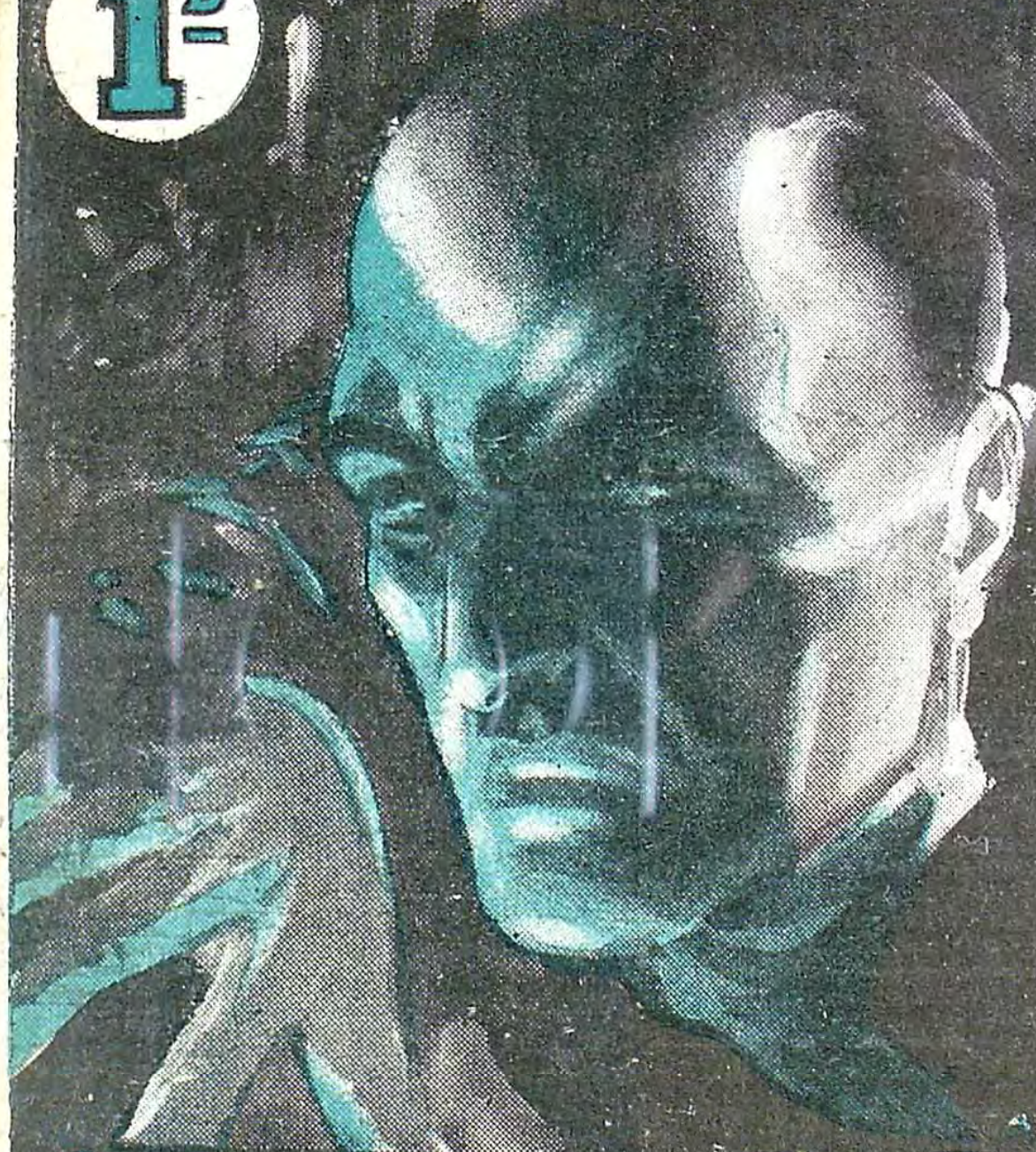


NO. 10.—FOR READERS OF ALL AGES.—1^D

NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

1^D



AGNES

SHADOWED BY TWO OR THE RENEGADE.

Week ending August 14, 1915.

TOM MIX

The Great

Selig

Cowboy
Actor,
Appears
Every
Week—



—in "Pluck"
Library, 1d.—



Stands for
Superiority
Both in Films
and Stories.
Buy Now!

8 6 each

The "Lord Roberts"

TARGET
PISTOL



Beautifully plated and finished.
May be carried in the pocket.
Trains the eye and cultivates the
judgment. Range 20 yards. Targets
12 1/2 in. Subless Ball Cartridges, 10-
200. Shot, 12 per doz. Send for list.

Crown Gun Works, 2, Whitall St., Birmingham.

IF YOU WANT Good Cheap Photographic
Material or Cameras, send
for Samples and Catalogue **FREE** — Works:
JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.

ARE YOU NERVOUS?

If you are nervous or sensitive, suffer from involuntary
trembling, nervous indigestion, constipation, lack of self-
confidence, will power, or mind concentration, I can
teach you how to quickly acquire strong nerves and mind
concentration which will give you absolute self-confi-
dence. No drugs, appliances, or belts. Send at once
your stamp for particulars of my guaranteed cure
in 14 days — GODFREY ELLIOT SMITH, 472, Imperial
Building, Tottenham Court Road, London.

ARE YOU SHORT?

If you let me help you
to increase your height,
I will give you a complete
system of exercises, means
of increasing your
height. No drugs, no
operation, no danger.
Send your stamp for
particulars of my
guaranteed cure in
14 days —
ARTHUR GILMAN,
10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.



This 1915
Model

30 DAYS
Free Trial



FROM
£2-15s

EXTRAORDINARY OFFER—30 days (one month)

free trial on this finest of bicycles—the **Mead Coventry
Flyer Superbo**. Warranted 12 years. Fitted with Dunlop
Tyres, Brooks' Saddle, Coaster or Speed-Gear Hub. We will
despatch it to you on approval, packed free and carriage paid,
without a penny deposit in advance. This offer is absolutely genuine,
for big catalogue showing full
line of cycles, for men, women,
boys and girls, at prices never before equalled. **It's free.**

TYRES, SPEED-GEAR HUBS, inner tubes, lamps,
cyclometers, and parts for all bicycles at half usual prices.
Exceptionally Easy Payments Accepted.
A limited number of second-hand bicycles taken in trade will be
cleared at once, at 15/- to £2 : 10 : 0 each.

RIDER AGENTS wanted in each town to ride and exhibit
sample 1915 model Mead furnished by us.

It Costs You Nothing to learn what we offer. You
will be astonished and convinced. **Do not buy a bicycle,**
tyres or accessories until you get our catalogue and new special
offers. **Write to-day.**

MEAD CYCLE CO., DEPT. 92F, LIVERPOOL.

XMAS CHOCOLATE CLUBS—Any
person, young or old, can earn £1 to £10
spare time. No Outlay. Particulars—Samuel
Driver, Berston Road, Leeds.

Applications with regard to Advertisement space
in this paper should be addressed: Advertisement
Manager, "Pluck" Series, The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

SHADOWED BY TWO;

or,

THE RENEGADE.

A COMPLETE, THRILLING, LONG STORY OF
NELSON LEE AND NIPPER.

CHAPTER I.

The Man who Blinked in the Light—The Will of Anthony Cartwright—
Jonathan Hume's Story.

THE man who came out from the house stood blinking in the darkness, his right hand stretched out a little as if to feel for an imaginary wall in front of him. He had left the door of the house behind him open, so that the light streamed out and showed up his figure. He was tall, well above the average, and the coat that he wore, reaching nearly to his ankles, made him appear even taller. For fully thirty seconds he stood motionless, the long line of Greatwater Manor—which is in Bucks—behind him, in front of him the drive, that led down to the gates and the home of the lodge-keeper.

The man looked down at his right hand as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and as he shuddered at the strain that was on it he moved with quick steps down the drive. It was not a pretty stain—it was the colour of blood.

Keeping to the grass edge beside the drive the man moved quickly along, more than once glancing over his shoulder, but all that met his gaze was the light that streamed out of the open doorway and a couple of lights showing through the old-fashioned windows.

The drive was a clear four hundred yards long, and the man covered the distance almost at a run until he was close to the lodge. Then he eased his pace and moved slowly towards the great iron gates, which were closed for the night. That could easily be seen on account of the lights that came from the windows of the lodge.

The man reached the gates, and for a moment stood there with his hands on them. Very slowly he opened them, with a caution that suggested many things on such a dark night, yet that caution seemed to be strangely out of place a few seconds later, for the man closed the gates behind him with a clang, and, instead of taking to his heels, stood waiting, his eyes on the lights that came from the lodge.

Perhaps it was five seconds, it was certainly not more, before the door of the lodge opened and a short, burly man came out, one hand shading his eyes as he looked towards the gates. For a moment he looked straight into the eyes of the man who stood on the other side of the bars, but as he moved forward the latter swung round on his heels and dashed off, the sound of his footfalls plain on the hard road.

John Joyce, who had been keeper of the lodge for Anthony Cartwright for a clear score of years, ran heavily through the gateway, but in the darkness of the night he could see nothing of the man who had dashed away down the road.

"It looked like Mr. Hume, the governor's companion," he muttered, rubbing at his thin grey hair; "but what did he want to stand on the

other side of the rails for, lookin' as if he'd seen a ghost? It ain't like him to be out late at night. Now, if it had been Mr. Will I could understand it."

Still rubbing at his grey hair, Joyce returned to the lodge and the meal of bread and cheese that he had been busy on when the clang of the gates had aroused him.

"He ain't got a coat like that," he mused, "leastways, I never see it."

That was as far as old John Joyce would have bothered himself about the matter, but he was not destined to be left in peace. Five minutes later the door of the lodge was thrown violently open, and a tall man in evening-dress, his face ghastly white, stumbled in.

"What be it, Mr. Hume, sir?" the lodge-keeper asked, jumping to his feet as he recognised his employer's companion.

"Murder!" the latter gasped. "I went in—just now—to see Mr. Cartwright before I went to bed—he's in his study—stabbed."

Jonathan Hume reeled as if he would fall, and snatched up a glass of water from the table and drank it eagerly.

"Fetch a doctor—the police," he said huskily. "Quick, man! Quick!"

It was in the grey light of dawn that three men stood in the study of Anthony Cartwright. As for Cartwright himself, he lay stretched on his back on the thick Turkey carpet, his broad face with all the blood gone out of it, as if somehow it had found a means of escape by way of his chest—at the spot where the hilt of a knife stuck out from the bosom of his dress-shirt.

Anthony Cartwright was dead, there could be no doubt about that, for the man who had struck the fatal blow had made no mistake about his aim, and the steel blade had gone straight through the heart. On his desk lay the book that he must have been reading, and the curious part was that the open page was marked carefully with a paper-knife, which suggested plainly that the man who had committed the foul murder had been no stranger.

The three men who looked down at the still form were of very different types. The short, rather stout man was Dr. Engles, who stood fidgeting with his eyeglasses. His practice was very much a family one, the kind of one in which sensational things do not happen, and he was plainly thrown off his balance for the time being. The tall, thin man, who stood with a look of sorrow on his thin face was Jonathan Hume, who had been companion and to all intents and purposes the adopted son of the dead man since Harry Cartwright, the murdered man's only child, had quarrelled with his rather eccentric father, and gone to try and make his fortune Heaven alone knew where. The third man, big and broad, and burly, was Detective-inspector Leyland, of Scotland Yard, a man who had won his way to the top of the tree in his profession by sheer pertinacity and dogged pluck.

"There is nothing for me to do," Dr. Engles said with the air of a man anxious to get away from an unpleasant scene. "There will be an inquest, of course, but otherwise the affair lies in your hands, inspector."

"And Mr. Nelson Lee's," Jonathan Hume put in in a low voice. "Before the inspector arrived I sent a messenger to London for that famous detective."

"Why?" the man from Scotland Yard snapped, his brows drawing together.

He appreciated the powers of Nelson Lee as much as any man living, and had been glad of his help on more than one occasion when he himself had come to a dead-end, but it was only when he did come to that dead-end that he wanted to be assisted.

Jonathan Hume raised his eyebrows with an expression of surprise,

"You forget what this means to me, inspector," he answered slowly. "At one blow I have lost the dearest friend that I had in the world. I thought it right that everything possible should be done to clear the mystery up. I am not a rich man, but I am prepared to give every pound that I have saved to bring the murderer to justice."

"Humph!" Inspector Leyland grunted. "It might have been as well to let the Yard first of all——"

Before the official could say more the door of the room opened, and a servant with a frightened expression on his face looked in.

"Mr. Nelson Lee," he announced, and stood aside to allow the famous detective to enter, all the time keeping his eyes as far away from the body on the floor as possible.

Nelson Lee came in in his usual quiet manner, his clean-shaven face immobile as ever, though there were dark marks under the eyes that suggested that he had been working more than usually hard of late.

"I am sorry not to have arrived by the earlier train," he said, "but I had a case to finish last night. Ah, is that you, Inspector Leyland. It was that affair of the Panton jewels that kept me up last night. You will be quite right if you arrest the butler and the man who called to give the estimate for repairs. I will give you all the proof that you need when you require it."

Nelson Lee drew off his gloves, and placed them with his hat on one of the tables in the room. Then, without further ado, and without waiting for any of the other men to speak, he knelt beside the victim of foul murder, his face tense, his eyes a little narrowed, his jaw grim and set.

"At ten o'clock last night," he said in a low tone, after raising the dead man's eyelids and making other examinations. "The blow must have been struck as Anthony Cartwright rose to his feet, probably in alarm. That is proved by the manner in which the handle of the knife slants downwards. Cartwright managed to get fully to his feet after the blow was struck, thus causing the hilt to be jerked downwards."

"That doesn't help us much," Inspector Leyland remarked shortly. "What we want to know is, who was the man who committed the murder, and how did he get in here. I have examined the doors and windows, and not one of them has been forced or tampered with."

Nelson Lee rubbed away at his smooth chin, and did not answer at once.

"I can tell you one thing," he said presently. "When the murderer left this house he kept to the grass edge beside the drive. You will remember that it rained yesterday afternoon, and the wet soil has plainly held the marks of the boots."

Jonathan Hume moved forward quickly, an eager expression on his face.

"Did the marks tell you anything more?" he inquired.

"A little," Nelson Lee assented. "The heel is of the shape known as Mexican, the sole is very long and narrow, and the heels have dug into the ground far more deeply than is usual."

"What do you gather from that?" Inspector Leyland asked.

"That the murderer wore the kind of boots common to the cowpunchers of America," Nelson Lee replied. "The unusual height of the heel would account for the depth that it had sunk into the soft turf."

Jonathan Hume nodded, and looked down at his own squarely-cut boots.

"The man must have passed the lodge," he said thoughtfully. "Would you care to have Joyce, the keeper of the lodge, up here?"

"I have already told him to come here," Nelson Lee answered, and as he spoke the door opened and the old man entered.

John Joyce was old right enough, perhaps getting on towards eighty, but until this day no one could have said that he was losing his strength.

or his faculties. But on this particular day he stood with a white face out of which the grey eyes peered uncertainly, and his legs shook under him, just as his hands shook as they fumbled at the buttons of his cord jacket.

He looked from face to face of the men present; at the man from the Yard, at the doctor who had attended him when he had been down with rheumatism, at Nelson Lee, and finally at Jonathan Hume. It was on the face of the latter that his eyes remained fixed, a kind of fascinated horror in them.

Nelson Lee placed himself between the body of the dead man and the lodge-keeper, for he knew the unnerving effect that such a sight has upon men who are not used to such scenes of violence.

"Did anything unusual happen last night?" he asked crisply. "Did you hear or see anyone pass your lodge at about the time that this murder was committed?"

"Humph! I warn you to be careful, and to tell the exact truth," Inspector Leyland put in, making quite sure that he should not be left in the background.

The lodge-keeper passed his tongue over his lips, and his work-worn hands played more nervously than ever with the buttons of his coat.

"I saw—no one, sir," he stammered, but his eyes were upon Jonathan Hume.

"You saw someone," Nelson Lee persisted.

"Speak out!" Jonathan Hume ordered eagerly. "I can see from your manner that you saw someone. Remember that there is the death of our employer to be avenged."

Joyce passed his tongue over his lips again, and his expression was that of a man who is utterly bewildered.

"I saw you—I thought I saw you, sir," he answered slowly. "I heard the gates clang together and ran out, and—and there was someone in a long coat on the other side of them—a long coat and a knocked-in hat—kind of American-like, the hat."

A dead stillness fell over the men in the room, and Detective-inspector Leyland moved instinctively towards Jonathan Hume.

"The man I thought was you stood behind the gate for a second or so," the lodge-keeper added, "then he run off down the road. I went back to my supper, not knowin' what to make of it, gentlemen, then Mr. Hume comes runnin' in in evenin'-dress to say as the master was murdered."

With a shaking hand Joyce wiped the sweat from his face, and Nelson Lee looked from him to Hume and back again.

"Did you notice what kind of boots Mr. Hume was wearing?" he inquired.

"What he always does wear—what the gents call pumps," Joyce answered. "My eyes aren't what they were, sir, and I must have——"

"One moment," Nelson Lee interrupted, drawing an envelope from his pocket, the writing on which was very small. "Have you ever seen that writing before?"

Joyce looked at it quickly, and without hesitation shook his head.

"No," he answered, and Nelson Lee smiled.

