

The NELSON LEE

2¢

A "HOME-JAZZ"

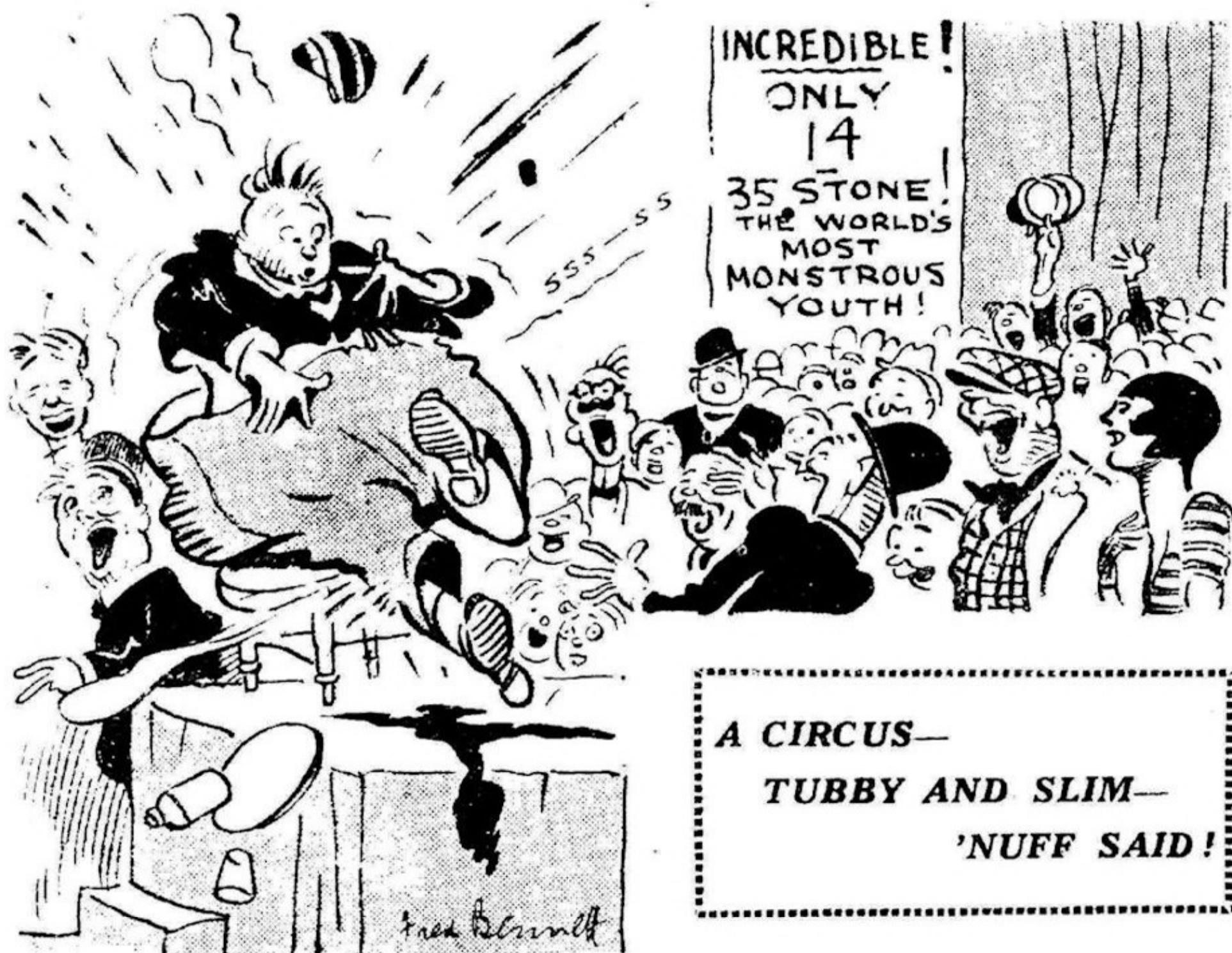
KAZOO HUMMER

FREE INSIDE



"Now,
Boys!
Let's make a
BIG NOISE
with our Kazoos!!"

The Laughable Larks of TUBBY AND SLIM!



**A CIRCUS—
TUBBY AND SLIM—
'NUFF SAID!**

Tubby Shows His Strength!

"MY word!" exclaimed Bertie Bootle, raising his voice excitedly. "Look at that picture of the piefaced performer with the lions; that ought to be good."

"H'm!" remarked Benny critically. "Leon, the lion tamer. Should think he could tame anything with that face. If I were a lion I'd do anything he told me to, except look at him."

The Bootle brothers, Tubby and Slim, were eagerly scanning a highly coloured pamphlet setting out the numerous attractions to be seen at Stupidd's Stupendous Circus, which was opening that evening in the town.

Needless to say, the irrepressible pair were keen to visit the show, the only fly in the jam being a severe lack of funds. They would have to wangle the price of admission out of their guardian somehow, and as he was out at the moment, his return was awaited with much impatience.

The front door closed with a bang and the two boys sprang up. Their guardian had returned. He stamped into his study.

"Can you let us have three shillings, sir?" shouted Slim, without giving the gentleman time to get his breath.

"Get away! Get away!" boomed the little colonel testily. "Don't wave that beastly paper under my nose like that, you make me want to sneeze."

"You might sneeze up three bob, then, sir," suggested Tubby, holding out an expectant hand. "We want to go to the circus."

"Go to the circus?" snorted the colonel. "Certainly not! I cannot countenance your attending such an entertainment."

"But, sir, there's elephants and cages of lions!" pleaded Slim.

"Huh! Most depraved sight," stated his guardian with seeming disgust. "Wild animals behind bars—bah!"

"Well, sir, you can't let 'em roam about loose."

"Jungle beasts in a zoo—pooh! I should feel ashamed of myself, gaping at open-air creatures in captivity. That's not a man's job. Why, when I was in the jungle surrounded by rhinoceroses—"

"Rhinoceeri, sir," corrected Slim incorrectly. "But you'll excuse us," he hastened on, cutting in before the narrative got under way. "Tea is ready. Coming, Tubby?"

Slim and Tubby vanished rapidly, leaving their guardian stalking up and down the hearthrug, hunting rhinos in his mind, and rather annoyed that he had been cut short in his yarn by the disappearance of his audience. The two brothers realised that they wouldn't get a penny piece out of their bad-tempered guardian.

"But we *will* go to the show," said Tubby, biting savagely at a doughnut, and Slim nodded agreement.

"Lead on, MacTubby! I'm with you!"

The circus proper was billed to commence at half-past seven, but the boys were on the fair-ground an hour before that time. All was bustle and excitement, and the lads elbowed their way through the jolly crowds with the intention of inspecting the side-shows.

"Coco-nut shies, Slim!" exclaimed the elder brother, and, passing the roundabout, with its raucous music and laughing riders, they made for the attraction in question.

An elderly tradesman in holiday attire was just taking aim when they got within reach, and Tubby could not resist the temptation to grab hold of his arm as he brought it back for the throw. The old fellow angrily jerked his arm free, but forgot to retain his hold on the ball.

It was the attendant who stopped the missile, and not the coco-nut. That worthy man was stooping down at the time, busily glueing a nut to its peg—or whatever it is they do to ensure your not knocking the nut off. He was facing north when the ball arrived, and it caught him a wallop in the south.

"He was struck by one of the hard things in life," moralised Slim mirthfully, as they slipped away to the next attraction.

"This, so it stated, was the Fat Fellow of Fourteen, guaranteed to weigh thirty-five stone without his cuff-links. Pictures of him adorned the outside of the tent, and for two copper coins our chums entered.

The Fat Fellow of Fourteen stood on a low platform and was surrounded by a crowd of interested spectators. You never saw such huge limbs as he possessed, and yet his face and hands seemed rather small in comparison.

This peculiarity aroused the curiosity of the sharp-witted Bootle boys, and Slim whispered a few words to his brother, who nodded and drew a large pin from his coat lapel.

On reaching the platform and pausing by the Fat Fellow, Tubby, unnoticed by the crowd, quickly and stealthily jabbed the pin in the outsize-in calves affected by the freak.

After a few moments a hush fell upon the onlookers, and a small hissing sound was heard. This increased in intensity until the Fat Fellow's face became ludicrous to watch. He was fast losing "weight," and he realised it. The reason was that his pneumatic suit, which was made up to look like flesh, deflated rapidly as the air escaped through the hole punctured by Tubby, and the Fat Fellow, getting thinner and thinner, finally did a panic-stricken bunk through the back exit, his rubber suit flapping and sagging about him.

The crowd yelled with laughter at the spectacle, and everybody was so tickled that they overlooked the fact that they were really the victims of a mild swindle.

Tubby and Slim, overjoyed at the success of their little joke, made their way out again with the crowd and looked around for fresh fields to conquer. The former's quick eyes next spotted a try-your-strength machine. According to its proprietor, all you had to do was to hit a movable peg with a huge mallet, when a metal slide was sent flying up a tabulated girder arrangement, the strength of the blow determining the height of the slide's journey.

If you were extra strong in the funny-bone, you were able to ring the bell at the very top of the girder, and so get your money back.

Tubby, after hearing the rules of the game, decided to have a pennyworth of muscular manipulation. He was really exceptionally strong for his age, and notwithstanding his rather ungainly shape, was possessed of arms and legs comparable with those of the finest athlete.

He grasped the long-handled mallet with great gusto and swung it to and fro like a feather.

Councillor Mugwump, the sworn enemy of the boys' guardian, Colonel Squint, was patronising the fair with his presence, and stood looking on, attired in the splendour of a frock coat and topper.

"Stand back!" warned Tubby to the surrounding crowd; but Councillor Mugwump was too pig-headed to take heed of the lad's warning. He regretted it a moment later, for Tubby, well astride, brought the mallet through his legs and gave the councillor a welt on the ankle. Then the mallet swung well over the boy's head and squelched the unfortunate gentleman's topper right over his ears.

Crash! Whirrr! Bing!

The mallet smashed down; the movable slide greased up the girder like lightning and smote the bell in such an unfriendly fashion that both bell and slide left the

**THIS BUMPER ISSUE
CONTAINS OUR THIRD
TOPPING FREE GIFT—**

**A
K A Z O O
HUMMER!**

girder and whizzed off into the air like a couple of comets.

Then the girder began to wobble, and the people had just time to get out of the way before it left its perpendicular position, and, with a tearing rush, crashed to the ground.

The owner of this side-show looked dumb-founded at the result of Tubby's successful effort to ring the bell. He scratched his head in a dazed manner.

"Lummy! You've caused it!" was all he could splutter. The brothers were in complete agreement with this remark, and they stole away while the going was good, leaving Councillor Mugwump still playing blind man's buff with his hat wedged over his eyes.

"The circus must have started by now," exclaimed Slim. "The question is, how are we going to see it without the necessary bobblets?"

"Why not shin up and lie flat on the roof? We could cut a peephole, and nobody would spot us up there."

"That's the idea," chortled Slim. "Come on, else we shall be missing the fun."

They made short work of scaling one of the uprights, and, using care, safely negotiated the sloping part until they reached the apex of the roof, some forty or fifty feet above the ground.

Lying astride the ridge-pole, Tubby produced his pocket-knife and managed to jag out two spyholes in the canvas. Then, heads almost touching, the two boys bent forward and applied their eyes to the apertures.

Lions at Large.

WHAT a sight met their gaze! The interior of the great tent was brilliantly lighted, and they could see tier upon tier of spectators surrounding the arena.

In the ring itself some elephants had just finished performing their parlour tricks, and as they went shambling out of one side of the arena, a cage of lions was drawn in from another. All the spectators elevated their necks in anticipation of the thrills to come, and the boys goggled through their spyholes, anxious not to miss a single movement of this much advertised part of the show.

