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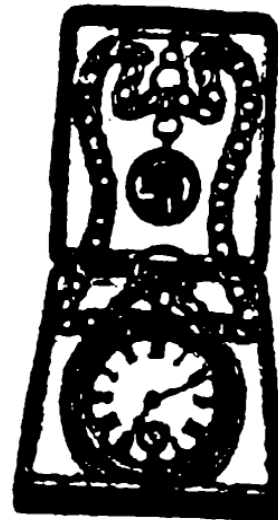


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CHAPTER I.

Nelson Lee in Birmingham—Mr. Lawrence Dare—In Confidence.

THE extensive works of the Haverfield Steel Co., Ltd., hummed and roared with industry. Smoke poured in columns from the three great shafts which raised their blackened summits to the sky.

And this great factory was only one of scores of a similar character which were situated in and about Birmingham. The Haverfield steel works was at present almost solely occupied in turning out munitions of war. Practically every other factory in Birmingham was busy on similar work.

The time was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. A stranger turned in at the gates of the Haverfield factory and stood for a moment looking about him with interest. He was a tall man, and well set up. His clean-shaven face had a quiet, determined look about it which proved that he was a man of strong character. And his eyes, although kindly-looking, were also keen in the extreme.

His quiet tweed suit fitted him to perfection, and when he walked forward again he did so with an ease of movement which proved that he was in perfect condition. He directed his steps towards a low outbuilding above which was a board bearing the words: "The Haverfield Steel Co., Ltd. Office."

The stranger pushed open the glass-topped door and found himself in a large apartment. Through a glass partition he could see other offices at the rear. Just before him several clerks were busy, and a young man faced the new-comer and eyed him questioningly.

"Kindly take my card to Mr. Roger Haverfield," said the stranger.

"I'm sorry sir, but Mr. Haverfield is away to-day."

"H'm! That's rather a bother," was the visitor's comment. "But I presume there is some other responsible gentleman here——"

"There is Mr. Dare, sir."

"And who is Mr. Dare?"

"Our consulting engineer, sir," replied the clerk. "To tell the truth, sir," he added confidentially, "Mr. Dare's the real boss of this factory. Mr. Haverfield himself doesn't do much."

"I see. Then perhaps it is just as well that I should see the gentleman you have named," said the new-comer. "Please take him my card."

The clerk took the slip of pasteboard, glanced at it, and then gave a little start. He at once turned his eyes upon the stranger again, this time with greatly increased interest. Then he turned and entered an inner office. In less than two minutes he was back.

"This way, sir," he exclaimed briskly, and with great respect.

The visitor was ushered into a comfortable apartment. It was occupied by Mr. Lawrence Dare, the consulting engineer of the Haverfield Steel Company. He turned in his chair as the visitor entered, and at once rose to his feet. He was somewhat elderly, but alert and active. Clean-shaven, and with merely a tinge of grey over his temples, he really looked younger than he actually was.

"This is a surprise, Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed cordially. "It is not often that I have such a distinguished visitor as the most renowned private detective in Europe."

The stranger, who was indeed Nelson Lee, smiled.

"I was not aware that I am so famous as all that," he remarked pleasantly. "I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Dare."

The two men shook hands, and Nelson Lee seated himself in a chair which his companion indicated. The one keen look which the great detective had bestowed upon Mr. Dare told him at once that the engineer was a man of very great ability.

Lee was unaware of the fact at the present moment, but Mr. Lawrence Dare was, in effect, the director of the firm's business. Roger Haverfield was actually the chairman of the company, but he allowed the management of the business to rest in Mr. Dare's able hands.

"I am here merely to make one certain inquiry," said Nelson Lee, accepting a cigar. "I am convinced it is only a matter of form, but my business is really vital in its importance. In plain language, Mr. Dare, there have been spies at work in Birmingham, and much valuable information regarding munition secrets has found its way into the hands of the enemy."

Mr. Dare looked very grave.

"Spies!" he repeated. "Upon my soul, Mr. Lee, you don't seriously mean to tell me that you have been directed to this factory——"

"Oh, no," Lee hastened to put in. "So far as I know not one of your employees has been suspected of supplying the Germans with information. The fact remains, however, that certain secrets have undoubtedly leaked out, and the enemy have got to know them. It is imperative that the traitor or traitors should be brought to justice without delay. I have been instructed to make a round of the munition factories in this town in order to get at the truth. I have already been engaged on the work for several days."

"And have your inquiries borne fruit?"

"No; so far I have drawn a blank," replied the detective.

"Well, I assure you, Mr. Lee, that you are destined to draw another blank in this particular establishment," said the consulting engineer gravely. "I will vouch for the patriotism of every employee of the Haverfield Company. You will not find a single man in this factory who could possibly be a traitor."

"I do not intend to go deeply into this business at present," said Nelson Lee. "To tell you the honest truth, I am only making my inquiries un-

officially. A friend of mine, who holds a responsible position in the Government, learned that I was visiting Birmingham, and he asked me to make a few casual inquiries."

"That's rather like obtaining your services on the cheap, isn't it?" smiled Mr. Dare.

"Well, I suppose it is, in a way," Lee replied, smiling also. "But I have no objection to devoting a little of my time to the interests of my country. You may be sure that the Government is taking adequate steps to discover the identity of the traitor. But my official friend was aware that a casual inquiry sometimes bears more fruit than a searching investigation."

Mr. Dare nodded.

"Especially when those casual inquiries are carried out by such an able man as yourself?" he suggested. "Well, Mr. Lee, you are at liberty to do just whatever you please in this factory. But I give you my word you will be simply wasting your time. I have no objection at all to you making a tour of the works straight away."

"Perhaps Mr. Haverfield would object?" Lee asked.

The other frowned.

"No. I don't think Mr. Haverfield would object," he replied. "It is quite possible, however, that he would make a fuss. I am afraid that my employer is not exactly an obliging man."

Nelson Lee could see at once that his reference to Mr. Haverfield had not struck a pleasant chord in his companion's mind. The detective was rather surprised at this, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"It is no affair of mine," he observed, "but I trust there is no discord between yourself and Mr. Haverfield. The young gentleman who ushered me into this office remarked that you were the actual manager. He gave me to understand that Mr. Haverfield was something of a figure-head."

Lawrence Dare smiled.

"Young Sims is observant," he remarked. "To tell the truth, Mr. Lee, my employer is a figure-head, and nothing more. It is not my intention to sing my own praises, but I verily believe that if I left this business it would decline rapidly. There is no bombast in that statement; I am merely stating a fact. Mr. Haverfield is a fairly young man, and he is possessed of no real business ability. In a gradual kind of way all the firm's responsibilities have fallen upon my shoulders."

"And you are content to bear the weight?"

"Oh, yes," was Mr. Dare's reply. "I have been with this firm, Mr. Lee, for over twenty years, and I believe it would break my heart to leave it now. In a way, I regard it as my charge to see that everything is kept up to the mark. Old Mr. Haverfield always told me that I was part and parcel of the factory, and I verily believe he spoke the truth."

"I was not aware that there was a senior Mr. Haverfield."

"There is not. I was referring to Roger's father—old Mr. Ernest Haverfield," said Mr. Dare. "He died just over a year ago, and left everything to his only son. He had founded this business in his youth, and by sheer pluck and business acumen he built it up and up. Ah, a fine man, Mr. Lee! It is a pity that his son——"

The engineer paused, and shrugged his shoulders.

"But, really, we are straying from our subject." He smiled. "I am afraid I weary you with my sentimentality."

"Not at all. I am exceedingly interested," Lee assured his companion. "Indeed, you have said so much that I should like to hear more. From a certain sadness in your tone, I gather that Mr. Roger Haverfield is not a worthy successor?"

"Roger is, I am afraid, dissolute and careless. His father handed the business over to him four years ago, and during that time the firm went down rapidly," answered the engineer, laying back in his chair and half closing his eyes. "At first I said nothing; it was not my business to interfere. But when the old man died, I quietly took the reins in my own hands, and did my utmost to get things back to their former state of prosperity. But it was a hopeless task; my employer drained the firm's resources continually, in order to lead a fast life. Of course, Mr. Lee," he added suddenly, "I am speaking to you now in absolute confidence."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am aware of that," he said quietly. "And I think my reputation, such as it is, will assure you that I will respect your confidence. I am sorry to hear that your firm has declined so much, Mr. Dare. I was under the impression that the Haverfield Steel Company was one of the most flourishing concerns in Birmingham."

"At present we are working at full pressure," replied Mr. Dare slowly. "Some little time ago Roger obtained a great amount of fresh capital. He had allowed matters to get from bad to worse, and at last, in order to avoid a crash, he made arrangements with several rich men in London, and a large sum of money was raised. To tell the truth, Roger Haverfield formed a kind of combine, and the business was placed on an entirely new footing. I disliked the arrangement exceedingly, but what could I do? After all, I am only a paid employee—I am only the firm's consulting engineer. I suppose, in a way, I also manage and direct the business, but that is only because Roger is incapable of managing it himself."

There was a certain sadness in Mr. Dare's tone which did not escape Nelson Lee. The great detective was very interested, and was anxious to hear more.

"You spoke of a combine?" he hinted.

"Oh, yes. I am afraid, however, I cannot speak with full knowledge on that subject. Mr. Haverfield did not consult me at all regarding the fresh capital he obtained, and I have been left to draw my own conclusions. Roger has acted foolishly, but it is not my place to criticise him; indeed, he will not suffer criticism. Like most men who are of a vain and overbearing disposition, he imagines his own judgment to be vastly better than anyone else's."

"You were, in fact, slighted?" asked Lee.

Lawrence Dare knocked the ash from his cigar and smiled.

"That has been quite an every-day occurrence of late months," he answered; "but for the sake of the old firm I suffer the indignity in silence. It is somewhat galling to practically control a business, and yet know that my employer places very little value on my services. But, as I said, for the sake of his dead father, I am content to let things go on as they are. I should be very sorry to sever my connection with the Haverfield Company now. I have grown to regard it as my own especial charge; I look upon it as my duty to stick by the firm loyally."

Nelson Lee knew that he was in the presence of a particularly ill-used man. He had gathered, by this time, that Mr. Dare was in the unenviable position of being in literal control of the whole business, and yet lacking the confidence of his employer. Yet, for the sake of the past, he was content to suffer the indignity without protest.

"From whom did Mr. Haverfield obtain his fresh capital?" asked Lee.

"Ah, that is more than I can say," exclaimed Lawrence Dare gravely. "But I know this much, Mr. Lee—this combine is composed of thoroughly unscrupulous men, and the money which has been placed at Roger's disposal

is far from being pure. I don't know the actual facts, but I am convinced that there has been grim, underhand work. There are ten or a dozen men now associated with Roger, and they care nothing for the fair name of the firm. They are out to make money, and are willing to descend to any shady deal in order to do so."

"But surely Haverfield himself does not countenance such methods?"

"Roger Haverfield has become an absolute blackguard of late years," replied Mr. Dare grimly. "You can understand why my position is so difficult, and why I am not exactly happy in my work. These men--these associates--are all London financiers, and they are not the type of men old Mr. Haverfield would have tolerated for a moment. The fact is, the business had been allowed to get into such a precarious position that Roger was forced to do something of the kind in order to save it from utter destruction. Apparently, the firm is now prosperous, but I am far from being contented. This great change has been a sad one to me."

Mr. Dare shook himself, and sat upright.

"But, good gracious! Why am I telling you all this?" he went on smilingly. "I am wasting your valuable time and my own, Mr. Lee. But, somehow, I am feeling all the better for having unburdened myself to you. A man must speak out now and again, and it is your misfortune that you should have been compelled to be the hearer of my woes."

The two men laughed, and Nelson Lee produced a cigar case. Although he had only known his companion for such a short time he took to him immensely. And the same applied to Mr. Dare. Purely in the ordinary course of conversation he had worked round to quite a confidential chat with Nelson Lee. And the great detective could understand the engineer's state of mind exactly.

Mr. Dare was a clever man; an exceedingly able man. If Roger Haverfield had only taken Lawrence Dare's advice all along the status of the firm would have been a very different one. There would have been no necessity to instal fresh capital, and the house of Haverfield would have continued to flourish as of old. At present it was only flourishing because it was working at full pressure on munitions, and because questionable capital had saved it from ruin.

And Lawrence Dare, who had been with the firm for twenty years, having spent practically his whole life for the sake of the firm, could not bring himself to the point of leaving. He probably knew as well as anybody else that if he did choose to leave he would be able to obtain a vastly superior position elsewhere. But Dare was of the old school, and was loyal to the Haverfield Company.

"Well, to change the subject," exclaimed Nelson Lee, "I have heard that you are something of an inventor, Mr. Dare. That you are, in fact, responsible for several engineering patents which are at present controlled by this company."

Mr. Dare nodded.

"I have thought out one or two small ideas, certainly," he replied modestly. "But I don't consider that I have invented anything really important. I am just finishing designs, however--"

He paused and looked at Lee quickly.

"For what?" asked the detective.

Lawrence Dare laughed.

"As a matter of fact, I had intended telling nobody of my new invention until I had the plans actually complete. But your personality, Mr. Lee, is so extraordinarily magnetic that I feel quite anxious to tell you all about it."

He bent forward.

"For over a year," he continued, "I have been devoting my attention to a new engine for use in submarines. My plans are on the point of completion, and I am filled with the very highest hopes. I know positively that when a full-sized engine is constructed it will entirely revolutionize submarine warfare; and will place the British undersea boats high above those of any other nation. I am very anxious to press the matter on with all speed, and I am very optimistic."

"I sincerely trust you will be successful."

Mr. Dare went on to state that it was his intention to submit the plans to Haverfield, and give the company the first option of constructing the new engine.