"Suppose we leave the question of short sight out of the argument," he said. "You do not seem to suffer much in that respect. Now, tell me—do you know anyone you could have mistaken for Mr. Hume?"

John Joyce hesitated, and Inspector Leyland grinned as if he regarded the case as already over.

"There's only——" the lodge-keeper began, but Jonathan Hume stopped him abruptly.

"You know that there is no one," he said sharply.

"Except your twin-brother, Mr. William," Joyce said mechanically, in a dazed kind of way. "I never could tell the two of you apart, except as you're darker."

Again there was silence in the room, and Jonathan Hume leant back against the desk of the man who lay dead on the ground, his breath coming quickly from between his teeth.

"He may still have had a key of the house," he muttered like a man who utters his thoughts aloud. "He knew that Mr. Cartwright had left his money between the two of us, even though Will did have a row with him and go abroad to America. He was coming back, and——"

The man stopped abruptly, a nervous laugh leaving his lips.

"You must forgive me, gentlemen," he said hoarsely. "The shock has unnerved me."

Nelson Lee looked at the man curiously, but it was Inspector Leyland who spoke.

"What is this about a twin-brother?" he demanded, in his best official tone. "Remember that someone has got to be charged with murder over this affair"—he nodded towards the body—"and that if you don't tell all that you know you'll be an accessory after the fact."

Nelson Lee was bending over the dead man again, examining the knife with which the fatal blow had been struck.

"It's American, right enough," he observed, as he straightened his back. "It has also been pawned in London. You can see the pawnbroker's mark on the steel, inspector. Suppose you tell us the truth, Mr. Hume."

Jonathan Hume covered his face with his hands, and his shoulders heaved. For fully five minutes he was silent, the others making no attempt to urge him into speech, then he spoke.

"I suppose that I must tell you," he said huskily at last; "though I can't believe that Will would do it."

"Our father was a friend of Anthony Cartwright's, and when he died Mr. Cartwright adopted us. We grew up here with him, and I was content enough with the life, but Will was different. For twins we were strangely unlike in that way. He wanted to go abroad, to see things, to live as he called it. The life on the estate was too monotonous for him, although he knew that Mr. Cartwright had left all his property between the two of us. You will find that when the will is read."

Jonathan Hume paused, and looked appealingly at the men.

"Must I go on?" he pleaded.

"Yes," Inspector Leyland snapped.

"There was a quarrel," Jonathan Hume continued. "Will had run up debts in London—there was a quarrel—and he left for America and became a cowboy."

"American boots with Cuban heels," Nelson Lee murmured. "When did he come back?"

"A month ago," Jonathan Hume answered slowly. "He wrote to Mr. Cartwright asking for money—and he refused. He was not a man who forgave easily."

"You can prove that?" Nelson Lee asked.

Jonathan Hume pulled open a drawer of the dead man's desk, drew out a crumpled sheet of paper, and slowly held it out to the detective.

"I must have money," the latter read. "You know that I would not ask a favour of you if I could avoid it, but I am down and out. I had a bad smash with a horse in Texas that has done my right leg in for life—not that that counts for much, for I got other injuries at the same time, and they reckon that I'm not good for long on this earth. I don't ask for much, and I wouldn't ask for anything if it wasn't that you'll soon be rid of me."

Nelson Lee folded the letter up carefully and put it in his pocket.

"We must look this brother of yours up," he said quietly. "I presume that you will do everything necessary here?"

Jonathan Hume seemed to make an effort to pull himself together, and he laid a hand on the detective's arm.

"Be merciful," he pleaded; "he is my brother."

A minute or so later Nelson Lee and Inspector Leyland were walking down the drive, and the former stopped for a moment to point out the boot-marks on the grass-border.

"American, right enough, Mr. Lee," the man from Scotland Yard said.

"And you notice nothing else, inspector?" Nelson Lee inquired.

Detective-inspector Leyland frowned down at the boot-marks, particularly at the deep dents that the heels had made.

"Hanged if I do!" he answered at last.

Nelson Lee rubbed at his smooth-shaven chin.

"It only struck me," he said softly, "that for a man who writes to say that he has lost the use of one leg—or practically so—that Will Hume walked remarkably evenly."

Inspector Leyland looked quickly at the man he had such good reason to respect.

"You don't mean to suggest that the murderer isn't Will Hume?" he gasped.

"I'm not suggesting anything," Nelson Lee assured him. "All I know is that I am going to have a look at Will Hume, if he is still at the same address that we have on the letter. I rather want to examine that leg of his."

The detective glanced at his watch, then at the village and station that lay a mile or so away.

"If we are quick there will be just time for breakfast before the train arrives," he said.

CHAPTER II.

The Investigation Down East—A Strange Story—Where is Will Hume? —Nipper at Work.

JONATHAN HUME stood facing Nelson Lee in the latter's consulting-room in London. The man was, naturally, in black; in fact the black appeared to stand out and hit you from the suit to the broad black tie that he wore. The only thing that relieved the monotony of the black, if it can be described in that way, was the valuable diamond-ring that the man wore on the little finger of his left hand.

Nelson Lee did not appear to be particularly interested in his visitor.

"You have heard nothing of the will?" the latter asked.

"On the contrary," Nelson Lee answered. "You forgot that it is my business to know things, and, therefore, I am aware of the fact that Mr. Anthony Cartwright revoked the will that left his estate equally between you and your brother, and that the later will left everything to you."

Nelson Lee did not tell him, however, that a still later will had been made.

Mr. Jonathan Hume looked down at his carefully-trimmed nails, and his face was sad.

"It isn't the money that I am thinking of," he said slowly. "I can't help remembering that it was for that that my brother committed murder, not knowing that he was left out of the will."

Nelson Lee shifted in his chair, and for once in a way there was an expression of annoyance on his face;

"You seem to be remarkably sure that your brother did commit the murder," he answered.

"What else can I think," Jonathan Hume protested. "Joyce swears that he saw a man like me the other side of the gates. Then you yourself have spoken about the curious marks of the boots, and the knife that killed Anthony Cartwright was undoubtedly American."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet and crossed to the window. In the street outside rain was falling in a drizzle, and the people who hurried along did so with humped backs and their collars turned well up to their chins. It was the kind of day when a man down on his luck has a look at the Thames, looks again when there is nothing but the murky lights of lamps shining down on it—and ends everything.

His eyes fixed themselves on a man who passed by very slowly, glancing at the house as he did so. He wore a hat of distinctly American shape, and his boots, though he wore trousers instead of riding-breeches, showed the high Mexican heel that your cowboy wears.

Jonathan Hume watched the detective closely, his rather long fingers intertwinning nervously. There was a suggestion of sweat on his brow, and he wiped it away with a quick hand.

"Mr. Lee," he said hurriedly, "I think that you have judged me rather harshly. You imagine that I want to see my brother convicted for something that he must have done in a fit of madness, and it is just because of that that I am here to-day. I want you to give up this case, to forget that you were ever called in about it. Whatever your figure is I am ready to pay it, and——"

Nelson Lee swung round on his heels, an expression on his face that made the other man draw back hastily.

"I shall run the murderer of Anthony Cartwright down," the detective said coldly; "but if it is any satisfaction to you I should like to say that I am sure that the murderer was not your brother."

"Why?" Jonathan Hume asked after a pause. "At the inquest a verdict of murder against him was returned."

"Verdicts are not always correct," Nelson Lee answered coldly, and his shoulders went up in a shrug. "By the way, I do not wish to hurry you, but I am expecting another visitor. I will let you know when I have got the right man."

Nelson Lee opened the door of the room, led the way into the passage, and threw the front door wide open. As he did so, a tall, bearded man came up the steps—the man who had slowly past the house and looked up at it—and in a moment he and Jonathan Hume were face to face.

"Will!" the man with the beard ejaculated. "Will Hume, and I've been searching for you all over London."

Jonathan Hume looked down coldly at the man who addressed him, though there was a drawn expression about his face.

"I don't know you," he said slowly. "I have a brother called Will Hume."

"Then that's it," the other said quickly. "He always told me that he had a twin-brother, but he couldn't be you, for the poor chap's leg had gone—scarcely walk on it, and he got mighty thin after the smash."

Nelson Lee stood back, listening and waiting, but not saying a word.

"And who are you?" Jonathan Hume asked by an effort.

"Harry Cartwright," the bearded man answered soberly, and his eyes glinted. "I came across to England with Will, and three days before the murder of my father, he disappeared. The fools of police seem to think that he committed the murder—all I can say is that they don't know Will. That's why I'm here. Will and I were partners up in the goldfields, and a

mighty rotten mess we made of trying to get the dust, and I tell you"—the glint in his eyes turned to a blaze—"that it's me for finding out what's happened to him. That's why I've come to Mr. Nelson Lee."

It was then that the detective stopped forward, his face as inscrutable as ever.

"Please come in, Mr. Cartwright," he said. "I will let you know if anything fresh occurs, Mr. Hume."

And Jonathan Hume, looking rather as if he had seen a ghost, shambled down the steps and up the street as Nelson Lee led his new visitor into his consulting-room.

He was a big man, this caller. His clothes were shabby with much use, his face was tanned to the hue of mahogany, the fair beard making it look darker even than it was, and there was something intensely resolute in the eyes.

"You have come to see me about the knife with which Anthony Cartwright was killed?" Nelson Lee inquired as he closed the door of his consulting-room.

The caller thrust his head forward sharply, but there was no fear in his eyes.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Because I noticed one thing that the police failed to discover," the detective replied. "'H. C.' is scratched on the blade, though the passage of time has very nearly worn the letters away."

Harry Cartwright nodded, and threw his felt hat on to the table.

"You're right enough, sir," he said; "though you can take it from me that neither I nor Will committed the murder. I knew him well, and he wouldn't have hurt a fly, much less a man."

"But they were not on good terms," Nelson Lee remarked.

"Neither was I," Harry Cartwright answered; "so I might equally well be suspected of the murder."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders. He was a man who believed in working entirely upon facts, who never left any possibility out of the reckoning, but he could not suspect the man who stood before him. Apart from the fact that he was the son of the murdered man, his face was as honest as it well could be.

"Tell me exactly why you are here," the detective said. "Sit down and have a cigar."

Harry Cartwright did as he was told, lighting one of Nelson Lee's choice cigars with an obvious air of relish.

"It's a mighty long time since I enjoyed anything like this," he said apologetically. "Now I'll tell you why I am here."

"Something has happened to Will, or else he would have given himself up to the police the moment that he saw that there were suspicions against him. He was ill when he left me—"

"Why did he leave you?" Nelson Lee broke in with.

"Pride," Harry Cartwright answered. "Nearly all his money was gone, but I still had some left, enough to carry us on for a month or two. Inside that time I reckoned to get work, but Will"—the man's face twitched with mental pain as he spoke—"what could he hope to do with practically only one leg and Heaven knows what else the matter with him since he was smashed up? I think that he came back to the old country to die."

Harry Cartwright paused, choked by his emotion, and Nelson Lee did not hurry him, waiting his own time for him to continue.

"He told me that he wasn't going to sponge on me," Harry Cartwright said presently, but I never guessed that he was going away as he did. A month ago I left him in our room in Bermondsey while I went to look for

work. When I returned he had gone, taking his bag with him, just leaving word that I should not see him again. Heaven knows I was ready to work for the two of us, for I wasn't forgetting a time out in the States when he saved my life at the risk of his own."

Harry Cartwright drew a canvas bag from his pocket and placed it on the table.

"There's the money that I've got left," he said. "It's a poor fee to offer you, but I can't do more. Will you try to find Will Hume—to prove him innocent?"

Nelson Lee pushed the bag away from him, and there was a smile on his lips.

"You need not worry about fee," he answered. "I have every reason to wish to discover Will Hume, and you have probably given me the clue that will help me.

"By the way, if you look in the newspapers to-morrow you will see that you are being advertised for."

"Why?" Harry Cartwright asked in surprise.

"For the excellent reason that your late father made another will a very short time before he died. According to its terms you receive a third of the entire fortune, a third goes to Jonathan Hume, and a third to Will Hume. For the present Jonathan Hume does not know that, as the lawyers first communicated with me. I have told Hume that everything has been left to him. I will give you their address so that you can go and see them."

Harry Cartwright whistled, but he did not appear to be over-elated at his change of fortune.

"It's only Will that I'm bothering about," he said; "with the money he might get a chance of pulling round."

"You had better go to the lawyers, anyway," Nelson Lee remarked. "By the way, this is a copy of the will, and there is one thing in it which perhaps you can explain."

The detective took a sheet of paper from his pocket, and pointed to a certain part of it that he had marked. This is what Harry Cartwright read:

"The secret of my great invention, which was rejected by the Government, will be found in the smallest drawer of the safe. I have kept the formula throughout my life believing that if ever Great Britain was forced into war that the so-called brutality of my invention would be forgotten when its use was considered. Should I die before the invention is needed, I charge my son Harry to destroy it so that it may not fall into the hands of a foreign power."

"What does that mean?" Nelson Lee queried as the young man looked up.

"I can tell you something," the latter answered. "My father was a very practical scientist, though few people knew it. For years he worked with one great idea in his head, and that was to invent a liquid which, thrown on to water, would kill anyone within a range of a hundred yards."

"But what would it be used for?" Nelson Lee asked in surprise.

"Torpedoes," Harry Cartwright explained. "My father completed the invention when I was quite a boy, but I have not forgotten the model that he made. There was the ordinary torpedo-head filled with gun-cotton, but behind that there was a tank to hold this awful oil, so that when the torpedo had exploded, the fumes would finish the work that the gun-cotton had begun."

Nelson Lee shuddered in a manner that was not usual with him.

"It sounds impossible," he muttered. "Was the stuff ever tested?"

"Yes," Harry Cartwright answered earnestly. "It was tried—a very small quantity of it—on the lake in my father's grounds, the stuff being

released by means of electric wires when my father and the Government expert who came down had reached a spot which was considered to be at a safe distance."

"And what happened?"

"All the ducks and water-fowl on the pond died, a flock of sheep a hundred yards away was reduced to half its original number, and my father and the Government official were both senseless for some time."

Nelson Lee's brows contracted in thought, but it was not long before he spoke.

"It is hard to believe," he said slowly, "but one never knows the strange things that a man's trained brain may evolve. I can understand our Government refusing to use it, and I can also understand the fear that your father had that it might fall into the hands of some other nation not so scrupulous. There is one alone——"

"Germany," Harry Cartwright interrupted. "Yes, it looks mighty like war with them before long, and think what they could do with submarines fitted with those oil-loaded torpedoes. It wouldn't be safe for a single ship to try and reach the shores."

"Yes, you are right," Nelson Lee agreed gravely; "but that danger can be quickly removed. Go at once to the lawyers, establish your identity, and from there travel down to your father's house with authority to search the safe. You will find that the lawyers have the keys for it. When you find the formula, burn it, and if there is any of the actual stuff see that it is safely destroyed. In the meantime I shall be hunting for Will Hume. He is the first link in the chain that I want to bring a rope to the neck of the man who murdered your father."

Harry Cartwright nodded, a deep line between his eyes, and it was plain that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, you must find Will Hume, Mr. Lee," he said slowly. "We have been like brothers, and I would give my share of the fortune to see him again. We have suffered so much together that I should like to be with him in the better times that are promised."

"You had better give me the address that he disappeared from," the detective answered, and Harry Cartwright supplied him with the information at once, though he added sadly:

"I fear that it will be no clue to you, sir. Will was always one to make a good job of things."

Nelson Lee's lips set a little more firmly than ever.

"If he is in this world we shall find him," he said. "In the meantime I advise you to go to the lawyers at once, establish your identity, and journey down to the Manor. You must place your hands on that formula at once, and——"

There was a knock at the door, and Nipper, Nelson Lee's young assistant, walked briskly into the room, a letter in his hand. A close observer might have noticed that there was a stamp upon it, although it bore the signs of travel in an unmistakable manner.

"Number fourteen brought it, sir," he announced. "He will call again to see whether there is an answer."

At a sign from Nelson Lee Nipper departed, and with a gesture of apology to Harry Cartwright, he tore open the envelope and drew the letter out. It was just a single sheet of paper covered by a mass of figures, signs and letters that would have been absolutely unintelligible to most people, though they would have guessed that it was a cypher. They would have been right in that, and they would have been equally right in deciding that it would be impossible for them to solve the mystery of it. There are many ciphers in existence, some of them comparatively easy, some so hard

that none but trained men in such matters could hope to fathom their secrets, but there was not one like that of the famous detective, which he himself had invented.

It was five years back that a case upon which Nelson Lee was engaged had nearly come to a terrible conclusion. The code that the detective was using then had been solved, a letter from one of his agents abroad—in the code—had been opened and read, and to this very day Nelson shudders when he thinks how narrowly he prevented a disaster that would have plunged the Courts of Europe into mourning.

After that the detective had refused to undertake any fresh cases. Imploring letters had poured in upon him, astounding monetary offers had been made him to induce him to change his decision, and his offices had been so besieged by people that one day he disappeared. For six months such a person as Nelson Lee might not have existed. His chambers were closed, and no information was obtainable with regard to his whereabouts. Certain criminals, who had been lying low or had gone abroad to find a fresh outlet for their energies, soon discovered this and became more active than they had ever been in the past, when they had lived in the shadow of Nelson Lee and the fear of prison that it brought them.