A round of applause went up as Senor Leon—described by Slim as "Pieface"—bounded into the arena cracking a small whip and smirking at the audience.

Pitchforks and a red-hot poker were thrust through the bars of the cage, supposedly to prevent any or all of the three mangy-looking lions from springing upon the senor as he made his entry into their domain.

The only flaw in the proceedings which detracted from the dramatic effect was the clumsy withdrawal of the red-hot poker. The attendant in charge of this manœuvre caught his arm against one of the pitchfork wielders and accidentally touched Senor Leon's tights with the hot iron.

"Yarouch!" yelled the lion tamer in

Spanish. "Warooo!" And he danced behind the bars like an excited monkey, while his three lions gazed at his antics with raised eyebrows.

The whole affair so upset the lion tamer's sense of dignity that he refused to proceed with the performance. Leaping from the cage, he shook his clenched fists at the convulsed people and spat out:

"Bah! Two of ze bahs! I have ze burn and ze tights are what you call—done in! Curses!"

He then limped away, leaving his lions to be pushed out again by the attendants.

The star of the next turn was a so-called trick rider, a stout lady aptly named Bella Balloona. She rode a docile white horse round and round the ring while the circus band played with more force than precision.

The stolid horse had a back as wide as a kitchen table, and to the disappointed brothers it seemed a simple trick for the unfairylike damsel to rise and stand on its back while it ambled along with easy motion.

"I could do tricks galore on that horse," grouched Tubby. "It's no worse than being on the ground. What-ho! They're putting on two turns at once. Here come the trapeze people."

With airy grace a troupe of acrobats were lightly stepping on to the net which was slung across the tent to prevent accidents in case of falling. They positioned themselves by the hanging ropes and then swarmed up hand over hand to the swinging bars attached to a frame on the roof of the tent.

The woodwork of the roof creaked and groaned as the acrobats started their spectacular flights from one moving bar to another, and the two non-paying members of the audience took a firmer grip on the ridge-pole.

"Hup!" The shout sounded very close to Tubby and Slim, and, a second after, a spangled figure passed close to their peephole, hanging head downwards.

"Hup!" The upside-down merchant had returned in his swing, grasping one of his comrades by the feet. To and fro they went, performing the most amazing evolutions on their elevated perches. Slim and Tubby watched them with intense pleasure. This was good; it was after their own hearts.

So great was his excitement that Tubby began to wobble on his insecure position, and after a futile attempt to retain his balance, he rolled off on to the canvas roof. Slim made a frantic grab at his brother, which action was also disastrous for him. Their combined weight was more than the weather-worn canvas could stand, and with a loud, splitting tear it gave way.

Rrrr-rip!

"Oh, lor!"

"My hat!"

The two lads yelled as they felt themselves falling through the ragged gap.

The trapeze people thought a thunderbolt had struck them. The unexpected addition to their troupe, just when they were in the

middle of flying all to different bars, caused a general miscalculation of distance. They all met in the middle and clawed at each other, dropping to the net, a scintillating bundle of arms and legs.

With a whoosh they rebounded from the springy net, bumped their heads in mid-air, and sat down again on the meshes to count the numerous stars hovering in front of their respective eyes.

The spectators, with raised heads, greeted all this with loud guffaws, believing that the whole business was staged for their benefit.

The trick rider, Bella Balloona, still rode her placid course round and round; the

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Tubby brought the mallet back for a hefty swing, unaware of the fact that he had squashed Councillor Mugwump's topper right over that unfortunate gentleman's head.
.....



horse, once having started running, being unable to stop, lest he gave way under the weight he was carrying. Slim altered this state of things, for, in trying to escape, he slipped through the mesh of the net and fell with a plop on to the broad back of the patient beast of burden.

Now Slim didn't weigh much more than a fly, but he was, so to speak, the last straw that broke the camel's back. The white steed, with a sigh of relief, gave over at the knees, and, sagging down, unshipped both his passengers. Before either of them could rise, the gee-gee jumped to its feet, and with a renewed show of vigour, galloped off through the exit.

Things were now becoming delirious. Attendants buzzed up to Slim and held him prisoner. The ringmaster, a gentleman in evening dress and a sham diamond stud as large as a decanter stopper, stamped up and down in a demented fashion.

Tubby had not been idle in the meantime. He had reached the edge of the net and precipitated himself down a rope ladder

to the top row of seats at the back of the tent. Along the gangway he rushed, down a flight of steps, and through a door marked "Stage hands only." He was now behind the scenes.

To his left was a big canvas arch leading to the arena, and he spotted his brother Slim in the grip of half a dozen attendants.

"We'll soon alter that," he muttered grimly.

A movement at his side caused him to turn suddenly, and he saw Senor Leon's lazy-looking lions, complete with cage. Suspecting they were not so fierce as the advertisements would have the public believe, he decided that they should be instrumental in releasing Slim from his predicament.

A padlock with the key still in it made his job easy, and, sliding back a panel of the cage, he waited for the animals to take advantage of their proffered freedom.

Not they! They'd had too much of the arena to seek it from choice, and there they sat on their haunches, watching with bored

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THE NEXT ROUND IN THE GRIM FIGHT BETWEEN—



CHAPTER 1.

The Conference at No. 10 !

"**B**UNGLED!" said the Prime Minister angrily. "That's the word I said, Mr. Lee, and that's the word I meant. You have bungled atrociously. This is no occasion for politeness."

"So it appears," said Nelson Lee, compressing his lips.

"From first to last you have misled the Home Secretary and myself," continued the Premier.

"I don't say that you did so maliciously, or deliberately. But the fact remains that you have blundered. What is far worse, you have caused us to blunder, too. I must insist, Mr. Lee, that you withdraw from this case at once."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse, Mr. Lee," said the Prime Minister hotly. "When I say a thing, I mean it."

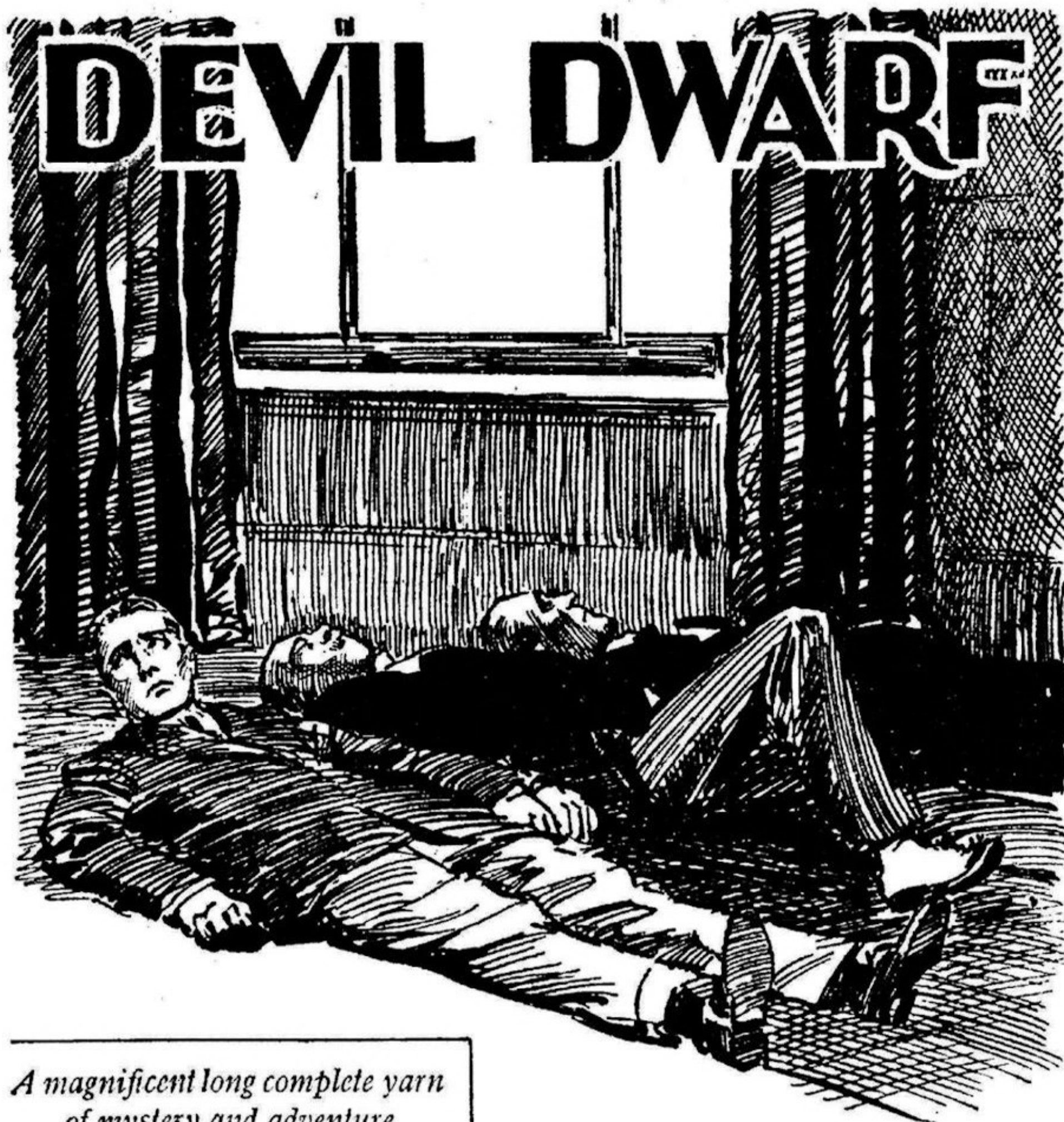
"Really, my dear Mortimer, aren't you a trifle—er—severe?" asked the Home Secretary agitatedly.

"I mean to be severe," replied the Premier. "I believe in plain speaking, Sudbury."

Lord Sudbury, the Home Secretary, looked thoroughly uncomfortable. He and Nelson Lee were seated, but Mr. Douglas Mortimer, Prime Minister of England, was standing. This conference at No. 10 Downing Street was of a very private, intimate nature.

"Within an hour, Nelson Lee, you will be dead!" Gloatingly, Dacca utters the words. It is his moment of triumph, but—there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip!

—NELSON LEE AND HIS "CUB" DETECTIVES, AND—



*A magnificent long complete yarn
of mystery and adventure*

**By
EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS.**

Nelson Lee, the famous criminologist, was quite calm and master of himself; but his expression was drawn, and his eyes were hard. He was not accustomed to being spoken to as the Prime Minister was speaking to him.

But Mr. Douglas Mortimer was famous for his bluntness. He was a man of striking personality—tall, clean-shaven, grey-haired. He had a habit of talking loudly, and of accompanying his speech

with dramatic gesticulations. He stood on the hearthrug now, his fists clenched, glaring at Nelson Lee.

Lord Sudbury was a man of a different type. He was short, inclined to be stout, mild-mannered and florid. He was a famous politician, and he had a great reputation as a diplomat. The Premier's plain-speaking pained him exceedingly—yet he, too, felt that Nelson Lee was deserving of severe censure. Only he would have administered the "dressing-down" in a different way.

"I summoned you here, Mr. Lee, because I felt it necessary to inform you that your activities must cease," continued Mr. Mortimer harshly. "You have done far more harm than good. In fact, you have done incalculable harm. You are a man of some reputation as a criminologist, but you must not imagine that you can tinker and interfere with international politics. We were informed by you that Sir Akbar Laldhi, the Balghistan Ambassador, was a traitor—that he was the man behind the baffling mystery of the missing Indian Air Mail liners. We were also

told by you that Sir Akbar murdered Hardin, the engineer, and Lord Dovercourt, the Air Minister."

"Mr. Lee was guilty of an error of judgment," said Lord Sudbury gently.