"I am not too old to have a very high ambition," smiled Mr. Dare. "It is my ambition, Mr. Lee, to sell my patents to the Haverfield Steel Company, and to restore the firm to its former state of clean prosperity. I wish to see all these new associates of Roger's bought completely out; and before long I'm going to propose that Roger should accept me as a junior partner. Once a partner I will soon make a great alteration, and Roger will never regret the move."

"But, surely, knowing Haverfield's character as you do, you are not anxious to become closely associated with such a man?"

Lawrence Dare nodded slowly.

"My dear Mr. Lee, Roger is the son of the best friend I ever had in this world," he said quietly. "Is it not natural I should take the keenest of interest in him? Is it not natural that I should desire to drag him from the questionable road which he has chosen? The boy is all right in the main; he has chosen bad business companions, that is all. I am very hopeful of pulling him up before it is too late."

"And you are relying, to a certain degree, on this new invention of yours to do it?"

"Exactly. But I am thinking of my country as well," said Mr. Dare, with shining eyes. "By Jove, Mr. Lee, I am impatient to see my new engine fitted to every submarine in the British Navy. The Germans would give millions for my invention, but they will never obtain it. Instead, they will receive the biggest surprise of the war before long."

Nelson Lee remained with the consulting engineer for some little time longer, and then the great detective took his departure. He had enjoyed his chat immensely, and already regarded Mr. Dare as quite an old friend. It was strange how soon the pair had taken to one another.

Lee was rather doubtful as to the fulfilment of the engineer's ambition. From what he had heard of Roger Haverfield, it did not seem likely that the latter would consent to be "dragged from the questionable road."

But the detective fully understood Mr. Dare's attitude. Nearly all his life he had been associated with the Haverfield Steel Company, and had been the closest friend of Roger's father. To find, after the old man's death, that the son had turned out badly was a great shock. And it was quite natural that Mr. Dare should wish to bring about an alteration. He had the interest of the firm in his very soul, and all personal matters were drowned. It was the firm that mattered.

As Nelson Lee left the steel works yard he wondered when he would see Mr. Dare again. And he had no idea that his next meeting with the engineer would be a far more dramatic one than this. It would come about, moreover, before many days had passed.

CHAPTER II.

Lawrence Dare at Home—Eileen—An Offer and a Protest—A Shock.

LAWRENCE DARE stood before the fireplace in the drawing-room of his private house. It was fairly late in the evening, and the French windows, wide open, allowed the July breezes to waft refreshingly into the room. It was still daylight, and the glow of the sunset caused the apartment to look singularly peaceful and pleasant.

Mr. Dare was in high good humour.

There was a smile round the corners of his lips, and his eyes were twinkling. He had only just returned from the office, and he was now waiting for his daughter to return from a neighbour's house.

Dare was fairly rich. His income was substantial, and his home consequently luxurious. Not that there was any sign of extravagance; on the contrary, the engineer lived quietly and unpretentiously.

It was just a fortnight after Dare's conversation with Nelson Lee. Strictly speaking, there was really no necessity for Lawrence Dare to be actively employed. He had ample means on which to retire.

But to retire would mean to leave the Haverfield Company in the lurch. Possibly—indeed certainly—Roger Haverfield did not value his engineer's abilities at their correct estimate, and would have been ready to accept Dare's resignation.

But Mr. Dare himself was far-seeing and shrewd. He knew, even if Roger did not, that if he left the firm now it would very soon collapse. In thinking this, Dare was in no way vain. He knew the business to its very core. He had worked with the firm until he had become part and parcel of it. And it was only such a man who could successfully manage it.

Every employee almost loved Dare; every employee looked upon him as "the governor." If Dare left, and a new man were installed, half the employees would leave the firm in the lurch. That was a well-known fact; although Roger Haverfield himself scoffed at it as sentimental nonsense. But it was strictly true.

The vast majority of the older hands had always worked under the eye of Lawrence Dare, and it was only for his sake that they stood loyally by the firm. There was not a man nor boy who did not loathe Roger—and if Dare went they would take sheer delight in leaving with him.

Mr. Dare himself disliked Roger exceedingly. But as he had told Nelson Lee, he did not allow personal feelings to interfere in business matters.

To-night Dare was in the best of tempers, and he turned with a smile of pleasure as he heard a light step on the terrace outside the French windows. The next moment a graceful figure appeared, and Dare stepped forward.

"What does this mean, Eileen?" he asked with mock sternness. "Allowing your old dad to return to find the house empty?"

"Oh, father, I'm awfully sorry," laughed the girl, running forward and kissing him. "I simply raced home when I found out what the time was! Why, you are looking quite merry, dad."

The girl took his two hands, and stood a little back from him, regarding him with big, questioning eyes.

Eileen Dare was not quite twenty, and she was a small, dainty girl. Her figure was perfect, and many people had often told Dare in confidence that his daughter was one of the prettiest girls in the whole of England. And, undoubtedly, there was a great amount of truth in that statement. Eileen was indeed beautiful. Her deep brown eyes, now twinkling with roguish merriment, were full of wonderful charm. They could be grave, too, and were as frank and open as the day. There was something singularly beau-

tiful about Eileen's eyes, and even her father had never been able to fully define the many various qualities which they possessed. They were eyes which were at once charming and extremely keen.

Her hair was dark and slightly curly, little wisps of it straying in untidy curls over her eyes and forehead.

Her complexion was delicate and yet healthy to a degree. She possessed a sweet little mouth, with rich, delicately-formed lips. Yet, although her mouth was so exquisitely curved, it could be seen that there was something very resolute about it. When Eileen desired she could set her lips very sternly, and it was on those occasions that her courageous, determined nature showed itself. As for her teeth, well, her father had often declared that they were just like a set of pearls.

Eileen's qualities did not merely consist of beauty and daintiness. She was an extremely athletic girl, and in consequence her limbs were lithe and supple, and she walked with a graceful ease which very few girls could lay claim to. As a runner Eileen had practically no equal.

She could ride, she could swim, she could shoot—in fact, there were very few accomplishments which Eileen did not possess. She drove her own little motor-car with extraordinary skill, and was no mean mechanic, into the bargain; on many an occasion she had made roadside repairs which an experienced chauffeur might have hesitated to attempt.

Father and daughter were very closely attached to one another. Lawrence Dare was so proud of his daughter that sometimes he went down on his knees and thanked Heaven that he had been blessed with such a child.

No man on earth could wish for a more dutiful daughter than Eileen. Her mother was dead—had been dead so long that the girl could scarcely remember her—and the love of these two was wholly lavished upon one another. Many people had often wondered why Eileen was not engaged. Certainly she could have made her pick from scores of admirers. But the girl had never cherished any thoughts of marriage. Her love was for her father and her interests were mainly centred upon her home.

Eileen liked men well enough. She was essentially feminine, but was at her ease in any company. There was nothing false about Eileen; and she was just a frank, delightful English girl, without a trace of falseness in her nature, and, notwithstanding her superb athletic qualities, there was nothing mannish in her manner or speech or behaviour. Her chief characteristic, in fact, was her naive, delightful girlishness.

She stood just inside the French windows, holding her father's hands, and then nestled up close to him, laying her head against his shoulder.

"You're home a little earlier this evening, dad," she exclaimed. "And that horrid worried look isn't in your eyes; that expression of concern which I have seen so often lately."

Mr. Dare kissed her.

"No, little girl, I am feeling strangely light-hearted this evening," he replied. "At last the work of years is finished. The plans of my new invention are completed to the last detail."

Eileen clapped her dainty little hands.

"Oh, dad, I am so pleased," she cried joyously. "I suppose you are going to submit them to the Government?"

"Yes, dear," he said. "And then, if my hopes are realised, it will be comparatively soon when our submarines will outmatch those of any other country. To-morrow morning I shall interview Roger Haverfield——"

He paused as Eileen frowned again.

"What is it, darling?" he asked.

"That man! Oh, dad, I don't trust him!" exclaimed the girl gravely. "We know how wicked he is, and it seems a terrible thing to show him your plans, and to place yourself in his power."

Lawrence Dare laughed softly.

"Why, Eileen, you don't think your old father would do anything so rash as that?" he asked. "Now you mustn't worry yourself in business matters. I shall not place myself in Roger's power, you may be sure of that. But the old firm—the old firm must have first chance."

"You always think of the firm, dad."

"And why not? Somehow, I look upon the Haverfield Steel Company as a very old friend. For nearly twenty years I worked by the side of one of the finest men God ever made; the truest friend a man could have. Roger's father did more for me than you know of, Eileen; and for his sake I must stand by the firm until the end."

"It is noble of you, dad, and I suppose it is right," said Eileen slowly. "Oh, it seems such a pity that Roger should have turned out as he has done. It wouldn't matter so much if he were alone; I believe you could influence him. But he is in close connection with many London financiers who are all bad men. I am afraid that things will never be right until the firm is as it used to be."

Mr. Dare nodded.

"You speak very shrewdly, Eileen," he replied. "But it is with my invention that I wish to bring about the change we so much desire. These financiers—these questionable men with whom Roger is mixed—must be bought completely out. And I have the most optimistic hopes that all will yet come right. It is my most cherished desire that the Haverfield Steel Company should retain its name for fair and honest dealing in Birmingham. This firm, I fear, is aiming at making money by unscrupulous and trick methods. We must put a stop to that almost before it starts."

Mr. Dare did not worry his daughter with business matters for long. Very soon the girl sat down at the piano, and played and sang to him, and then one or two friends dropped in, and the evening passed pleasantly and cheerful. The home life of Lawrence Dare and his daughter was really very happy, and it was only on very rare occasions that he broached any subject connected with business.

The following morning Dare went to his office at the usual time, and his step was springy as he walked the distance. The July day was perfect, and everything seemed wonderfully bright. That morning, too, news had come of British victories on land and sea. In consequence Mr. Dare had every reason to be in a cheerful mood.

He had already made a fixed resolve. A clever man never over-estimates his own achievements, and he knew exactly how valuable his new engine was. He knew that once the Government saw the plans—once the Admiralty experts went closely into the matter—they would be only too anxious and willing to give the Haverfield Company a tremendous contract for the new engine.

Dare had decided upon what figure he would name. He was aware that many firms in Birmingham would offer him a fabulous price for the invention, in addition to handsome royalties. But Mr. Dare had resolved upon a great sacrifice. For the sake of the old firm he would allow the Haverfield Company to absolutely control the new engine at a ridiculously low figure. Dare was far-seeing, and he told himself that he would be able to gain his real reward in the future.

As he had expected, Roger Haverfield did not turn up to his office until the morning was well advanced. As a matter of fact, Haverfield had grown

so accustomed to leaving the control of the business in Dare's hands that he really took unlimited advantage over his consulting engineer. He neglected work himself, knowing full well that Dare would attend to it with far greater ability.

Haverfield's private office adjoined Lawrence Dare's, but was much more luxurious in every respect. On this particular morning he came in, and it was obvious to most of those who saw him that he had been indulging in recent dissipation.

Roger was a comparatively young man, certainly not more than thirty-three. But his eyes were rather sunken, his complexion unhealthy, and his temper unnaturally sharp. A fairly big man, he was inclined to be fleshy. He always treated Dare with respect, although every other employee had many times felt the lash of his tongue.

He knew better, however, than to upset Dare. Haverfield was well aware that the engineer was almost invaluable, and he had quite sufficient sense to realise that it would be an absurd blunder to make an enemy of Dare. Roger had often laughed to himself in derision at Dare's sentimental loyalty. He frequently called the engineer an old fool—not to his face—for remaining with the firm when he could do much better for himself elsewhere. But since he had remained, and seemed like to remain, Haverfield was perfectly willing to let matters go on.

Dare had told his employer absolutely nothing with regard to his invention; he wished to spring it on Haverfield as a surprise. And with this pleasant object to view the engineer entered Roger's office, and found the latter going through a pile of correspondence.

"Morning, Dare," exclaimed Haverfield cheerfully. "Everything going O.K.? I have been away for a bit, but I suppose you've been looking after things, eh?"

"I have been conducting the business to the best of my ability," replied Dare, without cordiality. "It would be much better, in every respect, however, if you could see your way clear to attend the office more regularly. To be successful it is almost essential that the head of the firm should—"

Haverfield frowned somewhat.

"No lectures, Dare," exclaimed Haverfield curtly. "You will allow me to attend to my own affairs in my own way. I have been to London recently for the purpose of settling a big contract."

"I am glad to hear that," said the other. "I hope, moreover, that another contract will be signed and settled before very long. I am here this morning, Mr. Haverfield, to lay a proposal before you, which, I venture to think, will ultimately lead to a great triumph for the company."

Haverfield looked curious.

"What's the idea, Dare?" he asked. "It isn't like you to make such a statement unless you have a very excellent foundation. What is it—one of your inventions?"

Without further ado Mr. Dare produced the intricate plans and designs and laid them before his employer. He then proceeded to explain in detail exactly what the invention was, how it could be constructed, and how immeasurably valuable it would prove to the British Navy. He knew quite well that for all his careful explanation it would be utterly impossible for Roger to memorise everything. He was taking no risks in going so thoroughly into the matter. Without the plans themselves Haverfield would be helpless. He would know exactly what the invention consisted of but would be unable to profit by his knowledge.

As Roger listened to the engineer's discussion he grew intensely interested and strangely excited. Having been trained in engineering himself he knew exactly what it all meant, and could appreciate the untold value of

the new engine. And the designs were of such a nature that it was perfectly obvious that the completed machinery would be an absolute success. There was no chance of Dare's theories going wrong in practice. The value of the invention was perfectly apparent.

As the time went on Haverfield's eyes gleamed, and he breathed faster. Wonderful possibilities unravelled themselves before his mind's eye. He could see the Haverfield Steel Company enlarging; he could see the new works being erected; he could see the firm attaining a position of permanence in Birmingham. And it was no idle dream. It was all capable of actual accomplishment. With the sole command of Dare's invention the firm would be able to prosper in leaps and bounds.

