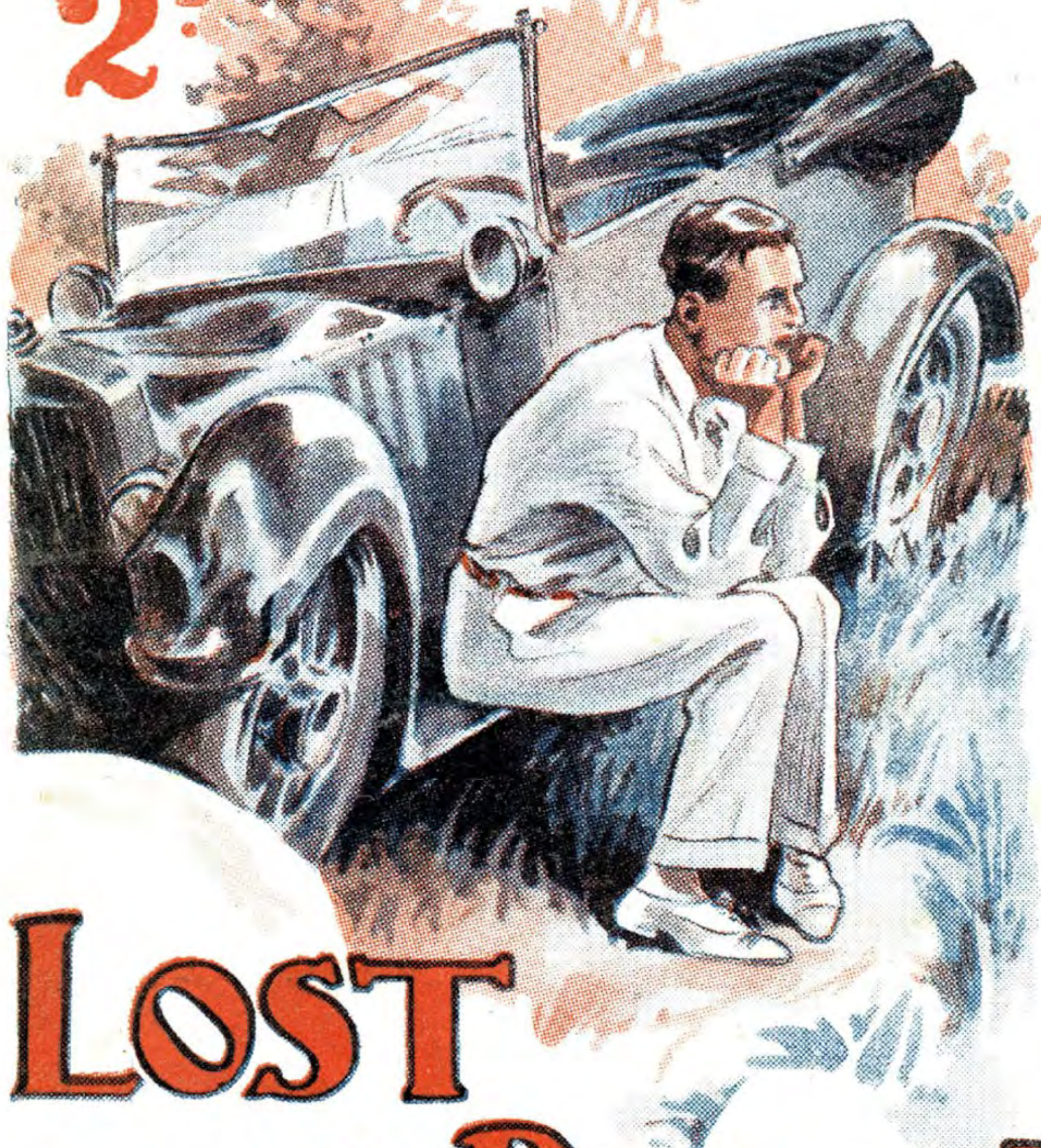


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IN THE BUSH!

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thorne and his cheery Chums of St. Frank's in Australia.

New Series No. 143.

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January 26th, 1929



Crash ! The Ford hit the big boulder with terrific force, and Archie Glenthorne was hurled out of the driving seat right over the bonnet.

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LOST IN THE BUSH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular" every Tuesday.)

At a first glance, Archie Glenthorpe would appear to be a helpless youngster; but really he's as plucky as they make 'em, and this week the genial ass of the Remove proves that more than ever.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

Rough on Archie!

THE township of Renmark, South Australia, was trying to get cool after the broiling heat of the day when Nelson Lee arrived at the big hotel, out of the dusk.

"Here he is!" said Nipper eagerly.

"By George, yes!" ejaculated Edward Oswald Handforth.

"Never," murmured Vivian Travers, "have I been so delighted to see my respected Housemaster!"

Nelson Lee found himself surrounded by a group of eager St. Frank's juniors. There were eleven of them altogether, including Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon of the Third. All the others were Removites.

"Any fresh news?" asked Nelson Lee, by way of greeting.

"None, gov'nor," replied Nipper.

"No word of Glenthorpe?"

"Not the faintest, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded gravely as he looked at the group of juniors. Round about there were several of the Renmark inhabitants, and they were looking at Lee with a certain amount of curiosity.

"We'd better go indoors, boys," said Lee crisply. "I want to hear the details of this extraordinary affair as quickly as possible."

"And we're just as anxious to tell you, sir," said Nipper.

Those eight Removites and three fags were all looking unusually serious. They waited impatiently while Nelson Lee had a few words with the manager, and with one or two Renmark townspeople who made themselves known to him.

It was a far cry from here to St. Frank's!

Strictly speaking, these juniors ought not to have been in Australia at all. They formed a sort of advance guard, and they had no right to be in Renmark, or, indeed, anywhere on the Australian continent. Their place was on the School Ship—the converted liner, St. Francis—which was even now serenely ploughing her way across the Indian Ocean, *en route* for Adelaide.

The rest of the touring school was on that ship, carrying on with lessons exactly as usual. Half St. Frank's had come on this novel trip; the entire occupants of the Ancient House and the Modern House. Back at St. Frank's, in cold, wintry England, the West House and the East House fellows were keeping the flag flying over the old school. Incidentally, they had the famous Blue Crusaders Football Club at St. Frank's just now, to liven things up a bit.

Nipper and Handforth and Willy and the rest would not have been in Australia in normal circumstances. But during their brief stay in South Africa news had come that Lord Dorrimore—the famous sporting peer—had been lost during a non-stop flight from Capetown to Cairo.

So Nelson Lee had allowed the School Ship to sail for Adelaide, promising that he would follow on by the next liner. For Nelson Lee was one of Lord Dorrimore's firmest friends, and he had deemed it his duty to go to "Dorrie's" rescue.

These twelve juniors, singularly enough, considered it their duty, too. So, on the fateful night, they had sneaked ashore, allowing the School Ship to sail without them. Then Nelson Lee had been obliged to take twelve companions with him.

Not only was Lord Dorrimore found and rescued, but his lordship had afterwards flown direct to Australia with his rescue party—using the great Manners monoplane, which was capable of a non-stop flight of eight or nine thousand miles.

Thus it was that Nelson Lee and these twelve juniors had arrived in Adelaide nearly a fortnight in advance of the School Ship. Now they were in Renmark, a thriving township not far from the New South Wales and Victoria borders. Renmark is an important irrigation centre, with many vineyards and fruit plantations in the district. The boys had come up by river steamer, and had enjoyed the trip immensely.

"Well, let me hear the details, young 'uns," said Nelson Lee gravely.

At last they were alone in a private room. And the famous schoolmaster-detective was standing with his hands behind his back, looking at his young companions.

"It was like this, sir——" began Handforth.

"If it's all the same to you, Handy, I'll do the explaining," said Nipper quietly.

"It's not all the same to me!" retorted Handforth. "My idea is to tell Mr. Lee everything in a few words——"

"Let Nipper talk, Handforth," said Nelson Lee briefly.

"Eh? Oh, all right, sir," said Handforth reluctantly.

"How much do you know already, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Very little," replied Lee. "I got your telegram, of course, and I immediately started from Adelaide. I sent you boys up

the river, to be out of harm's way—so that you can get into no mischief until the School Ship arrives at Adelaide. If you had carried out your programme, you would have travelled up the Murray River as far as Mildura, and then you would have returned to Adelaide by train, arriving in good time to meet the main party."

"And to see the Test Match, sir," said Handforth, nodding.

"Never mind the Test Match," replied Nelson Lee. "Instead of you boys keeping to that programme, I find you all putting up in this Renmark Hotel. And Glenthorne is missing."

"I'm afraid I'm the culprit, sir," said Vivian Travers quietly. "If there's any blame to be apportioned, I've got to have the lion's share."

"Don't you believe it, sir," said Nipper. "Travers was no more to blame than any of us."

"Begad, no!" nodded Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"None of us is to blame, if it comes to that," put in Willy.

"Well, let me hear the details," said Nelson Lee.

"Everything went on O.K. until we got to this township, sir—Renmark," said Nipper thoughtfully. "We had a fine time on that river-boat. We enjoyed ourselves tremendously. It was all so novel—so new to us."

"I expected it would be," nodded Nelson Lee. "I told you, before you started, that the trip was to be educative. Instead of you remaining in Adelaide, to be feted and entertained by the good citizens, I considered it better that you should be adding to your geographical knowledge."

"There's nothing like seeing these places with our own eyes, gov'nor," agreed Nipper. "Well, Handforth first started the ball rolling——"

"I did?" broke in Handforth, staring. "Why, you ass——"

"Handforth insisted that bushrangers were still to be found in Australia, sir," continued Nipper coolly. "According to his idea, bushrangers were as active as ever, holding up helpless townships, and all that sort of thing."

"I'm afraid you have been reading some sensational fiction, Handforth," said Nelson Lee severely.

"There *are* bushrangers, sir," declared Handforth, in a stubborn voice. "Two of them have got hold of poor old Archie!"

"Well, when we got to Renmark, sir, Travers thought he would work a practical joke," said Nipper. "He arranged it with a Mr. Smith—one of the local people—and seven or eight others. Travers did the thing thoroughly, and planned the whole affair with a tremendous lot of detail. Shortly after we had left Renmark, yesterday morning, to continue our trip up the river, the boat was held up by bushrangers."

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee. "A most exciting experience."

"Naturally, they were spoof bushrangers, sir," said Nipper. "It was Travers' wheeze to give Handforth, and some of these other chaps, a bit of a shock. Well, we were 'bailed up,' and the bushrangers escaped. Then, according to Travers' plan, we set off through the bush to trail the gang. While we were doing this two masked horsemen came along, grabbed Archie, and rode off with him. And we haven't seen him since, sir!"

"These two men?" said Nelson Lee. "Who were they?"

"Two of the supposed gang, sir," said Nipper. "They were two of the men who started out from Renmark with the others. But, while the rest were respectable townsmen, it seems that these two were a couple of sundowners—or tramps. They were riding on borrowed horses, and they not only stole these horses, but they kidnapped Archie as well. That part of the affair wasn't in the programme at all. And we didn't discover it until hours afterwards. At the time, we thought it was just an addition to the joke."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I can quite understand," he said slowly. "These men took advantage of the situation. I understand that nothing has been seen of Glenthorne since?"

"Nothing whatever, sir!" said Nipper quietly.



CHAPTER 2.

Nelson Lee Takes Charge!

NELSON LEE thoughtfully stroked his chin. "Well, it is a very serious situation," he said, at length.

"Poor Glenthorne! It is very rough on him."

"And it's my fault, sir," put in Vivian Travers wretchedly. "I'm to blame for the whole business! But, by Samson, how was I to know? How could I dream that two of those men would turn the joke into a reality?"

The usually imperturbable Travers was very upset. His eyes were filled with anxiety, and his cheeks were unusually pale.

"Travers, you need not blame yourself for this," said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "Personally, I do not consider that you have anything to reproach yourself with."

"Thank you, sir."

"The joke was a good one—a harmless one," continued Lee. "If I had been with you, I should have enjoyed it as much as

anybody else. As you say, how could you possibly guess that two of these Renmark men would turn out to be rogues?"

"But they're not Renmark men, sir," said Nipper.

"As far as we are concerned, they are Renmark men," insisted Nelson Lee. "Travers found them here, and gave them their instructions at the same time as the other townspeople. The fact that this pair turned the situation to their own account is unfortunate. These men, I understand, were vagrants?"

"Sundowners, sir," nodded Handforth.

"Men casually passing through the township," mused Nelson Lee. "Nobody even knows their names, eh?"

"That's the trouble, sir—they're practically strangers," said Nipper. "And they've vanished—with poor old Archie. We've been in communication with other townships, but nothing has been seen of the rotters. It's pretty obvious that they made off into the bush."

"They're going to hold Archie to ransom, I expect, sir," said Handforth eagerly. "By George! If we could only get on their track——"

"I am here for that purpose, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "You boys must leave this matter entirely in my hands. Without doubt, ran-

som is the object of this abduction. The men know, of course, that Glenthorne is a son of a wealthy family. They have hopes, no doubt, that a large sum will be paid for their prisoner's release."

"But how will they get in touch with Archie's people, sir?" asked Handforth.

"We cannot possibly know what these men will do," said Lee, lighting a cigarette. "I doubt, however, if they will attempt to communicate direct with Colonel Glenthorne, in England."

Soon afterwards Nelson Lee went into the big smoking-room, and he made the acquaintance of Mr. Warren Smith, who had been one of the leaders in that disastrous practical joke. He was a genial, likeable man, and he assured Nelson Lee that the kidnapping of Archie Glenthorne had hit them all as a tremendous surprise.

Lee got acquainted with other prominent Renmark men, too, including the local representative of the law, and from all these he heard the same story. The unfortunate Archie Glenthorne had vanished, and no trace of him had been found since.

It was very puzzling, too. One would certainly have imagined that those two horsemen, with their prisoner, would have been

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For further details*

SEE PAGE 31!

seen in some other township or settlement—or even, perhaps, on some outlying station. But no. The trio had completely vanished.

"They're in the bush," declared Mr. Smith firmly. "There's nothing else to think. They're lying low—probably in some retreat of their own."

Later, when the hotel had closed its doors, Nelson Lee bade good-night to the St. Frank's boys.

"Have you decided upon any line of action, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"I have decided nothing—yet," replied Nelson Lee. "You boys had better go to bed now. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall send you back to Adelaide—"

"Oh, sir!"

"Cheese it, guv'nor!"

"Begad!"

"I fail to see that you can be of any use here," said Nelson Lee, taking no notice of those protests. "Yet, perhaps, it would be better for me to keep you under my eye," he added. "Goodness only knows what trouble you will get into if I send you off on your own again."

"Far better keep us under your eye, guv'nor," said Nipper firmly.

"Besides, we want to help in the search for Archie!" said Handforth indignantly. "By George! You're not going to leave us out in the cold, sir, are you? Archie's our chum, and—"

"That'll do, Handforth—that'll do!" broke in Nelson Lee. "We will not go into any arguments to-night, if you please. I can quite believe that you are anxious and eager to search for Glenthorne. But we can do nothing until we have some line to work upon, and at present I must confess that the position seems to be fairly barren."

"Can't we get up search parties, sir?" suggested the irrepressible Handforth. "That's what I said to Mr. Smith only this morning. Why not get dozens of search parties, and scour the bush—"

"He thinks the bush is about as big as Bellton Wood, sir," put in Travers kindly.

"Yes, Handforth, I am afraid that your conception of the Australian bush is somewhat at fault—even though you have already had glimpses of it," said Lee dryly. "Sending search parties into the bush would be quite feasible if we had some notion of the right direction, but to go at random would be a mere waste of time. The problem is more difficult than you seem to believe."

Without allowing Handforth to argue any further, Nelson Lee said "good-night," and retired to his own bed-room.

As soon as he was alone he allowed an expression of real gravity to come into his face. He did not want the juniors to know how worried he was, but in all truth Lee was very greatly concerned.

He was glad to remove his clothing, and soon afterwards he paced slowly up and down, clad in airy pyjamas and a light silken dressing-gown. His brow was lined and troubled as he puffed at his pipe. The school-master-detective had not expected to have

any such problem as this placed before him so soon after his arrival in Australia.

Tap!

Lee glanced round, frowning with irritation. Somebody was tapping on his door, and he immediately thought of Handforth. It was just like Edward Oswald to come here, bothering.

Tap-tap-tap!

"All right, my young friend—all right!" murmured Nelson Lee grimly.

He strode over to the door, and flung it open.

"Mr. Nelson Lee?" asked a soft voice.

Lee took the pipe from between his teeth, and looked at the stranger who stood before him. If Lee was surprised, he showed no sign of it. The man in front of him was a rather rough-looking customer, and he was attired in a dressing-gown, too—only his robe was a cheap cotton one.

"My name is Lee," said the detective, nodding. "Do you want me?"

"I'd like to come into your room, Mr. Lee," said the other. "It's important—and private."

Nelson Lee stood aside.

"By all means," he said readily. "But I must confess you have the advantage of me, Mr.—"

"Gibson," said the other. "Gibson's my name. Pleased to know you, Mr. Lee. Put it there, sir!"

They were in the room now, and the door was closed. Nelson Lee accepted Mr. Gibson's hand—yet he felt that this man was no friend of his. There was something in the stranger's eyes—some lurking, shifty excitement—which warned Nelson Lee to be cautious.



CHAPTER 3.

A Startling Proposition!

MR. GIBSON strolled to a little table near the bed, selected a cigarette from a box there, lit it, and faced his host.

"You're making yourself at home, I see," remarked Nelson Lee.

"Too right, I am," nodded the stranger. "Well, Mr. Lee, your time is valuable, and so is mine. We'd better get down to business."

At first Nelson Lee had had a vague idea that this man was merely a curious local inhabitant; but within a very few seconds Lee had changed his mind. There was something behind this little affair.

"If we have any business to attend to, then let us get it over, by all means," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "But again you have the advantage of me, Mr. Gibson."

"Well, I'm a guest in this hotel, the same as yourself," said the other. "Been here since yesterday. Got business with the fruit people, out on the irrigation—"

"But what business have you with me, Mr. Gibson?" broke in Nelson Lee. "I would remind you that——"

"No need to remind me of anything," said Gibson. "And in case you think I'm wasting your time I'll tell you at once that I know where this missing boy, Glenthorne, is to be found."

If he expected Lee to start he was disappointed.

"Indeed?" was all that Nelson Lee said.

"We're private here, and so we can talk frankly," continued the stranger. "Between you and me, Mr. Lee, it's going to cost some big money for you to get that boy back."

"What do you call big money?"

"Twenty thousand pounds!" said Gibson coolly.

"Really," murmured Lee. "You are very modest in your requirements, Mr. Gibson. Am I to take it that you are a member of this—er—gang which has kidnapped young Glenthorne?"

"You can put it that way, if you like—it doesn't hurt me," replied Gibson. "I'm 'in' with the men who took young Glenthorne away. And I am here, in Renmark, to fix up the business details."

"My arrival, then, was most opportune?"

"Too right, it was!" nodded Gibson. "I was going down to Adelaide, to talk to you there. Then I heard that you were coming up, so I waited. We can talk our business here just as well as in Adelaide. You see, Mr. Lee, there was a great deal of publicity when you and these boys arrived in that aeroplane. We heard all about it, and we knew that you were in Adelaide—and I'm fully aware of the fact that you are in full charge of these boys. So I couldn't approach anybody higher up than yourself."

"And you think that I can act for the boy's parents?" asked Nelson Lee ominously.

"Who better?" said Gibson. "You're in charge of this school, and you're in charge of the boy. If you want to communicate with his parents, that's your affair. All I'm going to tell you is that you won't see him unless you guarantee to give me twenty thousand pounds."

Nelson Lee remained very, very calm. In fact, he was so calm that Gibson became uneasy. He uttered a startled exclamation as Nelson Lee moved towards the door.