"On the contrary, my information was correct in every detail," said Nelson Lee. "Sir Akbar Laldhi is an enemy of this country, and although our efforts against him have so far failed, I shall not rest until I have exposed him in his true colours."

Mr. Mortimer snorted.

"Sometimes, Mr. Lee, I begin to think that you are demented," he said impatiently. "You have also told us that Sir Akbar Laldhi is capable of turning himself into a hideous, hunch-backed dwarf."

"That is quite true," put in Lee.

"Forgive me, my dear sir, if I express a profound disbelief in your statement," said the Prime Minister acidly. "You came to me with this story, and your reputation was such that I respected your word. And I acted upon it. With what result?"

"Unfortunately, the result was disappointing."

"Disappointing?" echoed Mr. Mortimer, gesticulating wildly. "Is that the only word you can find, Mr. Lee? The result was a fiasco—a disaster. Scotland Yard men searched Sir Akbar's private residence in Regent's Park. Nothing came to light. It has been proved, beyond all question, that Sir Akbar is a man of integrity and honour. As for your absurd statement that he is capable of turning himself into a hideous dwarf, I am amazed that I ever gave credence to such nonsense."

Nelson Lee was keeping his temper with difficulty.

"One day, Mr. Mortimer, I will prove to you that Sir Akbar Laldhi and this dwarf are one and the same," he replied curtly.

"When that day comes, Mr. Lee, I will believe in the rest of your fantastic rigmarole," said the Prime Minister with caustic bitterness.

"You are making a very grave mistake, Mr. Mortimer," said Lee. "Sir Akbar Laldhi is Great Britain's most dangerous enemy. He has behind him a powerful organisation, and I am convinced that his hour for striking a deadly blow at our country is near at hand. I have been almost murdered on two occasions by this infernal dwarf. In my own heart I am convinced that he is Sir Akbar Laldhi. Exactly how he changes himself is a mystery—even to me. I need not remind you of the serious situation which has arisen in consequence of the missing air liners."

"The matter is of the utmost gravity," agreed Mr. Mortimer. "Many of our finest machines have vanished—utterly and completely. Dozens of Royal Air Force planes have gone, too, to say nothing of various privately-owned machines."

"And they have all vanished whilst flying over the border-line of Balghanistan," Nelson Lee reminded him.

"I do not deny that those infernal Balghanistan natives might be responsible," said the Premier. "We all know that there is plenty of intrigue against us in the East. But that is all the more reason why we should be extremely careful here, in London. Our search of Sir Akbar's private residence comes precious near to an outrage—and matters are strained enough already. Good Heavens, man, we cannot accept your unsupported word. You believe that Sir Akbar is guilty—you believe that he is capable of turning himself into a dwarf—you believe that he murdered Lord Dovercourt. But where is your proof?"

"I had hoped that the proof would be forthcoming when Sir Akbar's house was entered," replied Lee.

"It wasn't forthcoming," rapped Mr. Mortimer. "That's the whole trouble. We simply made fools of ourselves. And I blame you entirely, Mr. Lee—I blame you because you should have known better. And I must repeat that there can be no more of this. That is why I summoned you here this morning. You must cease your activities."

"I regret, Mr. Mortimer, that I must refuse."

"What!" shouted the Premier. "Did you hear him, Sudbury? This is positively outrageous!"

"Really, Mr. Lee, you must be more amenable to reason," said the Home Secretary considerably flustered. "Surely you must realise that your activities are—well, dangerous. Not only the peace of this country, but the peace of India itself might be involved."

"It is for that very reason that I am determined to go on," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Since you are so obstinate, Mr. Lee, I must warn you that you will receive absolutely no official aid," said Mr. Mortimer curtly. "You must see to it, Sudbury, that the Chief Commissioner of Police is informed. Mr. Lee is not to receive any police assistance."

The great detective squared his shoulders.

"I take it, then, that I am to be boycotted?" he asked.

"If you like to put it that way—yes," replied the Prime Minister. "After what has happened, Mr. Lee, you can expect nothing else. We can take no further risks."

CHAPTER 2.

The Newspaper Sleuth I

TREVOR DEXTER, of the "Daily World," sat carelessly on the corner of the news editor's table. And the news editor, having used every variety of strong language that he knew, paused for breath.

"Finished, Sam?" inquired Mr. Dexter.

No. "I've only just begun!" snapped Mr. Samuel Trott.

"Go ahead, then," said Dexter encouragingly. "I'm a frightfully good listener, Sam."

"Do you want me to kick you out of this office?" roared the news editor. "You're supposed to be the star crime reporter on this paper, aren't you?"

"I don't like that 'supposed' bit," said Dexter, shaking his head.

"You'll hear a lot more that you don't like before I'm through," fumed Mr. Trott. "And get off this table, confound you! Look what you're doing to my papers. You'll have those flimsies on the floor in a minute."

"Frightfully sorry, old bean," said the star crime reporter, removing his six-feet from the littered desk. "I shall remember another time. Your desk is so gloriously tidy that when I look at it, I feel——"

"Never mind what you feel," interrupted the news editor. "And I don't want any of your sarcasm, Dexter. I'm not in the mood for it this morning. What have you done about that rat story?"

"Everything I could."

"Which means nothing," grunted Mr. Trott. "We heard distinct rumours that Nelson Lee and all his cub detectives were half-murdered in an old house in Epping Forest—that they were menaced by rats. A thundering good story—and yet you make nothing of it."

"My dear old mince-pie, I did everything possible," protested the reporter. "I went to the house, and found nothing. No rats—no sensation—nothing. Of course, if you want me to think up a yarn, I'm quite ready to oblige. My imagination is one hundred per cent perfect. But I rather thought you required facts."

The news editor pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said fiercely. "Get out of here, and don't come back until you've got something good. Understand? I'm fed up with you, Dexter! If you come back without a story, I'll fire you on the spot."

"And then what will your poor old newspaper do?" asked Mr. Dexter, as he lounged towards the door. "The circulation is pretty mouldy, as it is. Only about two million, I fancy. It'll go down to about ten after I've been away for a fortnight."

He grinned, waved his hand, and vanished. And Mr. Samuel Trott charged his pipe, sat back in his chair, and his eyes twinkled. Quite privately, he and Trevor Dexter were the firmest of pals.

Outside, amid the bustle of Fleet Street, Dexter found himself surrounded by thick, swirling eddies of fog. It was a particularly unpleasant morning. The fog wasn't general; it lay over the great metropolis in odd patches. Some districts were perfectly clear, others were wallowing in a kind of pea-soup obscurity.

Dexter pondered for a few moments as he walked. He was very keen upon getting hold of that story. He knew that Nelson Lee and the boys of the Detective Academy had recently been involved in a particularly sensational adventure.

But the papers hadn't been able to get hold of the yarn. Nelson Lee, when approached, had been disgustingly uncommunicative. Even the murder of Lord Dovercourt, the Air Minister, had been set down as the work of a chance sneak-thief.

"There's something rummy about all this," Dexter told himself. "Lee and his cubs have a rummy adventure right on the top of Dovercourt's exit. And then, within a few hours, the Balghistan Ambassador's house in Regent's Park is entered by Scotland Yard men. If there's no connection between all that lot, I'm a suet pudding!"

The reporter suddenly made up his mind. He cut through into St. Bride Street, found himself in Holborn, and was soon striding down Gray's Inn Road. He knew Nelson Lee's address well, but he did not approach this. He went next door. There was nothing here to indicate that the establishment was an academy. It was one of those old-fashioned houses, sedate and self-contained; a reminder of the older London which is now rapidly disappearing.

The door was opened, in answer to Dexter's ring, by a smartly-dressed page-boy.

"Thank you," said Dexter, walking in and deftly closing the door.

"Name, sir?" asked Tubbs, the page-boy.

"My name," said Dexter, "is of no significance. This is Mr. Nelson Lee's Detective Academy, isn't it? Well, I'm a school inspector."

Tubbs gave him a scornful look.

"Tell that to your grandmother, sir!" he retorted coldly.

"I regret that my grandmother died seventeen years ago," replied Mr. Dexter.

"You're no school inspector—you're a reporter," said Tubbs. "Nobody but a reporter would have such a nerve."

Mr. Dexter produced half-a-crown, and gazed at it reflectively.

"Anybody upstairs?" he asked, tossing the half-crown in his hand. "Any of the cheery young gentlemen available?"

Tubbs took the half-crown.

"This way, sir," he grinned. "There's only Master Handforth, and he's in the Common Room. The others happen to be out."



Dexter went upstairs. He was ushered into the Common Room, where he found Edward Oswald Handforth deeply studying a road map of London.

Handforth had a wonky ankle—due to some horse-play the previous day. The other members of the academy had gone out on a tour of certain London districts. It was part of Nelson Lee's training that all these boys should know London by heart—every street and every alley.

Handforth, unable to go with the rest, was trying to content himself with a careful study of a road map of the same district.

"Hallo!" he said, looking up and frowning. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

Mr. Dexter felt rebuffed. This was not exactly a cordial greeting. But Handforth, of late, was very suspicious of strangers. He could not forget that there had been two or three attempts on Nelson Lee's life—and on the lives of the boys, too.

"I'm perfectly harmless, I can assure you," said Trevor Dexter. "If you care to search me, you'll find no hidden revolvers, no stilettos, or such like. Not even a poison-capsule or a tank of poison gas."

"Trying to be funny?" asked Handforth.

"It's all right, sir—he's a reporter," put in Tubbs, from the door.

"A reporter" ejaculated Handforth, as Tubbs vanished. "By George! If you think you're going to get any information out of me, you'd better think again."

"My name is Dexter," said the reporter. "Trevor Dexter, and——"

"Well, you won't be dexterous enough to pump me," interrupted Handforth.

Mr. Dexter sat down, slightly weakened.

"I really wanted to see Mr. Nelson Lee," he lied. "But I have no doubt that this is my lucky day. I am seeing you instead."

"You can't see Mr. Lee—he's with the Prime Minister in Downing Street," said Handforth tartly. "Had an urgent call this morning. Nipper's pretty worried about it."

"I don't wonder at it," said Mr. Dexter, nodding. "Seeing the Prime Minister must be a worse ordeal than having your tonsils cut. A great man, the P.M., but inclined to be hot-tempered. I've had one or two goes at him myself."

"He won't scare Mr. Lee," said Handforth loyally. "If you ask me, I think that Mr. Mortimer is a bit of an ass."

"His political opponents have said even worse things," murmured Dexter.

"Fancy having the nerve to tick Mr. Lee off!" continued Handforth indignantly. "As if it was Mr. Lee's fault that nothing came of that raid on Sir Akbar Laldhi's house!"

"Yes, it ought to have been more successful," said the tactful reporter.

"That rotten dwarf who tried to murder us in Epping Forest is connected with Sir Akbar, as sure as mud," said Handforth. "He trapped us all in that house, and surrounded us with rats. Thousands of 'em! They'd have bitten us to death if we hadn't escaped."

"Nasty things, rats," commented Mr. Dexter encouragingly.

"Mr. Lee is pretty sure that there's a colossal plot afoot," said Handforth. "Not an ordinary crook plot, you understand—but something tremendous. Something connected with Balghhanistan and India. That's why all those air liners have been disappearing."

"And this Sir Akbar johnnie is a wrong 'un, eh?" asked the reporter. "Is that Mr. Lee's theory?"

"There are these mysterious signals, too," said Handforth, shaking his head. "We picked up some on Browne's wireless set. Horrible guttural sounds. A sort of vocal code."

"Not the Balghhanistan language, by any chance?"