"I think I have made everything perfectly clear," Dare concluded at last. "I have explained every detail, and your own common sense, Mr. Haverfield, will tell you that I have exaggerated nothing. I have been working on this thing for five solid years; I have had many disappointments, but at last my success is even greater than I ever hoped for. At times I almost despaired, but I persevered and resolved not to produce my designs until I was confident that victory was assured.

"It's splendid," exclaimed Haverfield tensely. "It's wonderful!"

"I think you will readily understand that if I were to offer this invention to the Government they would snap at it instantly," Dare proceeded. "They would pay me any price I chose to name; they would give me orders for great numbers of the engine. But I have no intention of approaching the Government personally. It is my wish that the firm should transact all the business."

"By George, you mean that——"

"I mean that you shall have the first offer, Mr. Haverfield," said Dare quietly. "I want to sell my invention to you, so that the firm will benefit and obtain the credit. It is my wish that the Haverfield Steel Company should reap the fruits of my labours."

Haverfield's eyes narrowed.

"In a way, it is only right that you should do this, Dare," he said bluntly. "You are the firm's consulting engineer, and I presume you have worked upon this invention in the firm's time. Therefore, strictly speaking, the invention belongs to the firm."

Mr. Dare flushed.

"That is surely a singular way of looking at things, isn't it?" he asked. "It is grossly unfair for you to lay claim to having even the slightest rights to the result of my labours. I may add that I never spent one moment of the firm's time upon the work——"

"I'm sorry, Dare, I apologise," interjected Haverfield, hastily. "Of course, what you say is quite right. Well, what do you propose? This business is of such magnitude that I can scarcely think clearly. I must hold a consultation with my London colleagues——"

"No, I don't want to bring those gentlemen into this matter," said Dare disapprovingly.

And he went on to state the terms he had decided upon. It was a large figure, but comparatively small when the stupendous issues were considered. It was, indeed, absurdly low, and Dare had only named it because he had the interest of the firm at heart, and wished to bring about the much desired change.

Haverfield at once lay back in his chair and laughed unpleasantly.

"Absurd," he exclaimed. "Utterly absurd, Dare!"

"You mean, I presume, that I have altogether underestimated——"

"On the contrary, I mean that you have considerably overestimated the value of your invention," Roger said curtly. "Why, you must be insane

to think that we can pay such a sum as that—and such royalties, too! The firm does not possess that capital——”

“You seem to overlook the point,” interrupted the engineer quietly, “that I expressly stated that in the contract would be a provision which would enable you to sell the first consignment of engines to the Government before I received a penny. Your profits will then be so enormous that you will be well able to afford the sum I have named. I don’t think you fully grasp the fact that there are millions in this invention. I am not exaggerating.”

Haverfield’s lip curled.

“My dear man, you are exaggerating to a preposterous degree!” he said sneeringly. “Why, if you took your designs to the Government, they wouldn’t pay you anything like the sum you mentioned!”

Mr. Dare’s eyes flashed.

“I quite agree with you,” he said calmly. “They wouldn’t pay me anything like the price. To be exact, Mr. Haverfield, the Government would pay me treble—even more than treble! You are forcing me to become angry, and I may tell you now that I won’t sell my invention for a farthing less! I wish the firm to benefit, but if you take up this attitude, there is no other course for me but to approach the Government without delay!”

Dare spoke in curt, cutting tones. He was not only angry, but greatly disappointed. He had expected Haverfield to wring his hand and declare that he was too generous; and this, instead, had happened! Haverfield had told him that his invention was worth comparatively little. Lawrence Dare’s dignity was sorely tried and his temper sharpened.

As for Haverfield, he was apparently calm, but inwardly he was in a complete turmoil. His cunning had got the better of his discretion. He was thinking only of himself, and he was wondering how he could obtain his engineer’s valuable secret to his own advantage. He had thought, by ridiculing the sum Dare had named, to make the engineer instantly lower it. Apparently, however, the ruse was not successful. Haverfield saw everything as clear as daylight. He saw that the firm would be able to prosper tremendously by the fruits of Dare’s brain, and it was despicable of him to a degree to haggle when Dare had named such advantageous terms. He attempted now to smooth the troubled waters.

“Look here, Dare! You mustn’t hurry me!” he exclaimed. “This is such a huge scheme that it wants a deal of thinking over. I’ll consider the whole matter to-day, and let you know my decision one way or the other to-morrow morning.”

Dare accepted the dismissal with scarcely another word. He was greatly annoyed. He had anticipated such a very different interview. Instead of showing gratitude and pleasure, Haverfield had displayed low cunning. In a matter such as this, a final decision should have been arrived at instantly. The very future of the firm depended upon it. Frankly speaking, millions were at stake—and yet Roger Haverfield had raised objections!

Dare left his employer’s private office, taking the plans with him, and at once locked them up in the safe which was set into the wall of his own sanctum. Then he proceeded with the firm’s usual business, with a black frown and with bitter resentment in his heart. He had approached Haverfield with nothing but generosity within him, and he had met with a cruel rebuff.

It would have made many men furious; it would have caused many men to go elsewhere without hesitation. But Lawrence Dare waited. For the sake of his dead friend, for the sake of Roger’s father, he would not act harshly.

But the next morning a stunning shock awaited Dare.

When he arrived at his office, punctual to a minute as usual, an amazing fact was made known to him. He entered his sanctum, pulled the blinds up, glanced casually round, and his eyes rested upon the safe.

The door stood wide open, having obviously been forced by scientific means, and the safe itself was empty!

With a hoarse cry, Dare dashed forward. But one frantic glance was enough, was sufficient to tell him the ghastly truth. The plans of his precious invention had been stolen!

CHAPTER III.

An Urgent Wire—On the Scene—Eileen Dare's Shrewdness.

THE Bradshaw, Nipper! Rout it out, and look up the first available train to Birmingham!"

Nelson Lee spoke briskly, and waved his hand to Nipper as he glanced at a pink telegraph-form which was in his hand.

"Why, what's the wheeze, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly. "Are we off on a new case—"

"Look up that train, young 'un, and don't talk! We may only just have time to get to the station."

But an inspection of Bradshaw, however, revealed the fact that the next train to Birmingham left Euston in just under an hour. Therefore there was plenty of time and to spare before a start was necessary.

"That will do quite well, Nipper," remarked Nelson Lee. "We shall arrive just after noon, and will be on the spot in good time."

Lee handed the telegram to Nipper, who at once read it:

"Nelson Lee, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.—Please take first train Birmingham. Appalling robbery. Need your help most urgently. Matter vital. Please wire at once.—LAWRENCE DARE."

"H'm! Seems pretty important, guv'nor," commented Nipper.

"I have talked with Mr. Dare, and I like the man immensely," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think he would send me a wire couched in these terms unless there was something of very singular urgency amiss."

The great detective's preparations were few, and Nipper's merely consisted of a brisk wash and the donning of his straw hat. The pair arrived at Euston in good time—it was still comparatively early in the forenoon—and started for Birmingham with the conviction that something was decidedly wrong in the great manufacturing town.

Upon arrival, they drove straight to the Haverfield Steel Company's offices, and the presence of a police-constable in the yard told Lee that the trouble was fairly serious.

Mr. Lawrence Dare was in his own office, talking to Inspector Davis, of the Birmingham Police—a stolid, rather phlegmatic man of middle age. He was looking serious and self-important. Mr. Dare at once greeted Nelson Lee with cordiality, but Lee could see that the engineer was greatly upset.

"I am nearly off my head with worry, Mr. Lee," he said brokenly. "I was telling you during your previous visit, I think, that I had nearly completed plans of a new invention I was engaged upon?"

"That is so," was the detective's reply.

"Two days ago I completed the designs, and they were locked in this

safe," went on Dare, indicating the safe set in the wall. "This morning, Mr. Lee, I discovered the safe broken open and the plans missing. I hope you will forgive me for wiring you so urgently, but you can have no conception of the vital importance of those plans. Without exaggeration, I can safely say that millions are at stake."

"Dear me! I did not imagine things were so bad! Have you any suspicion as to the possible culprit?" asked the detective. "What I mean to say is, do you know of anybody who was aware of the presence of the designs in your safe, and who would benefit by their possession?"

Lawrence Dale hesitated, and glanced at the inspector.

"I would prefer to talk to you in private, Mr. Lee," he said slowly.

Nelson Lee nodded quietly and turned to the inspector. While he was having a few words with the local police official, he gazed searchingly at the rather small safe. It was quite an ordinary affair, and it had apparently been forced open by means of an oxy-acetylene apparatus. A portion of the door was completely melted away, and the paintwork was blistered and blackened.

He heard somebody enter the room, but did not look round. Then a harsh voice, unknown to him, uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Who is this man, inspector?" exclaimed the voice.

"Oh, this gentleman, sir?" said Inspector Davis. "He is Mr. Nelson Lee, the well-known private investigator, of London. He has come down——"

But Roger Haverfield interrupted the police officer, and strode across the room with sharp, jerky strides. He was obviously in a temper. Nelson Lee turned, somewhat surprised by Haverfield's tone, and faced the other.

"You are Lee, the detective?" demanded Roger curtly.

"Is that question really necessary?" asked Lee, with delightful smoothness. "I was under the impression that Inspector Davis had just mentioned my name."

Haverfield frowned furiously.

"Get out!" he exclaimed. "It isn't my habit to be impolite——"

"You astonish me," interjected the detective mildly.

"Get out, I say! The police are investigating this robbery, and I won't have a confounded private detective on my premises!" roared Haverfield. "I know your sort! You interfering busybody——"

"You will oblige me by curbing your insolent tongue," said Lee quietly. "I wasn't aware that it was your privilege to insult Mr. Dare's visitors, and I think I have remained passive long enough. Allow me to tell you, sir, that your manners are no more refined than your voice."

There was something icily cutting in the detective's tones, and the local inspector smiled into his moustache. Haverfield turned purple with fury.

"If you don't get off these premises in two minutes——"

"If I may be allowed to interrupt again," said Lee serenely, "I think it is hardly in your province to order me about. I am here at the express invitation of Mr. Lawrence Dare, and I will only go if he requests me to do so. I was under the impression that this was Mr. Dare's office, and therefore private."

"Mr. Lee is quite correct," said Dare. "I wired for him to come, Haverfield, and I wish him to remain. And really I am at a loss to understand your anger. I am acquainted with Mr. Lee personally, and know him to be a gentleman of absolute honour. If any man can unravel this mystery, it is he."

Roger Haverfield swore under his breath.

"Of course," he said harshly, "if you choose to place your affairs in the hands of this man, I have nothing to say. You will understand, however,

Dare, that I strongly disapprove of your questionable friend's presence in this building!"

Haverfield glared at Lee, and then withdrew. Inspector Davis had already left the room a moment before, and the detective and Nipper and Lawrence Dare were alone.

"Your employer is scarcely complimentary," observed Nelson Lee. "My name appeared to give him quite a shock. And there is a rather significant conclusion to be drawn from his desire to get rid of me."

Dare looked at his companion keenly.

"You guess, then——"

"My dear sir, I never guess," interrupted Lee. "At least, it is an unwise proceeding. Guessing is rather apt to lead one on a wrong trail. Perhaps you will tell me exactly what has happened here."

Mr. Dare proceeded to do so without further delay. He related to Nelson Lee how he had interviewed Roger Haverfield, and how unsatisfactorily that interview had terminated.

"This morning," continued the engineer, "I made the discovery which you now see. The safe was broken open and the plans missing, in addition to a small amount of cash and some shares. It is obvious that the burglar entered by the window, and forced open the safe by means of a special apparatus."

"So I observe. The metal was melted by means of a powerful oxy-acetylene flame," remarked Lee. "You may remember, Mr. Dare, that I was down here a short time ago in connection with a spy rumour. These plans of yours would surely be of tremendous value to the Germans. Do you think it possible——"

"No; I don't!" said Dare positively. "I am convinced that enemy spies had nothing to do with this affair. In fact, Mr. Lee, I have already drawn my conclusions, and I am at a complete loss. I am stunned. Terrible as it seems, I suspect my employer, Roger Haverfield, of having been concerned in the robbery."

Lee nodded thoughtfully.

"Such a theory is, of course, startling, but not altogether improbable," he said. "Haverfield is unscrupulous, as you have already told me, and under certain circumstances he might have acted upon a sudden scoundrelly impulse. If he did, indeed, do so, then he is relying upon his position to render him immune from suspicion. Who would dream of suspecting the head of the firm of committing the robbery? On the face of it, the thing is absurd. But, as you say, there may be something in the theory."

"Haverfield believes that the crime can never be brought home to him," went on Dare, speaking in low tones. "I hope to Heaven I am wrong, Mr. Lee, and that you will be able to open up a new line of inquiry. But it seems to me that Haverfield is counting upon his position to render him safe. And I think it will be almost impossible to prove anything against him. He is a cunning man, and he has many unscrupulous colleagues at his back. Alone, I don't think he would have done it; I am convinced he has been persuaded into taking the terrible step. Of course, it is almost certain that my employer did not commit the robbery in person. But a certain smug contentment on his face this morning made me instantly suspicious. You see, if he has actually got the designs he can make good use of them, and I shall be defrauded. My daughter is absolutely certain that Haverfield is responsible——"

Dare ceased speaking as the door suddenly opened. Both men looked round, and they saw a slight, girlish figure framed in the doorway. Eileen

Dare hesitated for a moment, and then stepped forward with outstretched hand and gravely concerned eyes.

"How do you do, Mr. Lee?" she said quietly. "I don't need an introduction, for I have seen your photograph too often to be mistaken. I didn't think you'd be here quite so soon, or perhaps I shouldn't have come."

"Really, that is rather unkind!" protested Lee, as he took her little hand.