"Keep away from there!" snapped the man. "You'd better hear me out!"

"Make no mistake, my friend—I had no intention of calling for the manager," said Lee, turning. "Indeed, I am quite curious to hear some more. What makes you optimistic enough to believe that Glenthorne's parents will pay such an exorbitant sum for his safe return?"

"They're rich—and if we don't get the money the boy will never come back!"

"Never?"

"Never!" said Gibson harshly. "So it's twenty thousand pounds—or death! I'm here to speak plainly!"

"And you are staying in this hotel, openly, under the name of Gibson?" asked Lee.

"I am."

"What is to prevent me having you arrested?"

"Several things," said Gibson, with a laugh. "But the most important thing is that if I'm arrested young Glenthorne will die."

"You've got it all arranged, have you?"

"Every move!" said Gibson, throwing his cigarette down and stamping on it. "Look here, Mr. Lee! We've had enough of this politeness! Parlour manners don't suit me. I want to talk—business!"

"How do I know that there is any truth in your story?" asked Lee, as he sat down.

"You may know no more about Glenthorne's whereabouts than any of these Renmark townspeople."

"Your job is to get that money—in cash," said the other. "You won't need to pay it over until the boy has been delivered into your hands. He's in the bush now, with my two pals. But that's all I'm going to tell you."

"Your statement is singularly barren," said Lee dryly. "I had already gathered that Glenthorne was in the bush. And you have the effrontery to come to me——"

"Cut that out!" interrupted Gibson sourly. "We don't want any long words, mister! I'm taking a chance, and I'm ready. If you're foolish, you'll have me arrested and lodged in gaol. But I'd better tell you that unless I return to my pals with the money at the end of seven days, Glenthorne will be taken into the heart of the bush and left there!"

"To find his way out alone?"

"Yes, to find his way out alone!" said Gibson. "And do you think he'll find it? A raw English boy? He'll be bushed within a couple of hours, and you know what that means—and at this time of the year!"

Nelson Lee said nothing for a few moments. But he was struck by the cunning of this plan. Much as he wanted to seize this rogue, and hand him over to the law, he could not do so. Perhaps it was all bluff—perhaps Archie Glenthorne would not be deserted in the bush. Yet, on the other hand, there was more than a chance that Gibson's story was true. Lee could not possibly take that risk. Thus he found himself facing this rascal with the knowledge that he could not lift a finger against him.

"You are quite right," he said grimly. "If Glenthorne is stranded in the bush his plight will be hopeless."

"He'll be left without food and water," said Gibson. "If he manages to get to a settlement, all well and good. But do you think he'll succeed? You'd best give in, Mr. Lee. I hold the ace. Promise me that you'll make arrangements about this money, and I'll lie low for a few days—and then, when the money comes, I'll lead you to the spot—Well, that'll do later. Anyhow, I'll

guarantee to place the boy into your hands, safe and well. But only on condition that you get that money."

"Twenty thousand pounds?"

"In cash," nodded Mr. Gibson coolly. "You've got a week. It ought to be easy—even if you have to cable three or four times to England. I shall be here, waiting—ready. But if you delay—if the time goes beyond the week—I shall——"

"Join your companions?"

"Too right, I will!" said Mr. Gibson sarcastically. "No, mister, I'll travel along to Adelaide. You'll have nothing on me! And my pals will know that the game has failed, and they'll leave the boy in the bush. That'll be the end of it—and I shall be safe."

He snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"You'll have nothing on me!" he added. "This is a private conversation, and, as evidence, it doesn't amount to a shred. You'd best give in. I've got you beaten all along the line!"



CHAPTER 4.

The Trump Card!

THERE was a mocking light of confidence in Gibson's eyes as he stood looking at Nelson Lee. The man had every reason for his attitude. He was safe, and he knew it.

Lee was quite helpless to take any action.

As Gibson himself had said, this conversation was a private one. If Nelson Lee called in the law, Gibson would undoubtedly laugh at the whole story and declare that Nelson Lee was dreaming, and it would be impossible to prove anything against the man.

He was not one of the two who had kidnapped Archie; he was not known to be connected with them in any way. He was apparently a harmless guest at this hotel.

"You must allow me to compliment you upon the completeness of your little plot," said Nelson Lee smoothly, at length. "It is very clever, Mr. Gibson."

The man scowled.

"I don't want any of your back-chat," he snapped.

"No, I am quite in earnest," said Lee smoothly. "Your plot is very complete—very brainy. As you have told me, my hands are tied. I cannot inform the police, firstly because I have no evidence against you, and, secondly, if the police decided to hold you on suspicion, Glenthorne's life would be forfeited."

"Too right, it would!" said Gibson harshly.

"However, I cannot give you an answer at this minute," continued Nelson Lee. "We will leave it until the morning, Mr. Gibson. I will think it over in the meanwhile."

"You'd best think in the right way!" advised Gibson dangerously. "We've left no

loophole. Understand? I'm not going to have any communication with my pals during this week. I shan't leave this hotel—or, at least, I shan't go out of Renmark. So you can watch me as much as you like—and you can make as many plans as you like. But they'll all come to nothing. You'd best get that quite straight. And if you do nothing—and if I fail to turn up with that money at the end of the week—Glenthorne will be taken into the bush, and my pals will clear off. That's all. I can't put it clearer than that."

"You have put it very concisely and neatly," nodded Nelson Lee. "Well, Mr. Gibson, there is no reason why this interview should be prolonged. I will bid you good-night."

"You'd better make up your mind——"

"Enough!" snapped Nelson Lee. "I will see you again in the morning."

"Remember! That boy will be bushed if——"

"You need not repeat your threats," broke in Lee. "I quite understand. Good-night."

"You've got the figure—twenty thousand?"

"I have."

"We won't consider anything under——"

"I will see what can be done, perhaps," said Nelson Lee. "If you will be on the veranda to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, I will join you."

"Good-o!" said Mr. Gibson, nodding. "That's a bet!"

He went to the door, opened it, and slipped out. After he had gone Nelson Lee stood in the centre of the room, frowning, and staring straight in front of him. He did not like the look of things at all. He was quite convinced that Gibson was no fake. Gibson was a member of a gang—the business representative—left in Renmark to transact the deal.

What could Nelson Lee do?

If he decided to watch the fellow, nothing would happen. Gibson would be aware of the game, and he would take no action. And there was always the chance that these rogues were in deadly earnest—that they would, indeed, "bush" the unfortunate Archie at the end of a week, and admit the game a failure—rather than drag on, with the increasing risk of being captured.

"They're clever!" muttered Lee. "Infernally clever!"

Tap!

Lee glanced at the door, and he saw it open to admit Nipper.

"What's happened, guv'nor?" asked Nipper in a low voice, as he closed the door and advanced into the bed-room.

"How do you know that anything has happened?" retorted Lee.

Nipper was looking curious and excited. He was dressed in his pyjamas only, and he came close to his famous "guv'nor" and looked earnestly into his face.

"There's something on, sir," he said tensely. "You can't fool me! Who was



The stranger looked at Nelson Lee squarely. "It's going to cost you twenty thousand pounds to get young Glenthorne back alive!" he said grimly.

that man who came out of this room a minute or two ago?"

"You saw him, then?"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"Did any of the other boys see him?"

"No."

"Have you told any of the other boys?"

"No, sir."

"I am glad of that," said Lee. "How is it that you saw this man? Were you watching my door?"

"Of course I wasn't!" protested Nipper. "It was only by chance I happened to come out—I was going to the bath-room—when I saw the man slip out and make off down the corridor. Who is he, sir?"

"You're very suspicious, aren't you?" asked Lee. "Surely a fellow guest can come—"

"Fellow guest be blowed, sir!" broke in Nipper. "You wouldn't be looking so worried and startled unless there was something special in the wind."

"Am I looking worried and startled?"

"Not now, sir—but you were a minute ago," said Nipper. "You were off your guard for a minute—and I spotted you."

"Upon my word! You're very acute in your observation, Nipper."

"You trained me, guv'nor," retorted Nipper coolly.

"H'm! Well, I suppose I'd better tell you," said Lee, after a moment or two. "Yes,

Nipper, that man was the—er—business representative of the kidnappers!"

"Great Scott!"

"A cool customer, Nipper."

"But you didn't listen to him, did you, sir?" asked Nipper, in astonishment. "You didn't agree to any of his terms about Archie, did you? My only hat! Why didn't you call for the manager—or for us? We would have grabbed the rotter, and—"

"It was no time for such drastic action, young 'un," broke in Nelson Lee. "This man—Gibson, he calls himself—is quite safe. He was frank with me, but I haven't a shred of real evidence against him."

And Nelson Lee, in a very few words, explained the situation. Nipper listened, his colour increasing. At last he had heard all, and he stood there, aghast.

"It's awful, guv'nor!" he ejaculated. "You're in a cleft stick! You can't move a finger against the fellow."

"So it seems."

"And unless you get that money poor old Archie will be left to die in the bush!" went on Nipper. "Can't we do anything, guv'nor—really? Can't we force this man to speak?"

"How?" asked Lee. "We can't torture him, can we? These are not the days of the Spanish Inquisition, Nipper. If the man is arrested, he will laugh at the whole story and say that I'm mad."

"Then the only thing to do is to get the money—and pay it over!"

"There certainly appears to be no other solution—if we are to get poor Archie back alive," said Lee gravely. "It seems that if I attempt to make any investigations the gang will continue to lie low. Or, indeed, if they get frightened, they might even abandon Archie before the week is up."

"That's just what I was thinking, sir," said Nipper in alarm. "Great Scott! You'll have to go easy!"

"Yes, whatever I do, I must do with extreme caution," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Not that I can see any possible channel for investigation. It seems that there is only one chance for the boy."

Nipper stared.

"You—you mean to get the money?"

"Well, can you suggest anything else?"

"I'm blowed if I can, guv'nor!" said Nipper, scratching his head. "But do you think Colonel Glenthorne will pay up?"

"There's not the slightest doubt that Archie's father will pay up if he thinks that any kind of delay will endanger the boy's life," replied Nelson Lee. "Indeed, it might be the best possible solution to pay up. There are times, Nipper, when it is better and safer to admit defeat."

Nipper gave a snort.

"Cheese it, guv'nor!" he protested. "You can't fool me like that! When you start admitting defeat, I shall start growing green whiskers!"



CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for the Juniors!

NIPPER went back to his own bed-room, troubled and uneasy. He did not believe, for a single moment, that Nelson Lee would tamely submit to the outrageous terms that the "business representative" of the gang had suggested.

Yet, if it meant Archie Glenthorne's life

"Oh, well, I'm not going to worry my head," said Nipper gruffly. "The guv'nor's got the case in hand—and there's nobody in the world who could handle it better."

And with this philosophical thought Nipper went to sleep.

He was awakened in the morning by Handforth, who came marching resolutely into his bed-room.

"Come on—out you get!" said Handforth briskly.

Nipper sat up, startled.

"What's the time?" he asked, blinking.

"Eight o'clock."

"Rats!" said Nipper. "I meant to be up at six!"

"Oh-ho! I thought you were the chap who could wake up at any hour you liked?" asked Handforth, grinning.

"So I can, as a rule," growled Nipper, as he tumbled out. "But I couldn't sleep last night. The heat, for one thing—and I was awake until nearly two o'clock thinking about things."

"I was awake, too," nodded Handforth. "And I've been thinking about things. To-day, my son, we're going to get into action!"

"We'll hear what the guv'nor has to say about that," retorted Nipper, as he started dressing.

Church and McClure, Handforth's faithful chums, appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, here he is!" said Church. "I suppose he's been telling you of his wonderful plan, Nipper?"

"No. I've escaped it so far," said Nipper.

"Escaped it!" roared Handforth. "You silly ass! It's the finest plan under the sun! It's a marvellous wheeze!"

"Who thought of it?"

"I did!"

"Oh!"

"Why do you say 'Oh!' in that tone?" demanded Handforth suspiciously. "I've decided that the only thing we can do is to get a lot of horses and scan the bush. We'll go in pairs, and we'll examine every inch of the bush to the north."

"Is this what you call your marvellous wheeze?" asked Nipper patiently.

"Yes."

"What does Mr. Lee say about it?"

"I haven't spoken to him yet—but I'm going to put it to him at breakfast-time," said Handforth confidently. "We'll explore all the bush to the northwards—"

"As far as Cape York, in Queensland, eh?"

"Yes, as far as that, if necessary," said Handforth defiantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle at," roared Handforth. "You heartless rotters! Aren't you willing to search the bush for Archie?"

"We're willing to do anything within reason, Handy," said Nipper gently. "But I'm afraid it'll be too much of a task for us to search all the bush between here and Cape York. You see, roughly the distance is about one thousand four hundred miles as the crow flies!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Handforth.

"And it's not all bush, either," added Nipper. "It might take us too long—"

"You howling idiot!" yelled Handforth. "I—I didn't mean we'd explore as much bush as that!"

"We'll satisfy ourselves with only going half way," suggested Church solemnly.

"If you're trying to pull my leg, Walter Church, I'll biff you on the nose! When I say we'll search the bush, I mean the bush about here. We don't want to go into the back blocks!"

"Leave it until you've had a word with the guv'nor, Handy!" said Nipper soothingly.

A GREAT SURPRISE IS IN STORE FOR—

"The chances are he'll have a scheme of his own, and he might not want you to help."

"That's impossible!" said Handforth. "He's bound to want me. Everybody knows that I'm a keen amateur detective."

"Ahem!"

"Got a cold?" asked Handforth, glaring.

"Not exactly, old man, but you mustn't be so optimistic about Mr. Lee," said Nipper. "He's got a warped idea about your capabilities. Strange as it may seem, he thinks that your detective ability is negligible."

"He thinks it's what?"

"Well, we won't say negligible—we'll say non-existent," amended Nipper. "I'm afraid you're not appreciated, Handy. It's a sad, sad world!"

Handforth snorted.

"Archie's one of us—and we're going to have a hand in rescuing him," he said firmly. "And if Mr. Lee tries to choke us off, we'll have something to say—and it won't be very sweet!"

He marched out, and went downstairs with Church and McClure. They found Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts talking with Willy & Co. of the Third, out on the sunny veranda.

By all appearances, it was going to be another blazing hot day—for in Australia, of course, it was practically mid-summer. The juniors had seen much wheat in this district, ripe and ruddy, all ready for cutting. It was January—but it was harvest-time.

"Where's Mr. Lee?" asked Handforth briskly, as he looked at the juniors, and then up and down the front of the hotel and along the sunlit street.

"Gone!" said Willy.

"Gone?" repeated Handforth, looking at his minor. "Gone where?"

"To Adelaide."

"You silly young ass!" snorted Handforth. "If you think you can be funny with me——"

"All right—ask the manager," said Willy. "Mr. Lee started off for Adelaide early this morning—in fact, he went just over half an hour ago."

"You're mad!" said Handforth. "Why, Mr. Lee only got here last night! He's going to investigate Archie Glenthorne's disappearance."

"Well, well!" said Travers soothingly. "We mustn't get flurried, Handforth, dear old fellow. It's much too hot for that. It happens to be perfectly true, though, that Mr. Lee has gone back to Adelaide."

"What's that?" asked Nipper sharply, as he appeared.

"Mr. Lee has gone back to Adelaide," repeated Travers.

"What rot!" said Nipper.

"Honour bright!" added Travers.

"Great Scott!" yelled Handforth. "Then—then it's really true?"

"I say—honour bright!"

"But why?" asked Handforth blankly. "What's he gone back for like this? He hasn't had time to investigate anything! And why couldn't he wait until we came down?"

"That was very inconsiderate of him, Ted," said Willy, nodding. "Of course, there's just a chance that he wanted to catch a train over at Paringa, on the other side of the river."

"Did you see him go?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Yes."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Good-bye," said Willy.

"You—you——"

"Well, you asked," said Willy. "That's all Mr. Lee said to me—'Good-bye!' Of course, before that I had asked him where he was going, and he told me that he was popping back to Adelaide. But he must have been very careless this morning. He didn't tell me why he was going."

"Why wasn't I up?" asked Handforth bitterly. "How the dickens was I to know that Mr. Lee would bolt off like this? Back to Adelaide! My only Sunday topper! He comes all the way here—fifty or sixty miles——"

"It's nearer two hundred, but never mind," murmured Travers.

"He comes all this way, and then goes back the next morning!" said Handforth, in bewilderment. "Why? What about Archie? How the dickens can Mr. Lee help Archie by going back to Adelaide?"

All the juniors—with the solitary exception of Nipper—were sorely puzzled. To them, Nelson Lee's sudden return to Adelaide was utterly inexplicable.

But to Nipper it was full of significance.

CHAPTER 6.

Nipper Keeps His Eyes Open!



N

IPPER was in the fortunate position of knowing something of which the other juniors had no inkling.

This knowledge now served Nipper well. He could readily understand why Nelson Lee had returned, post haste, to the Queen City of South Australia.

"Confound it!" muttered Nipper irritably. "I meant to be up early this morning, too. But I suppose the gov'nor was only too glad to get off without saying anything to me."

He asked the manager if Nelson Lee had left any message, but there was none. The

manager only knew that Lee had hurried away to catch an early train. Indeed, the famous schoolmaster-detective had hinted that if there was no ordinary train he would even charter a special.

"Of course, it's clear enough," muttered Nipper. "The gov'nor has decided that the only way to save Archie is to provide that money. He's got a week, anyhow."

The cabling facilities would be much more adequate in Adelaide. There might be delays here, in Renmark. Moreover, Lee had no wish for these townspeople to know of what he was doing. It was better, all round, that he should return to Adelaide and transact the business from there. He could then turn up with the twenty thousand pounds in cash, and nobody in Renmark would be the wiser.

It was easy enough for Nipper to realise all this. But never for a moment did Nipper believe that Nelson Lee would tamely pay that ransom, as Gibson demanded.

"No, the gov'nor can't bluff me!" said Nipper to himself. "He's got some sort of wheeze on. He means to get the money—because he can't risk Archie's life. But I'll eat my hat if the gov'nor pays that money over."

He amended this rash statement after a little further thought.

"Well, perhaps he *will* pay the money over," he murmured, "but if he does he'll jolly well see that Archie is safe first—and then he'll probably go ahead and get the money back and round up the crooks. Once Archie's O.K., the gov'nor will go all out. I know him!"

All the same, Nipper was very annoyed with himself for having missed Nelson Lee before the latter had gone. Yet it was obvious the schoolmaster-detective had slipped away on the quiet. He did not want the juniors to bother him with endless questions; and he realised, no doubt, that Nipper would quickly jump to the truth. And Nipper kept his own counsel; he said nothing to the other fellows.

He had a definite object in this, too. He could trust them with the secret, but he could not rely upon them refraining from staring at Gibson.

As matters now stood, Handforth and Tommy Watson and Potts and the others took utterly no notice of Gibson. He was nothing to them. At breakfast-time, they did not even glance in the direction of Gibson's table. But Nipper did—and Nipper was able to keep himself well in hand. If all these other juniors had known the truth, however, they would have stared at Gibson continuously, even though they would be pretending not to do so; and Gibson, being on the alert, would have spotted it—with, perhaps, disastrous results, for the man would have become alarmed.

But Gibson was looking particularly complacent this morning—and with excellent reason.

He had heard of Nelson Lee's departure, no doubt—and he knew what it portended. He lounged about idly after breakfast, smoking and reading. Nipper made it his business to keep a sharp eye on Gibson continuously. However, Nipper had been trained to this sort of thing, and the man never had the faintest suspicion that he was receiving all this attention. If it came to that, Handforth and the other Removites noticed nothing unusual in Nipper's manner.

"Well, the gov'nor didn't give me any instructions verbally—but he knows that he can rely upon my own common sense," Nipper told himself. "He probably expects me to keep Gibson under observation. Not that it'll be any good. I don't suppose the man will have any communication with those rotten pals of his!"