Then the news was in the papers that the detective was in London, that he had been seen at the first night of a new play, and had afterwards had supper with a little party of men which included a former Prime Minister and a man who swayed a great part of the really important finance of the world.

Rumours were at once afloat, the most popular of them being that which hinted at a stern chase right round the world in the pursuit of some mysterious master-criminal, and certainly Nelson Lee's tanned appearance made the theory appear to be more than possible.

Here we have the truth. For six months a man who appeared to spend most of his time sketching in the country had occupied humble rooms in the fishing village of Kenrath, which is down Cornwall way. The villagers had taken little interest in him—their wrestling for a living on the sea was the beginning and ending of all things for them. So Nelson Lee came and went, for six months crime was on the increase without his genius to check it. Then he was back again, much to the secret relief of the officials of Scotland Yard, who said some unpleasant things, amongst themselves, with regard to the six months that had been wasted.

Wasted? Nelson Lee could afford to laugh at the idea, for with him he had brought back to London the most remarkable code that the brain of a man could invent. Actually it was not one code entirely, though it was similar in the main. In the key of the code that the detective sent to his highly-paid agents at home and abroad there was something different in every case. Something quite slight and apparently unimportant, but of the greatest importance to Nelson Lee, for in the event of a leakage of information communicated to him by code he would know precisely which agent to blame. And the agents knew it, and there were no leakages such as might otherwise have occurred despite the high rate at which they were paid to be honest.

As Nelson Lee glanced at the closely written cypher that covered the sheet of the paper that he had just received he knew at once that it came from his agent in Berlin, who was one of his most trusted men, for Berlin was a city in which the detective took more than usual interest, very largely at the instigation of the British Government, which was never really blind to the danger and threats that always lurked behind the peace-words of the Kaiser of the withered arm, that was but the sign of a withered brain that was later to throw the world into a war of chaos and horror.

Nelson Lee read the letter as easily as if the cypher did not exist. Then he paused a little, his brows drawn together, before turning to Harry Cartwright, who was waiting with a certain amount of impatience.

"Listen to this," he said meaningly. "It is from my agent in Berlin, and there is no doubt that it bears upon this case, practically for a certainty, proving that Will Hume did not murder your father."

"Then read it!" young Cartwright cried breathlessly.

"I have to report," Nelson Lee read slowly and clearly, "'that for two weeks Baron von Gissing, the Kaiser's adviser, and Professor Munberg, the chief chemist at Krupp's munition factories, have been together every day, several times having interviews with the Kaiser. Letters have been passing to and fro between England and this country. Last night I discovered that another was to be dispatched. I arranged for an accident to happen to the messenger. The name on the outside of the letter was Jonathan Hume. There was no address. I tried to keep the letter, but a secret guard was following, and it was all I could do to escape with a bullet through my left arm. I shall have to come to England to have it dressed, as I dare not go to a doctor here. The agents of Von Gissing are sure to be searching for a man wounded as I am, and I should be of no use to you imprisoned on some faked charge. That is all—13.'"

"They are after my father's invention," Harry Cartwright said between his teeth; "but they won't get it if I can prevent it."

Nelson Lee smiled, but there was no real mirth in the twist of his lips.

"If," he echoed.

Cartwright's hands clenched, and his face was set as men had known it when he was up against a tough job in the Far West.

"You mean that I am too late?" he said slowly.

Nelson Lee laid a hand on the young man's shoulder, and looked him earnestly in the eyes.

"Do as I have already told you," he answered. "In the meantime, I shall see that Will Hume is found."

"I would give my fortune for that," Harry Cartwright said earnestly; "but how can you expect to find him where I have failed?"

Nelson Lee smiled confidently, though his face still remained stern in expression.

"If Hume is alive and in London, I will guarantee that he is found by to-morrow," he answered simply. "Now go, for both of us have urgent work to do."

Harry Cartwright nodded, and turned towards the door.

"I shall do my part," he said grimly, and was gone.

Nelson Lee glanced once more at the cypher letter that he held in his hand, then he touched a bell. In answer to the summons Nipper entered, his manner as alert as ever, for he was never so happy as when at work.

"There is work for you, lad," Nelson Lee said briefly.

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" Nipper answered brightly, a grin on his lips. "I was thinking of starting as a detective on my own if you did not give me more to do. I'll bet it's this Hume affair, as you've just been seeing that ugly-looking brute Jonathan Hume. My aunt, most people would order him to be hanged at sight."

Nelson Lee frowned, but there was no real expression of reproof on his face.

"How many more times shall I have to tell you to come to no definite decision without absolute proof?" he protested.

"Well, call this boulder Jonathan Hume an exception," Nipper persisted

coolly, "and I'm ready to bet my pay that this case ends in him being hanged."

"I fancy not," Nelson Lee said slowly, a curious inflection in his voice, but it was not because he did not fully believe Jonathan Hume to be guilty. Every circumstance pointed to it, and only one or two more links were required to complete the chain of evidence, that was all, but for all that he did not believe that the murderer would die by the rope. He thought of the sample of the terrible stuff that Anthony Cartwright had invented, and it seemed to him that—

Nelson switched his mind quickly away from surmising and came back to the work in hand.

"You will find Will Hume," he said briefly, with the air of a man who has every reason to know that his orders will be carried out without fail. "You have the address that Will Hume has lived at, and you will work from there."

He drew an oblong of card from his pocket and held it out to Nipper.

"It is a portrait of Jonathan Hume," he explained. "You may find it useful, as you will remember that he and Will Hume are said to be remarkably alike. I shall expect your report this evening. If you actually find the man 'phone his address to me."

Nipper looked puzzled, for tracking was very much in his line, and it was not usual for his master to doubt his capabilities.

"You think that I shall fail, sir?" he asked in surprise.

"I think," Nelson Lee answered meaningly, "that Will Hume is the type of man to have given himself up to the police were he alive. The two things for you to discover are the place of his death and the date of it."

Bermondsey was one of the many districts of London that Nipper knew blindfold, for under the able tuition of Nelson Lee he had made a study of the locality, which is one of the greatest assets that a detective can possess. It means that no time is lost in making inquiries with regard to direction; short enough delays, perhaps, but sometimes long enough to make all the difference between success and failure.

Anyone who knew Nipper as he really was would not have recognised him as he turned into Canton Street. The air was full of the stench of the tanneries, the gutters were literally choked with infants still too young to attract the notice of the education authorities, women, unbeautiful with toil and the ageing burden of care, stood pale-faced in the doorways, more hopeless-looking than the few faded plants that a few of the dust-patches called gardens boasted. Nipper, looking much older on account of the slight moustache that he wore, moved along briskly, taking no heed of the things about him, for they were familiar enough to him. The eyes of a detective become accustomed to the squalor in which so much crime is bred.

Number eighty Canton Street proved to be the end house of a blind street, the end of which was closed in by a high fence of sleepers that guarded a railway line.

Nipper stopped, presumably to light a cigarette, and to many it would have seemed strange that he required no less than six matches with which to perform the simple task. As a matter of fact, he was only giving himself a reason for pausing, for he had no desire to attract attention in Canton Street.

It was not his first visit to the place, for it was not so long back that he, Nelson Lee, and a couple of detectives from Scotland Yard had seen to the arrest of a man wanted for murder. The man had been convicted and duly hanged, but he had left behind him "pals" who had sworn to avenge his death. That was the reason for Nipper's disguise, for in some quarters even the day is no safe time for the marked man.

It was only a few seconds that the lad halted, but they gave him ample time in which to make up his mind. As the street was a "blind" one, he had only one direction to work in to find the trail of Will Hume, and he did not hesitate. He placed himself in the position of the lame and possibly dying man, and walked back slowly the way he had come, trying to imagine the pain that Will Hume must have suffered with every step that he journeyed.

Nipper progressed slowly, and instinctively took the first turning that he came to, which chanced to be on the right. His reason for doing this was simple enough, for he argued that Will Hume would have been certain to journey by byways, so as to lessen as much as possible the chance of encountering Harry Cartwright.

The road proved to be a long one, without a turning of any sort, and Nipper could imagine how every yard of it must have tried the strength of the injured man if he had gone that way. His one idea would surely be to rest or obtain a conveyance of some kind.

Nipper reached the end of the road at last, and his eyes lit up as he saw a solitary taxicab standing on an otherwise empty rank. Beyond it three brass balls hung before the shop of a pawnbroker.

What was there more natural than that Will Hume would have pawned anything available to make it possible to ease his weary limbs by taking a taxi? Surely the temptation would be too great to be resisted by a man in his enfeebled state?

Nipper moved towards the shop, meaning to make inquiries, though he knew how different he would find it to get attended to, and his training had taught him that minutes were far too precious to be wasted. He hesitated, looking from the shop to the solitary taxi, then he moved towards the latter. The driver, scenting a fare, thrust the paper that he had been reading under the seat.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

"I'm not sure yet," Nipper answered readily. "The fact is, that I am searching for a friend of mine, who may have taken a taxi from here."

The driver grinned derisively, and made a movement as if to take his paper from beneath the seat again. He checked himself, however, when Nipper mentioned the date and jingled the coins in his pocket.

"Maybe I might remember, if you've got any kind of description of him," he said more civilly.

"Very lame," Nipper answered, with a touch of eagerness, which he could not entirely repress; "and possibly wearing a broad-brimmed, soft hat."

The cabman started, and his red, good-natured face assumed an expression of suspicion.

"Look here, young man," he said gruffly, "you ain't Scotland Yard, for you ain't big enough, but how am I to know you ain't one of the bloomin' narks working for them?"

Nipper could have cried out for joy, for the man's manner told him that he was on the right track much sooner than he had dared to hope.

"You do remember him," he said, with conviction.

"Who said so?" the driver growled. "But I'm goin' to talk to you straight. I'm a poor man, and honest as most, but it ain't my business to run down a lame man who looked like dying. If he did take a cab from here I don't know which it was. Morriu'!"

Nipper smiled as the man drew the newspaper from beneath the seat and fixed his eyes on it with a glare.

"Look here," he said quietly "you can put me on the track of the man I want to find, and I give you my word of honour that it is for his own good."

You know that he was ill and poor, and I am one of the friends who mean to alter all that."

The driver looked up from his paper, hesitated, then was plainly convinced by the steady manner in which Nipper met his questioning gaze.

"I'll trust you," he said at last; "for as sure as I drive this cab and somehow make a living out of it, the poor chap was ill and poor right enough."

Nipper nodded, for he saw that the man would continue without word from him.

"He limped up here on the day you mentioned, sir," he said, "and me and my mates thought as he was going to drop as he stood on the kerb with a small bag in his hand. We was just goin' across to see if we could do anything for the poor chap, when he limps over the road and goes into the pawnshop. When he comes out he's without his bag. It was Jim Cripps's cab he took, and I know as Jim didn't charge him, though Jim ain't rich."

"Where did he drive him to?" Nipper asked eagerly.

"That's more'n I know, sir," the driver answered regretfully. Then his expression changed, and he bent sideways and unfastened the door of the cab.

"You hop in, sir," he said; "I know Jim's beats pretty well, and somehow I want to put you on the track of that poor lame chap."

Nipper obeyed readily enough, and without hesitation the driver started off, the speed at which he sent his cab along showing that he was pretty nearly as anxious as his fare to bring the search to a successful conclusion as soon as possible. The first place made for was the Elephant and Castle, but a blank was drawn there, and the driver of the taxi swung round and headed towards Camberwell, threading his way among the crowded traffic that looked as if it would be the breeder of a serious accident at any moment.

Camberwell was reached, and Nipper bent forward eagerly to look through the glass of the cab as he caught sight of a rank on which a number of taxi's stood. At the same an ejaculation broke from the driver, and he swung right across to the rank and pulled up with a skidding of wheels at a spot where a short, very fat man, who had obviously at some time been connected with horses, stood smoking a pipe.

"Jim!" the driver of Nipper's cab cried excitedly as he clambered out of his seat. "I've been searching half over London for you."

"Well, it ain't my birthday, but I'll have one, Sam," Jim Cripps answered with a grin, only to quickly become serious.

"There ain't nothin' wrong?" he asked anxiously, and Sam walked up to him and spoke earnestly in a low tone. Jim Cripps nodded more than once as he listened, and glanced towards Nipper, who had alighted from the cab and was waiting impatiently. A little later he came slowly towards the lad and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I do know the poor chap you're wantin', sir," he said slowly, "and I can take you to where I took him, though it's more than I'd do for most. Still, Sam says you're all right, and Sam ain't a fool in some ways. You hop in and we'll be there in twenty minutes."

Nipper alighted from the taxi, inside the twenty minutes, before a small house that was one of a row of particularly ugly-looking dwellings in a dingy street of Lambeth.

"You are sure that this is the house?" he inquired of the cab-driver.

"Sure, sir," the man answered with confidence. "Chaps like me get to notice things, and I remember that broken railing and the crack in the woodwork of the door. Oh, it's the house right enough."

Nipper paid the man liberally, pushed open the grimy gate, and stood before the door of the house. He had not found it difficult to track Will

Hume down, though there was still the chance that he had left this address, too.

The door was opened in answer to the young detective's knock, and a shrivelled up old woman looked out with a face that had long since forgotten what a hopeful expression was like.

"You might be wanting rooms, sir?" she ventured in the tone of one expecting a denial.

"Yes," Nipper answered. "May I see them?"

In her hurry to obey, the woman nearly fell over herself, and she led the way into a small front room, poorly furnished, but beautifully clean.

"The sitting-room, sir," she announced. "There's an extra chair in the bed-room as you could bring in here if you had company."

Nipper nodded, and the woman led the way to a small bed-room behind the parlour.

"You have other lodgers?" the lad asked.

"No, sir," the woman answered with something of a start. "There was one, but he left three weeks ago."

Nipper raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Why?" he inquired, with the air of a prospective buyer who has suddenly become suspicious.

The woman hesitated, rubbing her skinny hands together.

"He died," she answered slowly. "A nice man he was, though lame, but when he come here I thought as the doctors could do nothing for him. I hope as it won't make any difference about taking the rooms, sir."

Nipper drew half a sovereign from his pocket and thrust it into the woman's hand.

"I am afraid that they will not be big enough for me," he said; "but please take that for your trouble."

The woman gasped and stared at the coin, and from it to the lad, for it was the first time that she had met a man who gave money away. Most people that she knew tried to get away without even paying what they owed.

"By the way," Nipper added, drawing a photograph from his pocket. "Was your lodger anything like that?"

The portrait that the lad held out was one of Jonathan Hume that he had brought away from the house of the murdered man without anyone noticing the fact.

"It's him!" the woman cried, then bent her head further forward and shook it.

"I'm not so sure," she added. "It's the living double of him, but it must have been taken before he was ill. How did you come to have that, sir?"

It occurred to Nipper that the time had come for him to tell the truth, especially as this woman was obviously honest, and he did not hesitate.

"One more thing," the young detective concluded. "Who buried your lodger?"

"I don't know his name, sir," the woman answered. "He was a tall man with grey hair that my daughter said was a wig, and maybe it was, for there's many a man goes bald in these hard times. Anyway, he paid for the funeral, and I didn't see why he shouldn't take away the few bits of things the poor fellow had left."

"What bits of things?" Nipper asked quickly.

"Just a pair of them high-heeled foreign boots, a long coat, and a hat, and one or two more things like that," the woman replied.

"Was there a knife?"

"Now you come to mention it, there was, sir—a big, ugly thing."

Nipper moved towards the door, and the woman, gripping the half-sovereign in her hand, followed him.

"Please remember one thing," Nipper said over his shoulder. "On no account will you say that I have been here. In a few days you will probably know why if you read the newspapers. Good-morning!"

And Nipper, knowing that his mission was more than well accomplished, hurried off to report to his master.

CHAPTER III.

A Terrible Discovery—Jonathan Hume Does a Bolt—The Men from Abroad.

JONATHAN HUME stood facing Harry Cartwright, and though he tried to look at his ease, he found it very difficult. There was a fixed grin on his lips, and his hands locked and unlocked nervously.

"I am very glad indeed, Harry, that your father made the fresh will," he said. "I had intended to do what I could to find you to ask you to share the fortune that I felt was rightfully yours."

Harry Cartwright looked at the man with something very like contempt on his face.

"There is your brother, too," he said.

Jonathan Hume started badly, and there was a suggestion of sweat on his forehead.

"Of course, of course," he agreed hastily. "Did you ever meet him in America?"

"I came back to England with him," Harry answered briefly. "He was ill, pretty nearly dying, and he gave me the slip a few weeks back over some idea that he wouldn't live on me, but I shall find him before long."

Jonathan Hume licked his lips, and his hands gripped together so tightly that the knuckle bones showed white through the strained flesh.

"How?"

"Nelson Lee is on the job," Harry Cartwright explained, and wondered at the expression of terror that came into the other's eyes, but then he did not know the reason that the man had for his terror. Then the expression was gone, though the man's face remained paler than it had been earlier in the interview.

"I am glad of that," he said slowly. "A most competent man, I am sure. Of course you knew that he is investigating the death of your dear father?"

"Yes," Harry answered shortly, and moved towards a safe that was let into the wall.

"I must carry out the wish of my father," he added, and as he fitted a key to the safe he did not see the look of fear in the other man's eyes. "Such stuff like that never ought to be allowed to be in existence."

The door of the safe swung open, revealing the mass of papers and books within that the lawyers would soon take charge of, look learned over, and run up as big a bill of costs as possible.