"Don't make me laugh!" retorted Handforth scornfully. "Just as if Mr. Lee wouldn't know the Balghhanistan language! You didn't hear that guttural gibberish, or you wouldn't talk like that! Mr. Lee found a broadcasting station absolutely in Sir Akbar's house—and yet when the place was searched it wasn't there. And now the Prime Minister is jumping on Mr. Lee for being too rash. We didn't know anything about it until Nipper told us. Goodness only knows what Mr. Lee's going through now!"

Dexter, who had never dreamed of such success as this, nodded sympathetically. It was his first experience of Handforth, and he rather liked this bluff, rugged-featured youngster. There was something direct and straightforward about him. Furthermore, he was ready enough to talk. And the reporter seldom found people who were ready to talk. As a rule, he had to obtain his information by guile. He didn't know Handforth thoroughly yet.

"If you don't mind, young feller, I'll take down a few details," he said, producing a pocket-book. "About this rummy old house in Epping Forest. What actually happened there? I mean, about these rats——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Handforth coldly.

"Eh?"

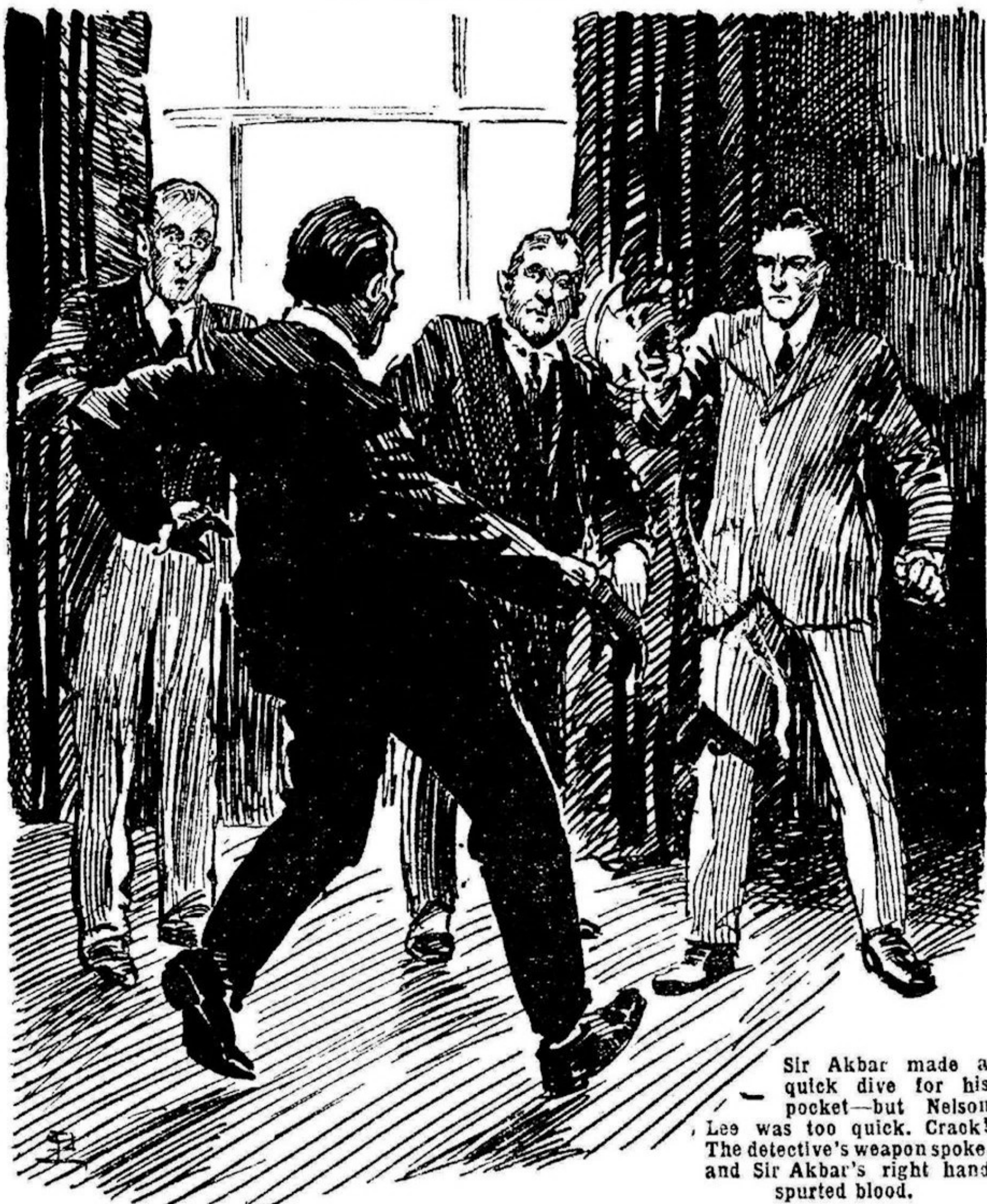
"Are you trying to get some information out of me?"

"My dear chap, I thought that you were agreeable to give me the yarn."

"I'm not agreeable to giving you anything," said Handforth. "What do you know about a houseful of rats, anyhow? Mr. Lee distinctly told us not to give any information to nosey reporters. And I'm obeying orders."

"Ahem! My mistake, it seems," murmured Mr. Dexter. "But perhaps it won't be a breach of rules if you tell me a bit more about Sir Akbar. Strictly confidential, of course. We daren't publish anything——"

"Sir Akbar!" interrupted Handforth, with sharp suspicion. "What do you know about Sir Akbar?"



Sir Akbar made a quick dive for his pocket—but Nelson Lee was too quick. Crack! The detective's weapon spoke, and Sir Akbar's right hand spurted blood.

"You just told me——"

"I've told you nothing—and I shan't tell you anything, either!" broke in Handforth. "Not likely! If you've heard any rumours about Sir Akbar, they're probably wrong."

"Well, the Prime Minister——"

"Who told you anything about the Prime Minister?" asked Handforth, in surprise. "Look here, I've already warned you that I won't be pumped!"

Mr. Dexter experienced some slight astonishment. Apparently, Handforth was quite unconscious of the fact that he had just been giving some very useful information.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said the reporter, rising. "Sorry you can't tell me anything, young 'un; but orders are orders, I suppose."

A minute later he was outside, heading straight for Downing Street.

BY the time Mr. Trevor Dexter reached Downing Street, that celebrated but unpretentious thoroughfare was enveloped in thick fog.

The traffic was crawling laboriously up and down Whitehall, feeling its way with difficulty. Here, in Downing Street, all was quiet.

Dexter had already made up his mind, and he went boldly to the door of No. 10, and rang. The door was opened by a manservant. Dexter was looking flurried and excited—two conditions quite foreign to his nature.

"Mr. Nelson Lee is here, I think?" he asked hoarsely.

"I am afraid you cannot disturb him, sir," said the manservant. "Mr. Lee is in the Prime Minister's private room——"

"It's very urgent," said Dexter. "If you think you could let me in——"

"Quite impossible, sir," said the manservant.

"Perhaps you'll let me stay indoors somewhere, so that I can get hold of Mr. Lee as soon as the Prime Minister has finished with him?" suggested Dexter. "Anywhere will do, you know—in the hall here, for example. Or perhaps there is a waiting-room——"

"I regret, sir, that I cannot possibly admit you," said the manservant.

"Now, look here, this matter is vital!" panted Dexter. "Here's a ten-shilling note. You must let me in!"

"Do you mind going, sir?" asked the manservant, as imperturbable as ever. "I have had strict orders to keep all newspaper reporters away."

Dexter gave a grunt of disgust.

"You win!" he said sourly.

He turned away, and the door closed. It wasn't all honey, being a reporter. Not that he had ever expected that he would get into No. 10 so easily.

Trevor Dexter, however, was an enterprising young fellow—and he was not easily discouraged. He had an idea at the back of his head that he was on the track of something big. Nelson Lee was in conference with the Prime Minister—and that fact, alone, was significant.

Before the reporter could move far away from No. 10, he was obliged to dodge for his life. A smoothly-running limousine materialised out of the murk, and Dexter, who was in the road, gave a leap for safety.

"Holy cats!" he ejaculated. "Trying to kill me, you blamed fool?"

He glared at the chauffeur—and in a second he cooled down. The chauffeur was brown. There was an elaborate crest enamelled on the doors of the limousine. He recognised it at once.

This visitor to No. 10 could be none other than Sir Akbar Laldhi himself. The Balghistan Ambassador! Calling on the Prime Minister at the same time as Nelson Lee! Certainly, there was something big going on.

Dexter faded out of the picture. He took up a position on the other side of the road, almost concealed in the fog. Yet he could just see the windows of No. 10, opposite. Owing to the fog, some of those windows were illuminated.

Dexter did not know which was the Prime Minister's private room. Perhaps it was at the rear somewhere. Yet he noticed a dim, shadowy figure crossing now and again at one of the first-floor windows—as though somebody was pacing about impatiently.

Dexter decided to wait.

He was rewarded very soon afterwards. For at that very same window, during a brief spell while the fog slightly cleared, he caught a glimpse of a figure which could belong to nobody except Sir Akbar Laldhi.

Trevor Dexter came to the conclusion that it would pay him to wait a little longer.

CHAPTER 3.

The Madness of Nelson Lee.

MR. DOUGLAS MORTIMER paused for breath.

He had been adding to his censure of Nelson Lee with all his customary rhetoric and gesticulation. He rather prided himself that he had made this blundering detective feel small. Until recently he had had quite a good opinion of Mr. Nelson Lee, but he had come to the conclusion that Lee was very "small fry." It was just as well that he—Lee—should be made to understand this.

At that moment a buzzer sounded. Mr. Mortimer seized a private telephone on the desk, and put it to his ear.

"Oh!" he said, after he had listened for a moment or two. "Yes, yes! I will receive him immediately. Yes, in this room."

He hung up the receiver, and his face was flushed as he turned towards the inquiring Home Secretary.

"Sir Akbar Laldhi is here," said the Premier. "No doubt he has come on a formal visit of protest. His Ambassadorial immunity has been abused, and I fear I shall find it difficult to pacify him."

"But surely you are not going to receive Sir Akbar here—at once?" asked Lord Sudbury, with a glance at Lee.

"Is it quite the moment?" murmured Nelson Lee.

"It is my particular wish that you should be present," retorted Mr. Mortimer curtly.

Sir Akbar Laldhi was ushered in. He was tall, dignified, and even handsome. On his face there was an expression of icy coldness.

"You have met Mr. Lee before, I think, Sir Akbar," said the Prime Minister, after the formal greetings were over.

"Yes, indeed," said the Balghanistan, giving Lee a chilling glance. "I believe it was on account of information supplied by Mr. Lee that my private residence was grossly subjected to a search."

"Your Excellency must acquit the British Government of any unfriendly motives," said Mr. Mortimer quickly. "There was never any hint or suggestion that your integrity was unsound, Sir Akbar. Mr. Lee has accepted full responsibility for that unhappy incident, and I wish you to know that he was actuated by the best of motives. He sincerely believed that there were traitors in your household."

"If there were traitors, I should have known of them," replied Sir Akbar coldly.

Nelson Lee listened, inwardly amused, while the Prime Minister, aided by the Home Secretary, consumed a considerable portion of humble pie. They did this in the interests of Great Britain—in the interests of peace.

"We realise, Your Excellency, that a full and complete apology is due to you," said Mr. Mortimer. "I have no doubt that Mr. Lee himself will personally add an expression of his own regrets."

Nelson Lee did not appear to hear. He was momentarily abstracted. His expression was tense, and in his eyes glowed a strangely intensive light. His face even had become slightly flushed.

"You heard, Mr. Lee?" asked the Prime Minister sharply. "It is your unquestionable duty, sir, to offer your personal apologies to Sir Akbar. This is your opportunity."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, this is certainly my opportunity!" he replied, in a strangely hard voice.