This seemed very unlikely—particularly in view of the fact that Nelson Lee had obviously gone to Adelaide to fetch the ransom money. Gibson's only task, now, was to wait at this hotel until Lee returned.

It was clear that Gibson was not suspected by the hotel management, or by any of the Renmark citizens. He was merely regarded as an ordinary hotel guest.

Yet here was this man, a member of the gang which had kidnapped Archie, openly lounging about, taking his ease, smoking and reading, and mixing with the other guests, discussing Archie's abduction!

The situation was not without its humorous side, and Nipper found himself much easier in mind this morning. As long as Gibson remained here, a guest under this roof, it was a moral certainty that Archie Glenthorne was safe. So, although the other juniors worried, Nipper felt very calm. And he decided that the best way he could help Nelson Lee would be to prevent his companions from doing anything drastic. It was a waiting game now, without any chance of anything being done until Lee returned; and it might be several days before the great detective came back.

Handforth was inclined to be troublesome.

"Well, we can't bother about Mr. Lee," he said stubbornly. "If he chooses to bunk off like this, it's his own doing. But we're going to search for poor old Archie!"

"How can we search, Handy?" asked Church. "We don't know the bush. It's more than likely that Archie is being held in some retreat fifty or sixty miles away. There's no real bush just here, and——"

"Then we can go to the place where the real bush is," said Handforth coldly.

"It's no good, old man," put in Nipper. "You seem to overlook the fact that every township, every settlement, and every station for miles has been warned——"

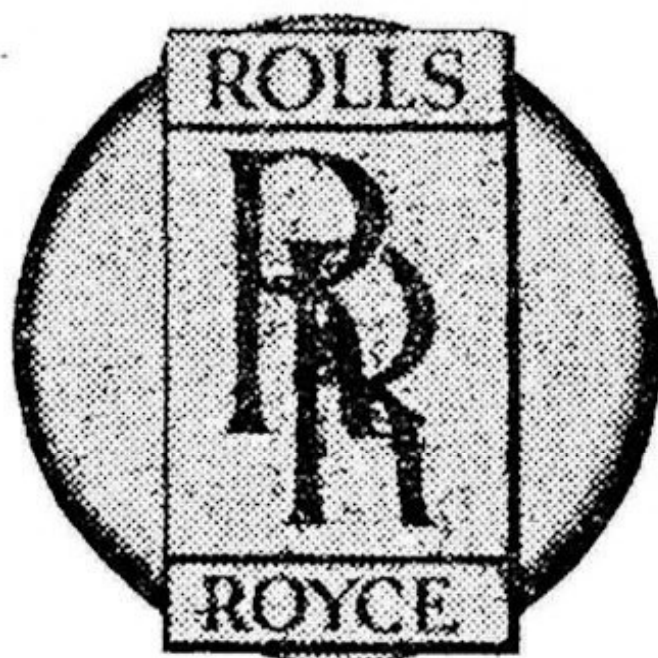
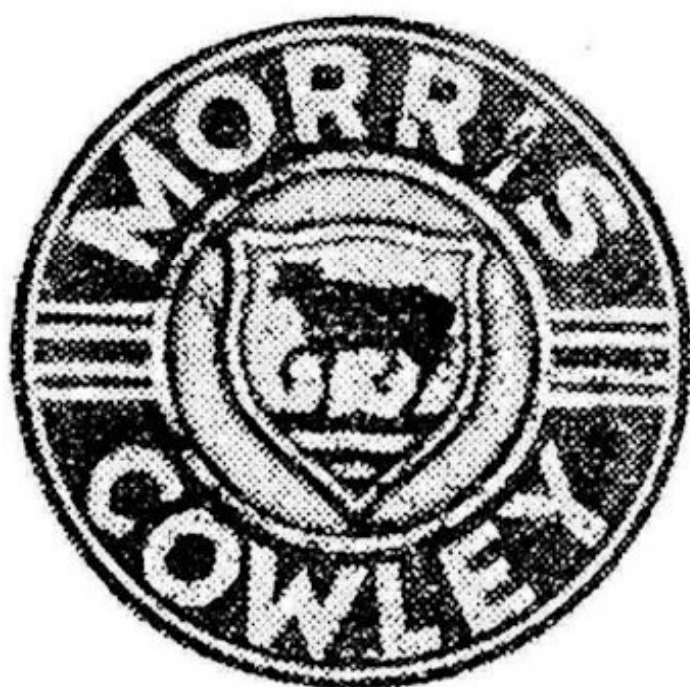
"Never mind the stations," said Handforth. "I don't suppose they've taken Archie anywhere by train, anyhow."

"Train?" repeated Nipper, puzzled.

"You said something about watching the stations——"

(Continued on page 14)

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LOST IN THE BUSH!



(Continued from page 12.)

"Cattle stations, old man," said Nipper gently.

"Eh?"

"In Australia, they're called stations," said Willy, with kindly patience. "In Canada, perhaps, they'd be called ranches—but in Australia they're stations."

"Then it's a silly name!" retorted Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "I thought Nipper was talking about railway stations."

"I wasn't," said Nipper. "I was saying that every settlement and cattle station for many miles round has been warned. Everybody is on the look-out, Handy. Nothing has been seen of these kidnappers. So what do you suppose we can do? We're only visitors here—we're strangers in an unfamiliar land, and we should only get ourselves laughed at. No, Handy, we can't do anything until the gov'nor comes back."

"I can't understand why he went!" grumbled Handforth. "It was such a rummy thing to do!"

The others were in the dark, too.

Nipper's task during the morning was an easy one, for Gibson did not venture out of the hotel. But after lunch he took a stroll into the town. Not that this led to anything. For Nipper, casually wandering about, and keeping his eye on the man, saw him buy some cigarettes, after which he stood chatting with a police officer for a minute or two, obviously discussing the weather.

Without question, the wily Mr. Gibson was taking no chances. He was having no communications with his confederates—but was waiting, in Renmark, marking time until Nelson Lee turned up with the money.



CHAPTER 7.

Willy the Sleuth!

"My sons, there's something on!" said Willy softly.

He and Chubby Heath and Juicy

Lemon, of the Third, were standing in the main street, seeking a little shelter from the broiling sunshine. They had been indulging in some iced drinks, and felt very refreshed—at the moment, anyway!

"Something on?" repeated Chubby Heath. "The Test Match, do you mean?"

"That's not until next week—and it's at Adelaide," pointed out Juicy.

"All the same, everybody's talking about it," said Chubby. "It's the only topic of conversation in this giddy town! Everywhere you go it's the same. They're jabbering about Jardine, or Geary, or Hobbs, or Sutcliffe."

"If they're not talking about those, they're talking about Larwood or Tate, or Chapman," said Juicy, nodding. "And, naturally, they're talking about Ryder and Oldfield and——"

"I don't want to hear a list of Test cricketers!" interrupted Willy sternly. "Dry up about the Test match!"

"Everybody's mad on Test cricket just now," said Chubby, with a grunt. "They've even forgotten about poor old Archie! Cricket's more important!"

This was perfectly true. Renmark, like the majority of other towns in South Australia—or, if it came to that, in the whole of Australia—could think or talk of nothing but the forthcoming Test match at Adelaide.

"It's that man Gibson," said Willy shrewdly.

"Gibson?" asked Chubby.

"Who's he?" demanded Juicy.

"Gibson—one of the guests at the hotel," said Willy. "I don't know whether you've noticed him particularly——"

"We haven't," interrupted Chubby.

"Well, there's something rummy about that man," declared Willy. "Nipper believes that he's avoided being spotted. Perhaps he has, by the other fellows—but not by me."

"What do you mean—avoided being spotted?" asked Chubby Heath, staring.

"Well, Nipper has been keeping his eye on this man Gibson all day," replied Willy. "I've noticed it—because I've been rather interested in Gibson, too. But for that fact, I don't suppose I should have twigged Nipper's game."

"I don't understand!" said Juicy, bewildered.

"You will in a minute—after I have explained," said Willy. "You think it's rummy that I should be interested in Gibson?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was only casually curious about him at first—but then, when I noticed that Nipper was giving him so much attention, I became more interested," said Willy in a low voice. "The fact of the matter is, I was up jolly early this morning—before you chaps."

"Well?"

"And I happened to see Mr. Lee talking earnestly with this man Gibson on the

veranda," continued Willy. "Now, there was nothing much in that, perhaps. But why should Mr. Lee talk with this perfect stranger—and so solemnly, too? They were in a place where it was impossible for anybody to overhear them, and yet they were talking in voices that were hardly above whispers."

"It certainly seems a bit funny," admitted Chubby, scratching his head.

"It's not merely funny—but it's significant," said Willy. "First of all there's Mr. Lee jawing with this man Gibson. Then, all day, Nipper has been keeping his eye on Gibson, and Mr. Lee himself has gone rushing off to Adelaide. I tell you, my sons, there's something on."

The other two fags, who had noticed nothing out of the common, were inclined to be sceptical. They didn't know who Gibson was, in the first place, and they had certainly failed to observe Nipper's activities.

"You must be mistaken, Willy," said Chubby dubiously.

"I'm not mistaken!"

"Then who is this man, and what's he doing?" demanded Chubby. "You're not suggesting that he knows anything about poor old Archie, are you? You don't think he's one of these Renmark detectives, I suppose?"

"Are there any Renmark detectives?" asked Willy, grinning.

"Goodness knows!" said Chubby. "But I thought every town had its detective force. Anyhow, you say the man was talking to Mr. Lee this morning——"

"And Mr. Lee wasn't looking any too friendly," nodded Willy. "I don't pretend to know any of the inner facts—but there's something rummy about this man, Gibson. I wouldn't have taken so much notice of Mr. Lee talking to him, only there's the added fact that Nipper has been watching the man all day."

"Must be your imagination," said Juicy. "I haven't noticed anything."

Willy snorted.

"You're blind—the pair of you!" he said tartly. "I wouldn't trust you to notice anything—except a tableful of tuck. If Nipper can keep his eye on the man, so can I?"

"Why not ask Nipper who he is?"

"Because I'm not an ass!" replied Willy. "Do you think Nipper would tell me? If there really is something in the wind, I should be told to go and eat coke."

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon did not seem to be at all interested, and when presently Travers and Potts came along and suggested more iced drinks, the two fags enthusiastically joined in.

"Just like 'em!" grunted Willy, as he found himself alone. "No more brains than a couple of gnats! I tell 'em there's something on, and they don't believe me."

Some little distance down the sweltering street, Mr. Gibson was strolling leisurely back towards the hotel. Nipper, on the other side of the road, was apparently very interested in a shop window. Yet Willy knew perfectly well that Nipper was still keeping his eye on that man.

And Willy was intrigued.

A minute later he was even more intrigued. An old Ford car came rattling down the street, and seated at the wheel was a rough-looking man in a check shirt and a wide-brimmed hat. He suddenly applied the brakes, and drew the car in towards the side of the road.

"Hallo, there!" he said boisterously.

Gibson turned, and the man in the old Ford car saluted.

"Pretty hot, eh?" said the stranger.

"Too right, it is!" agreed Gibson.

He went closer to the car, and the two men stood talking for some moments. Willy Handforth watched with considerable interest, and, further afield, Nipper was casually looking on, too.

Not that Gibson or his companion were aware of these attentions. They drove on until they came to the hotel. Then they both left the car and went in.

Nipper had all his wits about him, but he had no reason to suspect that there was anything significant about this chance meeting. However, Mr. Smith happened to come along just then—and Mr. Smith was one of the genial local inhabitants who had helped Travers in the bushranger stunt.

"Anything fresh?" he asked, as he paused.

"Nothing that I know of," said Nipper. "Mr. Lee went back to Adelaide this morning."

"Rather funny of him, wasn't it?" asked Mr. Smith curiously. "I thought he was going to stay here to look into this mystery?"

"I dare say he had a good reason for going back," replied Nipper vaguely. "By jingo! That's an old crock of a car," he added, deliberately changing the subject. "It's amazing how these Fords keep going."

"Yes, that's Joe Kenney's bus," nodded Mr. Smith, as he glanced at the dilapidated Ford.

"About time he got a new one, isn't it?" grinned Nipper.

"Can't afford it," said the other. "The Kenney station is a pretty poor proposition. About thirty miles out, in the bush. Lots of people have told Kenney that he's wasting his time. It wouldn't be so bad if he kept off the drink—— Still, I don't want to run the fellow down."

And Mr. Smith nodded cheerily, and passed on.

Nipper felt just a trifle disappointed. He had been hoping that something would develop from this meeting of Gibson and Joe Kenney, but apparently there was nothing doing.



CHAPTER 8.

Willy in Action!

WILLY HANDFORTH, however, was of a different opinion.

He had been standing close by while Nipper was chatting with Mr. Smith, and he had heard that the old Ford car belonged to Joe Kenney, from the Kenney station, thirty miles out. While Nipper went back into the hotel, Willy strolled along and stood examining the battered Ford.

"Well, Nipper can keep his eye on Gibson, if he likes," muttered Willy, "but I'm more interested in this Ford. So it comes from the Kenney station, does it? By jingo! I wonder if that fellow is in the plot? For all we know, Archie might have been carried off in this very car! He was on horseback when we saw him last, but he could easily have been transferred into this old bus."

Willy Handforth was an opportunist, and he seized his chance now.

The back of the old car was half-filled with parcels and bundles, and there was some rough old sacking, too. If Willy had not spotted this sacking, he would probably have continued his casual inspection, and then he would have strolled away.

But an idea suddenly occurred to him. He did not pause to consider whether it was a good one, or whether he would be led into any trouble. He hopped into the back of the car and fumbled under the sacking, as though looking for something. A moment later he wriggled his way completely beneath and he remained still.

The audacity of the thing ensured success.

There was quite a number of people in sight, but none fortunately close at hand, and nobody took the slightest interest in the doings of this youngster.

Two smartly-dressed, attractive girls had given Willy a glance from the other side of the street, but then a shop-window had caught their eye, and they had taken no further notice of the boy.

Now he was completely concealed, and he remained still.

"Well, if somebody lugs me out, I shan't have done any harm," he assured himself. "The chances are that I shan't be disturbed. Nobody will take any notice of this rusty old Lizzie."

The two girls, who were as smartly and tastefully dressed as though they were in Bond Street on a summer's afternoon, continued on their way, without once looking back at the old Ford. They had forgotten Willy already.

Nobody else, apparently, had seen Willy at all. At any rate, he was not disturbed. Other traffic passed up and down, and occasionally he could hear voices. But nobody came and pulled him out of his concealment.

"I'm safe enough now!" he muttered. "Good egg! The trouble is, I don't know how I shall get back if this chap takes me to the Kenney station!"

Willy did not really suspect that Joe Kenney knew anything about Archie Glen-thorne's kidnapping. He had apparently gone into the hotel with Gibson just for the sake of a drink. However, no harm would be done by making a little private investigation, and even if there was the slimmest chance of picking up a clue Willy saw no reason why he should not take it.

He wondered how long he would have to wait. It was stiflingly hot under that sacking, for the sun was glaring down upon it with full force.

"Phew! This is getting too much of a good thing!" murmured Willy, after about ten minutes. "I hadn't bargained for this! The beggars might be an hour yet!"

But he need not have worried. Only five more minutes elapsed before he heard voices, and one of them he instantly recognised as Gibson's. The old Ford creaked a bit as somebody got in; then there came the slamming of an ill-fitting door. Kenney, no doubt, had sat down in the driving-seat.

"Do nothing, then, until I see you?" came a strange voice.

"You've got it, Joe," said Gibson softly. "I don't reckon they'll be more than three or four days. Lee's gone to Adelaide for the money now."

"Good-o!" came a chuckle. "You needn't worry, then. We'll look after the boy."

"No chance of him being spotted at the station?"

"Leave it to me!" said Joe Kenney.

"Well, see you some more."

"Good-bye," said Gibson.

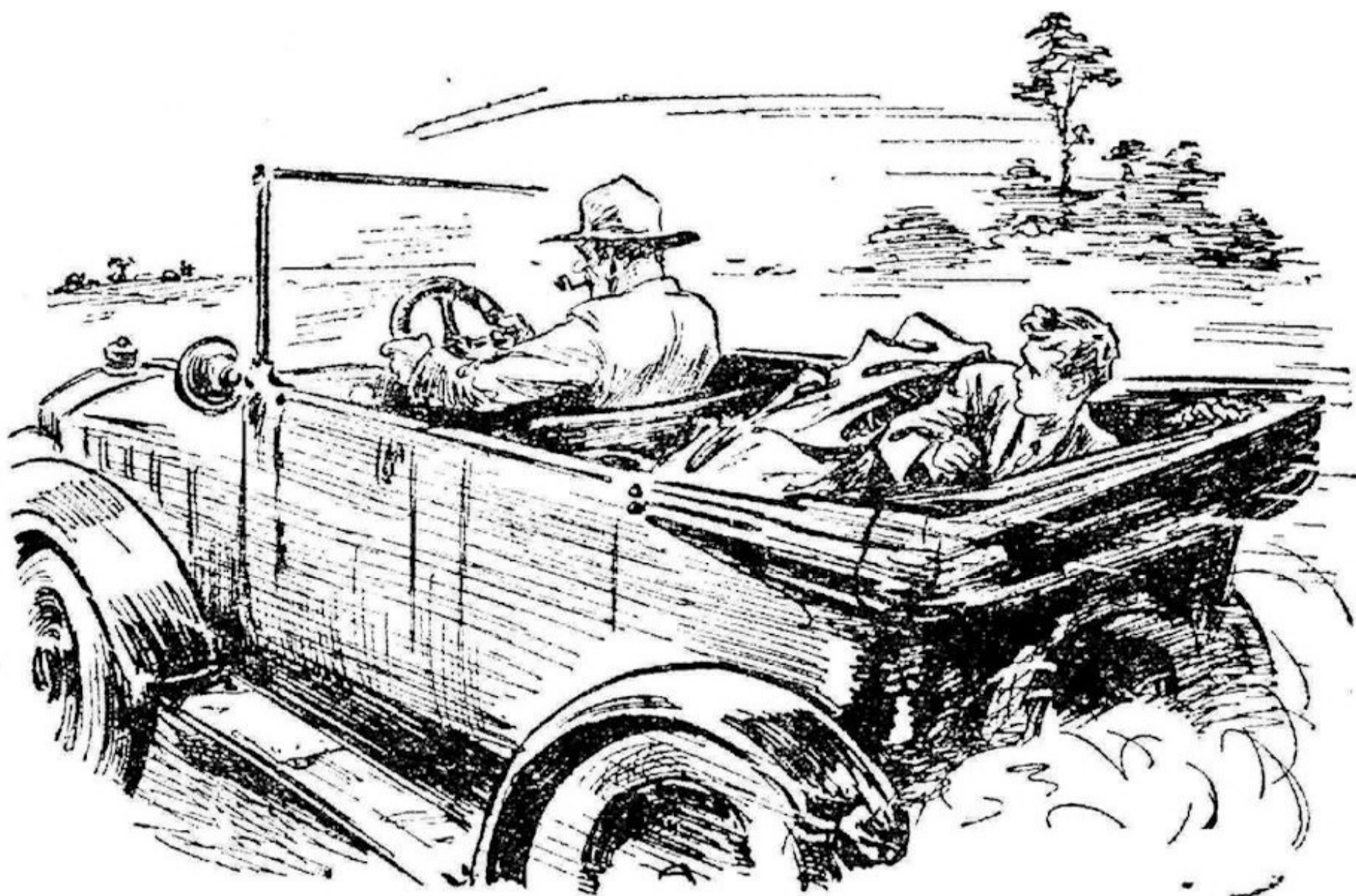
Willy, in the rear, had heard these words, and he was already quivering with excitement. He could hardly believe that he had been so lucky. He had overheard the vital words that were necessary! These two men had been referring to Archie Glen-thorne! And only one possible interpretation could be put upon that snatch of conversation—which, the men believed, had been uttered in private.