Harry's right hand went at once to the small drawer mentioned in his father's last will, and he drew it open slowly, with the air of a man who hates to look upon the thing that lies within. Then a cry of amazement broke from him, he snatched the steel drawer out bodily, and stood staring down at it with wide eyes.

It was empty.

Harry Cartwright turned slowly towards Jonathan Hume, holding the drawer out before him.

"What does it mean?" he demanded.

"Your father must have decided to destroy the things himself," Hume replied. "If the stuff had been handled carelessly it might have had the most awful results. I remember what was told me with regard to the one experiment that was made with it."

"It may be that," Harry said slowly, pushing the empty drawer back into the safe; "but I must see Nelson Lee about it when I go back to town."

Jonathan Hume nodded, and now the sweat on his brow was plainer.

"You will let me know how he gets on in his search for my brother?" he ventured. "You might wire me if he finds him."

"I will let you know at once."

With muttered thanks, Jonathan Hume walked out of the room, closing the door behind him, and as he stood with his back against it he was breathing hard. He was like a man who had received a shock that had brought him to the verge of fainting, and, if the truth were known, that was the case.

The shock will had been shock enough, for it meant that he would be deprived of part of a fortune, but a worse thing than that was the invention being mentioned in the will. And, last of all, there was the fact that Nelson Lee was employed in tracking down Will Hume. If he succeeded, he would know that it could not have been he who had committed the murder, which would mean that he would naturally turn his thoughts to Jonathan Hume himself.

And Jonathan Hume, his fingers twitching nervously at his collar, took a hat from a table in the hall and went hurrying down the drive. He wanted to be somewhere where he could think, and somehow his mind never would work clearly in the great house in which Anthony Cartwright had met such a foul end. He could always remember the jar of the knife as it struck home to the hilt, the look of horrified amazement on the face of the man who had done so much for the villain who was to be his murderer when he saw the chance of carrying out the crime safely, and letting the police search for a man who was dead, feeling certain that they would never learn the truth.

But now he was not so sure. Suppose Nelson Lee did discover the truth with regard to Will Hume, what then?

Jonathan Hume bit his lip as he strode down the drive. His chin was lowered on to his chest, but he raised his head sharply as the hoot of a motor horn reached his ears. The road that ran along the end of the drive was a private one, and it was not more than once or twice in a year that a car came that way.

Instinctively Jonathan Hume slipped from the drive, pushed his way through a clump of evergreens, and crouched down behind them. As likely as not the man in the car had merely taken the private road by mistake, or it might be that—

Several ideas flashed through the mind of the man as he crouched there, but not one of them was strong enough to make him go out into the open. He very soon had reason to be glad that he had not done so.

Old Joyce stepped from his lodge, looked at the occupants of the powerful car that had drawn up outside, then threw the gates open. Jonathan Hume watched the men in the car as it came towards him, and it was only by an effort that he bit back a cry of fear.

The man at the wheel was Nelson Lee, and the big man beside him was Detective-inspector Leyland, of Scotland Yard. There was an expression on the face of the latter, the look of a hunter who is about to run his game down, and Jonathan Hume understood. Nelson Lee knew that Will Hume was dead, and that it could not have been he the lodgekeeper had seen at the gates. That left him alone to answer the charge.

The car went swiftly up to the entrance to the mansion, the two men stepped out of it and disappeared within the building, but not for fully five minutes did Jonathan Hume dare to move. Then, cautiously as any hunted animal, he slipped away among the bushes, parting them with hands that seemed to be afraid of disturbing so much as a leaf. A squirrel, bolting up a tree, brought his heart into his mouth, then he was crawling along a hollow in the ground that hid him from the windows of the mansion, making for the line of trees on the other side of which ran the river.

Jonathan Hume reached the trees, and when he rose to his feet he was shaking so badly that he could scarcely stand. For fully five minutes he stood there, breathing like a man who has been running for his life, then very cautiously he moved forward again, for it was broad daylight, and there might be people on the river at that hour. Jonathan Hume cursed the daylight, for he knew that he dared not try to get away from the neighbourhood while it lasted.

There was no one in sight, and the man crept from among the trees, crouching as he went to the left, and so reached a dilapidated boathouse that had obviously not been used for a long time. The door of it was locked with a padlock, but the ring through which it passed had long since come away from the woodwork. Jonathan Hume opened the door, with a sob of relief, passed in, and closed the door behind him.

Through the rotting roof, that had several holes in it, the sun came brightly, and the fugitive swore at it and at everything that kept him from escaping. With a trembling hand he felt in one of his side-pockets, drew out a revolver, and examined it, then he drew something even more cautiously from another pocket—a small bottle, heavily sealed, and a sheet of paper covered with figures and writing.

Jonathan Hume held them close to his eyes, and for a moment the fear had left his face.

"It's worth half a million to them," he muttered. "They'll give that readily enough if they once see the stuff tried. They've been at me now for years to get it for them, but while Cartwright was alive I dared not do it. I shall have to let them know when I can see them. They said that they would come to England at any time."

Jonathan Hume fondled the bottle lovingly, and the piece of paper that held a secret that could rob Great Britain of her supremacy on the seas, but any thoughts of patriotism did not trouble him. It was a fortune that he was after, a fortune that would make him a very different person in some other country, where it would be impossible for anyone to imagine that he could be Jonathan Hume—murderer!

Nelson Lee, Detective-inspector Leyland, and Harry Cartwright stood in the bedroom that Jonathan Hume had occupied, and their faces were grim. The door of the wardrobe stood open, the drawers in the chest of drawers lay on the floor, and at one end of the room the carpet had been rolled back so that a board could be pulled up. It was from the place beneath that board that had been fetched the articles at which the three men were looking—a long great coat, much the worse for wear, a soft American hat, and a pair of high-heeled top-boots. Beside them lay a grey wig.

"I think that there can be no doubt about it," Nelson Lee said; "or that Jonathan Hume, apart from being a murderer, has stolen the formula."

"No doubt about it whatever," the man from Scotland Yard agreed. "Well, we've got our man all right when he comes in. I've been down to the lodge and told the keeper that he is to say nothing to Hume. He swears that Hume has not gone out through the gateway this morning, but

He is old, and may not have noticed him. Anyway, he has no reason to be suspicious."

"I suppose not," Nelson Lee said thoughtfully; "but, somehow, I'm not satisfied that we are going to make our capture yet, inspector. If Hume attempts to get away by any of the ordinary routes we are bound to nab him unless the men you have placed at the station and elsewhere are fools."

"They're some of the best men from the Yard," the inspector answered with dignity. "I defy a cat to get by them."

"It's to be hoped that you are right," Harry put in. "I want to see the murderer of my father punished, but there is something more important than that. One life has been sacrificed, but think how many will be in danger if that formula of my father's is sold to Germany. They wouldn't have any nice notions about refusing to use it."

Detective-inspector Leyland shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He had heard all about the formula, and he certainly did not believe in it. The man from Scotland Yard was a very fine man at his own prescribed work, but he did not suffer from an excess of imagination.

"I want to get the murderer, that's the main thing," he said. "If the formula's on him you can destroy it, Mr. Cartwright, after we have done with it."

There was a knock at the door, and a servant entered with two cards on a salver.

"Two gentlemen to see Mr. Hume, sir," he explained, instinctively addressing Nelson Lee.

The detective glanced at the cards, started slightly as he picked them up, and spoke to the servant.

"Ask them to wait in the study," he ordered. "If Mr. Hume comes in, send him to them."

"Very good, sir."

The door closed upon the servant, and Nelson Lee swung round to the man from Scotland Yard, an unusual expression of excitement on his face.

"Look at those," he said, thrusting the cards out. "Do you know the names?"

The inspector looked at the cards, whistled softly, and betrayed a very lively interest.

"I should think that I do, sir," he answered. "This Baron von Gissing was attached to the German Embassy over here, and between you and me, our secret service kept such an eye on him that he was transferred. I can't say that there was ever anything definite against him discovered, but he was too dangerous to be left alone."

"That's right," Nelson Lee agreed. "How about Professor Munberg?"

"Attached to Krupps's ammunition works," Inspector Leyland answered, with the promptness of a man accustomed to be a witness. "They say that he is the man who experiments with all their explosives, and it seems likely enough, as he lost his right hand in an accident a few years ago. Do you think that Hume has made an appointment with them?"

Nelson Lee rubbed away at his clean-shaven chin, and his eyes were narrow.

"That I cannot say, though I should be inclined to think not," he answered presently. "I do know, however, that they are after the formula."

"And what do you mean to do, sir?"

"Go down and see our German friends," Nelson Lee replied. "I shall introduce myself as Hume's secretary. You had better wait in the room at the side of the hall, inspector. Should Hume return, I fancy that I can leave his capture to you, but be careful how you handle him in case he has got a sample of that awful invention about him."

"I think that you can leave him to me," the man from Scotland Yard said grimly, and Nelson Lee strolled downstairs to the room in which he knew the Germans were waiting. On his way there his upper lip was altered in appearance by the addition of a slight moustache, and altogether his face changed to that of a rather insipid man.

Nelson Lee opened the door of the room very softly, and he smiled inwardly as the two men drew away hastily from the safe that was let into the wall.

They were both big men, very much of the German type, the one wearing a military type of moustache, the other clean-shaven and spectacled. Both were dressed well, in German fashion, and would have passed with the majority of people as harmless tourists, though the detective knew them to be two of the greatest dangers to Great Britain's peace.

The one would welcome a war because he was of the military party that lived with that idea alone in its mind. The other would welcome it because it would give him the chance to prove that his science was practical, and that the ammunition used by the great German guns had no equal in the world. He wanted other people to realise the power that was his, the great brain that he had used for one end only.

It was Baron von Gissing who spoke, the sudden surprise quite gone from his face. He spoke English absolutely perfectly, save that just now and again the very faintest possible foreign accent crept into it.

"Mr. Hume is not in?" the baron inquired.

"No," Nelson Lee answered. "I am his secretary, Mr. Smith. I wondered whether I might be of any service to you."

The baron spread out his hands in a gesture of protest.

"Why, no, Mr. Smith," he answered. "The fact of the matter is that this call is purely a friendly one. The professor and myself chanced to be spending a short time in England, and yesterday we heard the news of the terrible death of Mr. Cartwright."

"Derrible," Professor Munberg agreed with a strong accent, shaking his head. "Death is derrible when it comes so sudden."

Yet he was a man who spent all the working years of his life inventing things that should make possible all kinds of sudden and horrible deaths.

"We had the pleasure of entertaining Mr. Hume when he was in Germany," the baron continued earnestly; "and he often spoke of Mr. Cartwright as affectionately as if he were his father. We thought that, as it was not far from town to here, that we would run down and give Mr. Hume our condolences in person."

"Do you know when he will be in?"

Nelson Lee fervently wished that he did know, but no expression of interest crossed his face. He was not so confident as Inspector Leyland that Jonathan Hume would be easily captured, but he saw now what seemed to him to be a very fine chance of getting him should he have the luck to slip away from the police.

"Mr. Hume is very uncertain in his movements just now," he answered. "The death of Mr. Cartwright has upset him. Is there any message that I can give him?"

Baron von Gissing looked at Professor Munberg, and the latter nodded so slightly that most men would have failed to perceive the action. The man who called himself Smith appeared to do so, but that was quite a mistake. Nelson Lee was not in the habit of missing anything.

"We have our car here, sir," the baron answered; "and we are so charmed with your scenery that we think of staying two or three days in the village. I understand that there is quite a good hotel there. It will be simple for us to call upon him again, and we shall be pleased to keep any appointment that Mr. Hume cares to make."

"Wia pleasure," the professor agreed.

Baron von Gissing strolled to the window and looked out across the extensive grounds.

"A beautiful spot," he observed; "but I should have thought that you would have been afraid of being burgled, unless you take very great precautions."

The remark appeared to be quite a casual one, but Nelson Lee smiled inwardly as he realised the full significance of it.

"Just the ordinary bolts, sir," he answered carelessly. "The fact is that Mr. Cartwright never kept anything of value, not even papers, in the house."

"Very wise," Baron von Gissing murmured, but his eyes clouded as he glanced towards the safe. "The papers of a man like Mr. Cartwright must be keeping Mr. Hume very busy?"

"Fairly," Nelson Lee assented; "but most of them are in the hands of the lawyers, though, of course, he was the first to examine the safe and that sort of thing."

"Of course," the baron agreed, moving towards the door. "We will not waste any more of your time, sir. Please give my message to Mr. Hume and say how charmed we shall be to see him again."

Von Gissing and Professor Munberg moved towards the doorway, but Nelson Lee checked them by a gesture.

"One minute, gentlemen," he said; "there is just the chance that Mr. Hume left a message with one of the servants. I will go and see, as it may save you time."

Before the others could protest the detective had moved out of the room.

Professor Munberg shrugged his fat shoulders, and there was an expression of disappointment on his face.

"All dis delay," he growled. "The Kaiser vill der anger mit us make if we are nod soon."

Baron von Gissing frowned sharply, and glanced towards the closed door.

"Silence!" he ordered, in a low tone.

"Bah, who can the hearings make?" the other retorted.

"When you have lived a life like mine one understands many things," von Gissing answered meaningly; "that walls have ears, that the most innocent of bookcases may hide a door, that the very flowers on the table may conceal a telephone."

"But not here," Professor Munberg growled, picking up the vase of flowers from the table and showing that it was innocent enough. "Ach, but you plotters dream of dangers."

Baron von Gissing smiled curiously, and for a moment pulled back the left sleeve of his coat. For a moment an ugly scar was visible on the exposed flesh.

"That happened when I forgot that I was not as other men," he said grimly. "It was meant for my heart."

Professor Munberg would have spoken, but the other silenced him impatiently.

"Be quiet," he ordered. "Would you spoil everything when at last we have our chance of making Germany the mistress of the seas?"

Professor Munberg shrugged his shoulders again, and there was a sneering expression on his face.

"It will be vonny if the invention is nod goot," he said.

Baron von Gissing had been looking towards the door, but now he swung round towards the other with a savage expression upon his face.

"Funny?" he snarled. "It would mean the end of your power and mine with our master. All the years that we have laboured would be thrown away, for you know that the Kaiser is not the one who forgives a failure."

In the meantime, Nelson Lee had moved across the hall and out on to the drive, moving without caution, for he knew that the room in which the Germans waited did not command a view of the drive.

As a matter of fact Nelson Lee had not gone far down the drive before a low whistle from among the trees to his left attracted his attention. After a quick glance about him to make sure that he was not observed, he slipped in among the trees and came face to face with Nipper. Not that he would have been easy to recognise, for he was garbed in a suit of very dusty overalls and his face was almost covered by a large pair of motor-goggles, from behind which his keen eyes twinkled cheerily.

"What orders, sir?" he asked. "I followed the Germans down here on the motor bike, and I'll swear they never spotted me."

"You will still follow them," Nelson Lee answered at once. "Whatever happens you must not leave them. There is just the chance that they may get that awful stuff from Hume before I can have him arrested. There is the possibility that they have it now, and that they are playing some game of bluff, though it is not likely."

"But can't I stop and see the arrest, sir?" Nipper protested in disgust, but Nelson Lee shook his head sternly at him.

"A good soldier never questions orders, my lad," he answered. "You will never lose track of where they go. You will follow them whatever happens, and communicate with me when possible. I will tell you when your work is over."

"Have you plenty of money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then make for the road and wait. The baron and the professor will be out soon."

Without another word Nelson Lee hurried back towards the building, leaving Nipper among the trees, and it was not long before he stood, an apologetic expression on his disguised face, once more in the presence of Baron von Gissing and Professor Munberg, who looked at him impatiently.

"I am sorry that I can tell you no more, gentlemen," he said regretfully, and really his regret was far from all assumed, for somehow he knew that he would have no peace of mind until Jonathan Hume was safe in the hands of the detectives from Scotland Yard.

"We shall meet him later, never fear, Mr. Smith," the baron answered.

The two visitors were shown out, and from a window the detective watched them as they went down the drive, the baron apparently pointing out various places of scenery with his stick to the professor.

"The most dangerous men in Europe," Nelson Lee muttered. "When war comes they will be largely the cause of it. It must come one day, but it shall not be my fault if it is not delayed. If it costs me my life I must keep that formula out of their hands."

CHAPTER IV.

Nelson Lee Escapes with His Life—Chance gets Jonathan Hume Away —On a Fresh Trail.

NELSON LEE walked slowly down the drive from the mansion. It was dusk now, but Jonathan Hume had not returned, and the reports of the detectives guarding the station and other places were all the same—they were certain that the murderer had not got past them. Nelson Lee was not so certain, but for all that, he had agreed to one suggestion of Detective-inspector Loyland's, which was that they should have considerably

more down from the Yard, so that the countryside could be scoured thoroughly. It was plain that the man had somehow received the alarm, and knew that he was wanted. In that case, if he had not succeeded, it was obvious that he must be hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood.

All along the line officials had been warned, all through the day the telephone had been going, sometimes with Inspector Leyland on it, at other times with Nelson Lee with his ear to it, but no news had come with the dusk. No one in the least answering to the description of Jonathan Hume had been seen. All the time the detective hoped that Nipper's tracking of the Germans would also mean the running down of the murderer.