"Oh, I didn't mean it in that way," laughed Eileen quickly. "But, you see, I had come round to make a few investigations. Now that you are here, however, I am afraid my own efforts would appear rather out-of-place."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"So you were about to make investigations?" he exclaimed amusedly. "I'm afraid, Miss Dare, that detective-work is scarcely in your line. But, of course, you are naturally very anxious for your father to recover his valuable property."

"I am so anxious that it was impossible for me to remain at home," said Eileen quietly. "You won't send me away, will you?"

The question was put so naively that Nelson Lee could do nothing but laugh and assure Eileen that to send her away was the very last thought in his mind. The detective was some moments before he took his eyes off the engineer's daughter. He had seen many pretty girls during his career, but Eileen was so different from everybody else that he was forced to stare almost to a point of rudeness. Nipper, the young rascal, was gazing at the girl with open admiration which he made no attempt to conceal.

Eileen quietly walked over to the safe while the others went on talking. After a few more minutes had elapsed Lee decided to get to work. He had learned all the facts, and was aware of Mr. Dare's suspicions. As he turned away from the engineer a slight smile crossed his face.

Eileen was examining the safe with a business-like precision and with a keen thoroughness which could not be mistaken. Nipper, over by the window, was watching her in wrapt attention.

"Well," said Lee smoothly, "what is the idea of this, Nipper? I shall have to find you something to do——"

"Oh! Sorry, guv'nor!" exclaimed Nipper, starting round. "I was just watching Miss Dare, you know. Blessed if she isn't going to work just like you do, sir!"

Eileen, indeed, was so absorbed in her self-imposed task that she did not hear the remarks concerning her. She had brought a powerful magnifying lens with her, and she was now closely scrutinising every inch of paintwork on the safe-door.

"I hope you meet with success, Miss Dare," remarked Nelson Lee pleasantly, as he crossed over to her. "I have no wish to be inquisitive, but may I inquire what you are doing?"

As a matter of fact, the detective had half a suspicion that the girl was acting thus merely for the sake of making herself noticeable. But it did not seem in keeping with her character, as Lee had read it. And he was very soon to find out that Eileen was not trying to obtain cheap notoriety.

The girl looked round quickly and without a smile.

"Why, I am looking for finger-prints, Mr. Lee," she replied, with direct simplicity.

"Upon my soul!" was Lee's surprised ejaculation.

"Surely there is nothing astonishing in that?" went on Eileen. "You see, I believe that Mr. Haverfield committed this robbery, and I want to

prove it. I was here earlier this morning, and I placed a piece of prepared paper on the desk. Then I got talking with Mr. Haverfield, and made him unconsciously place his hand upon the paper. Oh, he hadn't any idea of what had happened, and a minute afterwards I picked the paper up and went out. See, here it is!"

And to Lee's amazement Eileen produced from her bag a piece of slightly greasy paper, upon which the imprints of a man's fingers and thumb were clearly visible. Lee examined it intently, in order to hide his surprised expression.

"So now," continued Eileen calmly, "I am trying to find finger-prints on the safe. If I find any which correspond with those on the paper we shall know that Mr. Haverfield was here last night. He hasn't touched the safe this morning, and he has never been in this room during the last fortnight."

The girl explained all this in quite a casual voice, and in a matter-of-fact tone which took the detective utterly by surprise. If Nipper had been speaking the detective would have been rather pleased at the lad's smartness. But this girl! Really, it was most singular.

"And you mean to tell me, Miss Dare, that you actually set that trap for Mr. Haverfield without his being aware of it?" asked the detective.

"Of course! There's nothing extraordinary in that, is there?"

Eileen's voice was so frank that Lee broke into a chuckle.

"Apparently you have the makings of an exceedingly keen detective in you, Miss Dare," he said pleasantly. "In fairness to yourself, I must withdraw my former remark regarding your unfitness for this class of work. You have displayed the most remarkable ingenuity."

And, indeed, Nelson Lee was not making an idle compliment. The very fact that Eileen had obtained Haverfield's fingerprints, unknown to the man himself, proved that she was an extraordinary girl. And, further, the way in which she spoke of her achievement was ample evidence of the fact that, in her eyes, it was quite an ordinary event. She did not even realise that it was quite the opposite.

Very soon the detective was making a close investigation himself, with Nipper by his side. With great thoroughness the detective examined every inch of the safe, and Nipper jotted down notes meanwhile. But although the pair spent a full half-hour, they were rewarded by no clue of any value.

At last the detective turned to make a remark. He saw Mr. Dare seated at his desk gazing unseeingly before him. The great blow the loss had inflicted was bearing heavily upon the engineer, and it was clear that he had very little hope of recovering the valuable designs. But Eileen was not sitting down and thinking. She was extremely active, and was very much interested in a small cupboard at the far corner of the room. When Lee looked round he saw her bending close to the floor, examining the inside paintwork of the door with great intentness.

She looked up quickly, having become aware that Lee was gazing at her, and her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks flushed. She rose at once, with one of her delicate hands tightly closed.

"I think I have discovered something of importance, Mr. Lee," she said easily.

"Indeed! In that cupboard?"

"Yes."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, my dear young lady," said Lee gently. "I really fail to see how that cupboard can possibly be connected with this robbery. In any case, what did you hope to discover?"

Eileen crossed the room.

"I am not quite sure what I hoped to discover, Mr. Lee," she replied, in the calmest of voices. "But I have, at least, found sufficient evidence to convince me—even if it will not convince the police—that Roger Haverfield committed this burglary last night!"

The girl's statement was both dramatic and surprising, and it was rendered all the more so by her deadly coolness. Mr. Dare rose to his feet at once, his eyes gleaming strangely.

"What do you mean, little girl?" he asked huskily. "How can you be so positive?"

"I am positive—absolutely positive," said Eileen, with conviction.

"Perhaps we may be permitted to obtain an insight into your hypothesis," suggested Nelson Lee quietly. "You have made a large statement, Miss Dare."

The girl thrust her hand out, and opened her fingers.

"Look at these," she said. "You are an experienced man in these matters; I am an absolute amateur. Yet I am certain that I have hit upon a certain clue."

Lee picked several hairs out of Eileen's dainty hand. Nipper and Mr. Dare looked on with keen interest. The hairs were long, curly, and of a tawny colour. The detective examined them closely for a few moments, and then looked up. There was a quiet expression of regret upon his face.

"You assumed, I suppose, Miss Dare, that somebody was shut up in the cupboard?" he asked.

"I am sure of it. But——"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," went on Lee. "But these hairs are not human. They have evidently fallen from the coat of an animal—a dog. In all probability, the dog was a spaniel."

Eileen nodded quickly.

"Your words only corroborate my theory," she exclaimed, her eyes gleaming with inward excitement. "I already knew that the hairs had dropped from the coat of a spaniel, and it is splendid of you to agree so readily. Now come and look here, will you, please?"

She walked to the cupboard, and Nelson Lee followed her wonderingly, and realising more and more how amazingly smart this sweetly pretty girl was. In some strange way Lee felt almost compelled to follow her investigation with a keen interest which might have possessed him had he been watching the operations of a detective cleverer than himself. As for Nipper, the youngster was open-mouthed, and his admiration knew no bounds.

"Just examine the paintwork on the inner side of this door, Mr. Lee," said Eileen, pointing. "What do you make of it?"

The detective went down on his knees, and at once observed several long scratches on the paintwork. He could see that they were quite recent, for there was a tiny film of the scratched-off paint still adhering to the door. Moreover, on the floor were further signs of dust-like paint.

"Of course, these scratches were caused by the spaniel," said Lee. "No doubt the dog was imprisoned in the cupboard, and he made attempts to escape. And it is also obvious that the dog was here only a short while ago. What do you deduce from these signs, Miss Dare? I am beginning to understand that your help is invaluable."

The girl flushed with pleasure, and her eyes flashed for a moment. Plainly she was by no means impervious to compliments.

"I can see quite a lot," she replied quietly. "If you care to listen to me, I will explain exactly what I mean. What I mean to do, in fact, is to

reconstruct the robbery, and tell you exactly how it occurred. At all events, I think it occurred in this way."

She paused as Nelson Lee rose to his feet. Then she looked slowly from the detective to Nipper, and from Nipper to her father. She was totally absorbed in her thoughts, and failed to see the looks of surprised wonder which were bestowed upon her. It was one of the most astonishing events in Lee's career to find a girl who could carry through an inquiry with the cool confidence which Eileen was displaying.

She glanced at the door, saw that it was tightly closed, and then commenced talking in low, sweet tones. But her voice was firm, and her way of putting things clear and concise. Her sense of deduction and observation, in fact, was little short of amazing, and this feature was intensified by her obvious facility for connecting her thoughts together with clever reasoning.

"Mr. Haverfield," she said, "owns a small spaniel, which he calls Thomas. You and I have often seen the dog, father, haven't we? Now, I want to ask you a question, dad. Have you ever known Mr. Haverfield bring the spaniel to the office during the daytime?"

Mr. Dare shook his head.

"He has never done so," he replied. "Indeed, I have not seen Thomas here on any single occasion. The only times I have seen the dog has been out in the street, on one or two rare occasions when I have met Haverfield giving the animal an airing."

"You know for a fact, anyhow, that the dog wasn't here any day this week?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, this cupboard was cleaned out the day before yesterday," went on Eileen coolly. "I know that for a fact, for I was here just after the woman had finished. Therefore, it is plain that the spaniel was shut in the cupboard since. You agree, Mr. Lee?"

"Certainly."

"Nearly every night," went on Eileen, "Mr. Haverfield takes Thomas out for a run, and it is his usual custom to walk from his private house to the works, here. All this is established fact. Now, I reconstruct the robbery in this way. Last night Mr. Haverfield went for his usual walk with the dog, and on his way here he was thinking deeply of the proposal which father had laid before him during the day. And it occurred to him suddenly to rob this safe, and to make it appear an ordinary burglary. It would be quite easy, and nobody could ever discover his guilt. He knew the value of the plans, and decided that the risk would be well worth the ultimate result."

"That is all splendidly clear," remarked Lee interestedly. "Well, what then?"

"The Haverfield Steel Company," continued the girl, "are manufacturers of hundreds of different kinds of patent apparatus—among them oxy-acetylene plants. That's right, isn't it, father?"

"Perfectly right," said Mr. Dare intently.

"Well, having come to his scoundrelly decision, Mr. Haverfield lost no time in getting to work," Eileen went on. "Next to his office is a large show-room, and it almost certainly contains several oxy-acetylene apparatus, among the other stock. Late at night these offices are absolutely deserted. There is a watchman right down in the yard, but the offices are left severely alone. Mr. Haverfield could get to work without fear of being discovered; and, even if he were, what would it matter? He is the master, and surely he would have a right here? Well, he made his preparations, and

came to this particular room with the necessary articles for the perpetration of the burglary. He probably left the dog in his own office, locked in."

"What makes you think that?" questioned Lee curiously.

"It was the most natural thing to do, wasn't it?"

"But the animal was locked in this cupboard."

"Yes, afterwards. I believe the dog whined and made a commotion," said Eileen, looking at Lee keenly. "Mr. Haverfield didn't like that, because attention might be attracted. So he fetched Thomas into this room, and shut him in the cupboard, so as to be out of the way. Then he went on with his work, opened the safe, took out the plans, and also removed the cash and the few shares, in order to make it appear an ordinary robbery. He forced the window and left the room in confusion. Then he replaced the oxy-acetylene machine, saw that there were no traces of his own visit, and went home. There!" concluded the girl. "What do you think of it, Mr. Lee?"

The detective stroked his chin for a moment.

"I think you have displayed wonderful cleverness," he replied frankly. "You have reconstructed the burglary with shrewdness and ingenuity. If the actual facts were not precisely as you have outlined, then they were extraordinarily near it."

"You agree, then, that Mr. Haverfield committed the crime?"

"In the face of this evidence I can do nothing else, Miss Dare," Nelson Lee answered slowly. "Those scratches were made on the door certainly not earlier than last night, and it follows, as a consequence, that the hairs were dropped from the dog's coat at the same time. There is no possibility, of course, of the animal having been imprisoned in the cupboard this morning? If so, the whole of this hypothesis is destroyed."

"The spaniel has not been near the building to-day," the engineer exclaimed. "I was here very early, and have been here every minute since. Oh, no, Mr. Lee, you can be perfectly certain that the dog has not been in this room to-day."

"Or yesterday. Think carefully."

"My dear sir, the dog has never entered this apartment."

"You are wrong there, for we have ample evidence to the contrary," said Lee. "It is clear, then, that your theory is the probable solution, Miss Dare. But, as you said at the outset, the police would not accept the theory for a moment. We have, however, a working basis to start upon, and we must make our plans accordingly."

"You mean to follow up this clue?" asked Eileen eagerly.

"Most certainly," Lee replied. "And you must allow me to thank you, my dear young lady, for having drawn my attention to a matter of the very first importance. I congratulate you heartily upon your sagacity and keen reasoning powers."

The girl flushed with pleasure again, and smiled charmingly.

"Thank you, Mr. Lee," she said simply. "I am so glad I have been of service to you. Oh, this is so interesting, isn't it? If it wasn't so awfully serious I should be enjoying myself tremendously."

"The fact that these hairs were in the cupboard and the presence of the recent scratches on the door prove that the dog has been in this room within the last twenty-four hours," went on the detective, "and, since the dog could not have entered during yesterday or to-day, it goes without saying that the occupation of the cupboard occurred during the night. Decidedly, we will make it our task to look very keenly into the affairs of Mr. Roger Haverfield."

Shortly afterwards Eileen left, and Nelson Lee watched her trim, graceful



Eileen finds a clue!—(See page 16.)

figure as she walked across the yard to the roadway. He turned and faced Nipper and Lawrence Dare.