Archie Glen-thorne was at the Kenney station! He was being held prisoner there!

Then the Ford was rattling and jolting out of Renmark, and Willy Handforth did some quick thinking. He didn't want to go all the way to that isolated cattle station, for, if he did get there, and was found by Kenney and his companions, he would be immediately captured.

On the other hand, if he escaped, it was essential that he should escape unknown to the driver. For if Kenney spotted him getting out the man would be warned. He would know that Willy had overheard—and it was quite possible that Archie would be whisked away to some other retreat before any steps could be taken to rescue him.

No; there was only one possible thing to be done. Willy knew that he would have to get out of this "Lizzie" without Joe



Slowly Willy raised his head from under the sacking, and cautiously he looked around him. Kenney, sitting at the wheel, did not suspect the fag's presence, but at any moment he was liable to turn round—and then the fat would be in the fire properly!

Kenney knowing a thing. Then he would be able to return to Nipper and the other juniors, and Archie's rescue would then only be a matter of careful planning.

Slowly and cautiously Willy managed to edge his head free from the sacking, and he took a look upwards. Kenney was in the car alone, and he was concentrating on his driving. At the same time there was no guarantee that he would not look round if Willy made any big movement.

"H'm! This is a bit tricky!" decided the fag.

The car was running at a good speed, and, much as Willy wanted to get off, he had no desire to sustain a broken limb.

Apparently the outskirts of Renmark had now been left behind, for the Ford was jolting along a rough, uneven track. It was not even a proper road. Now and again the jerks was tremendous, and Willy was bumped about with considerable violence. There came one terrifically heavy jolt. Kenney muttered an exclamation, and then the Ford decreased its speed very considerably.

"Now's the time!" muttered Willy.

He worked himself completely free from the sacking, and the next moment he was worming his way over the rear of the car—over the folded canvas hood, or top. As he scrambled out of sight over the rear he expected to hear a thunderous roar from Kenney. But none came.

Willy only clung for a moment or two; then he dropped. He hit the track, stumbled, and rolled over. Luckily for him, the car

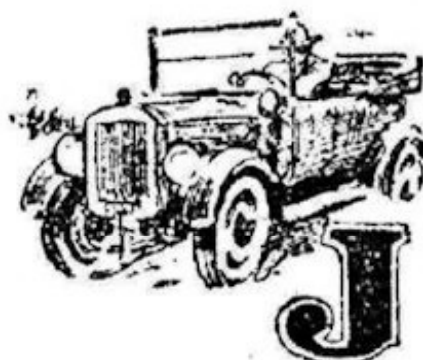
had reduced its speed to not more than twelve miles an hour.

As Willy rolled, so he lay, in the rough grass at the side of the dusty track. He only ventured to lift his head, and he beheld the Ford continuing its way, with Joe Kenney sitting stolidly at the wheel. Not once had the man glanced round.

"Done it!" murmured Willy dreamily. "My only hat! I didn't think it was coming off at first—but I've done the trick!"

His satisfaction was great. Not until the Ford had completely vanished from sight did he rise to his feet. Then, rather bruised and a bit stiff, he dusted himself down, and commenced the sweltering walk back into Renmark.

Not that Willy Handforth minded this walk in the least. He had accomplished something, and his delight knew no bounds.



CHAPTER 9.

At the Kenney Station!

JOE KENNEY never troubled to glance back because he hadn't the faintest suspicion that there was any need for him to be on the alert.

He was looking excited, and almost feverish, as he drove on. Seldom, indeed, had he subjected the faithful old car to such a jolting.

His cattle station was rather isolated, and there was no real road. Only a rough track, which, at certain times of the year, was impassable for cars. But now, during the summer months, the track could be used.

For a considerable part of the way the car ran through the bush. It wasn't all forest-land, but a desolate, sun-parched region with, here and there, clumps of trees, scrub, and rough grassland.

When the Kenney station came into sight it proved to be a crude sort of shack, with one or two outbuildings dotted about, and all scorching and blistering under the heat of the afternoon sun.

It was a drab picture. There was a shallow valley here, with sloping, scrub-covered hills on both sides. Here and there a few clumps of anæmic-looking sheep were to be seen, but the station itself, as a whole, bore an air of dilapidation and neglect.

Joe Kenney senior was the owner; he was the man who had originally settled in this out-of-the-way spot. But just at present Joe Kenney senior was in hospital, down at Adelaide, suffering from some malady which had kept him away from the station for many weeks.

His son was carrying on during his absence. In fact, Joe Kenney was carrying on in a manner that his father did not even dream of! For in the Renmark district old Kenney had a fairly good name. Both he and his son were too fond of drink, but they had always been straight, so far as everybody knew.

So it was quite safe for Joe to go into Renmark openly for supplies, and the fact that he had spoken to Gibson meant nothing. He had spoken lots of people in Renmark that day.

The shack, at close quarters, was even less pleasant to look upon than it had been at a distance. Running along the front of it there was a crude veranda, and as Joe Kenney brought the car to a standstill outside the "house" two men appeared from the open doorway.

They were both young men, and both tough-looking customers at that. If any of the Renmark townspeople had been there, they would have recognised this pair as Durrant and Brand, the two "sundowners" who had taken such a prominent part in that fake bushranger affair, earlier in the week.

They were, in fact, the two men who had vanished so completely with Archie Glen- thorne, and with two horses that did not belong to them. Those horses, at this very moment, were in one of the sheds.

There was very little fear of discovery here. If anybody came, their approach could be seen in good time to make all preparations. Joe Kenney himself was the only one who allowed himself to be seen if, by chance, a visitor should drop in, and visitors, out on this lonely station, were few and far between.

Nobody in Renmark had the faintest suspicion that Archie Glen- thorne had been taken to a cattle station; it was assumed that his kidnappers had carried him off into the bush,

into some hidden retreat. Joe Kenney, who was ostensibly living alone during his father's sojourn in hospital, was never given a thought.

"Well, boys, I've got some news!" sang out Kenney, as he strode on to the veranda.

"How's it going?" asked Durrant eagerly. "Nobody suspects you, I suppose?"

"Me?" laughed Joe Kenney. "Not likely! And as long as you jackeroos keep lying low there'll be no danger. Anyhow, within three or four days we shall have the money."

"Has Gibson fixed things, then?" asked Brand.

"Too right, he has!" grinned Joe Kenney. "Twenty thousand pounds, boys."

"Quit that guyver!" said Durrant incredulously.

"It's true—dinkum oil!" declared Joe. "An English feller came up from Adelaide—one of those schoolmaster blokes. Gibson scared him—said the kid would be bushed if the money wasn't paid over. And this English feller has gone back to Adelaide to get the money. Twenty thousand quid! That's the figger! They're going to pay up, boys!"

Taking his two companions into the living-room, Joe Kenney explained all the details—or, at least, as many of them as he had managed to gather. It had not been possible for Gibson to give him a great many details, but the main facts were all that these men needed.

Inside, the shack was not pretentious. Merely this living-room, a bed-room adjoining, and a small third room at the back—used, generally, as a store-house.

But just now it was Archie Glen- thorne's prison.

"How's the kid?" asked Kenney.

"Quiet—too scared to be noisy," replied Brand.

"Had any trouble with him?"

"Not a bit."

"Might as well go and have a look at him," said Kenney, as he moved towards an inner door. "Twenty thousand quid, eh? Gosh! If I was his father I wouldn't pay twenty thousand quid for a coot like him!"

He withdrew a heavy bolt, and opened the door. Inside, the room was gloomy, for there was no proper window. Indeed, there was no window at all, but at one time there had been a small skylight. This, however, had been recently covered over, so that only a tiny chink of light was admitted. The atmosphere in there was like that of an oven, and oppressively stuffy.

"Still alive, kid?" asked Joe Kenney amusedly.

He was looking at a ramshackle camp bedstead, against one of the rough walls. This was the only piece of furniture in the room, except for an upturned box, which was meant to serve as a table. Sprawling on the bed was the figure of Archie Glen- thorne, clad in soiled flannel trousers, and a shirt that had once been white. The unfortunate Archie looked up listlessly.

"Kindly rally round with a further supply of water," he mumbled. "Absolutely! The good old throat is like a dashed flue!"

"Cheer up, young 'un—you'll soon be back with your cobbles," said Joe Kenney. "Things are being fixed up for you."

Archie sat up, a frightened look in his eyes.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "I mean, what? Good gad! You don't mean to say that you've got in touch with my people?"

"Not exactly," said Kenney. "But we've got into touch with one of your schoolmasters, and he's arranging everything. Twenty thousand quid for your release, sonny!"

"Odds frauds and swindles!" gasped Archie. "Why, dash you, I only mentioned five thousand—"

"It was a good suggestion of yours, kid," nodded Joe Kenney. "But five thousand quid isn't enough. We're getting twenty thousand. Your parents must think a lot of you—which is a blamed sight more than I do!" he added contemptuously.

Archie Glenthorne fell back on to the bed again, breathing hard. He had a cringing look about him. He was utterly cowed. This experience had robbed him of his usual *sang froid*.

Joe Kenney advanced towards the bed, and Archie gave a low whimper of fright.

"Dash you, keep away!" he muttered shakily.

"I'm not going to touch you, you spineless rabbit!" said Kenney, staring in wonder at this helpless English dudo. "Gosh! And your pa and ma are willing to pay twenty thousand quid to get you back! If I was your pa, I'd pay to have you taken into the bush, and lost!"

Archie Glenthorne winced, and then he seemed to pull himself together.

"It's true, isn't it?" he asked hoarsely. "I mean, about—about the money? My people will pay, won't they?"

"If they don't pay, you'll never see 'em again!"

"Odds, horrors and fears!" wailed Archie. "They'll pay, you dashed blighter! Of course they'll pay!"

"Pah! You make me sick!" said Joe Kenney, with more contempt in his voice than ever.

He turned on his heel, and went out of the room, taking no notice of Archie's pleadings for more water.

Evidently this affair had been too much for the dandified junior. His spirit was broken.



CHAPTER 10.

Willy Gets Busy!

"CAN I have a word with you, old son?" asked Willy Handforth briskly.

"Sorry—I'm busy!" said Edward Oswald, with a wave of his hand.

"I wasn't talking to you."

"Eh?"

"I was talking to Nipper," said Willy.

"You can have as many words as you like, kid!" said Nipper obligingly. "Go ahead!"

"Come indoors, will you?" asked Willy. "I want to speak to you in private."

They were out on the veranda, trying to get cool. It was late afternoon now, and the sun was getting low.

"Just a minute!" said Edward Oswald Handforth grimly. "What's this? You want to have a word in private with Nipper? What for? Where do I come in?"

"You don't come in," said Willy.

"And where did you get to this afternoon?" went on his major sternly. "You vanished for nearly a couple of hours, and when you came back you were smothered with dust. What mischief have you been up to, my lad?"

Willy, who was now looking fresh and clean after a good wash, calmly turned to Nipper.

"Coming?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like," laughed Nipper. "No need to be so mysterious, though."

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Come back, Willy, you young bounder!"

But Willy took no notice of him; he went indoors. And Nipper accompanied him to a corner of the big open lounge, where they sat on a cane settee.

"I can't stay long," said Nipper, looking at the fag strangely. "What's the idea of this, Willy?"

"Afraid to let Mr. Gibson out of your sight, eh?"

"What do you mean?" asked Nipper sharply.

"You don't deny that you've been watching him all day, do you?" asked Willy.

"By Jove! You've got sharp eyes!" said Nipper. "So you've noticed it, have you?"

"You needn't worry," grinned Willy. "Nobody else has spotted it—least of all Gibson himself. Who do you think he is, anyway?"

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"I'm sorry, but I can't answer any questions," said Nipper. "It's a pity you've cottoned on to this, Willy. But I think I can rely upon your discretion——"

"He's one of the gang, eh?"

"Well, yes," admitted Nipper. "But that's all I'll tell you. The other fellows mustn't know anything about it. We don't want Gibson to guess that we're interested in him."

"How about that fellow, Kenney?" asked Willy. "That man who drove into the township in a Ford car?"

"You saw that, then?"

"I haven't missed much," said Willy complacently.

"Well, you needn't get suspicious about the man, Kenney," said Nipper. "As far as I know, he's only a harmless sheep merchant, or rancher, or whatever they call them out here."

"Then I know more than you do," said Willy. "Kenney is in the plot."

Nipper turned sharply, and stared hard at Willy.

"How do you know?" he asked in a low voice.

"I took a ride in that tin Lizzie," replied Willy.

"You did—what?"

"And before we started out of town Gibson came up and had a few words with Kenney," said Willy smoothly. "I was in the back of the car, hiding under some old sacking. They didn't know I was there. Gibson told the other man that Mr. Lee was getting busy about the ransom, and he advised Kenney to keep a tight hold on Archie."

"Great Scott!" said Nipper. "Is—is this true?"

"Dinkum oil!" nodded Willy.

"But—but——" Nipper paused, his breath taken away. "Why, you young wonder!" he ejaculated. "How on earth did you manage to do the trick?"

Willy grinned, and then he explained the full circumstances. He pointed out how he had noticed Nipper's activity during the day, and he added that he had felt it necessary that he, too, should keep his eye on Mr. Gibson.

"And when that Lizzie rolled up, and Kenney and Gibson got talking, I thought I might as well go a bit further," added Willy. "Mind you, I didn't think anything would come of it at the time. It was just a piece of luck. But there's the yarn—and, unless I'm a Dutchman, poor old Archie is at the Kenney Station, a prisoner."

"Then—then it's easy!" said Nipper eagerly. "We've only got to go to this cattle station, and we shall find Archie there. We needn't wait for Mr. Lee to come back with the money!"

"You're not telling me that Mr. Lee has agreed to these rotters' terms?" asked Willy, staring.

"I don't know what to think," said Nipper, with a frown. "But I'll tell you this much, Willy. Last night Gibson went into the guv'nor's bed-room, and admitted that he

was a member of the gang. He wanted twenty thousand pounds for Archie's safe return."

"There's nothing like being optimistic," said Willy.

"And this morning, when I come down, I find that Mr. Lee has gone!" continued Nipper. "He didn't leave any message for me, but I'm pretty certain that the guv'nor has gone to Adelaide to get that money. His plan is to hand it over and get Archie safely back. Then I expect he'll round up the gang, and recover the ransom money."

"Easier said than done," declared Willy. "Once those crooks have got away with the cash, there'll be precious little chance of grabbing them again. Of course, Mr. Lee may have some other plan in mind. Personally, I think he has. He's not the kind of man to submit tamely."

"I've been puzzling my brain all day," said Nipper. "I can't understand what the guv'nor is up to, but we can be jolly certain that he's not going to knuckle under tamely. He's got some wheeze of his own."

"Whether he has or not, he can't work it to-night," said Willy. "We're here on the spot—and we've got the information. Why shouldn't we rescue Archie on our own? There are eleven of us, and we ought to be able to do the trick without any trouble. It's a certainty that he's at the Kenney station. Why should we wait till Mr. Lee comes back? Why not have a *coup* of our own?"

Nipper's eyes gleamed.

"Why not?" he murmured. "Willy, my son, I take off my hat to you!"



CHAPTER 11.

The Plotters!

NIPPER realised that there was no longer any necessity for him to keep Mr. Gibson under observation. Willy Handforth had made the one vital discovery. Watching Mr. Gibson, now, would be a waste of time.

By that extraordinary stroke of luck, Willy had happened to overhear the words that mattered. Archie Glenthorne, without a shadow of doubt, was at the Kenney station, a prisoner—held there while these rogues negotiated for the ransom!

Even at this minute Nelson Lee was in Adelaide, probably cabling to England. He was responsible for Archie Glenthorne, and the very first thing to do was to get Archie back—safe. It probably went against Nelson Lee's grain to take this course—but what other line could he have adopted?

"Yes, Willy, my son, I take off my hat to you!" repeated Nipper softly. "You've done wonders!"

"Cheese it!" grinned Willy. "It was more luck than anything else."

"Rot!" said Nipper. "It wasn't luck at all! You were jony shrewd, and you acted at the right second. You're quite sure that you got off that Lizzie without Kenney knowing anything about you?"

Willy laughed.

"That was the trickiest part of the whole job, but I did it all right," he said. "Kenney didn't know I was there—and he didn't know that I dropped off. He's gone back to his station unsuspecting."

Handforth appeared at that moment, and he was looking inquisitive.

"What's all this mystery?" he demanded loudly.

Nipper positively gritted his teeth. This was the last thing he desired. It would be fatal to their plans if Handforth went about shouting that there was a mystery!

"There's no mystery, you ass!" said Nipper, jumping up. "How about coming down to the river to get cooled?"

"Oh, is that it?" said Handforth.

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, why couldn't Willy say so before?" demanded Edward Oswald. "I'm not sure that I want to go to the river——"

"But we'll go," interrupted Jimmy Potts.

"Rather!" said Tommy Watson.

And all the other boys signified their approval. So Handforth, of course, fell into line. He did not want to be left alone in the hotel.

So they all went to the mighty River Murray. But strangely enough Nipper led them to a secluded spot, and suggested that they should all squat down near the river bank to have a little chat.

"Why should we chat?" asked Handforth. "I thought about having a bathe——"

"Handy, old man, you mean well, but you're a hopeless case," said Nipper. "I've brought you all down here because I want to speak to you privately—urgently. We're safe here. There's not a chance of anybody overhearing us, and if we're seen nobody will suspect that we're holding a conference."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "What on earth are you talking about, dear old boy?"

"Listen to me!" said Nipper.

And the others listened, their eyes becoming more excited as the minutes sped by. Nipper explained all the circumstances. He thought it just as well to tell the other juniors of Gibson's true character—how the man had entered Nelson Lee's bed-room on the previous night, and how he had demanded twenty thousand pounds ransom for Archie Glenthorne.

"Great Scott!" said Handforth, aghast. "Twenty thousand quid! But—but Mr. Lee isn't going to pay it, is he?"

"I think the guv'nor's gone to Adelaide to get the money," replied Nipper.

"For the love of Samson!" murmured Travers. "I rather thought that Mr. Lee was made of different stuff. Well, well!"

"You silly ass, Travers——" began Nipper.

"Of course, I don't believe that Mr. Lee is going to knuckle under," continued Travers smoothly. "It isn't to be thought of, dear old fellows. I gather that he's got a wheeze of his own?"

"That's better!" said Nipper. "Of course the guv'nor has got a wheeze of his own. But why should we wait for it? We know these facts—and we know that poor old Archie is at the Kenney station."

And Nipper went into further details, Willy chiming in here and there and giving his own story.

Edward Oswald Handforth and Travers and the others listened with ever-growing excitement.

"Why should we wait until the guv'nor comes back?" demanded Nipper. "Willy has suggested—and I agree with him—that we should raid the Kenney station—to-night!"

"Begad!"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Let's raid it! Let's start off straight away——"

"Hold on!" said Nipper. "We can't do anything rash like that, Handy. I've been particularly careful this evening—because, if Gibson suspects anything, he'll probably bolt. And, naturally, he'll bolt to the Kenney station, and give the alarm. We musn't allow that to happen?"

"What do you suggest, then?" asked Travers.

"We'll go back to the hotel, and we'll have dinner, as usual," said Nipper. "And for goodness' sake remain calm and indifferent. Don't let anybody see that anything is 'on.' Then we'll go to bed, and wait until Kenmark is asleep."

"But—but it's such a waste of time!" protested Handforth.

"There's no hurry," said Nipper. "Those crooks at the Kenney station are quite comfortable, and they believe that everything is going smoothly. My plan is for us to slip out of the hotel soon after midnight. Then we'll go to the Kenney station, and take those rotters by surprise."

"But it's thirty miles!" protested Tommy Watson. "And we don't know the way, either! How the dickens can we do the trip in the dark?"