With a firm tread, he walked to the door, turned the key in the lock, and faced about. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary watched him with growing amazement—but now they were positively staggered.

"Now, Your Excellency!" said Lee, looking straight at Sir Akbar.

In his hand gleamed a small automatic pistol. His whole bearing was one of calmness and resolution. His lips were set in a thin, straight line. There was something extraordinarily grim and dangerous-looking about the great detective.

"Mr. Lee!" panted the Prime Minister. "Have you gone mad?"

"Be good enough to keep away from the desk, Mr. Mortimer," replied Lee sharply. "There must be no outcry from you—or from you, either, my lord. I have a favour to beg of His Excellency, the Balghanistan Ambassador."

Sir Akbar smiled contemptuously.

"What melodramatic nonsense is this?" he asked, with a sneer in his voice.

"The man is mad—absolutely insane!" panted Lord Sudbury. "Great heavens above! The strain must have turned Lee's brain!"

"A moment ago, Mr. Mortimer, you told me that my opportunity had come!" said Lee. "You were right. This is my opportunity. I am aware that my methods are drastic—but desperate ills need desperate remedies. Be good enough to remain perfectly still—all of you."

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were so startled that they had no power to make any outcry. They stared at Nelson Lee in dumbfounded bewilderment.

"Now, Your Excellency, I must ask you to obey my orders," said Lee, looking straight at Sir Akbar. "For some time past I have held the theory that you and Dacca the dwarf are one and the same person. What I want you to do is to transform yourself into Dacca here and now—before the eyes of the Prime Minister!"

Just for a moment Sir Akbar Laldhi allowed a light of venomous hatred to enter his eyes; then he laughed softly and melodiously.

"My dear Mr. Lee, you really must pull yourself together," he said. "Your theory is not only fantastic, but ridiculous. This case, apparently, has got on your nerves to such an extent that

"Keep your hands out of your pockets, Sir Akbar!" interrupted Lee sharply. "I warn you that I shall fire at the first sign of treachery."

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary positively battled for breath. These two dignified gentlemen were horrified. They were unaccustomed to any such drama as this. Here was action—and they were unused to action. Words were their speciality.

THE Home Secretary was the first to find his voice.

"We must call for assistance!" he panted. "Mr. Mortimer! Ring the bell! Bring your servants——"

"If you shout, or touch any bell, I shall be compelled to take drastic action," interrupted Lee. "Be good enough to remain perfectly still, gentlemen."

These Prizes Waiting to be Won, Chums!

6 Bicycles.

12 Wembley Cup Final Tickets.

(See the easy-to-win Football Competition on pages 22 and 23.)

Handsome Watches.

Pocket Wallets.

Penknives.

(Turn to "SMILERS"—page 18.)

"The man is insane!" ejaculated the Prime Minister. "I urge Your Excellency to be patient. We will deal with this madman gently. We cannot afford to have any brawl at No. 10."

"I quite understand," said Sir Akbar smoothly. "Mr. Lee is suffering from hallucinations. Really, I am sorry for him. My dear fellow, you must pull yourself together," he added kindly. "Put your weapon down——"

"Once again, Sir Akbar, I must warn you!" broke in Lee. "Keep your hands away from your pockets!"

He stood there, a relentless figure. He took no notice of Sir Akbar's bluff. He had seen the glint in the other man's eyes, and he was more than ever certain that his theory was correct. He would prove it, too, within the next few minutes.

"I am not mad, Mr. Mortimer," he said quietly. "But I am old-fashioned enough to have a love for my country. Either Sir Akbar obeys my orders, and changes himself into Dacca the dwarf, or I will shoot him as he stands. One or the other. In either case, England will be rid of her worst enemy."

"You shall suffer dearly for this, Lee!" said the Premier harshly.

"If I am compelled to kill this man, I have no doubt that I shall be hanged," replied Lee, his voice as steady as a rock. "Well, I am prepared for that. For the good of my country, I will cheerfully go to the gallows. Either this man dies by my hand, or he transforms himself into Dacca the dwarf. Never before in my life have I been so determined."

And in this Nelson Lee was speaking the truth. He was risking everything in this one throw. He had considered it carefully before taking his action. It was now or never. Sir Akbar was leaving England for Balghistan almost at once, and unless Lee exposed him now, he would never be exposed.

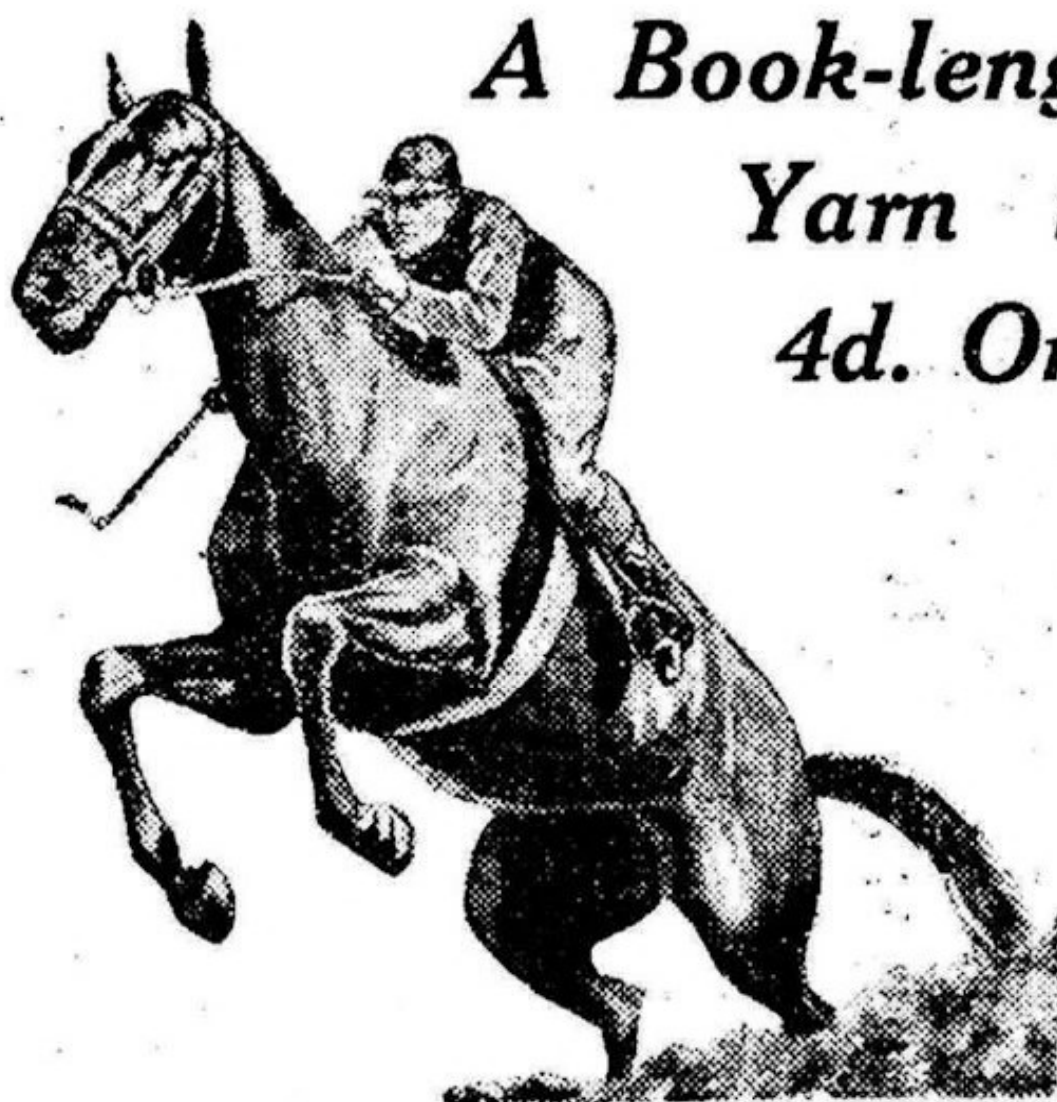
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"I am waiting, your Excellency," said Lee. "I think you know that I am in earnest. I will give you one minute to decide. If you take no action during that minute I shall know what to do."

"And you will shoot?" asked Sir Akbar contemptuously.

"I shall shoot—to kill," replied Lee.

"I must confess that I am bored," said Sir Akbar, shrugging his shoulders. "The position is singularly distasteful." He turned to the Prime Minister. "I do not, of course, associate you in any way with this man's preposterous action, Mr. Mortimer," he continued. "but the sooner this situation is ended the better."

As he spoke he made a quick dive for one of his pockets. He even half drew a weapon.

Crack!

Nelson Lee was first. Sir Akbar's right hand spurted blood. He fell back, his face distorted with fury. Blood was dripping from his hand.

"I warned you!" said Lee evenly. "Now, your Excellency, will you become Dacca the dwarf?"

And in Nelson Lee's eyes Sir Akbar Laldhi read Death. He took a deep breath.

"You win, Mr. Lee," he said hoarsely.

And then and there, before the amazed eyes of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, a strange and horrifying change began to creep over him!

CHAPTER 4

Dacca Plays Trumps!

THE change in Sir Akbar Laldhi was gradual at first—and then, abruptly, it became swift.

It seemed that the Balghistan Ambassador was merely hunching himself together for a spring of some kind; he was so infuriated that he had lost control of himself. But then it was found that there was something deeper in it than this.

For Sir Akbar twisted and writhed, and his whole body became contorted. He assumed a crouching attitude, his back becoming bent—so bent that a hump was formed. And while his whole bodily appearance was undergoing this change, his face became a thing of horror. The handsome smoothness of it was marred by a thousand wrinkles. They came suddenly as he contorted his features. He seemed to screw his nose and his cheeks up. His eyes sank deeply into hollows, and they burned like orbs of fire.

Mr. Douglas Mortimer and Lord Sudbury watched like men in a dream. They could scarcely believe the evidence of their own eyes. Nelson Lee's dramatic action had been sufficient to half stupefy them, but this thing was infinitely more staggering.

"Merciful heavens!" breathed the Prime Minister, aghast.

He was nearly stricken with horror. He had felt ill and faint when Nelson Lee had fired at Sir Akbar—when blood had spurted from Sir Akbar's hand—but all that was forgotten now. There was this fresh nightmare.

Sir Akbar Laldhi had vanished. He had gone. This—the Thing in the room was not Sir Akbar. It was the repulsive-looking Dwarf. A hunchback with a vile face. A face much browner than Sir Akbar's—a face which contained the venom of a fiend.

Nelson Lee was as cool as ice. Yet, inwardly, he glowed with triumph. His heart was beating a little more rapidly than usual. This was his vindication! He had proved his case.

"You see, Mr. Mortimer——" he began.

The detective broke off, half-turning. In this moment of his triumph he had glanced at the Prime Minister, and at that very second Dacca had acted. He had not only apparently become a different personality, but he was a different personality. And whilst Sir Akbar was a refined, cultured Eastern gentleman, Dacca was a monster. It was a case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in real life.

Lee turned to meet the attack, and Dacca was on him. In the next second they were at grips. Nelson Lee could have kicked himself for his momentary carelessness. In his eagerness he had overlooked the fact that Dacca was possessed of inhuman strength.

"Fool!" snarled the hunchback, as his claw-like hands clutched at Lee's throat. "Do you think that you can get the better of Dacca?"

"The bell, Sudbury—for heaven's sake, the bell!" shouted the Premier.

He and the Home Secretary leapt into action. Dacca knew that all was lost unless he acted with the speed of lightning.

He swept up a heavy ebony ruler from the desk and brought it down with stunning force upon Nelson Lee's head. The great detective was on the point of making a supreme effort—but he was not allowed to proceed. The handiness of that ebony ruler was Dacca's salvation.