"Your daughter, Mr. Dare, is really the most remarkable girl I have ever had the pleasure of meeting," he said quietly. "Her detective ability is singularly acute, and her powers of deduction marvellous in one so inexperienced. It seems to come quite naturally to her."

Mr. Dare's eyes shone with pride.

"Eileen is a wonderful girl altogether," he said. "You have no idea of half her accomplishments, Mr. Lee."

"She's a stunner!" exclaimed Nipper impulsively. "Oh, she's simply ripping, gov'nor!"

"Well, we are **on the track**, and I am inclined to be somewhat amused, in spite of the **seriousness** of the situation," was Nelson Lee's next remark. "I came down here to investigate the robbery, and find the whole case taken out of my hands by a mere girl—a dainty, delightful girl, with untold charms. It was **she** who made the important **discovery**; she who reasoned the whole thing out. We must look to our laurels, Nipper, or we shall find ourselves quite in the background!"

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CHAPTER IV.

A Night Expedition—Surprised—Lee's Ruse—Eileen at Work—A Shock.

NELSON LEE did not come in contact with Roger Haverfield again. The latter, to tell the truth, left the works almost immediately after his discomfiture by Lee and Mr. Dare. Where he had gone was not known, and the detective did not much care. He was sure that Haverfield had no idea he was suspected.

In the light of recent events and discoveries, Haverfield's perturbation upon seeing Nelson Lee became very significant. It was obvious that he feared the celebrated crime investigator would hit upon the actual truth. And Lee did not doubt that Haverfield would attempt to get rid of him at the first opportunity.

The detective and Nipper spent the evening at Lawrence Dare's house. Lee had already decided upon a course of action, but this did not come into operation until after midnight. So the evening was spent as enjoyably as possible. Eileen sang and played to the visitors, and proved her talent as a vocalist and a pianist. The evening, in fact, was most pleasant.

Some little time after the household had retired, however, Nelson Lee and Nipper ventured out upon their expedition. They had said nothing to Mr. Dare beyond the fact that they would probably be busy during the night.

It was Lee's intention to break into Roger Haverfield's office, and to ransack it thoroughly in the hope of discovering the missing plans. It was quite probable that they would be serenely lying in Haverfield's desk, within twenty yards of their original place of security. In any event, the game was worth attempting. Even if the plans were not discovered, other incriminating evidence might be forthcoming.

The pair arrived at the works, and found that the offices were in utter darkness, and the yard deserted. They scaled the wall and silently crept round to the main office building. Lee had already made a note of all the windows, and he came to a halt beneath a certain one."

"This is Haverfield's private office," he murmured. "Now, Nipper, you stroll back to the corner of the building, so that you can watch the gateway and the whole yard. If you see any sign of anyone approaching, warn me at once."

"Right you are, guv'nor," said Nipper readily. "It's rotten, though. I thought I was going to help you inside."

"You thought quite wrong, then. You will help me far more materially by remaining outside," replied the detective. "Keep your ears and eyes open, and don't let yourself be seen."

"Trust me, sir."

Nelson Lee pulled a false beard from his pocket, and secured it in position. Then he covered the upper part of his face with a black mask. To recognise him was impossible, and he was wearing a blue serge suit such as are seen by the dozen in every crowded street. There was no harm in taking precautions. It cost nothing, and might mean much. Lee had no inkling that he would be disturbed at his work—but there was always the possibility.

He found it a comparatively easy task to break into the office. The window-catch was a modern one, certainly, but Nelson Lee was quite capable of dealing with it. After five minutes steady work, he stepped into Haverfield's office, and switched on his electric torch.

The beam of bright, white light shot through the darkness, and illuminated a portion of the floor. Lee took care not to flash the light on the window. After a careful look round he decided that there were at least three possible hiding-places for the plans—in a desk, in a bureau against the wall, and in the lower cupboard of a locked bookcase. There was no safe in the room.

The detective decided to search the bureau as a beginning. It was essential that he should leave utterly no trace of his nocturnal visit, so he took his time over the unlocking of the bureau. There was, in any case, no urgent hurry; he had several hours of darkness before him.

But Nelson Lee was to learn that there were others abroad to-night!

He succeeded in unlocking the bureau, and then commenced a thorough search. There were many papers in each drawer, and he commenced his task systematically, disposing of one drawer before starting upon another.

He had finished the examination of the first drawer, and was just starting on the second, when the office became flooded with brilliant electric light. The thing was so sudden and unexpected that Lee caught his breath in with surprise, and twirled round.

He had heard nothing—been suspicious of nothing. Nipper had not warned him, and he had been totally unprepared for a surprise.

But he received a surprise, all the same!

Just clear of the door, and facing him, stood Roger Haverfield, his face pale, and his eyes gleaming with alarm and fury. And Nelson Lee observed another exceedingly unhealthy detail. A revolver was pointed at his chest with grim steadiness.

"Hands up, you scum!" snarled Haverfield hoarsely.

Nelson Lee did some extra-quick thinking. He placed his hands up instantly, and kept his eyes on the floor, after the first keen glance. The detective was upset and completely taken aback. But he was cool, and ready to meet the emergency.

He did not trouble himself by wondering how Haverfield had escaped Nipper's eagle eye, but thought out a plan of action in about ten seconds. In a tight corner such as this it was not the famous detective's way to linger or hesitate.

One thing struck him very forcibly—he must escape. He must escape at all cost. Never for an instant did he contemplate complying with Haverfield's orders, and keeping his hands up. To do so would be to place himself in the other's power. It was quite possible that Haverfield would shoot; but the chance had to be taken.

Discretion was the better part of valour in a fix such as this, although, if it comes to that, Lee would have to display considerable valour in taking to flight. To remain was dangerous and impossible.

If he allowed Haverfield to come closer, he would at once be unmasked, and then the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. At present Haverfield had no notion of the masked man's identity, and it was necessary that he should be left in ignorance. If he did make the discovery, and succeeded in detaining Lee, he would have no hesitation in handing his prisoner over to the police as a burglar. And the detective would be in a tight hole, for he had utterly no excuse to offer for his presence here, and from the point of view of the law he was actually a housebreaker.

Moreover, it would mean revealing his hand to Roger Haverfield, and that was even more vital. Nelson Lee thought all this in a flash, and he acted instantly, even as Haverfield commenced speaking again.

"Keep your hands up, and——"

Then Nelson Lee became active.

He suddenly twisted his wrist, and the electric-torch, which he still grasped, left his hand and spun through the air swiftly. The aim was accurate, and the next instant the revolver was dashed out of Haverfield's hand.

"By thunder!" roared the surprised man. "What the—— You cur!"

Lee did not think it necessary to hear Haverfield out. He was through the window in one leap, and he pelted away at top speed. One swift glance behind him made him aware of the fact that Haverfield had given hot chase. The detective dashed round the building, and fell headlong—purposely—behind a pile of great packing-cases which stood there. The next moment Haverfield dashed past, and Lee rose to his feet and doubled back on his tracks. The ruse was successful, for his pursuer kept straight on.

"Phew!" muttered Lee. "That was warm! Now for the next move!"

As he ran round the office building again, he rapidly tore off his mask and false beard. Then he stuffed his soft cap again into his pocket, and took from another pocket a rolled-up hat. Just as he was donning this, he came face to face with Nipper.

"What the dickens is up, guv'nor?"

"Haverfield's after me!" snapped Lee crisply. "Say nothing, Nipper. Leave it to me."

It had all happened with bewildering rapidity. Almost before Nipper could frame a word with his lips, Roger's figure appeared round a corner ahead.

"Hallo!" called Lee sharply. "Who's that? Come, Nipper——"

"By gad! Is that you, Lee?"

"Yes. Who are you? Upon my soul, Mr. Haverfield!"

They met, and Roger halted, panting heavily. He was obviously suspicious, and he eyed Lee keenly. But the detective was as cool as possible, and he bore not the slightest resemblance to the man who had been in the office.

"I am glad to find that nothing is amiss," said Lee pleasantly. "Nipper and I were out for a late stroll, and we saw a man running in this yard. We accordingly investigated. We did not think it would be you, Mr. Haverfield."

The statement was not exactly true in detail, but the necessity of the moment fully warranted a little harmless invention. Haverfield was bound to accept the detective's glib explanation, and he was, indeed, inclined to believe it. It scarcely seemed possible that the man he had surprised could be Lee himself.

"I found a burglar in my office!" panted Roger furiously. "Surely you saw him, Lee? Why, in Heaven's name, didn't you stop him——"

"I don't think he came this way," interjected the detective calmly.

And, as a matter of fact, Haverfield was under the impression that the supposed burglar had taken quite the opposite direction. He gritted his teeth, and glared round helplessly.

"You will kindly leave this property!" he said thickly.

Without a word, Nelson Lee and Nipper took their departure. The detective was decidedly pleased at the manner in which he had escaped. He had acted with wonderful smartness, and had succeeded. But his project was ruined by this interruption, and Lee was far from being pleased. He and Nipper at once started for Mr. Dare's house. There was nothing to be gained by remaining here.

Roger's sudden appearance was unfortunate in the extreme. He had entered the yard, to tell the truth, by a private gate at the rear. Nipper, therefore, had seen nothing of him, and he had seen nothing of Nipper. But he had caught a gleam of light from Lee's electric torch, and had opened the main door quietly, and had softly entered. The main door was just beyond Nipper's vision. Thus it came about that his master had received no warning.

The night's excitement, apparently, was over.

But it was not over by any means, as Roger Haverfield was to discover. While he was talking with Nelson Lee, a slight figure hastened swiftly across the yard and entered by the open door, which Haverfield had left ajar. A few swift, agile steps took the new-comer into the brilliantly lighted office.

The figure was that of Eileen Dare!

The night, indeed, was providing some extraordinary surprises. The girl's presence here was not only singular but perilous and somewhat foolhardy; but Eileen had ventured upon this expedition for two excellent reasons. One because she loved excitement and danger; and two, because she had made a fixed resolve to recover the stolen plans.

She had started out from her home with a very settled plan in her keen, active brain. She knew nothing of Lee's plan, and it was a mere coincidence that she should have resolved upon a course very similar to that which the detective had decided to adopt. Yet it was not a curious coincidence. It was only natural that she should act in this way.

For Eileen was no ordinary girl. She was plucky, adventurous, and did not possess such disconcerting qualities as nerves. Perhaps it was not the kind of expedition for a refined young lady to embark upon, but that was just where the spice of adventure came in. And Eileen loved adventure and peril.

Her father's happiness, his very future, rested upon the recovery of the submarine-engine designs. She had seen the great change which even one day had wrought in him, and her heart had been heavy. She knew that Roger Haverfield had stolen the plans—she knew it as surely as she knew that the stars were in the heavens—and she decided to risk all in a personal search of his office. The fact that Nelson Lee was engaged upon the case did not deter her. It was her keenest desire to win through alone.

For these reasons she was here. She had arrived at the yard in time to see Haverfield entering, and as she waited, undecided, she saw him dash round the building and disappear into the darkness.

Her opportunity had come, and she seized it without hesitation.

Once within the office, she glanced round her, and wondered what to do. Her quick wits told her that Haverfield would probably return at any moment. But this was exactly what she wanted. She had a firm conviction

that her errand would not prove fruitless. She was dressed quietly in dark clothing—an old costume. And she could feel, in her coat-pocket, something which gave her confidence.

That something was a tiny revolver—almost a toy. She had kept it for years in her bedroom, and had never used it—had never expected to use it. It had been scarcely anything more than an ornament. But it was a deadly little weapon, all the same, and it made her feel that she was prepared to meet Haverfield, if the occasion demanded, on equal terms.

A swift glance round her revealed a deep recess, across which were hung a pair of heavy tapestry curtains. The girl's face was grim and set, but it had lost none of its beauty. Indeed, with two spots of colour in her cheeks and her nostrils slightly dilated, Eileen seemed to be more beautiful than ever.

She swiftly crossed to the curtains, and slipped behind them. She found that there was ample room for the hiding of her slight, dainty figure. And she reached the welcome cover none too soon.

Almost before the curtains ceased moving, she heard Roger Haverfield striding along the passage. He entered, closed the door, and then crossed to the window. She heard him close it with a bang; and knew that he had muttered something under his breath.

Her little heart was beating swiftly now, beating with excitement, and with a presentiment that success was to be hers. After a while she ventured to part the curtains a trifle and peer through.

Haverfield's back was towards her, and he was going over the papers in the bureau. He remained there for fully five minutes, and had no suspicion that his every movement was closely watched. Roger was satisfying himself that the unknown intruder had taken nothing.

He closed the bureau with a bang, and then paused to light a cigarette. His attention was now turned to the central desk.

"Infernal nuisance! Who can the fellow have been?" Eileen heard him mutter. "I've got half an idea it was that spying Lee! All the same, he found nothing. By George, what a lucky thing I happened to come along!"

He opened his desk, and then unlocked a long drawer just inside. From this he produced several large papers, and spread them out before him. They had all been contained in one long envelope, and Haverfield now permitted himself to chuckle.

"Lee will never learn the truth, for all his cleverness!" he muttered, with grim satisfaction. "Who, indeed, would suspect the truth? That the employee's plans of a new engine had been appropriated by the employer! Upon my soul, there are elements of humour in the situation!"

Haverfield was not actually talking aloud to himself. He murmured the words just under his breath. But the room was so still, and the situation so tense, that Eileen heard every word as distinctly as if he had shouted them at the top of his voice.

Haverfield was actually gazing at her father's plans now! She herself had once seen them, and she knew already, by the one glimpse she had now obtained, that the designs were in her unsuspecting companion's hands.