"There'll be no difficulty about doing the trip," said Nipper. "There's a track to the Kenney station—a rough sort of trail through the bush. We can't mistake it, and if we go easily there'll be no danger of getting off the track."

"But the distance——"

"When we get back into the town, I'll go and arrange for a couple of cars to be left ready," said Nipper. "I can easily give some plausible excuse—I can say, for example, that we have a fancy to go for a car ride at night, just for the sport of it. Anyhow, you can leave that to me. I'll fix up the thing, and have two cars all ready waiting—so that we can get into them as



Archie's fist flashed out, catching Durrant right on the jaw. The man reeled backwards, knocked over the table, and thereby tripped up Archie's other captor just as that worthy was coming to the attack.

soon as we creep out of the hotel after midnight."

"Do you think we ought to risk it?" asked Church dubiously. "I'm not funky, of course—I'm game for the thing, if the rest of you vote for it. But supposing these men are armed. They might start shooting!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We can risk that!"

"I don't think there's much danger in that direction," said Nipper, smiling. "These men may be crooked, but they're not so murderous as all that. Besides, we shall get to the place in the small hours, and break in while they're asleep. In fact, it's my idea to locate Archie, if we can, get him out first, and then grab the crooks while they're asleep. Still, all that will have to be left to chance."

"Let's do it!" said Travers promptly. "Archie is our pal—he's our clobber, as they say out here. Here's a chance for us to get him back on our own. Think of Mr. Lee's face when he gets back and finds Archie with us!"

"By George! It'll be worth quids to see it!" chuckled Handforth.

And the juniors, after a further short discussion, voted unanimously for the plan.

How were they to know that some very unexpected events were, even at moment, taking place on the Kenney station?



CHAPTER 12.

Action!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE groaned dismally.

He was sitting on the edge of his ramshackle camp bedstead, in almost total darkness. It was evening on the Kenney station, and the light that came through into Archie's prison was negligible.

Beyond, in the living-room, he could hear the clatter of plates, and the noisy conversation of the three men. Supper was being prepared, and Archie involuntarily shuddered. The food he had eaten in this place had kept hunger away, but he felt bad at the very thought of it.

Not that the food itself was of poor quality. Archie's meals had largely consisted of beans, with a pannikin of cocoa or tea, and a chunk of bread, or some biscuits.

This had been the fare practically every day, much to Archie's disgust. Evidently Kenney did not intend to give his fastidious prisoner much variety. By now, of course,

the diet was getting monotonous, but Archie did not shudder because of this. He was a youngster of refined ideas, and when his food was brought to him in a rusty saucepan-lid, and his tea in a jagged old salmon-tin, he revolted. When, added to this, he found it necessary to partake of baked beans with only the aid of his fingers, or a biscuit, he felt that life was no longer worth living.

But Joe Kenney and his companions were not men of delicate taste. Food was food—and it didn't matter to them how it was served up. It mattered still less to them how Archie Glenthorne received it.



Archie's fist flashed out, catching Durrant right on the temple, and tripped up Archie's other cap.

It seemed to the forlorn prisoner that all hope was dead. He had only been here for a day or two, yet it seemed like weeks. And Archie's spirit was apparently crushed—he was backboneless.

"What-ho?" he murmured dolefully. "I mean to say, supper. Good gad! If it's beans again, I shall positively wither away. Absolutely!"

He had heard the bolt being shot, and now he looked up with dull eyes. The door

opened, and Joe Kenney stood there, holding a tin plate in one hand and a can in the other.

"Awake, kid?" he asked.

Archie shrank away, whimpering.

"Stow it!" snapped Kenney. "I'm sick of your whinings!"

His tone was full of contempt, but Archie shrank back even more. He could see, beyond the man's figure, the other two rogues sitting at the table in the living-room. The evening light was pouring through the open doorway, and that vision of the open air was a wonderful sight for Archie. He



reeled backwards, knocked over the table, and thereby rthy was coming to the attack.

felt, too, a waft of cooling air disturbing the stuffiness of that inner room.

In a dull sort of way, Archie noticed that Kenney was alone this time. On all previous occasions either Durrant or Brand had stood at the door, guarding it. But by now they had come to realise that Archie was a mere worm, without an ounce of fight in his whole composition.

So Durrant and Brand sat at the table, eating their supper, and Joe Kenney

advanced into that inner room, leaving the door wide open. From the very first, these men had regarded Archie with derision. He was an English dude—a feather-brained youngster who talked with an exaggerated drawl. He was a useless member of society, who wore an eyeglass, and who insisted upon dressing in the latest fashion. His craven spirit matched his way.

"Here you are, you young insect!" said Joe Kenney sourly.

"Oh, rather!" babbled Archie. "Pup—please put it on the box, laddie!"

"Be hanged to you!" retorted Kenney. "Get up, you jelly!"

Archie was looking beyond him—through that open doorway, at the two men sitting at the table in the living-room. With dramatic unexpectedness the prisoner leapt to his feet.

"Absolutely!" he whispered. "What-ho! Kindly take this, you foul blighter!"

Crash!

Something hit Mr. Joe Kenney in the jaw—something which felt rather like a sledge-hammer. Actually it was Archie Glenthorne's right fist—a hard fist, backed by supple muscles, driven with terrific force.

"Ugh!" grunted Mr. Kenney.

He went clean over backwards, nearly turning a somersault. The tin plate went in one direction, and the can of tea in another. Joe Kenney had been knocked out by a single punch before to-day—but seldom had he felt such a crashing blow as that.

"You chunk of fungus!" roared Archie, as he leapt over the fallen Mr. Kennedy, and dashed into the living-room.

Durrant and Brand, startled by that crash, were half on their feet now, and their eyes filled with amazement as Archie came tearing through. For it was a new Archie they saw. Hitherto their prisoner had been a cringing, whimpering coward. Now they saw Archie as he really was!

As a matter of fact, Archie was as brainy as they make 'em. He had known, from the start, that he had no chance of escaping—unless he fooled his captors. So he had pretended to get more and more frightened, hoping that one day the door of his prison would be unguarded.

That opportunity had now come!

"Tally-ho!" sang out Archie enthusiastically.

Crash!

Durrant was nearest to him, and Durrant had conveniently half-risen to his feet, one hand on the back of his chair, the other hand on the table. Archie's fist, swinging round,

landed on the point of Durrant's jaw. It was all done in a flash.

The man reeled over, and the table went flying sideways, plates, dishes, food, tea—everything, in fact—descending to the floor with a devastating series of crashes. What was more to the point, Brand went to the floor, too. He had been in the act of leaping forward, but that table had tripped him up, and he descended into the midst of the debris.

Durrant was sprawling on his back, dazed and dizzy. While he tried to collect his scattered wits, Archie sped through the open doorway like a hare.

He took the veranda in one jump, and was outside.

"A horse!" ejaculated Archie, looking round eagerly. "Dash it, where do they keep their dashed gee-gees?"

At this moment Joe Kenney was just beginning to recover, and he was staggering out into the living-room. Durrant was still sprawling on the floor, and Brand had only just succeeded in extricating himself from the broken crockery and the eatables.

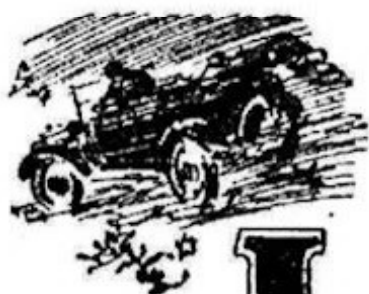
"He's gone!" snarled Brand. "Kenney, you fool! You've let him get out!"

"After him!" panted Joe Kenney thickly.

But at that very second Archie Glenthorne's gaze had fallen upon the "tin Lizzie," which was still standing outside the shack.

"Something," murmured Archie, "tells me that I'm going to turn into a dashed motorist!"

And with one leap he was in the driving seat!



CHAPTER 13.

Into the Bush!

LUCK was well on Archie Glenthorne's side. A minute's delay, at this critical period, would have meant recapture. For Joe Kenney and his two companions were just dashing out of the shack, and Archie would not have stood an earthly chance in a fight against the enraged trio. He had only gained his present success because he had sprung a surprise.

Now, as he pulled and pushed at every lever within sight, and trod on every pedal

he could find, he happened to hit upon the self-starter.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie.

The engine had given a splutter, a roar, and now the whole vehicle was quivering and shaking. The three men, at the same moment, rushed down upon him.

Grabbing at the hand-brake, Archie released it. He jammed his foot on one of the pedals, and the old Ford gave a leap forward like a frightened animal.

It was at this very second that Joe Kenney tried to leap on the running-board. He was a shade too late, and he staggered back as the car lurched giddily away from him.

"Absolutely not!" ejaculated Archie breathlessly. "What-ho! They're off!"

He clung desperately to the steering-wheel, and the tin Lizzie went wobbling down the track in a very precarious manner. The throttle was practically wide open, and the shattering din which filled the air was terrific. The car jolted over a big rut, and Archie's foot was jerked off the pedal—and, automatically, top gear was engaged. Archie didn't know how it happened, but he *did* know that the old Ford charged onwards at a tremendously increased speed, although the noise was less.

"Whoa!" gasped Archie. "Odds frights and alarms! She's absolutely got the bit between her teeth! Good gad!"

He was aware of a confused shouting in the rear, but he dared not look back. All his attention was needed for the driving, and it was rather a wonder that he did not meet with disaster straight away. He clung to the steering-wheel in desperation, the Ford was

doing something between twenty-five and thirty miles an hour.

Behind came the angry, frantic shouts of Joe Kenney and his colleagues.

They were just too late, however. Having failed to get on board the Ford as it was first starting, they were foiled. Now they could only stand and rave while they saw the car go tearing off along the track into the deepening dusk. And that track led straight to Renmark!

"He's beaten us!" panted Kenney. "The tricky young coot!"

"It was your fault!" shouted Brand. "You let him get out of that room—"

"Cut it out!" snarled Durrant. "He'll never get to Renmark! Where are the horses? We'd best go after him—he's bound to have a smash at the creek!"

"Gosh, you're right!" said Joe Kenney, pulling himself together. "We'll get him there!"

He remembered a steep dip three or four miles away, where a shallow creek ran right across the trail. There was a stiff decent, with rough ground at the bottom. Archie, charging full tilt along the track in the Ford, would never be able to negotiate that hurdle safely.

So Joe Kenney and the other two went

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rushing to one of the outbuildings, and before long they were harnessing a couple of horses. Kenney and Durrant were to go—while Brand remained behind at the station.

Meanwhile, Archie Glenthorne, safe from immediate pursuit, was grappling with new difficulties. It was nearly dark now, and the short twilight was closing in rapidly.

It was difficult enough to see, let alone to control this leaping, charging mass of rattling metal. More than once the steering was nearly wrenched out of Archie's hands, and disaster was averted by a narrow margin.

But Archie was triumphant. He had escaped! And he knew that this track led back to Renmark. If he only kept straight on, he would ultimately arrive at the township—and safety.

"A ripe and juicy scheme," Archie told himself. "Unfortunately, there are liable to be one or two complications. Whoa! Hold steady, dash you! Good gad! The frightful velocipede is absolutely getting restive!"

If Archie had reached Renmark, it would have been a miracle. He knew precious little about driving cars—and practically nothing about driving a Ford. Added to this, there were the combined difficulties of the fading light and the atrocious track.

"What-ho! This is considerably better!" murmured Archie, with relief, as the Ford settled down to a steady plugging roar as it climbed a long slope. "At the same time, the wind is rising rapidly, dash it! I mean to say, what about the other side of this dashed hill?"

Archie was not referring to the atmospheric conditions—but to his own inward alarm. In other words, he was getting the wind up. It was all very well while the Ford was climbing this slope, but what about the drop on the other side? There was bound to be a hill to descend, and Archie began to grow hot all over as he thought of it.

"Brakes, what?" he murmured. "I mean to say, it wouldn't be a bad scheme to locate the good old levers, and so forth."

But, what with keeping his attention on the steering-wheel, and peering ahead in order to keep the Ford on the track, he had precious little time for investigating the brakes. The one satisfactory feature about the whole affair was that he had travelled some miles, and that the Kenney station was now well in the rear, with the three kidnappers hopelessly outdistanced.

It was rough bush on all sides, with patches of scrub growing at intervals, and with clumps of trees here and there. It was a lonely, desolate tract of land—rendered all the more lonely and desolate by reason of the rapid approach of night.

Just when Archie was getting nicely accustomed to the steering, so that he could pay some attention to the brakes, the crest of the hill was reached, and Archie now saw a sharp descent in front of him. He had come up a long slope—but the corresponding descent was steep and short.

"Odds disasters and tragedies!" he ejaculated. "I mean to say, if we don't locate

the brakes there's going to be one individual less in this dashed world!"

In spite of Archie's limited knowledge of motoring, he was perfectly certain that he would never be able to get down that steep hill in safety. It was very dim, but he could see a terribly rough patch of track at the bottom, with a creek meandering across. If he hit that rough patch at any speed he would come a frightful cropper.

"Brakes!" he said firmly. "Absolutely!"

He grabbed at the hand-brake, and tried to pull it on. But at the same second one of the front wheels struck a loose stone, and the steering-wheel was knocked out of his hand. The Ford gave a giddy lurch, swerved sideways, and left the track on two wheels.

"Whoa!" howled Archie. "Steady, Dobbin!"

He released his hold of the brake, and clutched at the steering-wheel with both hands. But the car was off the track now, and plunging into the bush. And Archie let it plunge. The descent was not so steep, and there were no trees immediately in the way. He went charging through a patch of coarse scrub, and this, fortunately, had the effect of slowing the car up considerably. After that it went plunging on again, rocking and swaying, penetrating deeper and deeper into the trackless bush.

Darkness now came down rapidly, and it was as much as Archie could do to see twenty yards ahead. Yet, singularly enough, he must have travelled three or four miles, bearing a charmed life. Clutching at the steering, he avoided the clumps of trees in a miraculous way, only to go charging on again, bouncing and bumping.

There could, of course, be only one inevitable end to this "joy ride." And at last it came.

A big boulder loomed up immediately ahead, and although Archie did his best he failed.

The Ford charged at that boulder full tilt!



CHAPTER 14

Bushed!

RASH!

With a shattering clang of smashing metal, the Ford hit that huge boulder fairly and squarely in the centre of the radiator.

It was fortunate for Archie Glenthorne that he half-anticipated the disaster. For he had risen in the driving-seat; and now, when the crash came, he was hurled clean out, right over the bonnet, and actually over the boulder.

Thud!

He struck the ground violently, rolled over, and sat up.

"And that," he gasped, "is that!"

Strangely enough, Archie wasn't particularly hurt. He felt one or two bruises as he painfully dragged himself to his feet, but no bones were broken; neither had he suffered any cuts or grazes. The ground, fortunately, was fairly soft just there.

In the dimness, he walked round the boulder, and had a look at the Ford. One glance was enough. Both front wheels were off, the radiator was battered to scrap-iron, water was spurting out, and steam was going up in clouds. There was an ominous hissing sound, too.

"Oh, well," said Archie. "I mean, it might have been worse, what?"

He sat down on one of the running boards and considered the situation. He came to the conclusion that he had only travelled about a mile since leaving the "road," and that he was altogether about three miles from the Kenney station.

As a matter of fact, Archie was nearly double this distance away, but he had been so much occupied by controlling the car that he had had no opportunity of really judging the distance. And, optimistic as he had been earlier, he could not help now feeling a certain amount of anxiety. Yet he was not actually depressed. Archie believed in looking on the brighter side of things.

"Well, dash it, I've got away from those frightful blighters!" he told himself. "And, I mean, a chappie can't do everything at once. The next job on the good old pro-

gramme is to get to civilisation. And that, I mean, looks like being a giant's task. What-ho! Giant, do your stuff!"

After all, the situation wasn't so bad. It was only necessary for Archie to get back to the track, and then, by keeping to this, he would ultimately reach Renmark. Of course, it meant a long, weary trudge through the night—through the bush—and Archie had a vague sort of idea that there were wild animals roaming about. His knowledge of the fauna of Australia was not particularly comprehensive.

However, he was by no means faint-hearted, as he had already proved. It had gone against the grain to pretend to be a coward, but, at least, he had achieved his object. He had fooled Joe Kenney and the other two men into believing that he was spineless, and, because of this ruse, he had gained his liberty.

Now it was up to him to reach Renmark.

Unhappily the darkness proved a greater stumbling-block than he had bargained for. For the first hundred yards or so he had no difficulty in following the tracks that the Ford car had left, for the ground was fairly sandy and soft, and the wheel-marks were just visible, but after that he came upon a patch of harder ground, and there were no marks to be seen. Furthermore, the gloom had now increased so much that it was difficult for him to see the ground at all.

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Anyhow, he came to a halt after about ten minutes, and it was no good disguising the fact from himself that he had got off his bearings. Patches of scrub grew here and there, and there were lots of trees, too. Now and again he could hear the cry of some bush creature, and his mind turned to kangaroos, and even to tigers and elephants.

"Oh, well, I mean, it's no good being scared," he assured himself stoutly. "Forward, laddie! Here we are, on the road to Mandalay—I should say, on the road to Renmark—and, dash it, we're not jolly well going to give up!"

And on he trudged, unknowingly getting further and further away from that beaten track. Archie was penetrating deeper into the bush, and he was not only leaving Kenney station behind, but Renmark as well. He was going off at right angles, right into unknown country.

In a word, he was bushed!

Meanwhile, Kenney and Durrant, on horseback, had drawn rein, and were holding a consultation. Both men were filled with alarm and anxiety. They had galloped like mad for several miles along the track, but they had seen no sign of Archie Glen thorne, or the Ford.

"He hasn't been along this way, Joe!" declared Durrant. "He couldn't have got over that creek in safety. Besides, there weren't any marks."

"Hang the kid!" snarled Joe Kenney, frowning. "Where the thunder can he be?"

At the creek they had dismounted and, closely examining the ground, had easily seen that the Ford car had not passed along the track. If it had done so, distinctive marks would have been left as the wheels had come out of the shallow stream.

"The kid must have turned the car aside into the bush somewhere," said Joe Kenney. "That's what he did, Durrant, but where? The ground's as hard as a rock back there, and there won't be any wheel tracks. We'd better get into the bush, and make a few circles. Maybe we'll come upon him."

"Dead, most likely," said Durrant. "The Lizzie ran away with him."

"It's a pity you and Brand couldn't have stopped him before he got out!" said Joe harshly. "I was taken by surprise, but you fellers had plenty of time——"

"No need to go over that again!" interrupted Durrant savagely. "That kid fooled us—and he fooled us properly!"

They turned their horses into the bush, and although they were very familiar with the country they did not take any rash chances. They kept comparatively near to the track, crossing it and re-crossing it, and searching the ground close at hand. For they came to the conclusion that Archie could not have travelled far in the Ford after leaving the "road." Yet they made no discoveries. Both Archie and the car had vanished utterly and completely.

"We're done, Joe!" said Durrant at last. "What's the good of this? Best get back

to the station, and wait until daylight. Can't do anything in this darkness!"

"I believe you're right," grunted Joe Kenney. "Anyway, the kid won't be able to get back to Renmark—that's certain. He don't know enough for that. And the chances are he's smashed himself up."

So, with their anxiety more acute than ever, they rode back to the station.

And poor Archie Glen thorne, striding into the bush, believed that he was getting nearer and nearer to civilisation—whereas he was trudging on at random!



CHAPTER 15

After Midnight!

"HANDY, you chaps?"

Handforth put his head into the doorway of Nipper's bedroom at the Renmark

Hotel. It was just midnight, and everything was quiet and settled for the night. Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were fully dressed, and Nipper made a warning motion with his hand.

"Chuck it, Handy!" he whispered. "No need to stand there and ask us if we're ready! We don't want people to know that we're sneaking out."