Lee dropped, and like some nightmare creature Dacca swung round upon the Premier and the Home Secretary.

Crash!

The ebony ruler came into action again, and Mr. Mortimer staggered back and fell heavily, half-blinded and stunned by the force of that blow.



Lord Sudbury, leaping for the bell, was just unable to reach it. Dacca was upon him. In one spring—a spring that was like the movement of an animal—the dwarf leapt upon Lord Sudbury's shoulders, and bore him crashingly to the floor.

And again that ebony ruler came into action.

"Fools—fools!" panted Dacca gloatingly.

It had only taken him a moment or two to snatch some new-pattern handcuffs from the Prime Minister's desk. No doubt they had been submitted to him for inspection, and he had left them on his desk. Dacca utilised them. He handcuffed the three men together. They were all unconscious.

Dacca stood listening, his gaze fixed upon the door. He half-expected that somebody would come. Surely the sounds of the scuffle—the sounds of the heavily-falling men—must have caused some alarm?

DACCA the dwarf gave vent to a low, Satanic chuckle.

"All is well, my friends!" he said softly. "There has been no alarm. Nobody comes. The privacy of England's Prime Minister must not be disturbed, eh?"

The two unfortunate politicians were not able to hear, or to understand. The blows they had received had effectually stunned them. Nelson Lee, more hardened, more accustomed to an active, strenuous life, was just beginning to come round. Indeed, as he opened his eyes, and as his flagging wits came to his aid, Dacca plunged the needle of a hypodermic syringe into his arm.

"Death!" said Dacca gloatingly. "Do you understand, you interfering dog? Death? Nothing on earth can save you now!"

Nelson Lee's head throbbed agonisingly, and for a second or two he failed to understand fully. He saw Dacca plunge the needle of the hypodermic syringe into the arms of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary.

"What have you done?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Ah! Your wits have returned?" said Dacca. "Alas, too late, Lee! I have played trumps and the game is mine!"

He placed the syringe in a little box, and stowed it away in his clothing.

"I am always prepared," he went on, speaking in the same low voice. "Did you suppose for one moment, you fool, that I would come out—and on such a mission as this—without being ready? Curse you for your interference! You have compelled me to act drastically—and in order to escape from your accursed country I must now move with the speed of the wind. Fortunately, all is ready."

Nelson Lee tried to speak—in fact, he attempted to shout—but he was amazed and dumbfounded to find that his jaw was stiff. Nothing but a hoarse, inarticulate sound escaped him.

"It is the first symptom," said Dacca, smiling, and leering like some ghoul into Nelson Lee's face. "Do you understand? You are poisoned. All three of you are poisoned. Within the next hour you will all be dead! Nothing can save you."

Lee closed his eyes before that vile countenance.

"Paralysis first—starting with the vocal chords," gloated Dacca. "Consciousness will remain almost until the end. Agonies you will suffer—as I have always intended you should suffer. Minute by minute your limbs will become more and more useless!"

Watching from the street, the reporter saw Nelson Lee push his shoulder through the window and then sink down helplessly.





He turned away, convulsive movements shook his frame, and gradually the figure of the dwarf straightened. Within a minute Sir Akbar Laldhi was standing in the room—tall and dignified as before. But now he was looking utterly exhausted. He even clutched at a chair for support. It was always the same. This terrible transformation cost him dearly; and if he was compelled to keep it up for any

length of time, so the corresponding reaction was greater.

His face was haggard and drawn, and he looked years older, but all trace of the dwarf had gone now. He was Sir Akbar again. After a few moments of rest he bowed ironically to the three handcuffed men—who were sprawling on the floor near the big desk.

"Farewell, my friends," said Sir Akbar smoothly. "It is with the greatest regret that I depart in this way. When you are found you will be dead. May your sufferings be intense."

He walked to the door with a firm tread, turned the key in the lock, and opened the door. He passed out—after removing the key. Outside he found himself alone. Quickly, he placed the key in the outside of the door, and turned it. He walked away, and a moment later met the dignified manservant who had ushered him into the Prime Minister's presence.

"My car!" he said sharply.

"It is waiting, your Excellency," said the manservant, rather flustered. "I was not aware that——"

"Enough!" broke in Sir Akbar. "I am called away on urgent business. In no circumstances must the Prime Minister be disturbed. The right honourable gentleman is still in close conference with Lord Sudbury and Mr. Nelson Lee. You must not approach that room, until you are summoned, under pain of instant dismissal."

The manservant was astonished, but he was well trained, and he concealed his inner feelings.

"Mr. Mortimer has already instructed me, your Excellency, that he is not to be disturbed," said the man. "Nobody will be allowed to approach him, and nobody will go near the room until he rings the bell."

"It is well," said Sir Akbar. "I am merely emphasising the absolute necessity for privacy. The Prime Minister must on no account be disturbed."

He was ushered out. He promptly stepped into his waiting car, and drove off. Sir Akbar leaned back against the cushions luxuriously, and he smiled triumphantly to himself.

He'd won! True his double identity had been revealed, but only three persons were in the know—and those three would soon be dead!

CHAPTER 5.

The Enterprise of Mr. Dexter !

NELSON LEE acted the very instant the door closed behind Sir Akbar Laldhi. Not that he was capable of acting in any decisive way. In the first place, he was handcuffed to Mr. Douglas Mortimer and Lord Sudbury, both of whom were still unconscious. In addition, true to Dacca's prophecy, Lee was already suffering tortures. The muscles of his throat were horribly contracted—or felt so. He could utter no cry. And he could feel these same symptoms spreading all over his frame.

Without doubt, he and his fellow victims had been poisoned. There had been no bluff about Dacca's action. He had injected all three with a particularly virulent poison, extracted from a little-known Eastern plant.

If Nelson Lee did not have the advantage over his enemy, he at least possessed a full knowledge of what had happened. For in the whole of Great Britain there was probably no greater expert on poisons than the great criminologist. He had made a study of poisons—he knew the symptoms, the effects, and he had no difficulty in instantly "placing" the particular poison which had been injected into his veins. In no way did this knowledge calm him. Quite the contrary. He knew that he and his companions would be dead within half an hour—unless they received prompt treatment.

Nelson Lee's first thought was for the telephone. He could not shout, but there was just a chance that he might be able to whisper. The muscles of his jaw were becoming rigid, and his vocal chords were already half-paralysed. That poison, flowing through his veins, was doing its deadly work.

By a supreme effort he got to his feet, dragging the two unconscious men with him. He knocked the telephone over with his elbow, jerking the receiver from its hook. But when he bent down towards the transmitter, and attempted to form the words that were in his mind, he failed. No articulate sounds would come—only a hoarse, harsh breathing.

"Hallo, hallo!" came a distinct voice through the telephone. "Is anything wrong, sir?"

Nelson Lee was impotent. He could do nothing to explain the situation. But he guessed that this telephone was not connected direct to the exchange. It merely communicated with another room—perhaps the Prime Minister's secretary. There was a chance that somebody would get alarmed and come.



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

Sensible Tommy !

Teacher: "Tommy, what's the meaning of this? You haven't put any answers to these sums."

Tommy: "No, sir; I left those out purposely. I always get that part wrong."

(A. Wilson, 12, John Street, Rathfriland, Ireland, has been awarded a penknife.)

Truth Will Out !

A professor, after speaking seriously to a number of boys, ended his lecture by saying:

"Always look before you leap, and never be certain of anything you say. Only fools are certain."

"Are you sure of that, sir?" asked one boy.

"Certain of it, my lad," was the reply.

(R. A. Ennett, 6, Kingswood Grove, Douglas, Isle of Man, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Tales and Tails !

A teacher asked a little boy to define the word "trickle."

"To run slowly," was the reply.

"Now define 'anecdote,'" said the teacher.

"A short, funny tale," the boy answered.

"Now," pursued the teacher, "use both words in one sentence."

"The dog," replied the boy, "trickled down the street with a can tied to its anecdote."

(A. Eastwood, 58, Town End, Almond-bury, Huddersfield, has been awarded a penknife.)

Asking for Trouble !

The village choir boys decided to form a cricket club, and appealed for assistance. They thought the vicar would help them materially, so they wrote him the following message:

"Dear Vicar,—Your choirboys are forming a cricket club and would be grateful for a small donation. And should we be asking too much for those bats which the organist says you have in the belfry?"

(K. Clarke, 40, Talbot Street, Brierley Hill, Staffs., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

What a Watch !

Ship's Officer: "There goes eight bells. It's my watch below."

Dear old Gentleman: "Fancy a watch striking so loudly!"

(T. Clarke, Royal School for Blind, Leather-head, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Then Lee had another idea. The window! This room looked right out upon Downing Street. If only he could attract attention——

With that agonising paralysis getting rapidly worse, he fought his way across the short intervening space to the window, still dragging his companions. Lord Sudbury was just beginning to show signs of returning consciousness, but the Prime Minister was still "out."

Suffering agonies untold, Lee staggered against the window. It was impossible for him to raise his hands. With a last supreme effort, he drove his shoulder against the glass. There was a shivering crash and the glass splintered into fragments. As it did so, Lee fell forward, that paralysis gripping him in its dread embrace!

"SOMETHING," said Mr. Dexter, "is definitely up!"

The fog was still thick in Downing Street, and the reporter, unnoticed on the other side of the road, had been watching closely and eagerly. And, having watched, he had come to the conclusion that everything was not as it should be at No. 10, Downing Street. First of all he had seen the arrival of Sir Akbar Laldhi. Soon afterwards he had heard something which sounded very much like a revolver shot. Of course, it was impossible. A revolver being fired in the Prime Minister's house—yet Mr. Dexter had been very intrigued.

Following that he was almost certain that he had seen a humped figure moving about in one of the rooms. Strange—very strange! Then he had witnessed the departure of Sir Akbar. An almost precipitate departure, the reporter had thought. And now—— He had not failed to see the queer, stumbling figure of Nelson Lee. He had seen the detective push his shoulder into the window and break the glass. Then that figure had vanished, sinking down apparently in a state of exhaustion.

"What the devil shall I do?" muttered Dexter, frowning.

He was a man who was accustomed to make up his mind quickly. In his profession it was necessary to make quick decisions.

If he went to the main door again and said that something was wrong in the Prime Minister's private sanctum, he would probably be disbelieved. It would be accepted as a mere stunt for him to gain admittance. Yet Mr. Dexter was convinced that there was something very, very wrong in that room.

It was significant that all this should have happened so soon after the precipitate departure of Sir Akbar Laldhi. In the reporter's opinion, the whole thing was ugly. It savoured of sensational drama, and Dexter had a nose for anything of that sort.

Sandy's Grouse!

Employer: "Well, Sandy, how's the new wireless set?"

Sandy: "Aye, mon. Ah can hear it a'recht, but the little bulbs are no too good for reading by!"

(H. Shanley, 67, Folly Avenue, St. Albans, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

From Aberdeen?

Visitor: "Who are they operating on just now?"

Nurse: "A man who swallowed a golf ball."

Visitor: "And who is that man who is waiting impatiently in the passage?"

Nurse: "That's the man who lost the ball."

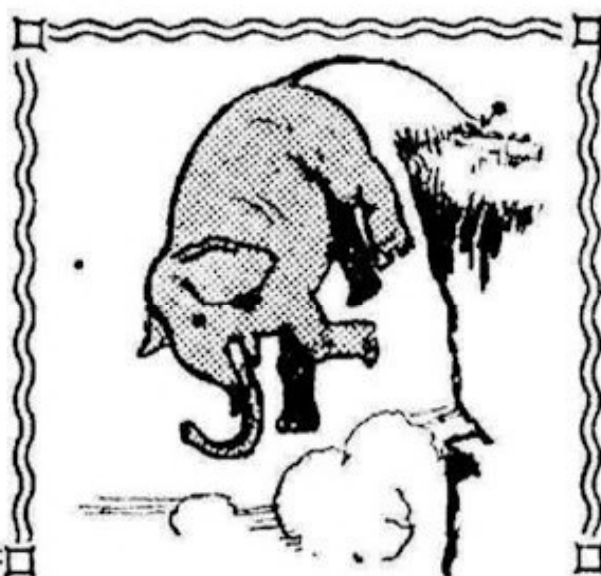
(F. Tolley, Ford Road, Bromsgrove, has been awarded a penknife.)