After a few moments, Haverfield refolded the plans and placed them once more into their long envelope. He glanced at his watch, and whistled softly. Obviously the hour was later than he had expected. He closed the desk, and then strode to the door and opened it. He stood there, the plans in one hand, having a last look round before he left. His decision to go was so sudden that Eileen scarcely had any time to form a plan. She had seen that Haverfield had her father's valuable plans on him, and now he

was about to depart, carrying them away to a place from which they would probably never be recovered.

It was a moment for swift decision and swift action.

And Eileen Dare proved herself equal to the situation. One thing she could not do, and that was to reveal herself. To do so would be to show her hand and to place herself into Haverfield's power as well.

It was quite impossible to make known the fact that it was she, Eileen Dare, who was in the room. If possible, she must cause Roger to think something quite different. In less than ten seconds her mind was made up, and she withdrew a tiny revolver from her pocket. Eileen really acted on the spur of the moment, and she performed her task magnificently.

Crack!

The revolver report sounded exactly like the snap of a whip, and it was immediately followed by a startled exclamation from Haverfield. There were two excellent reasons for his astonishment and dismay. In a second he knew that he was not alone, and the electric light snapped out like the snuffing of a candle!

Eileen had aimed fully at the huge single half-watt incandescent electric lamp which supplied the room with its two-thousand candle-power light. Haverfield believed in having plenty of illumination in his offices, and one big lamp of this nature was in every way advantageous.

For Eileen's purpose, nothing could have been better. The big, round globe provided an excellent mark, and once it was smashed there was not another glimmer of light from any portion of the room. Utter, pitch darkness surrounded everything.

Eileen had already taken her bearings, and she knew precisely what to do. Without making a sound, she dashed across the room, her right hand outstretched. Her heart was beating very fast now, but her sweet lips were set firmly with determination. Her hand came in contact with Haverfield's sleeve. He uttered an alarmed gasp. But Eileen knew exactly where she was now, and the next second her fingers closed over the long envelope, and she snatched it away. The whole dramatic incident did not occupy more than five seconds. It was one swift, breathless dash. The door was already unfastened, and Eileen nimbly slipped through into the passage and raced towards the exit door as fast as her agile legs could carry her. She could hear Haverfield in the rear, roaring and cursing furiously. She knew full well that he had no suspicion of her identity. But she had been successful. She had recovered the plans!

Eileen was as cool as Nelson Lee himself would have been under similar circumstances. Truth to tell, she had carried out her project with the most amazing courage and skill. And now that she had recovered the plans she lost no time in making her escape. She was across the yard in a flash, and took the low wall in one nimble bound; then, without slackening her speed, she ran through the quiet, deserted streets until she came within sight of her father's house.

As she entered the gate two figures approached her from the side, and she was amazed and somewhat disconcerted to find herself confronted by Nelson Lee and Nipper. Her own expedition had not occupied much time, and she had raced home with great speed. Lee and Nipper, on the other hand, had strolled home very leisurely, discussing the case. It thus came about that all three met in Lawrence Dare's garden. The defective and Nipper had been about to enter when Eileen appeared.

They were no less astonished to see her than she was to see them; in fact, they were considerably more astonished. Without saying much Lee led the

way into the big drawing-room, and switched on the electric light. Mr. Dare himself was in bed, and knew nothing whatever of these nocturnal escapades.

Eileen explained what she had done in cool, clear sentences. She was somewhat breathless, but her perfect condition obviated any prospect of exhaustion. She was good for another ten-mile run, if necessary.

Nelson Lee and Nipper listened in astounded silence. They had already had an insight into this girl's singular character, and they knew that she was totally different from all other young ladies, except in her natural feminine charms. These latter qualities were highly pronounced in Eileen, too. She was delightful in every respect, and refreshingly frank in her manner.

"Well, upon my word, Miss Dare, I hardly know what to say!" exclaimed Nelson Lee when she had finished. "You actually risked going to Haverfield's office and did not turn back even when you knew that Haverfield himself was there. On the contrary, you bravely entered and succeeded in obtaining what you went for. I really must congratulate you upon your courage and ingenuity. You have acted with all the resource of a trained detective. Indeed, it is my part to sing small—you have been successful where I have failed."

Eileen smiled quietly.

"I have done nothing so wonderful, Mr. Lee," she exclaimed. "Somehow it seems to come natural to me. I don't know why, but I have enjoyed to-night's adventure—oh, so much!" She paused, and her eyes sparkled. "But I've got the plans!" she added joyfully. "I've——"

"Dear me!" interrupted Nelson Lee very gently. "I'm afraid——"

"What is the matter, Mr. Lee?"

The detective's interruption had come as he was examining the contents of the long envelope. He had pulled out a large folded sheet of paper, and seemed to be at a loss. Eileen, quick-witted, instantly knew that something was very wrong.

"Have you any other envelope?" asked Lee quietly.

"No; that is the only one," replied the girl, her voice catching as a cold fear took possession of her. "What—what is the matter, Mr. Lee?"

The detective looked seriously distressed.

"I am afraid I have a great disappointment for you, Miss Dare," he exclaimed, in soft, sympathetic tones. "The contents of this envelope are not of much value. There is nothing here but a rough general design of the outer castings of your father's invention. The plans of the new engine itself are not here!"

It was a terrible shock, and very soon Eileen was forced to realise the truth. After she had braved so much, after she had been so hopeful! The girl felt almost stunned for a second. But then, with rare courage, she looked up fully into Nelson Lee's eyes, and there was a quiet, confident smile on her face.

"There are other days dawning," she said simply. "Sooner or later, Mr. Lee, we will recover my father's property. We know for an established fact now that the chief plans are in Roger Haverfield's possession, and, with that knowledge, we ought to be able to entrap him almost at once."

It was bravely spoken, but Nelson Lee knew how acutely the girl was suffering. And the great detective made a firm resolve to move heaven and earth in an attempt to set matters to rights.

CHAPTER V.

A Discovery—Haverfield's Friends—The Dread Decision.

THE events in the office had been so startling that it was a few seconds before Roger Haverfield could regain his breath after Eileen had departed. Haverfield had not the slightest notion regarding the identity of his unknown visitor. All he heard was a quick pattering of feet outside in the passage, and then dead silence. Even as he started forward to run in pursuit it struck him that it would be utterly impossible to capture the fugitive.

He might as well save his breath and remain where he was. Moreover, if it happened that a police-constable was in the road outside, and saw him, things might take on an ugly aspect. It was far better to remain where he was and accept the situation. But in doing so Haverfield gave way to violent fury.

He raved and swore, and for a short while scarcely knew what he was doing. Only one thought surged through his infuriated brain—the plans had been taken from him! The plans had gone! His whole structure of scheming had collapsed about his ears.

It was a stunning shock, and Roger Haverfield was not the man to take such a blow calmly. But in a short while his fury expended itself, and nothing remained but a cold calm, intermixed with fear. He was beginning to realise now that things might be very awkward for him.

The passage was in total darkness, in addition to the office itself, and as there was no other electric light in the room Haverfield strode into the passage and pressed down the switch. Two powerful lamps overhead instantly blazed out, and the very first thing Roger Haverfield's eyes rested upon, two yards from the outer door, was a long, folded paper.

He strode forward, picked it up, and then uttered a curious, gasping cry. For a second he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes. The paper was nothing more nor less than the chief plan—the intricate designs of the working parts of Lawrence Dare's new invention! There were, in fact, several papers, but as they were pinned together it was as though they were one.

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Haverfield, his eyes gleaming and his heart beating a fierce tattoo against his ribs. "What can this mean? By James, I believe I understand!"

The thing was, in fact, perfectly clear even to the meanest mind. When Eileen had sped down the passage, the smaller of the two enclosures which were contained in the envelope had slipped out. In the darkness Eileen had not noticed it, and in the tenseness of the moment she was unable to determine whether anything had been lost from the package.

Haverfield was filled with fierce joy. For the plan which was missing he did not care a jot. That was, after all, quite unimportant. And to find the main papers after he had given them up for lost was something to rejoice over.

He told himself that he was safe, and that his careful schemes would materialise, after all. The fact that an unknown person had seen the plans in his hands was of no importance to him. The unsupported word of the stranger would be of utterly no use. If any trouble arose Haverfield would deny everything, and it would be impossible to prove a case against him.

Roger was convinced that his unseen visitor had been Nipper, Nelson Lee's young assistant. No person in the whole world was farther from his thoughts than Eileen Dare. The quick patter of feet out in the passage, when the stranger had taken to flight, instantly made Haverfield suspect

a boy. And which boy but Nipper? The thing was obvious from Haverfield's point of view.

He swore that Nelson Lee must be got rid of at once. Under some pretext he must be sent about his business to London, or elsewhere. In any case, it was imperative that Nelson Lee should be sent hot-foot out of Birmingham.

But there was a difficulty. Lee was employed by Lawrence Dare, so, in order to get rid of Lee, it was necessary for Dare to go also. It was a stiffish problem, and Haverfield did not intend to think it out now. Moreover, he had visitors of his own awaiting him at his house.

More elated than he could express, he tucked the plans into his pocket, locked up the offices, and strode home. He took great care to remain unseen by a soul during his walk, and when he finally arrived at his house he was sure that nobody had witnessed his passage there from the office.

One of the front windows of his house—a lower window—was brilliantly illuminated, notwithstanding the extreme lateness of the hour. Haverfield let himself in by means of his latchkey, and walked straight into a large apartment on the left-hand side of the hall.

This was the library, and it was at present occupied by five men. They were all smoking, and four of them were playing a hand at solo-whist. The fifth man was looking on contentedly.

The atmosphere of the room was blue with cigar-smoke, and a distinct odour of whisky permeated the air. The odour, in fact, was not exactly pleasant. But Haverfield did not notice anything out of the ordinary, and he strode forward into the room and flung his hat upon a chair.

"You've been a thundering long time, Haverfield!" exclaimed the fifth man pleasantly. "What have you been up to?"

"I've been having the very deuce of a time," growled Haverfield. "When you have finished that hand, gentlemen, I should like you to listen to what I have to say."

The hand was soon finished, and sundry silver coins were passed from one to another. Then the five men gave their attention to their host. Haverfield lost no time in explaining that he had gone to the office—as they all knew—for the purpose of fetching the plans. He then told in detail precisely what had occurred. His audience, at first, were decidedly alarmed, but when Haverfield had finished they were all inclined to agree with him that there was no real danger.

But one thing must be attended to without delay.

Haverfield's five visitors had all arrived by a late train from London by pre-arrangement. They had come for a very definite purpose, and Haverfield had already explained to them the almost immeasurable value of Lawrence Dare's invention. He had told them that the thing was an absolute "cert"; not an atom of risk was attached to the undertaking, for once the engine was constructed the Admiralty would give orders for hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of the new engine.

All five men were rich, middle-aged, and their reputations were none too clean. They were some of the business associates of whom Mr. Dare had spoken to Nelson Lee. All City men, they were financiers, company promoters, and sharpers of the most unscrupulous character. Roger had, indeed, mixed himself with a questionable crew.

And these men were only half of the precious "combine" who had financed the Haverfield Steel Company. The remainder were in London. Lawrence Dare knew precisely who the men were, and his daughter knew also. And it was this knowledge which had caused the engineer such uneasiness.

"Look here," continued Haverfield, gazing round at his companions

"We must settle ourselves to one fact, gentlemen. There is great danger in Dare retaining his position of consulting engineer to the firm. We shall probably lose a certain number of employees if Dare goes, but there are plenty of others always ready to work, and we shall be in a position to offer higher wages. But Dare simply must go. It is impossible for us to make use of this invention until—until——"

"Well?" asked one man curiously. "Until what?"

Haverfield bent forward.

"There is no sense in beating about the bush," he said fiercely. "As long as Lawrence Dare is alive we simply can't make use of these plans. Oh, hang it all, don't look so startled! I am not suggesting that we should kill the man—there are other ways: Indeed, I have already thought of a very effective scheme."

"We shall have to go very cautiously, Haverfield," said another of his companions. "You are proposing a dangerous game. But I readily admit that if Dare can be got rid of everything will be much better. All the profits of his invention will come to the firm. But he has a daughter, I believe?"

Haverfield nodded.

"That is so, Bridger," he replied. "But Eileen Dare will not trouble us," he added contemptuously. "She is only a fool of a girl, and we can defy her to do her worst if it comes to it. Once her father has gone she cannot possibly prove that the invention was his. Oh, we needn't worry ourselves about Eileen Dare. But, with regard to the plans, I have already told you that I stole them in an impulsive moment. In a way, I regret having done so, for unless swift action is taken I shall find myself in Queer Street. I am sure that Dare and Nelson Lee suspect me, although at present they can do nothing. The only thing now is to press matters forward with all speed. Having gone so far you must carry the thing to a finish."

"You are inclined to be somewhat pessimistic, Haverfield," exclaimed the man named Bridger, twisting a fat cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "So far as I can see, everything is quite plain and clear. We have got hold of this engineer's plans, and if he is placed out of reach we can use them to our own advantage and profit. Well, we've got to get busy, that's all."

Haverfield nodded again, and took a gulp of whisky.

"If we give the project up now we can either destroy the plans or send them back to Dare anonymously. In either case a vast fortune will be lost to us," he exclaimed slowly. "For if Dare recovered his property he would certainly not consider a sale—with our firm, at all events. But, on the other hand, with Dare out of the way, I shall at once dismiss Nelson Lee, and everything will be plain sailing. What we have now to decide is how to rid ourselves of Lawrence Dare without bringing suspicion upon our heads."

There was a short silence, during which fresh whisky was poured out and new cigars were lighted. All these men were thorough scoundrels, but they jibbed at the thought of murder. They were crooks in finance, but they had never descended to bodily violence. No, to murder Lawrence Dare was quite out of the question.

They were quite capable of the crime—it would not have weighed on their consciences—but the safety of their own skins was always the first consideration. And "murder will out," to use a well-worn saying. They were afraid that their crime would recoil upon themselves.