Handforth received a gentle push from the rear, and Church and McClure propelled him into the bed-room. Church closed the door.

"What's the idea, fatheads?" asked Handforth, glancing round.

"Why the dickens can't you keep quiet until we're outside, Handy?" asked McClure.

"I am quiet, aren't I?" retorted Handforth. "I've only been whispering!"

"Your whispers are like hoots on a Claxon horn!" said Mac tartly. "It's a wonder everybody in the hotel isn't up, asking what the trouble is!"

"If you want a black eye, Arnold McClure——" began Handforth.

"Cheese it!" urged Nipper. "For goodness sake, Handy, don't start an argument here!"

"Well, these chaps shouldn't try to be funny!" said Handforth sternly.

Somehow they managed to get him outside, and fortunately nobody in the hotel seemed to be disturbed. The other St. Frank's fellows were coming up, and before long all the eleven were present.

Everything had been arranged in accordance with the plan. Two motor-cars were waiting somewhere in the township; Nipper had fixed everything. Both these cars, of course, would be driven by Renmark men—but nothing would be said to them about Archie Glen thorne until the township had been left miles behind. Then, of course, they would have to be taken into the secret. But these juniors wanted to rescue Archie themselves—without any outside aid. He

was their chum, and it was up to them to rally round him.

"My only hat!" murmured Handforth. "I wonder what all the other chaps would say if they could see us now?"

"Those on the School Ship, you mean?" asked Church.

"Yes! They're still in the Indian Ocean, doing lessons, and keeping to the ordinary school routine," chuckled Handforth. "And we're having the time of our lives!"

"Well, well!" said Travers softly. "Opinions differ, dear old fellow. Personally, I am not greatly in love with this adventure, and I shan't be easy in mind until Archie has been rescued. Then, perhaps, I shall begin to enjoy myself again."

"Well, if things go all right to-night we shall have Archie with us again for breakfast," said Nipper briskly. "By Jove! What a surprise for the gov'nor when he comes back!"

"Begad, rather!"

"He'll bring the ransom money, and he'll have a couple of dozen fivers when he finds that Archie is with us, and that Gibson and the other men are in gaol!" said Handforth, with a chuckle. "By the way what about Gibson? He might do a bolt while we're on this job!"

"That's not likely," said Nipper in a low voice. "He doesn't suspect anything. How can he? The main thing is to get Archie—and when we arrive back with him we'll invade Gibson's bed-room, grab him, and hand him over to the law."

"Good egg!"

They were all feeling very animated. They had got out without causing any alarm—without arousing a soul. Gibson, no doubt, was now peacefully sleeping in his own bed, utterly oblivious to the rescue plan that was afoot. For Gibson, naturally, knew nothing of Willy Handforth's discovery of the afternoon, and thus he would be perfectly easy in mind, believing that everything was going smoothly.

"Well, come on!" murmured Nipper. "It's time we got a move on, you chaps."

They started off in a clump, but just then a shadowy figure stepped out before them, and barred the way.

"What are you English boys doing out here, after midnight?" asked a grim voice.

"Gibson!" gasped Handforth.

They recognised the voice in a flash, and now, indeed, they recognised the man himself. Gibson, whom they had thought asleep in bed, was out here! And what was more, Gibson was evidently suspicious!

Nipper pushed his way forward, and confronted the man rather truculently.

"Can't we go for a walk, if we like?" he demanded. "Who are you to question us, anyway?"

"You're up to mischief, if I know anything!" retorted Gibson angrily. "Get back to the hotel!"

"Begad!"

"Of all the nerve!"

Although the juniors were startled, they were not inclined to take any notice of these high-handed orders.

"Sorry, Mr. Gibson, but you don't happen to have any authority over us," said Nipper calmly. "We've made up our minds to go for——"

"I don't want any back chat!" interrupted Gibson curtly. "You heard what I said just now. Get back to the hotel."

"Sorry, but——"

"Get back!" insisted Gibson. "Here, what's the game?" he added suddenly. "What do you boys think you're doing?"

He looked round suspiciously. The juniors had made a ring round him, and he was now encircled.

"We'd better grab him!" said Handforth excitedly. "He's suspicious, and unless we collar him he'll mess up the whole scheme! Pile in, St. Frank's!"

"Hear, hear!"

And with one accord the boys flung themselves at the startled Gibson.

"Stop!" he ejaculated. "You don't understand——"

But it was too late. The eleven juniors swarmed over him in a solid mass, and he went down beneath a writhing pile of youthful humanity. He was flung face downwards, and Handforth sat astride the small of his back. Church and McClure held his legs down, and Willy and Travers and one or two others grabbed his arms.

"It's the best way!" panted Nipper. "We can't have our plan messed up by this fellow! He's in the plot, anyhow so he might as well be collared at once."

"Let's take him to the lock-up!" suggested Handforth.

"The trouble is, there's no evidence against him—yet!" said Nipper. "Still, I dare say the chief constable, or sheriff, or whoever he is, will agree to hold the man."

"Of course," said Handforth. "It would be sheer madness to let him go. In five minutes he would be off, carrying a warning to his pals!"

Gibson was roughly hauled to his feet, and the juniors clung to him in grim earnest. There wasn't the slightest chance of his breaking away and escaping.

"Very clever!" said Gibson, in a tone that was filled with exasperation. "I congratulate you, boys, on your smart capture!"

"Eh?" gasped Nipper, with a jump. "Why, what on earth——"

"We'd better keep this little affair to ourselves, young 'un," continued Gibson. "As you are so insistent upon taking me to the lock-up, my only course is to be frank with you."

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth, dropping his hold as though Gibson had become red-hot. "It's—it's—it's——"

"The gov'nor!" said Nipper faintly.

For the voice of the prisoner was not the voice of Gibson—but that of Nelson Lee!



The juniors swarmed over the man in a solid mass, and he went down beneath a writhing pile of youthful humanity.



CHAPTER 18.

A Few Explanations!

EGAD!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"It's Mr. Lee himself!"

The boys all released their grip, and stood back, dumbfounded. And "Gibson" calmly dusted himself down and looked round at the circle of youngsters, breathing hard meanwhile.

"I don't know who's responsible for this, Nipper, but I'm not particularly pleased," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I warned you to keep quiet about Gibson's complicity in the plot——"

"But, guv'nor, we hadn't the faintest idea!" panted Nipper breathlessly. "Oh, my hat! I nearly had a fit when I heard your voice! We—we thought we'd got hold of Gibson!"

"I can well believe that!" said Nelson Lee, nodding.

"It's marvellous!" said Handforth blank. "We knew you were clever at disguises, Mr. Lee, but this beats everything! Of course, it's dark, and that helps you a bit——"

"Perhaps I had better point out, Handforth, that I have been impersonating Mr. Gibson for nearly twenty-four hours," said Nelson Lee calmly. "So I did not really need the help of the darkness to assist me."

"You—you mean to say that you've been Gibson all day, sir?" asked Nipper, in amazement.

"I have!"

"And I have been watching you, sir!"

"I know it!" nodded Lee. "You thought I wasn't aware of your attentions, young man, but I was!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"And I never guessed it, either!" said Willy Handforth dizzily. "Well, my aunt! You've given us a proper shock, sir!"

"And you have apparently made up your minds to ruin all my carefully-laid plans," said Nelson Lee, not without annoyance. "I appreciate your good intentions, boys, but there is such a thing as being too enterprising. It would have been far better if you had remained in bed."

"But we were going to rescue Archie, sir!" said Nipper. "We had everything fixed——"

"I came to Renmark for the purpose of rescuing Glenthorne," said Nelson Lee, "and although you thought I returned to Adelaide, I remained here. I shall be interested to know how you propose to get on Glenthorne's track?"

"He's at the Kenney station, sir!" said Nipper eagerly.

"By Jove! You know, then?" asked Lee sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"How did you find this out?"

"Willy made the discovery, sir," put in Handforth. "Of course, I should have found it out pretty quickly, but——"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Lee. "This, of course, makes a difference. Since you made this discovery, I cannot very well be angry. So you were setting out to rescue Glenthorne from the Kenney station?"

"Yes, sir!" chorused the juniors.

"In that case, I must compliment you, boys, for your determination," said Lee. "Yet I cannot quite understand how you came by your knowledge."

"There's a lot we can't understand, either, sir," said Nipper. "Oh, great Scott! To think that we've been watching you all day—under the impression that you were Gibson!"

"It only shows that we needn't have bothered our heads," put in Willy Handforth. "We could have left everything to Mr. Lee. He made that discovery about the Kenney station even before I did! When you come to think of it, it's a pity we didn't mind our own business—and leave the case in Mr. Lee's hands!"

"It was Willy who got the clue, gov'nor," said Nipper. "You know when Joe Kenney drove in the township in that old Ford car this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, Willy hid at the back, under some old sacking," said Nipper. "Of course, he thought that you were Gibson. He overheard you saying something to Kenney about the money—

and Kenney replied that the boy would be kept at the station safely."

"Oh, I see!"

"Well, Willy came and told me all about it, and naturally I got the other fellows in," went on Nipper. "We decided that we would go to the Kenney station to-night—and catch the beggars while they were asleep, rescuing Archie at the same time."

"Strangely enough, that is my own plan, too," said Nelson Lee dryly.

"Well I'm blessed!" ejaculated Nipper. "And we butted right in on it! I'm awfully sorry, gov'nor! But you can't blame us, you know. Your impersonation of Gibson is so absolutely marvellous—"

"Now, now!" laughed Nelson Lee. "That'll be enough of that, young 'un! You

assumed, no doubt, that I had returned to Adelaide to get the money?"

"Of course, sir," said two or three of the juniors.

"We believed that you had some wheeze of your own," explained Nipper. "We thought you were going to get the money, and then pretend to pay it over, and get Archie back afterwards. But, of course, we ought to be boiled for assuming anything of the sort! You've done something ten times more clever—and you could have done it without any help from us, either."

"All the same, boys, I appreciate your activities," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"What you have done, you have done with the best of motives. I must confess that I had no idea that you were so closely on the track, and when I saw you all leaving the hotel I was inclined to be very angry."

"And so you came and ordered us back?" chuckled Nipper. "But, gov'nor, how did you work it? I mean, where's Gibson?"

"In the hotel."

"And has he been there ever since last night?"

"Ever since last night!" nodded Nelson Lee. "Mr. Gibson, I am glad to tell you, is quite helpless, and is closely guarded."

"But when did you start this game, sir?"

"Very soon after Gibson had come to me with his preposterous suggestion of twenty thousand pounds ransom," replied Nelson Lee. "Since you know so much, boys, I had better tell you the rest. If I don't, you will pester me until my life is a misery."

"You bet we will, sir!" said Handforth.

"Naturally, I decided at once that I would have nothing to do with Gibson's proposal," continued Lee. "I immediately consulted with the manager, and with the representatives of the law. I suggested a plan to these gentlemen, and they approved of it. To arrest Gibson openly would be a mistake, since we had absolutely no knowledge of Glenthorne's whereabouts."

"So you adopted this wheeze, sir?"

"We made short work of Gibson," replied Lee grimly. "We entered his bed-room, and

LOOK, CHUMS!



(A reproduction in miniature of next week's cover.)

he was quickly rendered helpless. Then I busied myself in preparing my impersonation. It was not a particularly hard task, and at the end of two hours I imagined that Gibson and myself looked as alike as two peas."

"It was a jolly clever dodge, sir," said Willy admiringly.

"It was really the only thing to do," replied Lee. "Although Gibson told me that he would hold no communication with his confederates, I did not believe that. Therefore, I impersonated him. This morning I came downstairs, attired in Gibson's clothing, and I made a point of walking about the township a good deal during the day."

"Gibson, meanwhile, being kept in his room?" asked Nipper.

"Gibson is there still, with two men giving him every possible attention," said Nelson Lee dryly. "You see, I believed that the other members of the gang would come into town with the idea of finding out how things were going. Very fortunately, Joe Kenney pulled his car up quite near to me, and called to Gibson by name. At first I thought he was merely a casual acquaintance, but when Kenney asked me in for a drink he got in a whispered inquiry about the money."

"And then you knew, sir?" said Nipper.

"Then I knew!" agreed Lee, nodding. "I assured Mr. Kenney that efforts were being made to obtain the ransom, and that everything was going smoothly. He returned to his station, comfortable and confident. And Glenthorne, naturally, is being well cared for now. I have no anxiety regarding the youngster. But, of course, the sooner we can rescue him, the better."

"Let's all go, sir!" urged Handforth.

"I am afraid not," said Lee. "I have made careful arrangements with Mr. Smith and several other good people of Renmark, and we are to make a night raid on this distant station—"

"Well, that's our plan, too, sir!" interrupted Nipper. "Why can't we all go? I've got two cars ready—"

"You have, eh?" broke in Lee. "Well, I'm hanged! And I have two cars ready, too!"

"Then let's all go, sir!"

"Yes, be a sport, sir!"

"Well, considering that you have progressed so far with your own programme, perhaps I had better let you come along," said Nelson Lee, with a chuckle. "But, of course, you'll only be spectators when it comes to the actual raid."

All the juniors promptly agreed—but, privately, they held totally different views!

"It's likely that we're going to miss all the fun—I don't think!" snorted Handforth, as Nelson Lee walked away, having spotted Mr. Smith and a party of Renmark men awaiting him further down the street.

"For once the great Handy speaks words of wisdom!" said Vivian Travers enthusiastically.

Fortunately, Edward Oswald failed to appreciate the veiled insinuation, and the peaceful night was not shattered by his bellowing roars of indignation and his usual threats of violence in such circumstances.

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CHAPTER 17.

Poor Old Archie!

"THIS," said Archie Glenthorne, "is dashed awkward! Absolutely! I mean, I've read about chappies being lost in the good old bush, but reading a book and being one of the lost chappies yourself, are two dashed different things!"

Archie was sitting on a block of stone, surveying his immediate surroundings with distaste. There were stars overhead, and the moon had crept up and was shedding a soft, silvery light over the rugged landscape. Archie was in a shallow hollow, near a little rippling creek, and he had just satisfied his thirst.

"Still, things aren't so frightfully bad as they might be," he told himself philosophically. "Generally, these chappies in the stories go staggering about, gasping like billy-o, with their good old tongues hanging out in chunks. Water, I mean to say, is generally out of the picture. But here we have a plentiful supply. Somewhat poisonous in flavour, perhaps, but water, after all, is water."

It was undeniable that Archie was in a serious predicament; but, as he said himself, it might have been worse. He had been wandering about for two or three hours, and he was perfectly convinced that he had walked in a straight line. He knew this for a certainty. Every time he had paused he had made a mental note of some particular landmark—in fact, two landmarks in line. Thus, when he started off again he had been certain of continuing in the same direction, without any deviation from his course.

The trouble was, he had not yet located that "road"; and this was peculiar, for he knew perfectly well that the Ford had only plunged a mile or so into the bush, and he knew, moreover, that he had walked five or six miles. That was the rummy part of it.

"Oh, well, we shall have to keep going," said Archie, rising resolutely to his feet. "After all, a chappie can't do more than that. Sooner or later we're bound to strike something in the size or shape or form of a settlement. Dash it, Australia is a pretty large proposition, but there are a few townships here and there!"

Renmark was his objective, but he wouldn't grumble so much if he reached some other settlement. Even an outlying cattle station would suit him—always providing that it wasn't the Kenney station. This one he barred. Positively and absolutely, he regarded the Kenney station as beyond the pale.

A low, strange cry came to his ears, proceeding from some thick trees several hundred yards to his left.

"What-ho!" he murmured. "No doubt a wallaby calling to its young! Or perhaps it's only a rabbit having a slight argument with his neighbour out of the next burrow."

He made sure of his landmarks, and then trudged on again. He was footsore and weary, but his spirit was by no means broken.

"If I had a large supply of brains, I should probably guide the good old footsteps by the stars," he ruminated. "But, dash it, I don't know one dashed star from another. I mean to say, there they are, twinkling in the good old blue, and I don't know the difference between the Southern Cross and the Isosceles Triangle!"

He walked on, thinking deeply, keeping his eyes sharply open. He still had an idea that a lion or a tiger might suddenly jump out on him. The Australian bush, to Archie, was an unknown quantity.

Now and again some small creature would dodge hurriedly out of his path, a hundred

yards or so ahead, and once or twice he was certain that he spotted some kangaroos. But nothing came near him, and he was not in any way molested.

Emerging from the shallow hollow, he found a vast expanse of dim, shadowy country ahead of him. Nothing but grass and scrub and trees—without a friendly light showing in any direction. Not a sound bar the mysterious noises of the bush.

"Come to think of it," he said reflectively, "I don't believe there is a constellation of stars named after our priceless old friend, Isosceles. Dashed silly of me! Of course, Isosceles was one of Euclid's old pals!"

He came to the conclusion that Isosceles and Euclid must have gone to school together, and, having settled this problem, he felt easier in his mind. He came upon a clump of soft, dry grass, and he was tempted to lie down and take a rest. But after a moment he repressed this feeling, and marched sturdily on.

"Good gad, no!" he decided. "I mean to say, forty winks would be a somewhat juicy luxury, but it can't be done! Absolutely not! I might wake up in the morning to find myself surrounded by a ring of wild animals, waiting to make the first jump. Archie isn't going to be caught napping like that!"

By this time, however, he was steadily coming to the alarming conclusion that he was bushed. At first he had tried to delude himself; but now he knew the truth. He was lost! And he had a suspicion that the further he went the further away from civilisation he was getting.

But he concluded that it would be fatal to change his course. He couldn't do better than carry on—and trust to luck. Sooner or later he would, no doubt, hit upon some township or cattle station.

"The trouble is, it will probably be later than sooner," he mused. "I mean to say, it may be true, or it may not be true, but I've heard frightful rumours to the effect that some parts of Australia are so devoid of citizens that a chappie can walk a hundred miles without seeing anything in the shape of a human being except his own shadow. Well, I must say the populace appears to be dashed thin in these regions!"

Once he paused, thinking that he could hear a faint, throbbing hum in the air. For a moment it was quite noticeable, then it died away to a murmur, and finally vanished. Archie stood still, listening, but now he could only hear the rapid thumping of his own heart.

"Imagination, laddie—imagination!" he told himself sternly. "Good gad! This won't do! Pull up your socks, old grapefruit! You're hearing things!"

Yet Archie's imagination was not to blame. He really had heard a throbbing—that same throbbing having been caused by four powerful automobiles, crawling steadily along the uneven track which led to the Kenney station.

In the quietness of the night the sound had evidently carried on the wind.

It was a grim party which approached Joe Kenney's shack. In the two leading cars were Nelson Lee, two officers of the law, and a number of leading Renmark townsmen, all of them armed. Two other cars were filled with St. Frank's juniors, all of them eager to be in "at the death." They wanted to be the first to greet poor old Archie as soon as he was rescued.

When the cars were still a mile away from the station they were pulled up, and the engines were stopped.

"Better not go any further," said one of the Renmark men. "They'll hear our cars if we do. Better take it on foot now."

"How far?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Not more than a mile—just over the rise," said the other. "The station lies down in the hollow, beyond."

Nelson Lee turned as Nipper and Handforth and the others came crowding up, eager and expectant.

"You boys must keep in the background," said Lee sternly. "No, Handforth, you needn't argue with me."

"But, sir——"

"There may be some shooting, and there are plenty of men to do this work," said Lee. "You boys will either promise me, here and now, to obey orders—or I'll leave you all behind."

There and then they all promised to obey orders. Nelson Lee's tone was remarkably decisive!



CHAPTER 13.

The Raid!

NELSON LEE stood at the top of the rise, frowning down into the hollow. Near him were the other men, their rifles slung in the crooks of their arms.

"Still awake, by the look of things," muttered one of the men.

"Either that, or they have left a light burning for some special reason," said Lee. "This makes it all the more essential that we should act with supreme caution."