Ain't This Funny?

Old Gent (to little boy): "My little man, you must not say I ain't going. You must say I am not going, or you are not going, or they are not going."

Little Boy: "Ain't nobody going, then?"

(A. Parker, 1, Lon-Isa, Rhimbina, nr. Cardiff, has been awarded a penknife.)



Now You Know!

Teacher: "What is nonsense?"

Bright boy: "Please, miss, nonsense is an elephant hanging over a cliff with its tail tied to a daisy-stalk."

(H. Small, Cycle Depot, St. John's, Woking, has been awarded a handsome gilt watch.)

Wiped Out!

Diner: "Is there any soup on the menu?"

New Waiter: "Not now, sir. I wiped it off."

(W. S. Hawken, 17, St. Austell Street, Truro, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A Moving Story!

An American officer on sentry rounds stopped beside a Negro sentry and said:

"Rastus, don't forget, if you see anything move, shoot for all you're worth."

"Right, sah," replied the sentry, "an' if Ah sees anything shoot, Ah moves for all Ah'm worth."

(C. Watson, 16, Clarence Rd., London, E.16

has been awarded a penknife.)

Poor Percy!

"Mrs. Jones," said an annoyed woman to her neighbour, "I've no complaint to make about your Alf copying my Percy's sums at school, but I do think it's time to say something when your boy starts hitting my poor boy when the sum's are wrong."

(W. Cliffe, 168, Rashcliffe Hill, Lockwood Huddersfield, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"By Jove!" he muttered tensely.

He remembered the fog. He was something of a gymnast, and he reckoned that it would not take him half a minute to climb the wall and get through that broken window.

There might be a good story here!

No sooner had these thoughts chased themselves through Trevor Dexter's mind than he commenced putting the plan into operation. The fog helped him considerably. It concealed his movements. With monkey-like agility, he started up the face of the building, and in a remarkably short space of time he was clutching at the window-sill. He feared that somebody would come along, spot him through the murk and give the alarm, but nothing happened. With a deep breath of triumph, he hauled himself up on to the window-sill and gazed eagerly into the lighted room.

"Holy cats!" ejaculated Mr. Dexter.

Just inside the room he could see the figures of three men. He recognised one at once as Mr. Douglas Mortimer, the Prime Minister. He and the others were handcuffed together, and all appeared to be unconscious.

With a quick movement the reporter flung the window open and leapt into the room. With one glance he could see that Mr. Mortimer was unconscious. Lord Sudbury looked too dazed and helpless to question, and the expression in his eyes, too, struck a chill to Dexter's heart.

He glanced at Nelson Lee, and gained fresh hope. Lee's eyes, although containing that same agony, were intelligent. They were bright—they were full of purpose. The detective's jaw moved slightly, but only a convulsive breathing sounded. It was obviously impossible for him to articulate any words.

"In the name of heaven, what's happened?" asked the reporter hoarsely. "Can I do anything?"

He sniffed the air sharply. There was no sign of any noxious gas. His brain worked rapidly. Poison! He dropped on his knees by Lee's side—Lee being the only rational one of the trio.

"Mr. Lee!" panted Dexter. "What's wrong? How did this happen? And what can I do?"

Nelson Lee, who could hear perfectly and understand everything that was being said and done, made a tremendous effort. His hands were not yet devoid of strength. Feebly, he managed to point to a row of pencils in the reporter's waistcoat-pocket.

"You bet!" said Mr. Dexter promptly.

He whipped out one of the pencils and produced his pocket-book at the same moment. He turned a blank sheet and held the pocket-book in front of Lee. He forced the pencil into Lee's fingers.

Then he watched in an agony of suspense and compassion. Lee was attempting to write, but it was clear enough to Dexter that the effort was exhausting. Beads of perspiration were already standing on Lee's forehead.

"Steady, sir, steady!" muttered the reporter. "We'll soon have things right."

The pencil fell from Lee's grip and he sagged back, a glazed kind of look coming into his eyes. Dexter gulped and stared at the page of the pocket-book. He could see a scrawl on it—faint, erratic, and apparently a jumble of meaningless strokes. It had been the utmost that Nelson Lee could do.

Dexter felt helpless. Was he supposed to read something— His thoughts stopped. He recognised some of the scrawled characters on the paper.

"Sisley—yes, that's it," he muttered, his eyes burning. "Jumping dogfish, I've got it! Sir Malcolm Sisley, the famous Harley Street specialist! That's the beggar—the greatest expert on poisons in England! But what's this? Hanged if I can understand— Looks like 'Bhunda' something. 'Ibb' or 'Ikk.'"

His commonsense told him that not a second was to be lost. No good could come of wasting precious time by arousing the startled No. 10. There would only be confusion and a fatal waste of time. Dexter seemed to know that the lives of these three men were in his keeping.

He leapt for the telephone, and jabbed the hook up and down. And Nelson Lee, his whole body wracked with torturing agony, knew that there was a slim chance.

"Hallo—hallo!" shouted Dexter. "Is this 'phone dead? Why, in the name of thunder— Hallo!"

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" asked a startled voice.

"Never mind!" barked Dexter. "Put me through to the exchange."

"Yes, sir."

Whether the secretary—or whoever he was—imagined that the Prime Minister was speaking was not clear, but Dexter was relieved to hear, a second later, the voice of the girl operator at the exchange.

"I don't know the number, but give me Sir Malcolm Sisley, of Harley Street," said Dexter. "It's urgent—life or death! For heaven's sake, miss, hurry!"

CHAPTER 6.

Events Move Swiftly!

SIR MALCOLM SISLEY, luckily enough, was at home.

"What is that you say?" he asked, in response to the urgent call. "You are speaking from the Prime Minister's private room in No. 10?"

"Yes!" shouted Dexter. "The Prime Minister has been poisoned, together with Lord Sudbury and Mr. Nelson Lee. You've got to come at once, Sir Malcolm!"

ALL ABOUT THIS WEEK'S FREE GIFT!

The topping Kazoo Hummer which is presented to readers with this week's issue of the NELSON LEE is unique among Free Gifts. It will make an instantaneous appeal to everybody. You just hum softly into it, and any tune you like is reproduced faithfully and melodiously. Think of the jolly hours you will be able to spend, chums. And get all your pals to obtain one of these Hummers, too; you'll be able to form a band among yourselves.

"Are you trying to play a practical joke?" came the voice of the famous specialist. "You surely cannot be serious? The Prime Minister poisoned! Man alive, this is no occasion——"

"It'll be man dead unless you're quick!" broke in Dexter. "In fact, three men dead. I've just found them here in this room, helpless. If I never utter another word, it's the truth!"

The urgency of his tone seemed to convince the specialist.

"Do you know what poison it is?" he asked sharply.

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Dexter. "All I know is that they're helpless, and suffering intensely, by the look of them. They seem to be sort of paralysed. Holy cats!" he added suddenly. "Wait a minute: there's something on this paper—— Yes, 'Blunda-Ibb'——"

"'Blunda-Igg'!" interrupted Sir Malcolm, in a tone of horror.

"That's the name, I believe."

"Then heaven help them!" came Sir Malcolm's voice. "I'll come at once. Do nothing until I arrive."

The mention of that obscure Eastern plant galvanised Sir Malcolm Sisley into action. He rushed away from the telephone without even troubling to replace the receiver on its hook. He dashed out just as he was, hatless. Only for a few moments had he paused, and this was merely to seize a phial and a hypodermic syringe.

In Harley Street, he held up the first car that came along—a sports racer, as it happened, driven by an elegant young man.

"Case of life or death!" he said urgently. "My name's Sisley—Sir Malcolm Sisley, the physician."

"Accident?" asked the young man briskly.

"No; attempted murder, I believe," replied the specialist. "The Prime Minister himself! Drive to No. 10, Downing Street at full speed. Never mind the police; drive as you have never driven before. I'll take all the consequences."

"Hold tight!" said the young man crisply.

The fog here was almost non-existent. There was a little patch over by Regent's Park, but it did not extend into Harley Street or as far as Oxford Street. The sports car spun round, and then zoomed off to the astonishment of many passers-by.

That ride was one that Sir Malcolm Sisley was destined to remember for many a long day to come. The young man at the wheel had taken him at his word. The way in which he streaked through the traffic was not only demoralising, but hair-raising.

Policemen on point duty shouted and whistles were blown, but the sports car sped on, dodging round buses, crossing to the wrong side of the road, sneaking between taxis, and hurtling onwards like some projectile.

The driver evidently was a man of iron nerve—a man of extraordinary skill, too. Sir Malcolm could not have found a better fellow for this job. More than once there was nearly a crash, but it was averted miraculously each time. Twice the car was forced to run on the pavement, to the confusion and consternation of the pedestrians. Nobody was hurt, however, although several ladies fainted.

Down Regent Street at breakneck speed, across Piccadilly Circus, utterly regardless of one-way traffic police regulations. Down Haymarket like a streak and into Trafalgar Square, now running against the one-way stream of traffic. Whitehall—Downing Street. Fog here, but this helped rather than hindered, for the traffic was less dense.

Events had evidently been moving rapidly.

Policemen were on duty outside No. 10. A crowd was collecting. The door stood wide open, and there were many agitated figures in sight—secretaries—elderly men, young men, frightened girls, scared servants. Mr. Trevor Dexter had sounded the alarm. He himself was the first out, and he dashed at the car.

"Sir Malcolm Sisley?" he panted.

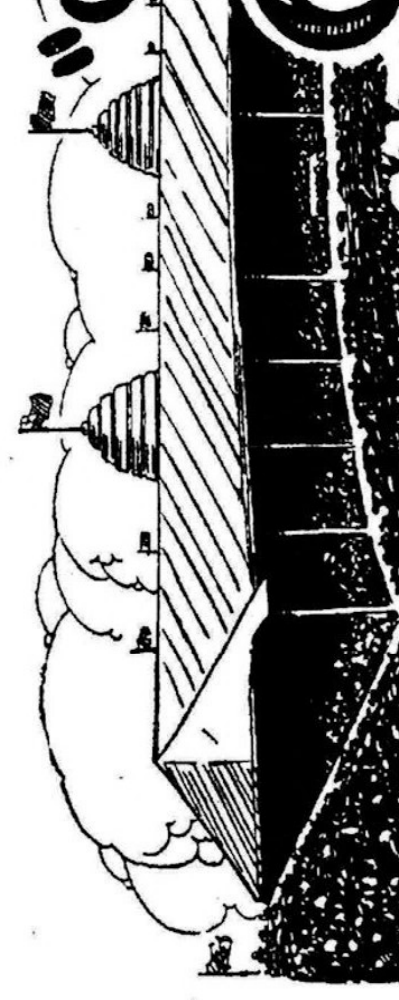
"Yes," replied the physician. "Is it true that——"

"This way, Sir Malcolm," urged Dexter. "Let's hope to heaven that you are in time!"

Somehow, Sir Malcolm got indoors, upstairs into that fateful room.

The handcuffs had been removed from the three victims, and they were placed in the big easy-chairs. Consciousness had now deserted them all. Indeed, at first glance, it seemed that they were already dead.

(Continued on page 24.)



"Who Scored those Goals?"