Nelson Lee passed out through the lodge gates, for he wanted to be alone to think, and the man from Scotland Yard rather sidged him with his complete confidence that the capture would shortly be made. He turned without thinking to the left, following the path that eventually brought him to the bank of the river. The moon was shining brightly, a fact that cheered him up a little, for it would make it harder for Hume to escape, taking it that he had not already left the neighbourhood. There were no boats for as far as the detective could see, as this was a peculiarly quiet part of the river. Besides it was not likely that Hume had slipped away in that manner. Lock-keepers had been set on the alert, and no boat could have passed them without its inmates being examined.

Nelson Lee stood with his back against the trunk of one of the trees, and his brain worked swiftly. He was pretty confident that his mission would be crowned with success, but he could not put away from himself the awful responsibility that was his. Baron von Gissing and Professor Munberg were after the formula right enough; undoubtedly they had approached him with regard to it in the lifetime of its inventor, and the detective knew that they would risk any steps to gain possession of it.

Most people would say that it was impossible for them to succeed, that Jonathan Hume was so surrounded that he must be captured before he could part with the formula, but then that is because they do not know the ways and means that lie ready to the hands of such men as these Germans. A hundred spies, two hundred if need be, would be at their command at one word, hundreds more could be called up from every part of England, every man as free of scruples as the other, for when Baron von Gissing or Professor Munberg spoke, their orders were equivalent to the commands of the Kaiser himself.

It was the two Germans who would have to be watched most closely, Nelson Lee decided. He would not dare to let a single movement of theirs escape him. Either they would lead him to Jonathan Hume—presuming that that man had not fallen into the hands of the police—or he would come to them. Whichever happened, Nelson Lee had got to be there to snatch away the formula before it had put world power on the sea in the hands of Germany.

Nelson Lee strolled along the footpath, going in the direction of the small town, meaning to find out whether the Germans really had taken up their quarters there. There would be no need for him to go into the hotel to find out, for with the neighbourhood in a state of excitement over the search of Jonathan Hume, the merest inquiries might be regarded suspiciously. It would be easy enough, however, for the detective to see whether the Germans' car was in the garage, and Nipper would sure to be on the look out for him.

Having made up his mind to this course of action, Nelson Lee walked on more swiftly, with the air of a man who has business to do, and it was that very air that was to bring him as near to death as he had ever been in his life. Not that the detective had much doubt about the Germans

really staying at the hotel, for the news that Hume was wanted must have reached their ears by now, and they were sure to stop and see what happened, so as to be able to shape their plans accordingly.

In the boathouse that stood on the bank of the river crouched Jonathan Hume. His clothes were dusty with the accumulated dirt of the place, and some of it had got smudged on to his face, where it had caked in the damp of the sweat. He knelt with his eyes glued to a crack between two of the boards, and all the time he inwardly cursed the moon, that made his chance of escape harder than ever. He knew that he had been right when he had guessed that he was wanted, for during the afternoon two obviously plain-clothes detectives had passed close to the shed, and he had heard them mention his name.

Jonathan Hume knew that there were hundreds of men like that, each doing his best to try and get him hanged, and he cursed them collectively and individually. If Nelson Lee had not interfered, he would have been a rich man already on the share that he would have received of old Cartwright's fortune, but there was a far greater fortune in the sheet of paper and the sealed bottle that reposed in his pocket.

If once he could get to Germany with it he had no fear of capture. There would be a huge fortune waiting for him for the secret, and it would be the business of the Government to see that he got safely away to enjoy it. Perhaps he might even stay in Germany for a bit.

Jonathan Hume's eyes searched the towing-path as far as the bend that hid the ground beyond, and in his right hand he held his revolver. He was tired from want of sleep, his eyes ached with continual watching, but the fear of arrest held him to that crack in the boards hour after hour.

He wanted food, and his mouth was so dry that the sound of the water rippling past the roots of a tree made him feel physically sick, but he dared not go out and quench his thirst so long as the moon would shine down brilliantly. Anywhere among the shadows men might be waiting for him.

The murderer fumbled at his collar, which was already grimed with the marks of his fingers, and his half-closed throat made him picture the death that awaited him if he were captured. He pictured it, and a kind of madness came to him as he looked down at the revolver and swore that Nelson Lee should not live to see him pay the extreme penalty of the law.

Hume told himself that he could have defied the whole of Scotland Yard, though he was possibly mistaken in that, and that Nelson Lee alone had made him a hunted fugitive while he stood between him and a great fortune.

Of course there would be war once Germany had made use of the terrible secret to the full, by the aid of Professor Munberg and his subordinate scientists, but that mattered nothing to the man. He was one of the few Britishers who put money even before their patriotism—other men might suffer and die, women and children might weep and starve, but that was of no account so long as that kind of thing did not happen to Jonathan Hume.

The murderer's head nodded forward, and he struck his forehead against the boards, the weight of the blow bringing him to with a cry of pain. Instinctively he stared through the crack between the boards again, and as he did so every vestige of blood departed from his grimed face.

Coming along the towpath was a man rather more than the average in height. He walked with his head thrust a little forward, and his quick movements suggested that he had business in hand.

"Nelson Lee!" Jonathan Hume gasped, the revolver falling from his hand to the boards, but a moment later he had snatched it up again. His brain was on fire, and never for a moment did he suspect that it was nothing but chance which brought the detective that way at that hour of the night.

Not for a second did he stop to think that Nelson Lee would scarcely have come alone had he have known that the murderer was crouching in the old boathouse. Jonathan Hume only knew that the man was drawing nearer and nearer with rapid strides, and a grin that was that of a madman came to his lips.

One sure shot and Nelson Lee would be out of his path for ever, and he did not stop to think of the other men who were watching for him. Nelson Lee, and Nelson Lee alone filled his horizon for the time being.

The detective came briskly forward, unconscious of the danger that he was drawing nearer and nearer to. He drew to within a score of yards of the boathouse, then ten, then he swung a little to the left so as to pass behind it.

Crack!

There was a sharp report, a flash of light that Nelson Lee seemed to feel score his eyes, there was a burning pain at the side of his head, then he pitched to the ground and lay still, his face in the dust, his arms outstretched.

The door of the boathouse was snatched open, and Jonathan Hume emerged, the revolver still smoking in his hand. He stood staring down at the still form of the detective, and the laugh of a semi-madman broke from him. He stooped as if he would touch the body, then suddenly the expression of his face changed. The crack of the revolver might have been heard, and men would be coming to the spot to arrest him for the double murder.

With an expression of fear on his face Jonathan Hume went racing along the towpath, fully believing that he left behind him a dead man, though if the truth were known, Nelson Lee had escaped with nothing worse than a stunning caused by the bullet grazing along his temple.

For a hundred yards or more the murderer raced along the path, then he had to stop for breath. He dipped his hands into the river and gulped a few mouthfuls of water down, then he was running again. He had no definite plan of action except that he meant to make for the main road, even his confused brain telling him that the detectives would not be likely to be looking for him there. They would be searching the dark places.

Jonathan Hume kept on for another two hundred yards more, when his want of breath forced him to fall into a walk, and with staggering steps he turned into a path through the wood that he knew would take him to the main road for London. That was the place that he hankered to be in, for London is a natural hiding-place if one has luck. Later he would be able to slip across to Germany.

The murderer reached the trees that fringed the edge of the road, then once more his nerve forsook him. He feared to step out on to the hard surface of the stones and let the full light of the moon play down upon him. Almost ahead of him, though some distance away, he could see the lights of the house in which he had committed the murder, and the sight of them forced him into action once more. He started to walk away to his left, but as suddenly as he started he pulled up abruptly.

From a little distance away had come the humming of the engines of a powerful car, and the murderer's ears, made alert by the danger in which he stood, told him that it was heading towards London.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of the engines, and a desperate plan flashed into Jonathan Hume's mind. He made no attempt to hide behind the trees, but took up his station in the middle of the road, his revolver gripped in his right hand.

The great headlights of a car swept round the corner, cutting a line of light along the road, and throwing into prominent relief the tall figure of

the murderer as he stood there with his right hand raised. And it gleamed on the metal of the weapon that his fingers held.

There was the sound of a guttural oath, the crunching of studded tyres as they skidded on the sandy surface of the road, and Jonathan Hume was standing facing the car.

At the same moment a particularly noiseless motor-cycle pulled up no more than fifty yards in the rear of the car, and its rider, who was no other than Nipper, shut off the engine and bent forward in an attitude of listening, but he did not remain like that for long. Propping his machine against the fence he went at a run along the grass bank at the edge of the road, halting and crouching back against the hedge when he could make out the dark shadow of the car ahead, the men in it, and the other man who stood in the roadway with his right arm extended.

Every word of the conversation that followed reached his ears, and this is what he heard with horror:

"What the dickens does this mean?" the big man at the wheel demanded angrily.

"It means that if you call out or move, you will be shot," Hume answered with a snarl. "I'm going to get into the back, and you're going to take me to London."

As he spoke, he moved forward, and his face came into the light of one of the side-lamps.

"Jonathan Hume!" the man at the steering-wheel gasped, and almost at the same moment the murderer panted out:

"Von Gissing!"

The men stood staring at one another, and Hume had lowered the revolver that he held in his hand. Professor Munberg stared, too, and looked nervously over his shoulder.

"It was you who fired?" Baron von Gissing, who was the first to recover from the shock of the meeting, inquired. "What man have you killed now?"

Jonathan Hume licked his dry lips, and his white face showed wet in the light from the car.

"How, how do you know that I have killed a man?" he stammered.

"As you have one to your account I don't suppose that you would stop at two," the German replied, grinning evilly behind his moustache. "Was it one of the men searching for you?"

"It was Nelson Lee," Jonathan Hume answered mechanically. "He came towards my hiding-place and I shot him down."

"Dead?" Von Gissing queried.

"I shot at his head," Hume moaned. "I was so near that I could not miss."

Then he took a staggering step forward, and clutched at the edge of the great car.

"You must get me away!" he cried in fearful tones. "Once I am in London I shall be safe until I can slip abroad."

For the moment the murderer thought of nothing but his own safety, not even the things in his pocket that the murder had been committed for, and for which he expected to get a great fortune. He only knew that men were searching for him like bloodhounds, that even now there might be some close in the woods, and his legs shook under him.

"Get me away!" he cried again.

Baron von Gissing looked steadily into the man's face, steadily and eagerly, and a cruel smile came to his lips as the latter nodded.

"Ach, dat is goot!" Professor Munberg put in. "We shall you to London in safety take."

"And further than that," Baron von Gissing agreed. "My private yacht could get over in a day or two, and it would be simple enough to smuggle you aboard."

"Yes, yes," Jonathan Hume panted. "I will go anywhere, and I have the formula that you came to England for."

"Get into the back of the car," Baron von Gissing said to the professor. "Our friend can tell his story as we drive along. Pass me over the spare motor-coat and cap. I don't think that we shall get pulled up. If we do, remember that I shall give our real identities, and that Hume is the chauffeur. As we drive along he shall tell us his story."

"There is another what will be pleased mit it, too," Professor Munberg growled as he entered the back of the car to make way for Hume, and he moved his fingers as if they twisted at the ends of an upturned moustache.

The great car sped onwards, travelling at a slower rate, however, than it had been doing when it had swung round the corner of the road and been held up by Hume, for Baron von Gissing could not give so much attention to the steering as he listened to the murderer's story. It did not take long to tell, and when the man had finished, Von Gissing sat staring ahead with a fixed smile on his lips.

"You have the formula on you," he said once more, like a man who utters a triumphant thought aloud.

A sense of security was coming back to Jonathan Hume, aided by a drink from a flask that the professor had brought in the car with him.

"I have more than that," he answered readily; "there is a sample of the stuff itself. I shall see that that is tested before I give up the formula—at my own price."

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten the price," Baron von Gissing muttered. Then he edged away from the man beside him. "If it is in a bottle, for Heaven's sake see that it doesn't get broken."

"Perhaps it would be safer with me, mein friend," Professor Munberg suggested, but Jonathan Hume almost snarled when he spoke back to him.

"I shall keep it," he said, and he did not notice the smile on the lips of Baron von Gissing, and he forgot the fact that the baron had the reputation of obtaining anything that he wanted—in his own way.

There was the skidding of wheels as the powerful car moved away, and Nipper was left standing in the shadow of the hedge, his heart turned to ice, one terrible thought running with throbbing agony through and through his head.

Nelson Lee, the man who had been more than a father to him, was dead—murdered by Jonathan Hume; the villain who already had had the blood of one man on his hands.

Nelson Lee lay dead on the towing-path, that was what Jonathan Hume had confessed, for, as he said, he could not have missed.

Nipper staggered towards the gap in the hedge through which the murderer had come, his one idea being to go to his master, though he knew that he could do no good. He staggered a few yards amongst the trees, striking his head against a branch and making it bleed. The pain was nothing to him, but it served to wake him from the shock that he had sustained, so that he could think clearly.

The murderer of his master was escaping, but that was not all that troubled the lad. The man had got to be caught and brought to justice, but Nipper realized that there was something that his master would have desired more than that—the keeping from Germany the secret of Anthony Cartwright's invention.

By an effort Nipper pulled himself together, and tried to put out of his

mind everything save the work that he had in hand. The murderer of Nelson Lee had got to be tracked down, and at the same time the invention of Anthony Cartwright had got to be prevented from falling into the hands of Germany.

With his mind fully made up, but always the ache in his heart, Nipper hurried back to where he had left his motor-bike, and very soon the engine was humming.

The car that held the two Germans and Jonathan Hume must have gained a good start, but Nipper had no fear with regard to catching it up. The cycle that the lad rode was an exceptionally speedy one, his nerve was like steel, and there was the death of his beloved master to be avenged.

Nipper rode with a vengeance, his head craned forward, all his attention concentrated on the roadway ahead. On his journey down, in broad daylight, he had found the road none too easy, and now it was a hundred times more difficult. There were frequent sharp bends in the road, numerous sudden declines, and each one had to be negotiated with the skill of an expert if an accident was to be averted.

Nipper skidded as he took a corner at almost full speed, recovered himself almost by a miracle, the back wheel of his bike missing a ditch by inches, and tore on again without losing his nerve in the least.

The light of the moon showed a clear stretch of road ahead, and Nipper took every advantage of it, letting out the engine for all it was worth. So far there had been no turnings that the car could have taken, but soon they would have chances to leave the main road. True, it was not likely that they would do so, as they were almost certain to make direct for London, but it was no time to leave anything to chance.

If the villains were once lost sight of, it might take any amount of time to pick it up again, and by then it might be too late, for the invention of Anthony Cartwright might be in the hands of the Germans and Jonathan Hume might successfully have hidden himself away, for Nipper realised that once the murderer had managed to escape from England there would be hundreds of ways in which he could conceal himself.

Nipper swung the next corner without difficulty, the light of the moon helping him while it kept out from behind the clouds, but that was not to be for long, and he was soon once more tearing along in the darkness, with nothing to guide him but the shadow of the hedges as they streamed by.

Mile after mile was covered without Nipper getting sight or sound of the Germans' car, until he began to think that in some way the others had dodged him. Perhaps, although they had no reason to believe that they were being followed, they had dodged off by way of one of the field tracks. A man like Baron von Gissing was not the type of man to leave the smallest thing to chance.

Suddenly Nipper's hopes rose with a bound, and his eyes searched the darkness ahead, at the same time setting his bike going at the highest speed of which it was capable. He would have sworn that from ahead of him the hum of a car came faintly, and it could be none other than that occupied by Jonathan Hume and the Germans.

Another bend of the road was passed, and right ahead, no more than a hundred yards distant, was the motor-car. At the slow pace it was travelling it was obvious that something had happened to it, or so it seemed to Nipper, who now felt certain that nothing could rob him of his prey.

The lad slackened the speed of his own machine, which had not been so quiet when travelling at high speed, his eyes always glued on the car ahead. He saw it slacken still more, he could see the heads and shoulders of men protruding above the tonneau, but, unfortunately for him, there was

something that he failed to notice—where it had been possible to see three men in the car only two were now visible.

The car stopped. Nipper was sure of that, for the sound of its engine ceased entirely, and he wished that he could spring forward and grapple with the men, who, between them, had caused the death of his master. Instead of that, however, he thrust his bike up against the hedge and started to creep nearer and nearer towards the car, although he could have watched it just as easily from his old position. Perhaps he was influenced by the desire to be as near as possible to the men he meant to bring to justice.

Nearer and nearer Nipper drew towards the car, until he was no more than a score of yards from it, and it was then, for the first time, that it dawned upon him that there were two men in the car instead of three. He peered forward, expecting to see the third man bending over the bonnet of the car, and failed.

From the other side of the hedge against which Nipper crouched, came the sound of a twig snapping sharply, and, too late, the lad understood what it meant. He had not followed unobserved, as he had imagined, and he swung round sharply towards the hedge. He was just in time to see the figure of a big man come up from behind the hedge, his hands went up to guard, but before they could do their work the blow had fallen.

Something crashed down upon his head; hedges, trees, the waiting car, the figure of the man who had struck the blow, swayed together into a senseless jumble, the curtain of insensibility rubbed it out like a damp sponge passed across a child's slate, and Nipper lay still in the road.

Baron von Gissing pushed his way through the hedge and bent over Nipper. The latter's motor goggles had slipped away, and his features were exposed as Jonathan Hume and Professor Munberg came hurrying up.

"Only a lad who was fool enough to be curious," said Von Gissing. "We had better tie him up and put him out of the way until we can push on."