They could see down upon the Kenney station. They could see the shack, and the outbuildings, in the moonlight. A yellow glow was showing from the front window of that ramshackle little wooden house.

"They can't be expecting anybody," said Smith in a puzzled voice. "They'll be expecting us least of all. Kenney went back

home fully satisfied that everything was going smoothly, didn't he?"

"As far as I know," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "I am convinced that Kenney was in no way suspicious."

"Well, let's get it over," said one of the other men briskly. "I'm all for making a sudden rush, and getting the thing finished."

"We'd better spread out," advised Lee. "If these men are watching, and they start shooting, it'll be bad for us if they catch us in a clump."

"Too right, it will," agreed Smith. "We'll do as you say, Mr. Lee."

As the raiders approached the shack, they spread out fan-wise, with Nelson Lee well to the fore. Behind them, just topping the rise, were the St. Frank's fellows.

"By George!" said Handforth, as he watched. "Look here, you chaps! Let's make a detour, and get round to the rear! Those rotters might make a bolt for it, and escape out of the back door. Then we shall be ready!"

"Good egg!" said Jimmy Potts.

"We promised the guv'nor that we wouldn't take part in the raid," said Nipper dubiously. "We don't want to break our word——"

"But that won't be!" urged Hand-

forth. "We'll get round to the back—just to be on the safe side. You never know what might happen."

After all, there seemed to be no harm in following out this plan, and within another moment or two the boys were streaking off round the hillside, so as to get to the rear of the shack and the outbuildings. In the moonlight, they could see the whole scene clearly.

At that particular moment, Nelson Lee, in advance of the others, was getting very near to the front of the little house. No shots had come; indeed, no indication of life had been seen in the shack. It was pretty clear that Joe Kenney and his companions were utterly oblivious of this raid.

"Now!" came a sudden shout from one of the men.

It was the signal to throw all caution to the winds, and Nelson Lee was the first to leap forward and to throw himself across the veranda. He flung the door open, and held his revolver ready.

Three startled ejaculations came to his ears. He beheld an unexpected sight. Kenney and Durrant and Brand were not sleeping. They were in the living-room, seated at the table, playing cards and smoking.

"What in thunder——" began Joe Kenney.

"Hands up—and look sharp about it!" ordered Nelson Lee curtly. "Quickly, now!"

Brand leapt to his feet, and his hand flew towards his hip-pocket.

Crack!

Nelson Lee's revolver spoke, and Brand shrieked madly as the bullet grazed his arm. His hands shot upwards, whilst his face lost every atom of colour until it was a dirty, muddy hue.

Then Smith and the other Renmark men came crowding in, their rifles ready. Kenney and Durrant and Brand were taken utterly by surprise. They hadn't had the faintest chance of escaping, let alone putting up any kind of fight.

"Say, what's the meaning of this?" snarled Joe Kenney savagely, after giving his two companions a quick, meaning glance. "Have you gone mad, or what?"

"Where is the English boy?" demanded one of the officers sternly.

"Where's who?"

"The boy Glenthorne, whom you kidnapped," said Lee.

"You seem to be a hard case, don't you?" said Kenney insolently. "There's no English boy on this station."

In that second Joe Kenney was tremendously relieved to realise that Archie Glenthorne had escaped. For, unexpectedly, dramatically, exposure had come. And now he need not fear it—for Archie was no longer here!

Durrant and Brand, although slower-witted, came to this conclusion, too. But their very expressions, their startled fright, proved clearly to Nelson Lee that they were not so innocent as they professed to be.

"Well, Joe Kenney, I'm going to put the bracelets on you—just to be on the safe side," said one of the officers of the law. "The same with you two sundowners. I suppose you'll try to say that you didn't take the English boy away during that fake bush-ranger affair?"

"We don't know anything about him!" said Durrant defiantly.

They were all handcuffed, however, and while two or three of the men looked after them, Nelson Lee made a quick examination of the other two rooms. Archie was not there. Then Lee hurried outside, and went to the outbuildings, one or two of the men accompanying him.

"Everything all right, sir?" came a hail, eager and anxious.

"Yes, boys—you can come now!" sang out Nelson Lee. "You can make yourselves useful."

"Where's Archie, sir?" asked Nipper, as he came running up with the others.

"Extraordinarily enough, Glenthorne doesn't seem to be here," replied Lee, with a worried frown. "They may have hidden him in one of these outhouses, however. We must make a very thorough search."

They did—but the result was disappointing. There were not many outhouses, but every one was searched high and low. And there was absolutely no sign of Archie Glenthorne.

While Nipper and Handforth and the others excitedly discussed the situation, Nelson Lee strode back into the shack, and he found Joe Kenney and Brand and Durrant looking less scared. They were sullen and truculent, and clearly they were determined to brazen out the whole affair.

"See here, you!" shouted Joe Kenney, as Nelson Lee appeared. "I've heard that you started this racket! You're a schoolmaster, eh? Do you think I want any of your infernal boys here?"

"What has become of your Ford car, Kenney?" asked Nelson Lee bluntly.

Joe Kenney started.

"My Ford car?" he blustered. "A—a feller took it away."

"Into the bush?"

"No, hang you!"

"In that case he must have taken it back to Renmark—since there is no other track," snapped Lee. "And we know for a fact that your Ford car did not come back to Renmark. Neither did we meet it on the way. Where is it, Kenney?"

"You can go to blazes!" roared Kenney furiously.

Nelson Lee did not go to blazes. He went into the inner room, and, with the assistance of a powerful torchlight, he made a thorough examination. It wasn't long before he discovered many signs of Archie Glenthorne's recent occupation. The camp bed—the indications of food; and, what was far more interesting, Archie Glenthorne's jacket. This had been hidden beneath a grubby blanket, which was in a heap on the floor. Lee took it back into the living-room.

"Does this belong to one of you, by any chance?" he asked ominously. "Come! There's been enough of this nonsense!"

"What's that, Mr. Lee?" asked one of the Renmark men.

"Glenthorne's jacket."

"Then the boy has been here!"

"Undoubtedly he has been here," replied Nelson Lee. "I imagine that Glenthorne escaped during the evening, and that he took the car with him—probably running off the track, and getting into the bush. This will explain why these men were playing cards, instead of sleeping. They were expecting that Glenthorne would find his way back to the station, attracted, perhaps, by the light."

Lee did not fail to notice the startled glances the three rascals exchanged as he said those words. For that, in fact, had been their very plan.

"You imagine a lot, don't you?" snarled Joe Kenney. "I tell you, the boy has never been here! We found that coat back in the bush, and—"

"Quit those lies!" said one of the officers. "The boy was here, and you were holding him for ransom. Where is he?"

"You're so clever you'd better find out!" retorted Kenney.

Nelson Lee was gravely concerned at this unexpected check. He had been sure that

Archibald Glenthorne would be at the station. Now, it appeared, Archie had escaped. All praise to Archie for his enterprise and daring—but it was unfortunate that he should have chosen such an inopportune time.

And when Nelson Lee thought of that missing Ford car, when he thought of the bush, he became seriously alarmed.

"It's no good questioning these rogues," he said, turning to the other men. "Glenthorne has been here, and he has escaped. Without any loss of time, we had better arrange several parties, and we will scour the bush."

"A pretty tall order," said Mr. Smith dubiously.

"That Ford car cannot have got far," declared Lee. "It is more than likely that Glenthorne is badly hurt, and that he needs assistance. I am very glad that all the boys came with us. They will be useful now."

There was great consternation amongst the St. Frank's juniors, but they eagerly fell in with Nelson Lee's plan. Three parties were formed, with one or two men in each, the other members being St. Frank's juniors, and they set off along the track to Renmark, spreading out into the bush as they went—searching.

Their hearts were heavy now. They had hoped for so much, and they had really gained so little. For they had raided the station, and had captured the crooks, only to find that Archie Glenthorne was missing.



CHAPTER 19.

A Shock for Archie!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE dragged his weary steps over the rough ground, and he limped painfully.

There were one or two blisters on his feet, and thirst was troubling him again.

He had found no other creek, and he was beginning to fear that before long he would penetrate deeper into a dry, waterless region where there would be no chance of obtaining a drink. And he felt that the dawn was near, and then would come the scorching, blazing, hot day. Yet he continued to trudge onwards, always keeping to the straight line by watching the landmarks.

"Oh, well, it's no good losing heart!" he decided, bracing himself. "Pull yourself together, laddie. Dash it, you're getting morbid! You're bound to find more water before long!"

After a few more steps he came to the conclusion, definitely, that forty winks would be of service to him.

"The tissues are getting dashed jellified," he muttered wearily. "I'm absolutely wilting at the knees, dash it! A dose of the

good old dreamless will shove chunks of energy into the system. What-ho! Where can we lie our weary bones?"

He looked round for a suitable place, but just here the ground was hard and rocky and unfriendly. He walked on, noticing a clump of thick bushes in the moonlight, just ahead. He skirted round these, blinked, took a couple of paces forward, and blinked again.

"Odds riddles and mysteries!" he ejaculated aloud. "Good gad! Impossible!"

There, not ten yards away from him, was the wreckage of the old Ford!

He had been walking for hours, walking, as he firmly believed, in a straight line. And here, by some miraculous trick, he was back at his starting point.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he muttered, running painfully forward. "Absolutely! I'm dashed!"

It was no trick of the eyesight. There was the battered Ford, jammed against that boulder. Everything was exactly as Archie had left it hours earlier.

"But, I mean, it's ridic.!" muttered Archie, passing a hand over his brow. "Of all the priceless mysteries!"

Although he had walked miles and miles, he was forced to the conclusion that he had gone round in a great, wide circle, and by pure chance he had hit upon the old Ford again. He had read of people wandering round in circles when they were bushed, but he had never quite believed it. If he had thought anything at all, he had imagined that the circles had been quite small. Besides, hadn't he taken precautions to ensure that his route should be straight? Unfortunately, Archie's precautions were of a primitive description and were unreliable. It had seemed to him that he had been walking in a straight line, but really he had not done so.

He sat down on the rusty running-board and propped his chin in his hands.

"Oh, well, there it is!" he said briefly. "I mean, what's the use?"

In some vague way the Ford car gave him a degree of comfort. It was a sign of civilisation. He knew, too, that he could not be very far from that "road." His earlier fears—that he had wandered deeper and deeper into the bush—were groundless. In fact, after a bit, he became quite cheered up.

"Absolutely!" he said firmly, as he rose to his feet. "Why not? Forty of the best and brightest, and daylight will be here, and then we shall be all serene. We'll soon get to the road, and then—"

He broke off as he caught sight of the old sacking in the back of the car, and some rugs, too. He seized them, spread them on the ground, and lay down.

"This," he murmured, "is absolutely the stuff to give 'em!"

But after a few moments he wondered if he was wise. It was just about the hour before dawn, and there was a chill nip in the air. It occurred to him, too, that it

might be dangerous to go to sleep out here, in the bush. What did people do when they wanted to sleep in the bush?

"Why, of course!" said Archie, sitting up. "A camp fire, laddie! Absolutely! The good old blaze will dispel the gloom, and it'll be most frightfully warm, too."

He had no difficulty in collecting a pile of dry wood. He found an old oily rag in the car, and within a minute he was striking a match, and setting fire to the rag. It blazed up brightly; he set it on the ground, and then quickly put a number of dry sticks over it, piling more all round. Smoke began to pour up, then the flames began to lick round the dry wood, and it crackled and blazed.

"What-ho!" Archie murmured. "We'll soon be all right now!"

But at that moment an extraordinary thing happened.

A tongue of flame began creeping over the ground, away from the scarcely-started camp fire. Archie stared at it, fascinated, mystified.

The flame ran more rapidly, and shot higher. Then, with a sudden burst of strength, it fairly leapt towards the old car, and spread upwards and outwards with a fierce roar of triumph!

"What the—— I mean to say——"

Archie broke off, for in that second the truth had dawned upon him. Petrol! In the crash, the car's petrol-tank had sprung a leak; and the spirit had been gradually leaking out, running away in a little stream. It was this tiny stream which had caught fire, and which had carried the flames rapidly to the car itself.

Archie leapt forward, his first instinct being to put this fire out. But then he knew that he could not do so. For by now the flames were licking round the chassis and the body, leaping up with ever-increasing fury—until, indeed, the whole scene was ruddily lit up by the glare!



CHAPTER 20.

All Serene!

"I WANTED a camp fire, but, dash it, I didn't ask for one this size!" said Archie breathlessly. "I wonder if there's much petrol in that tank! If so, there's just a chance that——"

His heart suddenly seemed to miss a beat. For it dawned upon him that the petrol tank might explode at any moment! And he was within five yards of the fire!

"Tally-ho!" he ejaculated. "Archie, laddie, kindly remove the old carcase into another hemisphere!"

He fairly dashed away, intending to stand at a distance of about a hundred yards, where, he felt, he would be in safety.

But before he had covered sixty yards there came, behind him, a mighty, booming explosion. It deafened his ears, and it was accompanied by a lurid flare of white light. The wind rushed at Archie like something solid, and he staggered, stumbled, and fell.

"In the nick of time, as the good old story-books say!" he muttered, as he sat up.

He stared at the fire dazedly. It was worth looking at now. The car itself had not actually been blown to pieces, but its shape had been considerably spoilt, and every inch of it was flaring up into the sky like an enormous torch.

Little did Archie Glenthorne realise that that explosion was the luckiest thing that could have happened for him!

For less than a mile away one of the search parties was scouring the bush—a party which included Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth, and Willy and Travers. Both the other search parties were within three miles.

And they all heard that booming explosion—they all saw the flare in the sky.

"What was it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, as he and Leo and the other members of their party stood still, staring excitedly into the gloom.

"An explosion of some sort—and there's a fire following it," said Nelson Lee.

"But what could explode out here, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Petrol, perhaps," replied Lee.

"You—you mean—Archie, and the Ford car?" gasped Nipper. "Great Scott, guv'nor! You think that Archie——"

"I hardly know what to think!" interrupted Lee tensely. "But we must get to this fire at once—as quickly as we can. We must set our minds at rest. Come, all of you!"

They went on at the double, and although the distance was comparatively short it seemed ages before they came within full sight of the fire. They raced up until they were quite close, Nelson Lee in the lead.

By now the conflagration was growing less. All the petrol had been burnt up in that first outburst; only the upholstery was now burning, sending forth an acrid smoke and myriads of sparks. The actual flames were dying down.

"Good heavens! It is the Ford, without any doubt!" panted Nelson Lee. "But Glenthorne is not here! There is no sign of him!"

"Look! There's—there's something over there, sir!" panted Nipper, pointing.

Nelson Lee twirled round and looked.

"Yes!" he muttered. "By James, you're right!"

Dimly visible in the lurid glare, and on the far side of the car, they could see a still kind of bundle. At first sight it had looked like a patch of rock, but now they

(Concluded on page 44.)

"BETWEEN OURSELVES"

has unavoidably been held out this week. It will, of course, appear as usual next Wednesday.—Ed.

ANOTHER SMASHING FULL-OF-ACTION INSTALMENT THIS WEEK!

What's Wrong with the Rovers?



(Introduction on page 38.)

Nelson Lee and Nipper are prisoners, and Stephen Langton, the Rovers' daring chairman and crook, thinks he holds the trump card. But Langton has reckoned without the famous detective's resourcefulness and that mistake costs him dearly!

Nipper Hits Out!

TELKEMP, the black-bearded man who called himself captain, affected a semi-naval dress, and was clearly in command of the crooks, who posed as salvage-men endeavouring to recover valuables from a ship sunk during the war. He was a gruff, reticent man, but his three new prisoners—as well as the two rich men who had been with him for some time—Ridley and Mayhew, the kidnapped Northmouth Rovers' directors—seemed to interest him. He had them all to supper in his cosy cabin on the Sunday night, and though he spoke little himself, he seemed to like to hear them talk.

Nipper was unusually silent. He knew that something big was in the wind, for his chief had been very uncommunicative—a sure sign that he was busy thinking—and he knew that Lee had talked with Craddock and the two kidnapped Northmouth men, though the detective had been careful to make it appear that their conversation had been of the most casual nature.

From a very fine wireless set in a corner of the cabin came some excellent music

from the Dutch high-power station at Hilversum, and presently Telkemp glanced at his watch and strolled over to the cabinet.

"No doubt you gentlemen will be interested in news from your own country, and I fancy there may be something of interest to me," he said.

He moved the pointers on the dials, and Daventry came in with startling strength. The announcer was reading the weather forecast, followed by some news of no particular interest to Nipper. Then suddenly he was sitting up and taking notice.

"Some anxiety is felt with regard to Flight-Commander Craddock, who set out last night to test a new type of military machine over the North Sea," said the announcer. "The Admiralty have ordered destroyers to make a search for wreckage along the route the airman is believed to have taken."

Click!

The black-bearded man had switched off.

"You are in the public eye, Captain Craddock, and I'm afraid that considerably more anxiety will be felt about you."

Telkemp spoke mockingly, but Nipper thought there was a shade of anxiety in his dark eyes. He probably did not like the mention of destroyers. Nipper was not in the least surprised at there being no mention of Nelson Lee or himself. They were on secret service, and publicity was the last thing the authorities would wish for. Craddock's real business had been suppressed.

The next morning Nelson Lee, Nipper and Ridley were on deck, after breakfast, when they saw a steamer approaching.

"It's the supply boat," explained Ridley. "It looks innocent enough, and brings provisions, then takes back to Holland anything that Langton has brought from England. We shall be hustled down below. I suppose they are afraid that we shall see too much, or make an attempt to stow away."

A bullying type of thick-set young Dutchman in brown overalls and sea-boots, came swaggering up.

"Daun!" he said sharply.

Nipper was looking at the small rusty old steamer approaching, and the young Dutchman gave him a kick as a reminder to hurry.

But he had misjudged his man. Nipper was a fighter, and he was not going to stand that. In a flash he was round, and had planted his fist clean between the eyes of the burly young Dutchman, and sent him backwards to the deck.

"Any more of you?" Nipper cried, glaring round, fists clenched, ready to fight to the last gasp before he was flung down below. The Dutchman was rising, a murderous glare in his small eyes, and two other men made a hostile but cautious

movement towards the boy with the powerful punch. But Telkemp waved them back, growled something in Dutch, and then turned to Nipper.

"You will be good enough to go below," he said politely. "Hans, see them to the cabin."

The little party went down the companion-way, followed by the greasy, portly steward.

"Vot a poonch you haf mit you!" he said to Nipper in an awed voice.

"Not going to be kicked by any dirty Dutchman!" said the truculent Nipper. "No offence to you, old son," he added, remembering the nationality of the man who had been very decent to them.

"Never vos I take offence from a man mit such a poonch!" said the steward.

Down in a barely furnished cabin Mayhew was talking to Craddock, who seemed to regard the whole thing as more or less of a joke. Mayhew turned to the detective and Nipper.

"I'm afraid I've bad news, Mr. Lee," he said. "As I told you, I speak Dutch fairly well, though I've never let these chaps know it. I'm afraid that plan of yours is knocked on the head. Langton is expected to-night. They are getting a bit panicky here, and there's some new move on the board. But the trouble is that they know Craddock is an officer and a very clever pilot, and they are therefore going to keep him locked in his cabin, though we shall be at liberty as usual. Without Craddock we're helpless."