"We must think out a plan," said Haverfield, "which will decide Dare's fate finally. But to have him disappear, or openly killed is quite impos-

sible. I don't underestimate Nelson Lee's cleverness, and I am sure that he will at once suspect foul play. Sooner or later he would ferret out the truth. The idea is to put Lee completely off the scent and to discredit Dare in his eyes. In this way Lee will, on his own account, have nothing further to do with the case."

"H'm! That's a pretty tall order," remarked Jonathan Bridger. "Your idea is to make it appear that Dare has committed some crime or other to get him in prison, perhaps. But I don't see——"

"I have already a settled scheme in my mind," interjected Haverfield keenly. "Listen, gentlemen, and I will tell you exactly what it is."

They all drew closer, and Haverfield commenced speaking in low, grim tones. When he had finished there was a general murmur of approval and sceptical doubt. But a further long discussion ended in a complete mutual agreement.

There, in that library, the fate of Lawrence Dare was decided upon. It was a terrible fate—a ghastly, cruel fate—and it was destined to be carried out at once. The engineer's enemies had planned their vile scheme with utterly callous deliberation.

CHAPTER VI.

The First Move—A Stunning Surprise—Eileen's Horror—The Sentence.

THE next morning Lawrence Dare turned up at the office as usual. He had heard everything that had occurred during the night from Nelson Lee and Eileen. The engineer had been amazed and shocked to find his suspicions so amply justified.

Now that the suspicions had become actual facts, Mr. Dare was rather inclined to openly tell Roger Haverfield what had been discovered, and to demand the return of the plans. But, acting on Nelson Lee's advice, Dare decided to abandon this decision, and to attend the office as though nothing had been discovered.

It was better so.

In the detective's interests—and, as a consequence, in Mr. Dare's interest also—it was better that Haverfield should not be made aware of the fact that his villainy was known. Lee wanted to capture the man red-handed; he had no intention of allowing Haverfield to find a loophole of escape.

But even the great detective, astute as he was, could not possibly be prepared for the terrible dramatic turn which events took that day. The surprise came as one of the most stunning shocks which it could be possible to inflict.

And it was all the more stupefying because there was utterly no inkling that it was coming. In itself, Haverfield's plot was simple. But it was this very simplicity which rendered it utterly incapable of being detected. It was its simplicity which engulfed Lawrence Dare in the trap so hopelessly that there was no chance of deliverance.

That morning Roger Haverfield was very much the same as usual, except, perhaps, he was slightly more cordial. He had primed himself well for what was to come.

Shortly before noon he went into Mr. Dare's office and requested the engineer to go on a tour of inspection round the works with him. Dare at once assented, having no occasion to refuse.

Inspector Davis had been present a short time before, and had reported that there was no clue to the burglary. Mr. Dare was not at all surprised to hear this, but he took care to give the worthy inspector no inkling of the actual facts.

The engineer was absent from his office for fully half-an-hour, and for the greater part of that time he was showing some visitors over the steel works. Haverfield had taken himself off very shortly after the tour started.

It was general knowledge that Mr. Dare had, on several occasions, visited many important munition factories in and around Birmingham. He was well-known and highly respected in the town, and had free entry into any and every manufactory.

His business had been for purely business reasons, but it was known that he had been told many inside facts, many secrets, and had seen munitions of war being constructed which were being kept totally hidden from the public.

All this was to have a direct bearing upon the events which followed.

Shortly before the luncheon hour Dare returned to his office and seated himself at his desk in order to finish off a few letters he had already started upon. His keen interest in his work did not prevent him carrying it on thoroughly, in spite of the knowledge that his employer was scheming against him.

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Dare, without glancing round, called to the unseen visitor to enter. He heard heavy footfalls, and turned with some astonishment. He was faced by a police-superintendent. Inspector Davis, and an ordinary constable. The engineer smiled as he beheld the trio.

"I hope you have brought me news——"

"Lawrence Dare, my name is Superintendent Mackenzie, of the Birmingham Police," interrupted the officer, curtly. "It is my duty to place you under arrest——"

Dare started to his feet.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he asked. "Come, this is a joke, I suppose?"

"I am afraid the incident is scarcely humorous," said the superintendent. "I have here a warrant for your arrest under the defence of the Realm Act, and the charge against you is that of being a traitor to your king, and a paid spy of the enemy."

For one moment Lawrence Dare stood completely dazed. Then he broke into a hearty laugh—a ringing, rippling laugh of pure amusement.

"Upon my soul, this is the most astounding joke——"

Before he could proceed further Inspector Davis stepped forward and a pair of handcuffs were snapped tightly round his wrists. It was then that Dare began to realise that something was very seriously amiss. The laughter died out from his face, and furious indignation and anger took its place.

"You must be mad!" he panted. "I—a spy! I a traitor to my king? Good heavens! How in the name of wonder did you get hold of that story?"

"I should advise you to say as little as possible, Mr. Dare," exclaimed the superintendent coldly. "We are acting from information received—information so conclusive that there can be no doubt as to its authenticity. Inspector Davis," he added, "you will search this room at once."

It was as though Lawrence Dare had received a knock-out blow between the eyes. He stood absolutely stunned, and unable to say another word. It was not so much the charge against him, but the fact that it should ever have been brought. That he, as staunch a patriot as ever breathed, should be arrested for espionage!

Of course, the whole thing was utterly absurd. In a very few hours he would be able to prove that the charge was as unjust as preposterous. Nelson Lee would soon set matters right, and his daughter, Eileen——

Mr. Dare shivered somewhat and breathed hard and with great hoarseness.

And then the second shock came.

The inspector had been searching the desk. There was one drawer which was locked—although Dare himself had not locked it. The inspector smashed it open and took from it a bundle of papers tied together with cord. For some moments he examined them with staring eyes, and then turned to the superintendent.

"Exactly as we were informed, sir," he exclaimed tensely. "Great Heaven! To think that Mr. Dare could be such a traitor! These papers are utterly damning proof of his guilt—they are plans of other factories, secret codes, and letters in German."

Mr. Dare uttered a strangled cry.

"It is false," he exclaimed wildly. "There were no such papers in my desk! Oh, what can it all mean? I—I can scarcely think clearly——"

"Search the prisoner," ordered the superintendent curtly.

Mr. Dare did not resist; indeed, he was not capable of resisting. And in less than two minutes further conclusive evidence was produced. In his own pocket—actually inside his wallet—were further proofs that for months past he had been supplying Germany with secret information regarding British munition factories. It was horribly plain that Lawrence Dare was a base traitor to his country.

Without delay he was taken away in a waiting taxi and handed over to the military authorities. And it happened that Nelson Lee arrived on the scene just after the engineer's departure. The detective could scarcely believe his ears, and he dashed off with all speed to the military headquarters.

He arrived some time after Dare had been placed under guard, and the commander was well aware of the whole circumstances. He received Nelson Lee with a grave face.

"Yes, it is perfectly true, Mr. Lee," he replied in answer to the detective's query. "Lawrence Dare, consulting engineer to the Haverfield Steel Company, Limited, is at present under military guard awaiting court-martial."

The detective almost gasped.

"But the whole thing is ridiculously absurd," he protested hotly. "Why, colonel, I know Mr. Dare intimately—I know him to be a man of the utmost integrity and honour. It is all some ghastly blunder."

"If so, then Mr. Dare will be acquitted," replied the military commander gravely. "With all my heart I trust it will be so. I am not personally acquainted with the prisoner, but I know that his name has hitherto been honoured and respected in Birmingham. You must be aware, however, that when a spy is unmasked it is generally proved that he was a man supposedly above suspicion."

"But—but—I know there is a mistake," persisted Lee intently. "I know it as well as I know the sun is shining!"

The colonel looked grim.

"Let me enlighten you upon one or two points," he said. "For some time past, as you yourself are well aware, the most vital inner secrets of several munition factories have been finding their way into German hands. The enemy has got to know invaluable information. In nearly every case the facts were regarding factories which Mr. Dare repeatedly visited. It may be coincidence—I cannot say. But there it is! You may be sure that Mr. Dare will have a fair trial. In his office, and upon his person, the most damning evidence was discovered of his guilt."

"Good heavens!"

"I think you'll have to realise, Mr. Lee," went on the commander gently,

"that you have been as much deceived in Dare as everybody else. Why, this is one of the clearest cases that the military authorities have ever had before them, and I am speaking now after I have only just become acquainted with the news. Later on, when the full facts become known, I have no doubt that the proofs will be even blacker."

Nelson Lee felt too stunned to say anything, and his companion proceeded.

"And there is the burglary of Dare's safe to consider," he said. "What of that? In the light of this arrest, what inference is to be drawn from that burglary? Why, Dare intended his invention for Germany all the time, and engineered the supposed burglary so that, when it became known that the Germans had got hold of the secret, no possible suspicion could attach itself upon him! It is one of the most conclusive pieces of evidence in the whole case!"

"By James, I had not thought of that!" exclaimed Lee, biting his lip. "As it happens, however, I know for a certain fact that Dare himself had nothing to do with the burglary. I tell you, colonel, that Dare is entirely innocent."

Nelson Lee was not allowed to see his friend, and he hastened back to the town. He discovered Nipper just outside Lawrence Dare's house, about to enter. The lad had also heard the news—it was all over Birmingham by this time—and he was flabbergasted.

"Oh, gov'nor, what can it mean?" he asked huskily.

"Some devilry, Nipper—some dastardly plotting!" replied Lee grimly. "Oh, it simply cannot go on! We must work like niggers in order to prove Mr. Dare's innocence. But what of Miss Eileen? Does she know?"

"Yes, sir," gulped Nipper. "She's—she's in the house, crying. That lovely girl crying! Oh, gov'nor, I feel like hitting out and—and——"

The lad could scarcely speak. This great shock had stupefied everybody. Even Nelson Lee wondered if it were all a ghastly dream. But, unfortunately, it was acute, terrible reality.

When the detective entered the house, he found Eileen in the drawing-room, and one or two maidservants were hovering about the hall, obviously distressed. Lee closed the drawing-room door, and walked across to Eileen. She looked at him quickly, and smiled through her tears.

"It is silly of me to give way like this, Mr. Lee," she said bravely, although her voice shook a little. "Did you ever hear anything so absurd in all your life? You will convince the authorities that dad is innocent, won't you?"

Nelson Lee clenched his hands.

"I have already done my best," he replied quietly. "I am afraid your father will have to undergo a court-martial, and, unless I am mistaken, it will take place almost at once. There is some terrible plot at the bottom of this!"

"I know it," Eileen declared, facing Lee and looking steadily into his eyes. "Oh, how helpless I feel! I wish I could do something! I wish I could—— But what is the use of becoming hysterical? I must keep calm. All will come right before long. Heaven could never permit such an injustice as this to continue!"

"Do you know exactly what has occurred?"

"Yes. I was told by Inspector Davis," she replied. "He was very kind, Mr. Lee, but he gave me no hope. He told me of the papers which had been found—papers which were shockingly conclusive. But I am sure of one thing!"

"And that is?"

"That Roger Haverfield is at the bottom of the plot!" Eileen declared

quietly. "I know it—I absolutely know it! It is a vile plot to get rid of my father—to have him shot as a spy! Oh, it is all so ghastly!"

She was dry-eyed now, and terribly calm.

And she had stated an actual fact. The plot was, indeed, directed against Dare in order to encompass his death by military execution. If it was not actual murder, it was dangerously near to it. To tell the truth, it was far worse than straightforward assassination. It was an awful plot—one of the most awful a man could conceive.

With Dare shot and his name made foul, it would be an easy matter for Haverfield to appropriate the engineer's invention, and to produce it as the company's. The "planting" of the false evidence had been a comparatively easy matter. Roger's companions had supplied the specimens of German letters, and the munition plans and other papers had been easily procurable. Haverfield, being a manufacturer of munitions himself, had information absolutely first-hand. And his dastardly confederates helped to fake the supposed proofs of Dare's guilt.

Who would suspect that such a plot could possibly have been hatched by Lawrence Dare's own employer? The very idea of it was preposterous! Never for one second did Haverfield stand in danger. The nature of his scheme rendered him immune from suspicion.

And the "evidence" which had been concocted was utterly and completely conclusive. There could be no possibility of Dare's acquittal. And there could be no possibility, moreover, of the crime being brought home to its perpetrator. Nelson Lee himself admitted that there was not a single ray of light.

Eileen bravely told herself that all would come right at the court-martial. But three days passed, and there was no change in the situation. Nelson Lee and Nipper remained in Birmingham, and they did much to keep Eileen's spirits up. But, without a single clue to follow up, Lee was hopeless. He worked as he had never done before, but the result was nil.

And then came the court-martial. It was held in camera, and the result was known fairly late in the evening, just as night was falling. The dread sentence was not made public, but Nelson Lee learned of it almost at once.

Lawrence Dare had been sentenced to be shot at dawn.

CHAPTER VII.

The Great Blow—Eileen's Terrible Vow—Conclusion

THE awful nature of the blow was almost too terrible for contemplation. Nelson Lee turned deathly white when he heard of the sentence, and he made no attempt to conceal his agitation.

An innocent man sentenced to be shot as a spy!

It was stupendously terrible. And there was no time for the wrong to be righted. Dare was to be shot within seven hours! It was not as though he were to be sent to prison. In that case, Lee could have worked steadily and deliberately until he proved his client's innocence.

But there was no time at all. When the sun again rose, Lawrence Dare would be dead—shot as a traitor to his country!

Nelson Lee took the news to Eileen, and broke it as gently as possible. In some strange way the girl seemed to have a premonition of the disastrous news, and she listened as though turned to stone. Nipper was there, too, and the lad buried his face in his hands in utter despair. It was not like Nipper to give way to an outburst such as this; but the lad had a heart of gold, and the sight of Eileen nearly drove him crazy.