"Yes, we must lose no time," Jonathan Hume said in a shaking voice, and mechanically he bent and looked down at the still form of the lad.

"Nipper!" he gasped. "Nelson Lee's assistant!"

The two Germans drew their breath in sharply, and the face of Baron von Gissing was very ugly as he looked down at the lad.

"So," he said slowly. "I remember when he and his master interfered with one of my plans. Well, the master is out of the way, and a single blow—the man raised the heavy revolver the barrel of which had been used to fell Nipper—and he will no more—"

"Stop!" Jonathan Hume panted, his face ghastly with fear. "They would blame me, and we can easily take him to Germany with us."

Baron von Gissing grinned, and there was something distinctly repellant in the twist of his lips.

"Yes, we can take him to Germany," he agreed; "it is so much easier to deal with people there."

Jonathan Hume sighed with relief, but possibly he would not have done so could he have seen Baron von Gissing's face as he said: "It is so much easier to deal with people there."

CHAPTER V.

The Finding of Nelson Lee.

DETECTIVE LEYLAND and Harry Cartwright bent anxiously over Nelson Lee. In the light of the moon the wound to his head looked worse than it actually was, and for the moment they believed him to be dead. They had been brought to the spot by the report of the

revolver, a score of men were searching the wood for the man who had fired it, for they had no doubt that it was Jonathan Hume, and as they bent over the detective they feared that he was dead.

"Alive!" the man from Scotland Yard said in a tone of relief. "It seems to me that he is only stunned. We can carry him up to the house."

As carefully as possible the two men started to carry Nelson Lee towards the mansion in which old Anthony Cartwright had been murdered, but they had got no further than the road when Nelson Lee opened his eyes, for a moment stared vacantly about him, then struggled out of the arms of the men and on to his feet.

"There is no time to lose," he said, as he stood there swaying, a pain in his head that would have made many a man give in. "It was Hume who shot at me. He was hiding in the old boathouse on the towing-path—I did not know that he was there—I must have been stunned."

By an effort Nelson Lee steadied himself on his feet, and pressed a hand to his aching head.

"He cannot be far off," he added. "We must search at once."

"But where?" Inspector Loyland said lamely.

Nelson Lee looked at the road that lay white in the light of the moon, and as his brain began to clear he knew that there was good reason for the question from the man from Scotland Yard. So far Jonathan Hume had succeeded in hiding himself, and there was no telling in what direction he had gone after—believing that the detective had discovered his hiding-place—he had shot Nelson Lee down and run for his life. There was the river that he might have taken to, he might still be in the woods, or there was the road that led towards London.

Nelson Lee looked down at the surface of the road, and suddenly a sharp cry broke from him.

"Look!" he cried. "Do you see where a large car has been pulled up so sharply that it has skidded?"

Detective-inspector Loyland looked at the marks on the road, and knew that the detective was right.

"You mean," he began, "that——"

"I mean," Nelson Lee interrupted, "that we have got to find out at once whether Baron von Gissing and Professor Munberg have left the hotel. If they have I think we may take it for granted that Jonathan Hume has gone with them—taking the formula with him."

Inspector Loyland whistled softly.

"Heaven help him, if they have," he said grimly. "He might as well have put his head in the hangmen's noose."

Three eager men, the one with an aching head that made him feel sick as he walked, hurried to the hotel at which they had discovered the two Germans had taken rooms, and on inquiry their fears were confirmed. Baron von Gissing had stated that he did not care to remain in a neighbourhood where there was a murderer at large, and, having paid the bill, had departed in his motor-car with his companion at a time that was almost exactly that at which the report of the revolver had been heard.

Out in the roadway, for the detectives had no desire to speak in front of the landlord of the hotel, Inspector Loyland looked anxiously at Nelson Lee.

"They will have had time to reach London," he said meaningly. "What shall we do?"

"Follow," Nelson Lee answered simply. "You can trust Nipper not to have lost sight of them."

He took a cigar from his case, but did not light it.

"The point is whether they will settle with Hume in London," he mused.

"Get away with him to obtain possession of the formula?" Inspector Leyland asked abruptly.

"Precisely," Nelson Lee agreed: "but I don't think that they will. If they committed murder in London—Jonathan Hume is not likely to give up the formula—they would stand the risk of being detected, but in Germany, well, the man would disappear, and that would be all."

Detective-inspector Leyland nodded, and his face was very grim.

"I reckon that we ought to be able to get them, sir," he answered. "As you say, Nipper is on the track, and the Yard is sure to know where Gissing and Munberg are staying—men like that are not allowed to land without an eye being kept on them. Where they are we shall find Hume."

"Perhaps," Nelson Lee answered, but there was a very strong note of doubt in his voice. "We can only try."

CHAPTER VI.

Baron von Gissing Bluffs.

BARON VON GISSING, agent of the German Government, and Professor Munberg, one of their greatest and most diabolical scientists, sat comfortably in their private sitting-room of the International Grand Hotel, which everyone knows is in London.

"If you look out of the window, my dear professor," the baron remarked coolly, "you will see one of the obvious products of Scotland Yard watching to see whether we go out. Unless I am very much mistaken it is Leyland, although he has sacrificed his face hair."

The big professor laughed, and pulled at his cigar.

"These British are but kinder—children," he growled in his deep voice. "Fancy dem hafin' the believe that us they could what you call—bowl out."

"It certainly does seem a bit absurd," Baron von Gissing agreed with a smile. "To-morrow my yacht will be in Dover; at midnight we shall sail; before the dawn the formula that we have been seeking for years will be in our possession without having to pay a reward for it, and—"

"Und Hume?" the professor queried as his co-conspirator paused.

"He will have the bare chance of his life," the baron answered callously; "and that is really more than he deserves. Remember that he is a murderer."

Professor Munberg did remember, but for all that he looked curiously through his strong glasses at the face of his companion. He was not forgetting that more than one man had disappeared who had stood in the path of Baron von Gissing, disappeared in such a manner that all inquiries of all the police in the world had failed to solve the reason for the disappearance. It almost seemed as if Von Gissing had the power to turn a strong man into a few of the many billion of atoms that go to make up the unseen world.

"So," the professor nodded, and before he could say more the door of the room opened and a servant looked in.

"Mr. Nelson Lee to see you, sir," he announced, addressing the baron.

Baron von Gissing might have been expected to start or show some sign of agitation, but he did nothing of the kind.

"Show him in at once," he said coolly, and less than a minute later the famous detective entered the room. On his left temple there was a strip of plaster, but otherwise he showed no sign of how near to death he had been.

"I am glad to see you after such a long time, Mr. Lee," he said cordially, holding out a hand that the detective appeared to be unable to see. "It must be—er—two years—"

"Two days," Nelson Lee corrected him. "Perhaps you remember Mr. Smith, the secretary to Mr. Hume?"

Baron von Gissing's eyebrows twitched a little, and his teeth fixed more firmly about his cigar.

"So that was you," he said lightly, though there was a slight suggestion of forcing in his voice. "I congratulate you on the make-up, Mr. Lee, though I know what you are capable of in that direction. May I ask to what I may attribute the pleasure of this visit?"

"Jonathan Hume," Nelson Lee answered directly. "I know why you wished to see him. It was to obtain the formula that he had murdered Anthony Cartwright to get possession of."

Baron von Gissing chewed at the end of his cigar, Professor Munberg looked positively vacant. The baron knew that he was up against no ordinary man—that had been proved to him before—and he weighed every word before he uttered it. More or less he had expected this visit.

"I certainly did want the formula," he admitted after a short pause. "Why should I deny it? I work for my country as you work for yours."

"I trust not," Nelson Lee said coldly. "I have never been accused of being a spy—and other things."

Baron von Gissing shrugged his shoulders, and did not appear to be in the least put out.

"You are a plainspoken man, Mr. Lee," he answered. "Tell me precisely what you want here."

"To know where you are hiding Jonathan Hume," Nelson Lee answered without hesitation, "and to warn you that neither you nor he will be allowed to enter Germany with that formula."

Baron von Gissing sighed and threw out his hands. He, too, was a good actor—it was part of his profession—but he did not deceive the detective.

"I wish that there was a chance of us fighting a duel of wits," he said regretfully; "but, unfortunately, there is not. The professor and I came here, as you say, to try and obtain possession of the formula, unfortunately for us you had already fixed the murder of Anthony Cartwright on to Jonathan Hume, and he had made a bolt for it. Believe me, Mr. Lee, I am as anxious to find him as you are, but there is not a clue to go upon. If you have failed, what can I hope to accomplish?"

Baron von Gissing flicked the ash from his cigar. His manner was one of boredom, but for all that his active brain was hard at work. He was ready to make his next move—one of sheer bluff; but he did not hurry about it. Your real diplomatist—spy, if you like—realises the value of not appearing eager.

"I will be frank with you," he continued, and that was quite enough to put anyone who knew the baron on his guard. "My yacht will be at Dover to-night, and the professor and I intend to sail on it."

"And the formula?" Nelson Lee asked meaningly.

The baron shrugged his shoulders with an air of helplessness.

"That is on the knees of the gods," he replied. "Perhaps this man Hume may succeed in winning his way to Germany. If he does so, I can assure you, speaking as man to man, that there is little doubt that the formula will eventually be in the hands of the German Government. On the other hand, I am willing, just to satisfy you, to allow you to search all our belongings and every inch of the yacht before we sail, so that you may be sure that neither Hume nor the formula is there."

Nelson Lee looked at the man with narrowed eyes, and for the moment

he did not know what to say. Of one thing he was certain, however, and that was that any search, as suggested, would be utterly without result. Yet he was certain that somehow the formula and Hume were to reach Germany unless he could prevent it. Every port was being watched for the man, but no one knew better than Nelson Lee that that does not mean everything. Your detective knows that there are a hundred ways in which a wanted man may leave the country.

Of one thing Nelson Lee was sure, however, and that was that Baron von Gissing was not likely to leave Jonathan Hume out of his sight for long, and as he thought of that a solution of the mystery came to him.

Gissing and the professor were sailing in the yacht that night, and there was nothing to prevent them picking up a man once they were out at sea. A small boat from Deal, from half-a-dozen other places could easily be picked up on the sea, and no one would be the wiser.

Nelson Lee rose to his feet, his mind fully made up.

"There is nothing more for me to say," he remarked; "though you understand that I have not given up the search."

Baron von Gissing nodded, and rose to open the door.

"Neither have I," he answered coolly. "May the best man win."

Nelson Lee walked briskly out of the hotel and went up the street in the direction of the park. There was no longer an expression of calm on his face, in fact, his narrowed eyes were full of an anxiety that he no longer attempted to conceal. He turned into the park, which was pretty empty at that time of the day, and dropped on to the first vacant seat that he came to, where he sat figuring with his stick on the ground, until the disguised Detective-inspector Leyland seated himself beside him.

"Well, sir?" the Scotland Yard man asked in a low, eager voice. "What have you discovered?"

In as few words as possible Nelson Lee described his interview.

"There is nothing to be done yet," he concluded. "We dare not risk making a mistake."

"And Nipper, sir?" Leyland queried.

Nelson Lee's lips twitched, and his face was paler than usual.

"He must be in their power," he answered slowly. "That is why no mistake must be made. The deserted motor-bike, the tracks that we found in the wood, and, more than all, the fact that I have not heard from the lad, convince me that he is a prisoner."

"Have mercy on him in the hands of those ruffians," Inspector Leyland muttered earnestly.

Nelson Lee's hands gripped hard on the handle of his walking-stick.

"Heaven help Von Gissing and Munberg if any harm comes to the lad!" the detective answered between his teeth.

CHAPTER VII.

A Check—Nipper at Work—The Horrors That Happened.

NIGHT had set in as Nelson Lee stood on the quay at Dover. With him were Detective-inspector Leyland and Harry Cartwright, but the shadow of a great crane hid them from anyone who did not pass almost close enough to touch them. Out on the water they could dimly make out the shape of a yacht, flying the German flag, and as they looked at it they did not speak until Nelson Lee broke the silence.

"A boat has put off to it," he said, in a low tone. "Ah, her sidelights are going up, and we must get aboard our own craft."

Nelson Lee turned on his heel and made his way along the quay, picking his way with a certainty that showed him to be not unfamiliar with the place. They reached a flight of slimy stone steps leading down to the lapping water, and as they did so a short man in sailor rig stepped forward and touched his cap.

"Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen," he said, in a gruff voice, that was made gruffer by drink, "but the blessed engines of the Slipaway have gone back on us, so we can't leave port to-night."

The man glanced towards the yacht that already had its sidelights up, and Nelson Lee clenched his teeth. It was on that boat that Baron von Gissing and Professor Munberg were sailing.

"You mean that you aren't going to carry out your contract?" he said sternly.

"I mean what I says," the sailor answered gruffly. "The boat's mine, and I'm not goin' to tear the inside out of her for you or anyone else."

Nelson Lee knew what it meant. Baron von Gissing had reckoned that he would attempt to follow the yacht, and he had lost no time in baulking that plan. It would not have been difficult for him to learn that Nelson Lee had chartered this craft, and with all the money that he had at his command bribery had been easy. Nelson Lee might have bribed, too, outbidding the German, but he had a good reason for not doing so. The navigation of this vessel would be entirely in the hands of this skipper, and he would be able to fool them as easily as he liked. Apart from that it was quite possible that Von Gissing had seen to it that there were some of his agents upon her.

"There are other yachts in the harbour," he said coldly, and he could have struck the short seaman as the latter grinned.

"There ain't one with steam up," the seaman said. "Somehow they all seem to have taken it into their heads to let their furnaces go out to-day, though there weren't no telling that a gent like you might not come long."

Nelson Lee turned on his heel, for he had heard enough. He knew that Baron von Gissing had been at work with a vengeance, and that nowhere in that harbour would he get a vessel capable of keeping up with the German's yacht, for that vessel had been built for speed. For a score of yards or more he led the way down the quay, his chin sunk forward on his chest, but suddenly he looked up, his eyes on a lean, dark craft that lay out in the harbour—a torpedo-boat.

"That's it, Leyland," he said, with an excitement that was unusual with him. "We've got to convince the commander of that vessel, or his chief, that we're on Government Service. It's our chance to follow Von Gissing's yacht."

Detective-inspector Leyland looked doubtful, and nodded to where the baron's yacht had been.

"She's sailed already, sir," he answered. "And if I know anything of the officials, it will be a clear hour before we can get weigh on us."

Nelson Lee's eyes narrowed, and his lips were very firm.

"We've got to do it before then," he said harshly. "We've got to make the officials realise what this means."

"I hope that we do, sir," Detective-inspector Leyland answered doubtfully.

Baron von Gissing's yacht had slowed up until she was almost without steerage-way, and the baron himself looked eagerly over the bulwarks as a motor-boat came alongside. A man stepped out of it quickly on to the rope-ladder, and came up hand over hand until he was on the deck. It was Jonathan Hume, a coat turned right up to his chin, hiding something of his ghastly white face, and he stumbled and almost fell as Von Gissir--

led him towards a cabin on the deck. Next, a long, heavy box, like a coffin, was hoisted up, and a couple of sailors lifted it and carried it to the cabin.

Baron von Gissing smiled contentedly as he looked from Jonathan Hume to the coffin-like object that lay on the floor—the long box, in the lid of which a number of holes had been bored.

"You shall rest for an hour or two, my friend," the baron said coolly; "after that we will come to terms."

With a still broader smile on his lips the German walked from the cabin, and Jonathan Hume, pale in the light of the swinging lamp, was left alone with the box with the perforated lid.

Jonathan Hume moved restlessly up and down the cabin, at last halting and staring down at the box.

"Shall I do it?" he muttered huskily. "They daren't play me false, and yet——"

Slowly he drew from an inner-pocket a sheet of paper and a screw-driver, hesitated again, then went swiftly to the door of the cabin and bolted it, the sweat standing out and glistening on his face.

"It will be the safest place," he muttered. "They would never think of looking here if they tried to bluff me."

Jonathan Hume was realising how completely he was in the power of Baron von Gissing and Professor Munberg, and as he realised it a great fear possessed him. All along he had told himself that he would be the one to dictate terms, that the Germans would practically be bound to pay him any sum that he chose to ask for the devilish formula, but now he knew that he had been wrong. In his anxiety to get away from England and Nelson Lee, he had not thought much of the means that he was adopting to do so. As he had waited for the appointed hour, hidden away in a cottage on the East Coast, only one thing had seemed desirable to him—to be aboard the yacht as soon as possible.

Even the sight of the box in which Nipper was a bound and gagged prisoner had not made him realise the absolutely helpless position that he would be in once he was aboard the yacht.

Now, however, the man's eyes were opened to the truth, and he was afraid.

Dropping to his hands and knees, Jonathan Hume set to work on the lid of the box, but his fingers shook so badly that at first he could not loosen even one of the screws. By a mighty effort he pulled himself together, and the first of the screws was released. Quickly he set to work on another, his very fear now lending him nerve, and the sweat stood out on his face in proof of the frantic efforts that he made.

Screw by screw came away from the lid, to be thrown down carelessly on to the floor, then the lid was lifted clear, and the contents of the box could be seen in the light of the lamp.

Nipper lay there, rigid as a corpse in the grip of the cords that bound him, a gag between his teeth. His face was pale, too, as that of a corpse, and it was only the gleam of the indomitable eyes that showed the lad to be alive.