"Scarcely that, Mr. Mayhew," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "You see, it's very like the case of your knowledge of Dutch, which you have kept from our temporary hosts. I obtained a pilot's certificate many

What's Gone Before.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous detective, and his assistant

NIPPER, are investigating the strange disappearance of James Ridley and Mark Mayhew, two directors of Northmouth Rovers, the famous First Division football club. Lee suspects that they have been kidnapped by

STEPHEN LANGTON, the Rovers' chairman, who is a keen airman, and is known as the "Bat." Lee also thinks that Langton is smuggling illicit goods between England and Holland. Others who seem to be implicated in the mystery are Bert Barter, Minter and Coles, the club's centre-half, manager and trainer respectively. One night, when Langton sets out on a flight, Nelson Lee and Nipper pursue him in a military aeroplane piloted by Tony Craddock. To the detective's surprise, the Bat alights on what looks like a salvage ship, anchored in a deserted part of the North Sea. This ship fires upon the pursuing plane, which is forced to descend upon the vessel, too. Thus Nelson Lee and his companions become prisoners. Next morning, Nelson Lee finds James Ridley and Mark Mayhew—the missing directors of Northmouth Rovers—on board. They have been here all the time; this unsuspecting-looking salvage ship is the centre of Langton's activities! Nelson Lee tells the two directors that the next time Langton visits the ship, he intends to borrow the "Bat's" plane, and fly them back to Northmouth!

(Now read on.)



Ridley and Mayhew made short work of the Dutchman, while Nelson Lee dealt very effectively with the unsuspecting mechanic.

years ago, but I have not shouted about it!"

In The Searchlights!

NIPPER watched the preparations with interest. In the afternoon a grey destroyer had come close to the salvage ship. All the prisoners had been sent below, and divers had got busy. Signals had been exchanged between the British warship and the apparently innocent Dutch salvage ship, and then the destroyer, which had evidently stopped to ask if anything had been seen of an aeroplane, had steamed quickly away.

Now the vessel did not look anything like so innocent. The derrick and diving apparatus had disappeared; steel arms had swung out on either side; a donkey engine rattled and wheezed, and thick wire cables from a mast were lifting up a sort of divided deck that fitted perfectly over another deck. When those great flaps went outwards over the projecting steel arms, the width of the deck was doubled, and bulwarks had disappeared.

"I hope no one follows Langton to-night," whispered Nelson Lee, as two men placed a small gun in position by the helio-

graph they had already erected. "It rather looks as though our people would be off their guard though, for it's barely six now, and that would suggest that Langton will be leaving Northmouth the moment darkness falls—hours before his usual time."

Wearing their thick fur coats they stood watching, fascinated. Craddock, the young R.A.F. officer, had been imprisoned in his cabin, but had wished the others luck. They were not allowed on the landing deck, but stood on the upper deck by the bridge. Suddenly there was a flicker in the darkness, a guttural cry from a man on the salvage ship, and then a stabbing ray of light.

The light flickered again, and then scores of tiny lamps glowed round the edges of the landing deck.

"Clever!" said Nelson Lee. "They didn't use them on Saturday, as there was sufficient moonlight."

Then, through the darkness, they saw the circling, dropping aeroplane, and the "Bat" made a perfect landing on the deck. Chocks were placed under the wheels, and the 'plane was ready to take off from the other side of the vessel. The moment it had landed those little glowing lights had been switched off.

Stephen Langton opened a door at the side and stepped out of the cabin—a roomy cabin, something like that of an airliner. He looked perfectly cool and collected.

As he was walking along with Telkemp towards the latter's cabin, he stopped by the three men and Nipper.

"Well, gentlemen, I am inclined to think that your stay will not be greatly prolonged. There is just the little formality of paying the bill, a subject I will discuss with you later. There will be no charge to you or your young assistant, Mr. Nelson Lee, as your visit here places me under an obligation to you!"

He spoke mockingly, and there was a slight smile on his thin mouth. Crook though he knew him to be, Nipper could not help having a certain amount of admiration for him. He was so different from the other members of this gang with whom he—Nipper—had associated; Minter, the crooked little manager of the Rovers; Barter, Grogan, Coles, and this odd collection of scoundrels on board the supposed salvage ship.

"I'm afraid you must regard the obligation as most unwillingly incurred!" replied the detective in the same light tone, and with a short laugh, the "Bat" passed on with the black-bearded man and two others.

Two men were left on the flat deck on which stood the 'plane. One was obviously a mechanic, who walked round the machine examining controls, the other was the burly young Dutchman whom Nipper had knocked down that morning. The other men were either with Langton or in the warmth of the cook's galley.

Nelson Lee gave some whispered instructions. Ridley and Mayhew strolled over to the young Dutchman, lounging at the end of the alleyway, and Nelson Lee and Nipper cut across and gained the alley on the port side, moving swiftly towards the 'plane.

And then things happened quickly. Ridley, a tough, wiry man despite his age, had the Dutchman by the throat, and had choked back the cry of alarm that rose to his lips, whilst Mayhew, with several scores to pay that bullying young man, hit him on the head with sufficient force to stun a bullock.

At the same moment Lee had dealt the unsuspecting mechanic a blow on the side of the neck that sent him senseless to the deck, and Nipper had wedged a spanner in the mechanism of that gun alongside the heliograph. Then there was a rush for the open door of the 'plane. Nelson Lee had observed that night that the engine was started by pulling a lever, and the detective grabbed it as Nipper and the two men came scrambling in after him.

The engine, still hot, roared into life at once, and before Ridley had closed the door they were taking the air. Silent as the engine was, the noise of getting away in the stillness of the evening was bound to rouse the men. Nipper, looking out of the window, saw dark forms rushing out on to the flat deck, saw two men making for the gun.

But nothing happened, and the 'plane was climbing high, heading for England. Nelson Lee was elated. He had never handled a machine like this, and it was a delight to do so.

They were well clear of the ship now, and Nipper was chuckling over the success of the whole enterprise, when suddenly the darkness around them was stabbed by two beams of silvery light that were roving the sky.

"Destroyers!" said Nelson Lee, a little uncomfortably. "I

don't like this. It's like flying over one's own lines in an enemy machine!"

And the next instant they were dazzled by the brilliant light on either side of them.

The grim destroyers down below on the grey tumbling sea had caught them in their searchlights!

The Round-Up!

IT was a decidedly uncomfortable moment as the 'plane was caught in the dazzling white searchlights from the destroyers below them on the North Sea. Nipper expected a shot at any moment; a shell that, in the excitement of the moment, might burst too close to be healthy.

BOOM!

That was the dull roar of a naval gun, and then came a flash and explosion, but it was some distance ahead of them. The gunner down below was not excited, although that small shell bursting in the

HURRAH!

A "Blue Crusaders" Serial
written by

E. S. BROOKS

is starting

VERY SHORTLY!

air ahead was a decidedly strong hint that it would be unhealthy to go on.

"I hope I can make a safe landing on the sea," said Nelson Lee calmly, as they were rapidly dropping. "I don't mind their shooting so much, for they'd scarcely dare go for a direct hit, even though they think Langton is in the machine. But if I report the position to the man in charge there'll be no loss of time before there's a little excitement in the North Sea."

Nipper saw the idea. The destroyers were less than an hour's fast steaming from the so-called salvage ship, and by getting into communication with them now a lot of time would be saved. But Ridley and Mayhew looked glum. They were too old to enjoy adventure in air and on sea, and their great desire was to get safely back to Northmouth.

The searchlights followed them as they planed down, and they alighted on the grey, white-flecked sea, over which the powerful, silent machine was skimming. Then there was a bump; spray splashed up over the windows, the floats were resting on the tumbling water, and the plane was rolling uncomfortably.

One searchlight was focused upon them, and they saw the other grim-looking destroyer speeding up to them. It came up and stopped beside them, almost touching the tip of the wing. A thick-set man in a pilot jacket, with a muffler round his neck, and a somewhat battered naval cap pulled well down on his sandy head, was leaning over the side.

Lee opened the door of the plane, which was just above the break of the waves.

"Are you Stephen Langton?" demanded the officer.

"I haven't that honour," replied the detective. "My name is Nelson Lee. I have my assistant and Ridley and Mayhew with me here."

A sharp cry of surprise came from the captain of the destroyer, and two other officers who had joined him.

"I'm delighted to see you safe, Mr. Nelson Lee," said the captain warmly. "We felt certain you had gone west with Craddock. Is he all right?"

"He was when we left him."

"But if that isn't Langton's plane I'm a Dutchman!" cried a young officer, who had a pair of powerful glasses slung round his neck.

"Oh, it's his machine all right, and a beauty, too!" replied the detective.

And then, across the short space of tumbling North Sea, he shouted all the information it was necessary for them to know. Pointing out that Langton and the men on the supposed salvage ship

would know now that the game was up, and that they would probably get up steam and seek some hiding-place.

"If they make a Dutch port and abandon their ship, the gang will have vanished before the international formalities can be got over, but if you make for the spot now, you'll have them," went on Lee. "They've a small anti-aircraft gun, and I think Langton would go down fighting, but the crew aren't the sort to argue, if you drop a shell in the neighbourhood as a gentle hint."

Instructions were flashed to the other destroyer, and then off the two warships went at full speed. Nelson Lee calmly filled his pipe.

"We must let the destroyers get there first," the detective said. "We don't know the effective range of that gun of theirs, and it would be senseless to take unnecessary risks."

"But what's the idea, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "It's the destroyers' job now."

"You're forgetting the Northmouth end of this business," pointed out Lee. "Stone won't make any arrests there until he knows that Langton has been caught, and that his secret destination is known. It was to find that out that we've waited so long. We intended to make a clean sweep, and I intend gathering up the leavings in Northmouth late to-night. The men there will know nothing of what has happened. Telkemp had a very good receiving set, but he could not transmit. That would have been too dangerous; the ether is so crowded to-day that a station powerful enough to reach Northmouth would have instantly attracted attention, and been located. Why should a salvage ship want a powerful transmitting set? The ship they wanted to keep so quiet would have been under suspicion at once. Not only Britain, but the whole of Europe would have been interested, and the game would not have lasted a week."

Nipper nodded.

"I see that, but what's the programme?" he asked.

"We follow the destroyers," said Nelson Lee. "If possible, I want to have a little chat with Langton, and then we fly to Northmouth. The gang there will be expecting their chief, and I think there should be a rather interesting scene upon the Rovers' football ground!"

(Readers simply mustn't miss next week's concluding instalment of this stunning serial, which ends in a blaze of thrills. An announcement concerning our new serial by E. S. Brooks will appear next Wednesday. Watch out for it!)

THE "LIGHTNING CONDUCTORS!"



"Lightning" Larwood

Fast bowlers are always in demand, yet for all that there are very few of 'em in cricket at the moment. Why? See what our special contributor has to say about it.

A VERY long time ago, probably before you were born, somebody with a neat turn of wit was responsible for this remark: "There are two sorts of fools who play cricket. The first sort are those who bowl fast, and the second sort are those who keep wicket to fast bowlers."

I don't suppose for a moment that anybody took those meant-to-be-funny words seriously. But as the years have passed over our heads, and we have come down to modern times, it is perfectly obvious that there are less fools of one kind than there used to be. The same number of people are "foolish" enough to keep wicket, but nothing like the same number of people are "foolish" enough to bowl fast.

Out of Fashion!

We have had a spell of cricket—first-class cricket, that is—in which fast bowling has been out of fashion. This not only applies to England; it applies to Australia as well. Consider what happened after the first of the Test matches of the present series. In that first game Jack Gregory—already nearly old enough to be numbered among the veterans—strained himself, and brought to an end his cricket career so far as Test matches are concerned. Now, here is an amazing thing. When Gregory could not play, Australia looked around in vain for a good fast bowler to take his place. Not

being able to find one, they took the field for the second Test match without a fast bowler. What was the result? England piled up the biggest score ever made in a Test match in any country up to then.

There was a recent period in English cricket—soon after the war—when, strictly speaking, we had not a single fast bowler right up to top class. Yet in the summer of 1921 the virtues of fast bowling on good wickets was plainly demonstrated. Australia brought to England two fast bowlers—the Jack Gregory before-mentioned and "Ted" Macdonald, who now plays for Lancashire. These two fast bowlers of Australia almost literally skittled England's batsmen out in one Test match after another, with the result that England lost three of the five games, the other two being drawn.

Now it was not merely the fact that Gregory and Macdonald were fast bowlers which enabled them to make such a mess of England in 1921. There was also this additional reason—that English batsmen, not having been called upon to play fast bowling in ordinary county games, were unaccustomed to such pace.

Much the same sort of thing has happened in Australia during the present season. Larwood is a great fast bowler about whom I shall have some more to say later on. But it is clear that at the outset of the present series of matches he was able to take the Australians by surprise, and skittle them out because they were unaccustomed to playing bowling of such a pace.

Perhaps it is not really surprising that there should be a world shortage of fast bowlers. The groundmen who prepare the pitches on which big matches are played do their work so wonderfully as to take all the fire out of the ground. That in itself is discouraging to the fast bowlers. Again, when we are young we are not very wise. We all try to bowl fast. Haven't you tried to bowl fast as a boy?

A Comparison!

Later on, however, we get rather wise, and if we think that we can get wickets with comparatively slow deliveries, then we ask ourselves, "What is the good of bowling fast?" In other words, we remember the old witticism about fast bowlers being fools.

Compare the bowling of a man like "Tich" Freeman with that of Jack Gregory or Harold Larwood. Freeman takes the ball in his hand, almost literally walks three or four steps up to the wicket and tosses the ball towards the batsmen. He gets wickets with these "dead easy" deliveries, too. In fact, last season, in England, he took more wickets than any other bowler had ever taken in one season.

Freeman could start bowling at twelve o'clock and be still bowling at five o'clock without unduly tiring himself. Now look at Gregory or Larwood. Before delivering a ball they walk back a full twenty yards, or even more. Then they start to run, work up pace, and by the time they get to the wicket they are going at top speed. Every ounce of energy is put into every delivery.

The result is, of course, that when a Larwood has bowled five or six overs at the outside, he begins to tire: his effectiveness begins to wane, and he has to be taken off. That isn't all, however. In putting every ounce of energy into their bowling the fast men are likely to strain themselves, as we have had reason to notice both this season and in the seasons preceding.

When you consider these things, then I think you will agree with me that it is not surprising that fast bowlers in first-class cricket are scarce. I think, that so far as the professionals are concerned, the fast bowlers ought to be paid more money than the slow bowlers, but maybe the slow men won't agree with me in this view.

Yet there cannot be the slightest doubt that when the wicket is perfect, when the batsmen are really good, it is the fast bowlers to whom the skipper must look to get the other fellows out. The Australians have

certainly suffered during the present summer from too much Larwood. He has been carefully nursed by his captain—kept fresh. And when a batsman who has previously shown a dislike for his bowling has come in, then Larwood has been put on.

Unlike a Fast Bowler!

Actually, Larwood is nothing like the conventional type of fast bowler. He only looks like a boy, and is little more than a boy in build. The fast bowlers of olden times were mostly giants in stature and strength—supermen physically. That is why we ought to take off our hats to Harold Larwood. In the history of cricket there may have been fellows who have bowled a bit faster, but there has never been one of such small stature who could send them down with anything like the pace and accuracy of Larwood.

In another direction, too, Larwood's successful fast bowling is extraordinary. When a tall man is bowling fast he can make the ball bump off the ground because of the height at which it is delivered. Gregory is not only tall—six-feet-three—but he also jumps just as he is preparing to deliver the ball. Thus it comes from his hand at a tremendous height, and comes up from the ground at a correspondingly sharp angle. But Larwood has no such advantage.

He is the amazing "lightning conductor," the man who keeps the batsmen on tenterhooks, playing the ball nervously, edging it into the slips. How long Larwood will last at this game of performing miracles—for his fast bowling is almost that—cannot be decided. But there is this to be said for him. That one of these days, when he has worn himself out, in the bowling sense, by banging down these catapult deliveries, he may be played for England for his batting.

We may well hope that this day is a long time off. We can produce batsmen in plenty. Fast bowlers are as scarce as roses in January.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Claude Hirst, 16, Brooklyn Avenue, Dalton, Huddersfield, wants correspondents in India.

Hubert Hirst, 16, Brooklyn Avenue, Dalton, Huddersfield, wants correspondents in Australia who will tell him about sheep farming.

H. Moore, Goodyers, Tutnall, Bromsgrove, Wores., wants correspondents in India; also with readers interested in chemistry.

Miss Ruby C. M. Bond, 40, Erith Rd., Bexley Heath, Kent, wishes to correspond with girl readers on the Continent.

Harry Slater, 41, Tavistock St., Nelson, Lancs, asks his old correspondents to write.

T. Cook, 26, Billet Street, off Gregory Terrace, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wants

N.L., old series, Nos. 368, 495, 512, 518, 521 and 556.

Conrad Basson, 84, Longfellow Street, East London, South Africa, wants correspondents in Holland, India, Sumatra, Java and Guiana. Also has N.L. Nos. 542—563, 564—568 for sale.

R. Lyons, 12, Farleigh Road, Stoke Newington, London, N.16, wants correspondents.

Ronald Coles, 5, Salisbury Terrace, Frome, Somerset, wants correspondents anywhere.

J. H. Garner, 4, Valentine Avenue, Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants N.L., old series, Nos. 1—400.

Walter Ashby, 45, Priory Street, Stockingford, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, wants correspondents in the British Empire and the States.

Leonard Scott, 20, Frederick Street, N.10, West Brunswick, Melbourne, wants correspondents anywhere.

LOST IN THE BUSH

(Continued from page 36.)

could see that it was a rug. They went racing up, and gathered round.

"Yes, it's Archie!" shouted Hamforth triumphantly. "Poor old chap, he must be half-killed—"

He broke off as Archie Glenthorne suddenly sat up, yawned, and looked round dizzily.

"Kindly cease this chatter, ladder!" he complained. "I mean, how can a cove get forty of the best—"

"Archie!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Why, good gracious, the boys only been asleep!"

Everybody was shouting. If this wasn't like Archie Glenthorne, what on earth was? They had thought him dead and yet here he was, rolled in those blankets, more asleep than awake! As a matter of fact, Archie had decided that he could do nothing with the flames, so he had taken the rugs a good distance off, had rolled himself in them, and had calmly gone into a sound sleep.

"Eh? I mean, what?" he ejaculated, as his numbed wits came back to him. "What ho! The good old populace, what? Good gad! This is pretty frightfully good?"

"Are you hurt, Glenthorne?" asked Nelson Lee anxiously.

"Absolutely not, sir," said Archie. "Well, not what you could call hurt. There are sundry blisters on the good old pedal extremities— Oh, you mean the explosion? Well, I thought, in the cove, sir, that I'd better get slightly out of the way."

"You boulder, Archie!" said Travers. "Glad, I hope you'll forgive me, dear old fellow! You wouldn't have been kidnapped if I hadn't arranged that silly Lashanger trick."

"I say, what rid?" protested Archie. "Dash it, it wasn't your fault, old lettuce! Absolutely not! Don't be so ridie. Kindly allow me to indulge in thirty-five of the best, I mean, I've only had five so far!"

And that, of course, was the end of the adventure.

Archie Glenthorne was conveyed in triumph back to the Kenney station, and when he confronted Joe Kenney and Durrant and Brand, those three rascals collapsed. It was idle for them to maintain their air of innocence any longer.

"Well, boys, we shall get on the train for Adelaide to-morrow," said Nelson Lee that evening. They were back at Remmark again, and were all sitting on the veranda of the hotel. "We've had our adventure here, and now for a return to work—to lessons."

"Here, cheese it, sir?" protested Hamforth. "Don't remind us of that!"

"But you must be reminded of it, young 'uns," said Lee dryly. "The School Ship will arrive to-morrow, I expect, and you will all go straight on board—and I hope there will be no more of these irregularities. If you want to look forward to anything—look forward to a resumption of school work."

Nipper grinned.

"Personally, guv'nor, I'm looking forward to the fourth Test match!" he said complacently.

And all the others, having dismissed the thought of resumed lessons as of no account, dwelt on the joys of the forthcoming excitement of the big Test match.

THE END.

(Next week's grand prize is entitled, "The Adelaide Test Match Sensation". Read how William Napoleon Brown succeeds in bringing off one of the most amazing feats in cricket history! And don't forget, chums, that our wonderful Free Gifts are coming in a fortnight's time!)

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