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MISS ELLALINE TERRISS

Eileen sat in her chair, her face the colour of alabaster. Her breast heaved gently, and she seemed to be staring right through Nelson Lee into infinity. The brave girl was almost on the point of collapse at that moment. She could see, in a vision, her father before the firing-party. She could see the soldiers shoulder their arms. She could see her father fall—

Eileen uttered a little scream, and swayed. Lee jumped across to her, and attempted to make her drink some water. But she rose to her feet and faced the detective. Her beautiful face was set and stern, and her eyes were terrible to look upon.

"Is there nothing we can do, Mr. Lee?" she asked quietly, her voice almost inaudible.

"Heaven help us—nothing! There is no time!" groaned the detective.

Lee was thinking, at that moment, how completely Roger Haverfield's plot had succeeded. There was nothing to prove that Haverfield had engineered the affair, but Lee did not need proof. Eileen, too, knew that her father was the victim of the basest villainy.

The detective admitted to himself readily enough that he was beaten in this case. Yet he did not blame himself in any way. No human being in the world could have done more than he did. The plot was so complete that nothing short of a miracle could have saved Lawrence Dare from the fate which had been prepared for him.

And Nelson Lee was practically convinced that Haverfield could never be made to answer for his foul crime. The whole thing had been planned with such devilish cleverness that retribution seemed unlikely.

Gradually things had gone from bad to worse. The precious plans were still missing. They were still in Haverfield's possession. And now, not content with robbery, he had resorted to the most terrible form of murder! For it was murder—black murder! And the latter crime had been perpetrated for the purpose of turning the invention to good account. With Dare alive, the designs could not be used. So Dare had been sacrificed.

It was all so horrible.

Never, in the whole course of his career, had Nelson Lee encountered such a tragic case. And it infuriated him to be so helpless! With all his absolute knowledge that Lawrence Dare was innocent, he could do nothing at all.

Was ever Fate so crushingly cruel? Right from the outset, it seemed as though Fate had set out to entangle Lawrence Dare in the net. And now, at last, the engineer was entrapped hopelessly.

Lee was amazed at Eileen's composure. He knew that the poor girl was distracted beyond words, but she was as brave and as calm as though she herself were going to die. She loved her father distractedly, loved him more than she could ever express. And he was going to be shot—shot as a spy! The knowledge was so overwhelming that Eileen could not possibly realise the full horror of it. That would come after—after the tragedy was over.

For the present she seemed stunned, but quite calm.

"We must do something, Mr. Lee," she said deliberately. "Oh, anything—I don't know what! Cannot you suggest a plan? Can we go to the military commander here? Can we persuade him to extend——"

Lee shook his head sadly.

"I have already spoken with the colonel," he replied, "but nothing can be done. A spy is given no consideration, and rightly. A blunder such as this has never occurred previously, and the military authorities are not to blame. They cannot accept my statement that your father is innocent. They have judged by the proved evidence."

Eileen paced feverishly up and down the room.

"The War Minister!" she cried suddenly. "Oh, Mr. Lee, it is in his power to grant a pardon! Do you think——"

"Please—please, Miss Eileen, do not entertain hopes which cannot possibly be realised," said Lee distractedly. "At the very most, the War Minister would only grant you an interview with your father before the end, and such an interview would only be the essence of cruelty——"

Eileen stamped her little foot.

"We will go to the War Minister!" she cried. "Oh, I want to see my father, Mr. Lee! I want to say good-bye to him. And there is something else—something I have to tell him!"

Nelson Lee soon found that Eileen was determined, and so there was nothing else for it but to go. The girl's own motor-car—a powerful little racer—was ready in a few minutes.

Eileen herself took the wheel, and she drove superbly. There is no necessity to describe the journey, the interview, and the return. In the early hours of the morning, Eileen and Nelson Lee were back in Birmingham, armed with an order, signed by the War Minister himself, authorising the military commander to allow the girl fifteen minutes with her father alone.

Eileen was deadly calm, and she followed an officer to her father's cell with a firm tread and a fixed purpose in her eyes. Nelson Lee waited with Nipper, who had joined his master at the military headquarters.

The meeting between father and daughter was a sacred thing, and for some moments they held one another in silence. They were alone, and the door was closed. A flickering gas-jet illuminated the grim apartment.

Lawrence Dare had carried himself proudly throughout the trial. He was still upright, but the change in him was terrible to see. His face was thin and haggard, and his eyes almost glassy. Now and again he held his side as though in pain.

"Eileen—Eileen," he choked, "why did you come? My brave—brave girl! I don't know what to say to you, darling. This injustice—this awful crime! If God is just, the devils who engineered my downfall shall answer for their great sin!"

"Oh, dad, I—I——"

And then Eileen Dare checked herself. She drew herself up straight, and solemnly pointed her finger upwards. Her father watched her with wonder in his tired eyes, and almost feared her next words.

Her voice, when she spoke, was as cold as an iceberg, and it was perfectly steady.

"Father, I have come here for one reason," she said slowly. "I have come here to make you a solemn vow before my Maker. I am only a girl—a small, insignificant girl; but, if God is kind, He will see that my oath is kept——"

"My own Eileen!" panted Dare. "What are you saying——"

"Listen, father! I swear to you, solemnly and before Heaven, that I will bring punishment upon every man who was responsible for your conviction! I know them all—Roger Haverfield, Jonathan Bridger—all of them! And not a single man shall escape my vengeance! I swear that on my oath!"

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Dare clasped his daughter to his heart.

"You know not what you are saying, child!" he muttered huskily.

"Don't say that, father!" said Eileen quietly. "I have made my vow, and it shall be kept! Those men have been the cause of this—this tragedy, and they shall suffer! The law cannot touch them, for they are beyond the reach of the law. But I—I shall make them pay!"

There was something terrible in Eileen's sweet voice as she spoke the words. Her father, listening as though dazed, knew that she meant every word, that she would carry out her terrible oath to the letter.

But Lawrence Dare did not die the death of a traitor.

Eileen's farewell to her father lasted well over the fifteen minutes, and the colonel had not the heart to drag her away. When she did leave her father, she seemed almost insensible to all that was going on around her.

Nelson Lee led her away, and drove her home, and there she was taken care of by her kindly old housekeeper. Lee was sure that the girl was destined to pass through a terrible illness before she became herself again.

And in the morning news came that Lawrence Dare had died from heart failure shortly before dawn. The military doctor announced that Dare had been suffering from his heart for years, and the sudden death was only natural. The terrible ordeal had proved too much for him, and he had succumbed in time to avoid the awful death which had been awaiting him.

But the fact that he had been indirectly murdered remained unaltered. Dare's death would never have come about if it had not been for the exceptional circumstances. He would have lived healthily for years.

Eileen, however, was overwhelmingly glad that her father had died peacefully, and it was some consolation to know that, in any case, he had not been long for this world. The awful horror of the tragedy was somewhat lessened.

But the girl was stricken with brain fever, and it was six weeks before she could stir again. And when she did get well, she regained her old strength, and her cheerful, sunny nature asserted itself by degrees.

And she had a purpose in life now—a fixed, definite purpose. The lapse of weeks had in no way altered her determination. Her solemn vow to her father would be kept. She would avenge his death! She would punish his murderers!

In due course the new submarine engine was produced by the Haverfield Steel Company, and it was such an amazing success that the British Admiralty approved it, and placed a stupendous order.

The fortunes of the Haverfield Company were assured.

Eileen Dare went to London to live. She took a luxurious flat, and her companion was a maiden aunt, of whom she was very fond. The girl interviewed Nelson Lee soon after her arrival in London, and outwardly Eileen was very little changed by the great tragedy which had marred her young life.

But Nelson Lee read the great purpose in Eileen's wonderful eyes, and he knew at once, although she said no word on the subject, that, although the father had gone to his death in dire disgrace, the daughter would exact the vengeance.

THE END.

(The second story of this splendid new series will appear the week after next. Next week's story will be entitled "THE CRIMSON DISC," a grand romance dealing with Nelson Lee and Dr. Mortimer Crane, the Man with Four Identities.)

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The Mysterious Island.

THUS it came about that, a month or so later, Dr. Campbell's new yacht, the Valda, set out from England in search of the supposed South Seas treasure island.

She was a large, well-found steam vessel, with a picked crew, and fitted with almost every improvement known to modern science. She was well armed, too, and had even, packed away in her hold, two aeroplanes of a new type specially designed by the doctor himself.

Alec Mackay, to his great delight, had his chum, Clive Lowther, as fellow traveller, and with them went, of course, the indispensable Ben Grove.

The ostensible aim of the expedition was the study of the natural history of certain islands in the vicinity of the mysterious Easter Island, of which curious accounts have been given by the two or three travellers who have visited it. And as Dr. Campbell was known as a zealous and experienced scientist and explorer, the statement created neither surprise nor particular curiosity.

"So that is the island at last! The place we've been thinking of, talking of, dreaming of for so long! It seems hardly possible to realise that we are at last actually in sight of it, and that all our expectations will soon now be put to the test! How do you like the look of it, Clive?"

"Not much, Alec, if I must confess what is in my mind. Compared with some of the beautiful islands we have passed, it seems to be a contrast indeed—if what we can see of it is a fair sample!"

This talk took place on the deck of the large steam yacht Valda, as that vessel, after two or three minor adventures, approached a huge, dark-looking and forbidding mass rising out of the depths of the ocean, and towering high up towards the heavens.

This, according to the data furnished by Ben Grove, was the island upon which the explorers were to search for the wonderful "gold cave."

Clive Lowther lowered his telescope with a disappointed look; and his face, usually good tempered in expression, was clouded with dissatisfaction.

"It gives me the shivers to look at it," he went on. "You speak of dreaming about it, Alec. If it turns out as disappointing in other ways as it is in appearance, then all our hopes have been dreams indeed!"

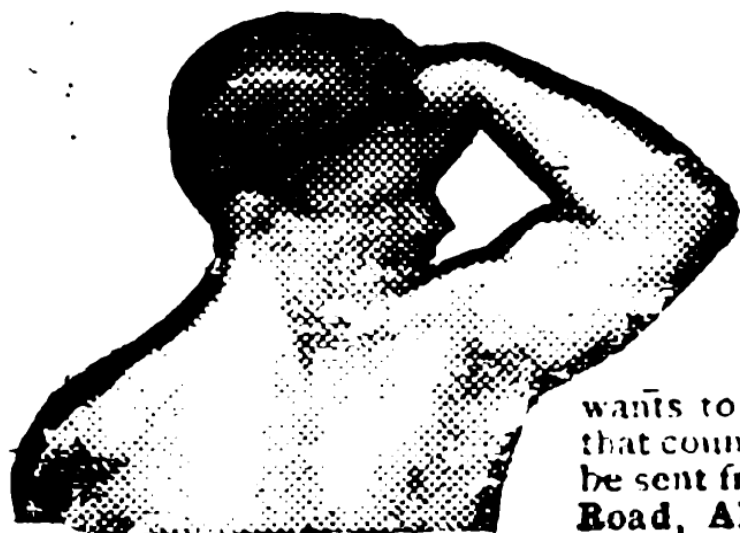
(Continued overleaf.)

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Just then Dr. Campbell came up beside the two, and gazed attentively at the uninviting-looking place they were approaching.

Seen now, in his white dress and sun-helmet, he seemed a different man from the man people at home knew as the absorbed, studious-minded scientist, giving to poring over abstruse experiments in the laboratory.

He was tall and robust, with an upright, alert figure, which denoted masculine activity, and a face expressive of a somewhat stern, determined character. But with it all, there was a breezy manner, and a light in the eyes which hinted at the kindly nature which lay beneath.

Alec Mackay was his ward. Alec's father, the captain of a Scottish merchant ship, had disappeared many years before while on a trading expedition in those very latitudes they were then visiting, and had never been heard of since.

By a will made by Captain Mackay before he had last left England, the doctor had been appointed Alec's guardian in case anything happened to his father, and as the lad had no mother, the worthy doctor had taken him to live with him, and, in due time, had made him one of his own assistants.

Dr. Campbell now took the telescope from Clive, and looked long and searchingly at the land they had come to visit, and he, too, was impressed by its gloomy appearance. This was made the more noticeable by a column of black smoke which rose from a high peak, and, speaking broadly, cast deep shadows over the rocks and valleys below.

The doctor called Ben Grove to him. The latter had been standing forward staring at the island, with a face in which there was even more disappointment than in Clive's.

Ben came aft to the doctor with a look in which surprise and perplexity struggled with dismay.

"What's the matter, Ben?" Dr. Campbell asked.

"Strike my flag, sir, but this doesn't look like the place at all," the old sailor declared.

"Why, Ben, what's wrong with it?"

"It be darker; no green grass an' trees, as I can see—an'—why, it be higher—ever so much higher!"

"Ha," muttered the doctor. "That may quite possibly be, and yet it may be the same place. These volcanic islands rise from the depths of the ocean with startling suddenness at times. And," he added grimly, "they sometimes disappear just as suddenly. It is possible enough that this one may have risen higher out of the sea since you saw it last."

"I can't think it be the same place, sir," Ben persisted, doggedly.

"Beg pardon, sir, fur sayin' it, but doan't ye think as the cap'n may 'a made a mistake?"

Dr. Campbell smiled.

"We'll question him," he said. "Go and ask him to come here."

A minute or two later Captain Barron, the doctor's navigating officer, appeared, a smile on his face, and lurking laughter in his eyes.

He was known in marine circles as "the Jolly Baron," so seldom was it that he was seen without a smile. He was short, dapper, and smart; a splendid seaman, yet one who seldom bullied his men. It was said, indeed, that he could get more work out of a crew by cutting jokes with them than other skippers could by any amount of cursing and swearing.

(Another thrilling instalment of this grand sea yarn next week.)