"I'd give something to have your cursed master here, too!" Jonathan Hume snarled. "If it hadn't have been for him I could have stayed in England to make my terms. He's dead, but I'd like to have him here to torture."

Nipper shuddered as he heard the words. His own danger and suffering meant nothing to him, in fact, he felt that there was nothing to live for without his master. Death had no terrors for the lad, yet he wanted to live and be free for one reason.

Nelson Lee's ambition had been to prevent Anthony Cartwright's formula falling into the hands of the Germans, and now that his master was dead,

it was his business to complete the work. When that had been accomplished nothing really mattered.

Jonathan Hume hesitated, then he thrust the sheet of paper down beside the body of Nipper.

"They will never think to look there," he muttered triumphantly.

Then the lid was closed again, and a feeling of absolute hopelessness took possession of Nipper. He realised that he was as helpless as if he really lay in a coffin, and that nothing could prevent the formula eventually falling into the hands of the Germans.

Nipper, his ears strained to catch the slightest sound, heard the click of the screwdriver as it slipped on the head of the first screw that Jonathan Hume was replacing. He heard the second and the third put in before other sounds occupied his attention. The first sound that reached him was the pad of boots on the deck, next there was the sound of someone trying the cabin door, followed by an exclamation of fright from Jonathan Hume. Then Nipper heard the bolt of the door being drawn back, and behind his gag he smiled. At last there was the hope that he might win free to finish the work that Nelson Lee had begun.

It was Baron von Gissing who stepped into the cabin, an expression of suspicion on his face. He glanced from Jonathan Hume to the box in which Nipper lay, and Hume shivered as he feared that the German might notice the screw-holes in which there were no screws. The screws and the screwdriver he had slipped into his pocket.

"You seem nervous," the German sneered. "You ought to remember how well you are protected, especially as you did not succeed in killing Nelson Lee."

Lying in the box Nipper heard the words, and a great feeling of gratitude swelled up into his heart. He had fully believed his master to be dead.

"We will get the business over at once," Baron von Gissing said shortly. "Professor Munberg is waiting in the cabin."

Nipper listened for the click of the cabin door, and the moment that had reached him he set to work. He knew that only a few screws now held the lid of the box down, and he reckoned that he would not have much trouble in forcing it upwards. After that he knew quite well what he intended to do. While the lid had been off the box he had seen that there were life-belts in the cabin. By the aid of one of them he would be able to keep afloat for an indefinite period, the precious formula in his pocket, and he had no doubt about being picked up quickly.

With all his strength Nipper forced upwards, and to his great relief the lid gave at once, so that he was able to sit up in the box that might have well proved to be his coffin.

To free himself from the cords that bound him was a comparatively easy matter for the lad, for under Nelson Lee he had made a study of the art. In a very short time his hands were free, next he had removed the gag from his mouth, and the bonds from his legs were quickly thrown aside.

Nipper knew that at any second he might be disturbed, and he lost no time. He thrust the formula of Anthony Cartwright into his silver cigarette-case, then hastily drew on one of the life-belts in the cabin.

Silently as a shadow Nipper crept up on to the deck, and as silently he lowered himself down a rope that hung over the yacht's side. Then he was in the water and swimming steadily away, his heart beating fast with triumph as he told himself that there was no longer danger of Anthony Cartwright's formula falling into the hands of the Germans.

Professor Munberg looked up eagerly as the baron led Jonathan Hume into the cabin, then poured a stiff drink out into a tumbler.

The murderer snatched at it with shaking hands, and the glass tinkled against his teeth as he gulped the neat spirit down. Baron von Gissing stood looking on with a smile on his lips, and a cynical expression of triumph in his eyes.

"I haven't dared to rest," Jonathan Hume said huskily, the spirit bringing a little colour back into his cheeks. "Every man that I've seen, every person who has even looked at me——"

"I know," Baron von Gissing interrupted coldly. "I have seen men like you before, men who have a way of staring at their own shadows and seeing the faces of their victims in the dark. Bah, you will get over it! Give me the formula and the sample."

There was no longer the slightest pleading in the manner of the German; his words were a command.

"Ja, we haf waited the long time," Professor Munberg growled.

With startled eyes Jonathan Hume looked from one man to the other, and his right hand went to his breastpocket.

"What do you mean?" he whispered, in affright. "You told me that you would take me to Germany, where the price could be arranged."

"Diplomacy, my dear sir," the baron said coldly. "The price will be paid here and now on this yacht."

Jonathan Hume made an effort to pull himself together and look brave, but the effort was not a great success.

"I have not told you the price," he said hoarsely. "But I am willing to hear yours."

Baron von Gissing paused to light a cigar, and there was a cruel expression in his eyes.

"Your life," he answered presently. "If you hand over the formula and the sample, you will sail with us until we are close to the coast of France. You will then be put into a small boat that will bear no name, and if you are lucky you will get ashore with the hundred pounds that we shall give you."

"A hundred pounds!" Jonathan Hume mumbled the words as if he failed to understand them, and there was something very like madness in his eyes. "My price is a hundred thousand!"

"You have no price except the one that I have told you," Baron von Gissing persisted coldly.

"And if I refuse it?" Jonathan Hume's voice had suddenly grown cold too, and there was something in his that the other men were unfortunate enough not to understand.

"If you refuse," Baron von Gissing said slowly, "I shall have no alternative but to use this." He drew a neat automatic-pistol from his pocket, and the way that he handled it showed that he knew how to use it with effect. "There will be no one to make inquiries about you, and my men will be silent—they are paid to be."

Jonathan Hume turned livid. Since the murder of Anthony Cartwright, since the day when Nelson Lee had taken up the case, his nerves had been getting more and more frayed. Baron von Gissing had been right when he had said that the murderer saw the face of his victim in every shadow, and to keep the face away he had been drinking all day until he was on the verge of madness.

"You mean all this?" he asked harshly.

"Yes."

Professor Munberg nodded, and appeared to be quite indifferent to the scene. As a matter of fact he was prepared to leave everything to Von Gissing, knowing a great deal with regard to that man's powers.

Jonathan Hume looked at the two men, and slowly a mad smile crossed his lips. He knew that if he ever reached France that it would not be long before Nelson Lee tracked him down, and then—

With a shriek of laughter he snatched from his pocket a small phial.

"You shall know the secret!" he screamed madly, as he raised the phial above his head.

"Shoot!" the professor gasped, for he saw what was coming. "Shoot!"

The pistol barked out angrily, and Jonathan Hume reeled and clutched at his breast with his left hand. Then, for a second he steadied himself, and the phial dropped to the floor of the cabin. With marvellous agility Professor Munberg threw himself towards it, but he was too late. Once more the mad, screaming laugh broke from Jonathan Hume, and the heel of his boot crashed down on to the phial.

.

"Yacht on the port-bow, sir," a sailor announced, as dawn began to come into the sky; and Lieutenant Selkirk, in charge of one of his Majesty's torpedo-boats, shaded his eyes with his hand and looked in the direction indicated. With him on the bridge were Nelson Lee, Inspector Leyland, Harry Cartwright, and Nipper, none the worse for his immersion, for he had been fortunate enough to be picked up quickly by the very boat he desired.

All through the night the torpedo-boat had searched round for the yacht of Baron von Gissing, but without success.

"It's the yacht!" Nelson Lee cried eagerly, looking through his glasses. "And from what I can see of her she's out of control. I wonder what has happened—"

Then suddenly he caught his breath in between his teeth, and his face went white.

"For Heaven's sake slow down!" he said hoarsely. "Watch the look-out man, and if he shows a sign of faintness go full-astern."

The officer's face went tense, too, for he knew what the search meant. At a slow pace the torpedo approached the craft that was rolling sluggishly in the water, stopping within a hundred yards of it. So far nothing had happened to cause alarm aboard the war vessel.

"I shall board her," Nelson Lee said quietly.

"I'm with you, sir," Leyland put in promptly. "It may all be a trick."

In a very short space of time a boat was lowered from the davits, and the two detectives, Harry Cartwright, who had insisted upon going, and Nipper, were pulled slowly towards the derelict yacht. With every yard that was covered Nelson Lee expected a calamity, and he breathed a sigh of relief when the side of the yacht was reached without anything having happened. The next moment he had leapt on board, and his companions did not hesitate to follow him.

Then three men and a lad stood staring with horrified eyes about the deck of the yacht, for if the living had deserted it there were still the dead.

In the wheelhouse a man stood doubled forward over the wheel, on the deck, right forward, another man lay stretched at full length, and on the little poop-deck a third man lay across a coil of rope, a pipe still in his hand.

With his face grey—and Nelson Lee was not a man who knew the meaning of fear—he led the way to the deck-house. Slowly he opened the door and looked in.

On the floor lay Jonathan Hume, Baron von Gissing, and Professor Munberg, each of them quite dead. And close to the first named were the fragments of a glass phial.

For fully a minute Nelson Lee stood rivetted to the spot, then with a shudder he pulled a sheet of paper from his coat. From his pocket he drew

a match and struck it, and the flame licked at the corner of the paper, took a firm hold of it, and broke into a blaze.

Presently the last scrap of it was burning itself out on the carpet, but even when the last little flame had died away Nelson Lee placed his boot on the piles and ground them into a fine powder.

"The last of the formula," he whispered huskily, and his face was wet with perspiration.

THE END.

**On No Account Should You Miss Next Week's
Thrilling Story of NELSON LEE and NIPPER.**

The yarn, which is written by one of the most celebrated
detective story-writers of the day, is entitled:

The War Factory Mystery ;

OR,
THE MAN FROM KRUPP'S.

ORDER YOUR COPY TO-DAY!

FREE GIFTS WITHOUT COST

HOW YOU CAN CHEER OUR MEN AT THE FRONT

Following the Postmaster-General's announcement of a few days ago, all post offices are now receiving reading matter from the public, and sending it to the Front free of charge.

Here is an excellent opportunity for you of sending FREE GIFTS at just the bare cost of purchasing the papers. Remember that no newspapers will be accepted, and no periodicals over a year old will be accepted. Neither cover nor address are necessary.

This paper is just the sort that is required at the Front. So take this, and other periodicals you have—or, better still, buy some for the boys—and hand them over the counter of the nearest post office, and YOUR GIFT will be sent to the Front—FREE OF COST.

The Boys of Ravenswood College;

or, Dick Clare's Schooldays.

A New Story of School Life. By S. CLARKE HOOK.

Author of the famous Jack, Sam & Pete stories, appearing weekly in
"The Marvel Library."

Dick Clare, a rich youngster, joins Ravenswood College, and he soon makes his presence felt.

One day news comes to the school that Dick and his chum, Tom, have been drowned, but ultimately they turn up safe and sound.

Melby, one of the other boys, takes a violent dislike to Dick Clare, and is especially jealous because the Headmaster takes special notice of the new boy.

Melby manages to get hold of some rabbits, and prepares to cook a meal in the dormitory.

Dick decides to enter a crew for the sculling race which is about to be held, and he engages a man named Bunny to train his men.

Bunny is Pleased.

ONE afternoon Bunny was taking his young crew up the river. He took the lines as Melby was gated.

"You are feathering too low, bow, you duddle-headed ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom, who was the ass.

"What are you guffawing at, you chuckle booby? Stroke, you are too short. D'ye think you're qualifying for a ferryman? I never did see such a pair of slobber-bacons in all my born days. Why don't you row? Put your backs in it—if you haven't got any brains!"

"Think we are improving, Bunny?" inquired Dick anxiously, when the noisy practice was over.

"Young gents, you are doing a treat," said Bunny. "You are coming on jest nicely, and I sha'n't let you slacken off. Wait till I put the finish on you; but that will be higher up the river. I want to give them all a surprise. Mind the tuckshop. I want to see you as hard as iron. We are not going to stand still. We shall either improve or go back. We're going for'ard, or I'll know the reason why. You can have a gentle run home. Good-luck!"

Bunny grinned as the youngsters started off. He was pleased with his men, but thought it injudicious to give them too much praise, in case they should slacken off.

All went well, and the day of the college regatta was drawing near. Melby had given the chums a good deal of trouble, but Bunny expressed satisfaction at his steering, so that they were hopeful he would turn out all right, and not disappoint them at the last moment as he had threatened to do on more than one occasion.

"There's a meeting this evening," said Tom one day. "We have got to give in our names for the races. Hal Lakin is making the arrangements."

"Right you are," exclaimed Dick. "You leave it to me. Bunny says we are about as good as he can make us, and he speaks well of Melby's steering."

"So does Melby," observed Tom. "To hear him talk, you would think he knew twenty times more than Bunny. But that doesn't matter—so long as

he doesn't run us on the mud. Candidly I believe a good lot will depend on whether Gowl is backing our boat or some other one. He is certain to be betting on the events, and it would not be a difficult task to get at Melby."

"Well, we will keep our eyes open; but I should scarcely think he would play a trick like that, because we would be bound to find him out, and then it would be warm for him."

The meeting that night was well attended, and very noisy. The young captain was very popular with the youngsters, never calling them to account without good cause, and so they were inclined to presume a little.

"It's all right, Cedric," laughed Hal. "You have told me half a dozen times that you want to enter for the hundred yards. I have already got your name down. Do you want me to put it down six times?"

Cedric was the baby of the college. He was yearning for a younger boy to come there, but fortune did not favour him.

"No; that's all right. Lakin, so long as you don't forget it," said Cedric.

"I am likely to remember it in my dreams. Now then, Gowl, you and Fox are entering for the open race?"

"Yes; that's right!" exclaimed Gowl.

"Two of the townsmen have entered."

"I know. We shall uphold the honour of the college. I've seen them at practice, and don't think much of it."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Hal. "Who is your cox?"

"Leave that blank for the present," answered Gowl. "We have the choice of three, and it's not quite settled which is the best. I'll let you know before the race."

"Good! Any more entries for the open race?"

"You might put us down," said Dick, stepping forward.

"What?" gasped the captain, when the cheering from the youngsters in Foster's house had ceased.

"Tom and I would like to compete."

"I say, Clare," laughed Hal, "you are taking something on. Do you know it's a two-mile course?"

"It's ridiculous!" snarled Gowl. "I call it holding the college up to ridicule."

"Can you stay the course, youngsters?" inquired Hal.

"Yes—at a pace," answered Dick. "Suppose you come and see us row before refusing?"

"I have no right to refuse," answered Hal; "it is an open race. But the townsmen are grown up, and Gowl and Fox will have all their work cut out to hold their own against them."

"I never agreed to this!" cried Melby. "I'm their cox, and ought to have been consulted. Dick Clare is taking too much on himself. I don't believe Tom knew anything about the rotten idea."

"True enough!" exclaimed Tom. "I left it all to Dick, and there's the end of it."

"I don't know so much about that," grumbled Melby. "I don't want to make an idiot of myself—"

"Better not talk then," observed Tom.

"Do you wish to enter for the open race, Hart?" inquired the captain.

"Rather! I don't believe we have got the ghost of a chance, all the same. If Dick thinks we have, there's the finish. Are there three prizes?"

"No," answered Hal; "only one. There are only three entries, if I accept your names."

"I know. It's a jolly pity there aren't three prizes, because then we would have a rattling good chance of winning one of them."

"The thing is absolutely absurd!" cried Gowl.

"I fail to see that it matters," retorted Hal. "If the youngsters stay the course, and put in fairly good time, it will redound to their credit."

"And we shall have a charming account in the local paper, saying that they were the second best crew Ravenswood could turn out," said Gowl.

"Oh, bother the paper!" exclaimed Hal. "Besides, it would be ridiculous to say that, seeing the youngsters' ages. You would represent the Upper School; they the Lower."

"I'm certain Mr. Foster wouldn't listen to such rubbish," declared Gowl.

"Here, Cedric," exclaimed Hal, "go to Mr. Foster's study, and ask him if he could spare a few minutes. He kindly offered his services if he could help us, and told me to let him know."

Mr. Foster soon entered the hall, and listened attentively to Hal's statement.

"It is essentially a matter for you to determine, Lakin," he said. "You control the sports."

"I'd like your advice, sir."

"No harm could be done in allowing these boys to compete. Probably they will fail—indeed, it looks as though they could not possibly succeed—but they will do their utmost."

"They will disgrace the college," snarled Gowl.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Foster sternly. "Neither Clare nor Hart will ever do anything to disgrace the college. I am confident of that."

"I'm the cox, sir," cried Melby.

"I know you are," retorted Mr. Foster.

"Then I'd be glad if you would just couple my name with theirs, sir. I don't care only to have my name coupled with theirs when they get up to one of their howling japes, because it hurts. When they deserve praise—and you will admit that is jolly seldom—I consider I'm entitled to have my name coupled with theirs. It is like this. Both my father and mother—"

"I have no time to listen to a speech, Melby," said Mr. Foster. "As I have pointed out, Lakin, this is a matter for you to decide. There would, of course, be no disgrace if the lads were beaten."

"Their wishing to take part in such a race is pure conceit," declared Gowl. "Why can't they row in the kids' race?"

"I presume they wish to try to achieve greater things," answered Mr. Foster, smiling. "Unless we strive to attain the top we shall certainly not be putting forth our best."

"I fail to see that we ought to commence at the top of the ladder," said Gowl.

"What is your objection to the lads rowing in the race?" inquired Mr. Foster.

"It will make us look so small."

"No doubt the captain will take into consideration what you have said," answered the master.

"Have you any objection to the youngsters competing, sir?" inquired Hal.

"None, whatever."

"Your names are entered," said Hal.

"Leave mine blank for the present, Hal," said Melby. "I shall have to consider the matter. I don't choose to make myself obnoxious to others just because of conceit. My father—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Hal, as Mr. Foster left the hall. "We haven't got time to listen to your panegyrics on your family."

"I never mentioned such a word," exclaimed Melby. "In fact, I don't know what the rotten thing means. But I know jolly well I'm not going to be forced into this race against my will."

The chums were in their study after the eventful meeting, when Melby came in.

"I say, you are in for it now," he exclaimed. "Gowl says he'll flog you within an inch of your life if you don't withdraw. He says he doesn't care a bit about the secret power you hold over him, and that if you get him expelled, he will do the same for you. He's going to thrash you most awfully."

"Oh, go and drown yourself, you silly babbler!" cried Dick. "You have no more sense than Gowl, and he has got about as much as a rotten medlar. You can go and tell him I said so, if you like. As for any secret power I have over him, he never said a word about it, because it does not exist. Gowl knows perfectly well that if I knew anything against him, or anything that would get him into trouble, I would never be so contemptible as to hold it over his head."

"Well, I'm not going to be treated as if I was no one," declared Melby. "You haven't asked my permission to challenge Gowl, and I know we could not beat him. If you don't withdraw I won't steer. That's my final decision."

"All right!" exclaimed Dick. "Hallo, what's up, kiddy?"

This was to Cedric, who entered the study at that moment.

"Oh, my eyes! What a lovely place!" exclaimed Cedric gazing around.

"Did you come to tell me that?"

"No, you are to go to Gowl immediately."

The Race.

"LOOK here, Cedric," exclaimed Dick, completely ignoring the message.

"How would you like to steer us in the race?"

"Rather! I say, I would like it, Dick. But I can't steer."

"I suppose you can learn, can't you?"

"The masters don't seem to think I can learn much."

"Oh, they haven't given you time yet! You shall come down at our next practice, and take your first lesson."

"I'm hanged if he shall!" said Melby. "I have decided to steer."

"You said you wouldn't, and that finishes it," said Dick. "If you think you are going to threaten us and play fast and loose you are jolly well mistaken. This is an important matter, and we are not going to allow you to queer our pitch. You will have to be up at five to-morrow, Cedric."

"You bet I will," said Cedric. "I'm off for prep. I say, Dick and Tom, it's awfully decent of you. You won't forget Gowl's message. He's in a tearing rage and kicked me out of his study because I asked him where I should find you. He will think I haven't found you, and kick me again, and he hurts."

Dick hesitated for a moment, then decided on going to the bully's study, while Melby tried to get Tom to refuse to agree to the change, but he tried in vain.

When Dick entered the bully's study he found him seated at supper with his best friend Fox, who was almost as great a bully as Gowl.

"Shut that door you insolent little vagabond!" snarled Gowl.

"If it's all the same to you, I prefer having a means of retreat," retorted Dick. "What do you want?"

"To give you the flogging you deserve, and I'll do it, too, whatever happens, if you don't withdraw your name from the open race."

"You must be a senseless idiot, Gowl. Nothing will happen, except that I shall get hurt—so will you if you hurt me. I'm a great believer in retaliation."

"Take that!" howled Gowl, hitting him over the head with a stick he had at his side, evidently for the purpose.

"And you take that!" retorted Dick, seizing a cream cheese off the table, and sending it full in the bully's face; after that Dick fled, while Gowl rushed after him, and Fox brought up the rear.

There was a step on the landing. Dick remembered it, and took it at a leap. Gowl forgot it, and sprawled face forward, while Fox sprawled over him.

"Aren't you fellows frightened of hurting yourselves?" inquired Dick, darting on, for they were up in an instant. "Ha, ha, ha! I fancy you knocked your nose on the floor, Gowl. No, you don't!"

Gowl made a grab at him as he darted into Number 7 and slammed the door, while Tom also put his weight against it.

"Lock it, old chap!" cried Tom. "Never mind the brute's howls."

"I don't; but the beastly door won't shut. Charge!"

They did.

"Fingers! My fingers!" howled Gowl.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "He's got them in the door."

"Then you can depend on it that's why it wouldn't shut," said Dick calmly. "It's all right, Gowl. You may come in, but you must behave yourself. Hurt your fingers? Well, they will soon get all right again."

"Oh! Fury! I'll make you suffer for this!" hooted the bully.

"You may be right, Gowl," said Dick, winking at Tom, "but my impression is that you are the one who has got to bear the suffering, and you are bearing it badly. Look out! Here comes Mr. Foster. I expect he will want to know what has happened if he sees your damaged nose and fingers."

"Did you—ha, ha!—damage his nose?" inquired Tom. "And has he been shoving ointment on it?"

"No, that is cream cheese," answered Dick: while Gowl strode away, for Mr. Foster was coming along the corridor. "I bashed it in his face. It's all right, Tom. He won't bother us any more. What are you laughing at?"

"His fingers. Of course, it was an accident, and all that, but to think we were jamming at the old door while he had got his fingers in it! Ha, ha, ha! My eyes! No wonder it wouldn't shut!"

"It can't be helped."

"No. He would have helped it if he could. But look here, Dick, you keep your eye on Melby. He's fearfully vindictive, and will upset our little plans if he gets the chance, and Gowl will help him. Mind you, I don't believe for a moment Gowl is afraid of us winning. What maddens him is that fellows of our age should dare to compete with him."

"He will be madder still if we beat him."

"Just so, old chap. I don't think he will get madder for that reason. Still, there's nothing like trying. Have you told Bunny?"

"Well, Bunny told me."

"What?"

"To challenge them. We shall do all we know, so can't do more. My mother will be amongst the visitors, so you will have the chance of seeing her—so will Bunny. It is to be hoped he doesn't call me a duddle-headed ass in her presence. It might be detrimental to his reward."

It seemed to Dick that he had scarcely got to sleep that night when Cedric entered his dormitory and shook him up. It was pitch dark.

"I say," exclaimed Cedric, "is it five yet? I haven't got a watch."

"Bother it! No! It will be light at about three, and it's pitch dark now; so it can't be five—unless there is a total eclipse of the sun."

"But suppose we oversleep our—"

"Oh, go to bed!" growled Dick, turning over and going to sleep again.

How long he slept for he did not know. It seemed a very short time when Cedric awoke him again. It was still dark.

"I say, Dick, it is six o'clock."

"Here, you want chaining up, kid! It's as black as beetles."

"I heard it strike six. I had gone to sleep, but luckily the college clock woke me."

"Jolly unlucky, I'd say. It must have been tolling twelve, and you only counted the six last strokes. Look here, Cedric, you just wait till I call you next time."

"Suppose you oversleep yourself?"

"There's not much fear of that if you come buzzing into my room every five minutes of the night. Clear out! I'll call you right enough."

Cedric disappeared, and the rest of Dick's sleep was undisturbed; while early the following morning they started off for practice, and Bunny seemed to be pleased at the change. He ordered Cedric to come there every time he got the chance, with a view to being coached. And he progressed so well, that Bunny put a fearful lot of money on his crew at five to one odds.

On the eve of the regatta the chums paid Bunny a visit, and Melby went with them. He said that he was glad he was out of it, because he happened to know they would lose. They found Bunny in his boathouse, and he stopped his remarks immediately.

"There's someone has been here this evening and smashed a hole in the side of your outrigger—the one you've been using all along," he said. "Now, see here, I don't know who did it, but if I don't receive the value of that boat I'm going straight to Dr. Stanley."

"Very likely it was one of the town chaps," said Melby.

"And very likely it wasn't," retorted Bunny. "It is jest as likely it was Gowl."

"I say, you will get into a row if——"

"And so will he; while you won't escape too lightly, my young shaver! I saw you out with him to-day, and you weren't so far from here."

"Oh, I say——"

"You can say what you like, but maybe I'll say a bit more. Some boys think themselves remarkably clever. They knew thundering well all my other boats were engaged, but that's where their knowledge stopped. They didn't know that the boat we are racing in is a new one, and that it's in the other boathouse higher up the river. Haw, haw, haw! Those clever boys thought to stop your racing, young gents, but we had a bit up our sleeves, and if they get at the new boat I'll forgive them. We had best get up to have the final spin, and you ain't wanted, Melby. You can go back and report my remarks to Gowl, and see how he likes them."

"We had nothing to do with it."

"That's a lucky thing for you, 'cos it's the sort of work Dr. Stanley won't appreciate. However, seeing you had nothing to do with it, you have nothing to fear, and the bit of evidence won't frighten you—till I put it before the Head. So long!"

Melby was about to say a little more, but thinking better of it he walked away, and Bunny muttered something about young scamps.

The following day was all that could be desired, and as the open race was the first event, the banks of the river where it was to take place were thronged.

The town boat was the first to take up its position at the starting skiff. Their colours were red, and the two scullers certainly looked fit, while they were powerfully-built young fellows. They received a good deal of cheering, for all the inhabitants wanted the town crew to win.

Next came Gowl and Fox, their colours being dark green, while the youngsters' colours were blue. They received a regular ovation from the Lower School fellows, and some advice; but Dick and Tom had already received all the instructions they needed. Bunny was on horseback on the towpath. He meant following all the way, but was fully determined to give no more advice under any circumstances.

"Are you ready?" cried the starter, raising a pistol in the air. "Forward! Go!"

Blue and Green got away simultaneously, but Red was a trifle late; however, they soon made up for it. For a few lengths they raced Gowl, then they forged ahead, while Green cleared the youngsters' boat.

Dick made no attempt to quicken his stroke, and Cedric looked very anxious as he saw the two other boats forging ahead.

About half a mile was covered; the leading boats—which were level with each other—were several lengths ahead of Blue.

"Red are splashing a lot!" cried Cedric. "I believe Gowl is ahead now, and he's got the advantage of the bend. Yes. He's ahead."

Dick made no reply, but when he had rounded the bend he slightly quickened his stroke, and Bunny grinned. Dick was obeying orders exactly, and Bunny knew those orders would get the very best out of the youngsters.

They were rowing to perfection. The dark blue oars flashed out of the water in perfect time. Bunny was satisfied, and that is saying much.

"I say," cried Cedric, "we are jolly well overhauling the town boat! I really believe we shall pass them."

Dick still pegged away, and Tom had the feeling he was not doing his best, but he kept silent. Gradually they crept up to the town boat until Bunny could no longer see daylight between them; then drew level. Again and again the Reds spurted, each time taking the lead, but each time losing it again, although Dick did not quicken his stroke.

"My eyes! We've passed them!" cried Cedric, at last. "They have jolly well gone to pieces. And, I say, Gowl is splashing a good lot. His boat is rolling a bit, too."

On they swept, and the youngsters on the bank yelled in their glee.

"Give it to her, Dick Clare!" yelled one.

"Row, you stupid bird!"

"For the honour of Foster's!"

"Stop paddling, and shove some pace on her!"

"Needless to say Dick did not take the slightest heed of the advice. He was simply following Bunny's instructions, and it was not until he reached the spot pointed out to him that he again quickened his stroke.

"We are creeping up!" cried Cedric. "Well rowed, you chaps! Oh, if you could only win! We are gaining—but they've spurted!"

Dick glanced at the bank. He saw his last mark, and once more quickened his stroke. Again Gowl spurted, and there was a good deal of splashing. Blue still crept up until the boats were level, and thus they kept, although every now and then Green got a slight lead.

"Ready, Tom?" panted Dick. "Let her have it! One mighty burst!"

Like a flash the two boats shot past the winning barge. A pistol-shot rang out; but neither Green nor Blue knew who was the winner.

As the panting crews lay on their oars, their gaze was fixed upon the mast, up which the bunting would be run.

Then presently a ball went up. It floated out in the breeze, and the blue flag rose to the main, while a mighty cheer rang out from the Lower School.

Dick's Great Effort.

"I SAY, Gowl," exclaimed Fox, as the bully brought the outrigger alongside the slip: "this is about the limit. Fancy those kids licking the Fifth. Hark at the youngsters cheering them!"

"I suppose you could have done better," snarled Gowl, going to the dressing-room. "I wasn't in form, that's all."

"You can bet it won't be all, though," answered Fox. "It's time you took young Clare down. Bother his blackmail. I wouldn't be frightened of him, and——"

Fox stopped, for the expression on Gowl's face was so fierce that his chum, although nothing like tactful, considered it wiser to say no more at present.

"Well, we've whacked them, Tom," observed Dick. "Pretty tough, wasn't it?"

"Especially at the last," answered Tom. "I'm jolly glad it wasn't another length. I'd have gone to pieces if it had been."

"Which shows you Bunny knows how to get the best out of you. You steered us grandly, Cedric. Come along. We will get a change, then I'll introduce you to my mother. I can see her talking to Viva. Hope she isn't telling—— No matter."

"Telling what?" inquired Melby, coming up.

"Melby seeks information," said Tom. "Pussy nearly got out of the bag that time, Dick."

"I consider it rotten that you should treat me in this manner," cried Melby. "I ought to have been cox. It's scandalous that you should have thrown me over at the last moment."

"Rats! You threw yourself over," retorted Tom. "You said you wouldn't steer."

"But I didn't mean it. You would have won a lot better if I had held the lines. That young idiot Cedric can't steer."

"Cedric will improve," said Dick. "So shall we. This is our first attempt at racing, therefore you can't expect it to be our best. It was good enough to win, and that is all we care about. Come on, you chaps."

"Look here, Dick," exclaimed Tom. "I don't think I'll be introduced to your mater just now. You know mothers say things that make the fellows laugh. They mean well, but they make you look rather ridiculous when you've won a race or anything like that."

"Can't be helped. You come along. You too, Cedric. You can take your share of the butter; it's not fair that I should have it all. My mother knows you pretty well—faults and all, you beauty; but you don't know her."

Mrs. Clare shook hands with her son, and Tom stared at her in wonder, because she looked so youthful.

"That's the image, my dear mother," said Dick, nodding towards Tom.

"And that is our cox—Cedric."

"You see, Tom, I know all about you," said Mrs. Clare, as she shook hands with the two. "Dick always gives me full particulars in his letters. Some of them are confidential communications, Dr. Stanley."

"Perhaps Dick would prefer not to have them divulged," said the Head, smiling.

"Yes. And I am afraid I know who is the instigator of the pranks."

"Oh, Dick would be bound to take the blame!" said Tom. "It's his way."

"Well, I am very glad he has found so many friends," said Mrs. Clare. "I am also very glad you won the race. I am sure Bunny—I mean Mr. Rabbits—must have worked very hard to get you in such good form."

"There's the image, mother," exclaimed Dick. "May I call him up, sir?"

"Rabbits!" called the Head, and Bunny came forward, trying to look glum, but he did not succeed, and he scarcely knew what to do when Mrs. Clare offered him her hand.

"You have turned out a good crew, Mr. Rabbits," she said, smiling at him.

"If you don't mind calling me Bunny, ma'am, I'd like it better. It comes more natural. The boys always call me that."

"Certainly, Bunny. Are you satisfied with their rowing?"

"Why—yes, ma'am. Mind you, there's room for improvement—a big improvement—but they are all there. That last spurt was a grand bit of work. They've done me credit."

"My son has written to me all about you, Bunny. He has told me what pains you have taken. I consider you have done them a great deal of good. Will you please accept that present as a mark of my appreciation."

Then Mrs. Clare handed the astonished Bunny a very handsome gold watch and chain; and when he got home he found his name engraved on the inner case.

"She's the most beautiful and best lady I've ever spoken to," murmured Bundy. "And those youngsters did row! Only wait till I've done with them."

"Tom, I'm in a difficulty," exclaimed Dick.

"Get your mother to plead with the Head for you," said Tom. "I say, what a way she has got with her, old chap. Never made us feel a bit ridiculous—never even praised us. She is splendid. It's a lucky thing for you that you haven't inherited her beautiful face. My eyes, you would have got chaffed! What's your difficulty?"

"I don't want Gowl to speak to her. I don't want her to hear the fellow name."

"Does she know him by sight?"

"No. Only by name. It's rather awkward, but I shall have to give the bully a hint. I believe she has sent for the crew. Come along, old chap."

The youngsters ran up. Gowl was walking towards the spot where the Head stood, and Fox and the cox were with the bully.

"I say, Gowl," exclaimed Dick. "Can I have a word with you in private?"

"No, you can't, you little fool! I don't want to listen to your balderdash."

"Very well. You see that lady with Viva—she is my mother."

"Ha, ha! That over-dressed creature! Ha, ha! Oh, my eyes! Go and kiss her by all means. Give her a pot of rouge for her next birthday present. I'm not going to talk to that little lot."

Another rollicking instalment of this great school story next week, when an enthralling tale of Nelson Lee and Nipper, entitled "The War Factory Mystery," will also appear. Don't Delay—Order to-day!

TOMMY WILL THANK YOU

if you send him a copy of this issue of the "Nelson Lee Library." All you need do is to fill in this address-form, affix a penny stamp, fold the paper, and tie it with string and then post it. If posting to a sailor, simply cross out the words "Company," "Regiment," and "British Expeditionary Force," and write "H.M.S. Benbow"—or whatever the ship happens to be named. Result: a soldier or sailor made happier—and grateful to you.

To

Company

Regiment

British Expeditionary Force.

With best Wishes from

1d.
STAMP.