A Simple 4 Week Competition

O Topping "MEAD" CYCLES and

Wembley Cup-Final Tickets OFFERED

Must Be Won!

It's

FREE!

SET 3

ADMIT ONE TO THE CUP-FINAL

ADMIT ONE TO THE CUP-FINAL

ADMIT ONE TO THE CUP-FINAL

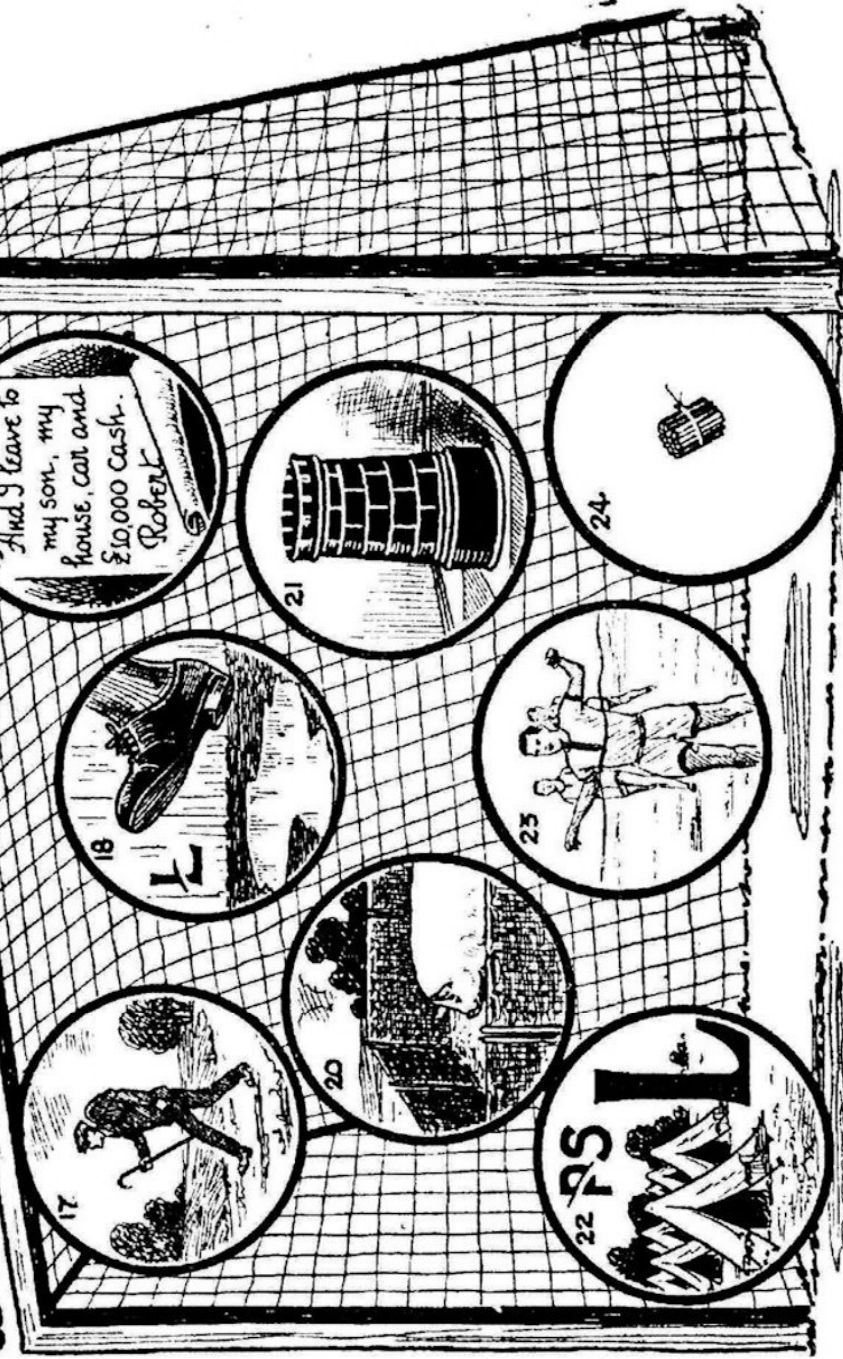
We continue our grand competition this week, in which we are offering you these topping prizes which simply must be won—in a few weeks' time we shall have to find winners for them. I am sure you will all agree that this is far too good an opportunity to pass over. So if you missed the opening sets of puzzles, ask your newsagent to get the two previous issues of "Nelson Lee" (dated February 15th and 22nd respectively) which contained both those earlier sets.

This is what you have to do to win one of the prizes. In the goal which you see on the left here are a further eight circles, and in each of them is a picture-puzzle representing the name of a well-known footballer, which we invite you to solve.

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

As you find the answers, write them IN INK, against the corresponding numbers on the entry form given here, which you should then sign, also in ink. Now cut out the coupon and keep it by you—together with the two previous coupons—until next week, when the fourth and final set of puzzles and the list of names belonging to them, will appear. With this final set we shall give you full instructions for the sending in of your entries. The competition rules appeared earlier in the contest and will be reprinted next week, also

Who Kicked Them?



You can Find the Answers HERE!

- | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|
| ALLEN | HAMPSON | PHILLIPSON |
| AMOS | HART | PIERCE |
| ANDREWS | HORTON | PIGG |
| | HULME | PUDDEFOOT |
| BARCLAY | HUTCHINSON | PURCELL |
| BARRINGTON | | QUANTRILL |
| BERESFORD | JENNINGS | |
| BISHOP | JOHN | RACE |
| BLACK | JOHNSON | RAW |
| | KEEPING | ROBERTSON |
| CAMPBELL | LAW | ROUNCE |
| CAMSELL | LEACH | |
| CASTLE | LITTLEWOOD | SCOTT |
| CURRAN | MARSDEN | SEARLE |
| | MASON | SLICER |
| DUNNE | MEADS | STRANGE |
| DUTTON | MITCHELL | |
| ELLIOTT | MORRIS | TEMPLE |
| FAWCETT | NISHETT | THIRLAWAY |
| FIRTH | OLIVER | TURNBULL |
| FORWARD | PEASE | |
| FREEMAN | PENN | WALKER |
| GERMAN | | WATSON |
| GOODIER | | WHITE |
| GOODWIN | | WILSON |
| GUNSON | | WOOD |

"Who Kicked Them?"

FREE ENTRY FORM No. 3.

- 17.....
- 18.....
- 19.....
- 20.....
- 21.....
- 22.....
- 23.....
- 24.....

Competitor's

Name

"NELSON LEE."

3

DACCA, THE DEVIL DWARF!

(Continued from page 21.)

The Prime Minister was the first to receive attention. Sir Malcolm felt his pulse, lifted his eyelids, and in a very short space of time a deep breath of relief escaped him.

"Perhaps I am in time," he muttered. "Another ten minutes and it would have been too late! Unless arrested, this poison is absolutely fatal."

He jabbed the needle of his syringe into the Prime Minister's wrist. Then, quickly, he treated Lord Sudbury and Nelson Lee in the same way. There was a hushed audience—secretaries and officials and others. The whole of No. 10, in fact, was in a state of confusion and horror and fear.

TREVOR DEXTER, in another room, was at the telephone. He was speaking to Mr. Samuel Trott, of the "Daily World."

"Yes, that's it!" he said briskly. "Prime Minister—Home Secretary—Mr. Nelson Lee. All three poisoned. Found helpless in Mortimer's room at No. 10."

"Found by you, eh?" came the news editor's voice.

"By little me!" said Dexter. "Don't forget to feature that, Sam. Sir Malcolm Sisley on the job. Sir Akbar Laldhi left No. 10 just before the men were found poisoned——"

"Don't be an idiot!" broke in Mr. Trott. "We can't print anything like that. There's no proof against this Laldhi man."

"Better leave that for a bit, then," said Dexter. "The other news is sensational enough. I'll ring you again within a few minutes. Be ready for me."

He snapped the receiver on, leapt up, and forced his way into the other room. Several officials tried to stop him, but they failed. Dexter found himself by Sir Malcolm Sisley's side.

"I'm the man who 'phoned you," he explained. "I didn't mention that before, but it is just as well that you should know. What's the verdict, sir? Any chance for them?"

"They will live," replied Sir Malcolm quietly.

"Look! Mr. Lee's recovering already," said somebody else. "How long will it be, Sir Malcolm, before consciousness returns?"

"Very quickly now," said the specialist. "The extract of the Bhunda-Igg root is a virulent poison and, when injected into the veins, it has an extraordinary effect, causing paralysis at first, accompanied by violent agony, and then rapid death."

"What have you done, Sir Malcolm, to save them?" asked Dexter. "Looks like a miracle to me."

Take a Look at Next Wednesday's Bumper Programme, Chums!

THE CITY OF HIDDEN DREAD!

By E. S. BROOKS.

Stranded in the heart of Balghanistan—a country ruled by a man who hates all Westerners—with no prospect of help from anywhere. Nelson Lee and his small party are in a position which is fraught with peril. Many exciting adventures befall them during their search for Balghan—that mysterious "city of hidden dread"—a city which white men have entered never to be seen any more. Make sure you don't miss reading this enthralling yarn, chums.

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR.

Look out for another stirring instalment of this magnificent motor-racing serial next Wednesday.

The Laughable Larks of TUBBY AND SLIM!

PRIMO THE TERRIBLE!

"SMILERS"

Many prizes are to be won in this popular feature. Have you sent in YOUR "Smiler" yet?

"WHO KICKED THEM?"

The fourth and last coupon in this easy-to-win football competition appears next week. The prizes are well worth winning—bicycles and Wembley Cup Final tickets.



ORDER NEXT WEDNESDAY'S "NELSON LEE" IN ADVANCE!

"Yet I have done practically nothing," replied the physician. "There is only one certain and decisive antidote for the Bhunda-Igg extract. If this is administered in time—injected into the veins—the poison is immediately sterilised. It is rendered impotent. In other words, the blood resumes its normal character, and the muscles and tissues which had become paralysed are automatically capable of functioning again. The effect of this antidote is miraculous to watch."

"You mean that these three gentlemen will be quite out of danger soon?"

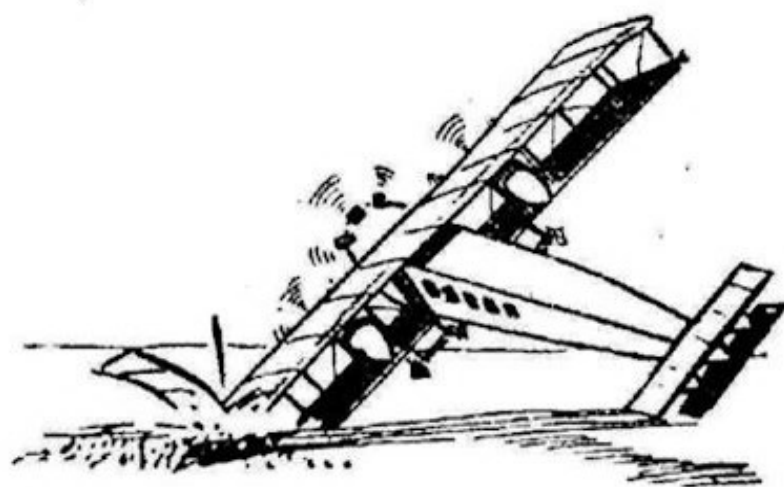
"Not only out of danger, but in an hour there will be little to show that they have been through such an experience," replied Sir Malcolm. "However, they have received other injuries; there are serious wounds on their heads. I rather expected to find, indeed, that Mr. Lee's skull was fractured, but such is not the case."

WITHIN fifteen minutes, Nelson Lee was not only sitting up, but he was quite rational—and he insisted, moreover, on using the telephone at once.

The room had now been cleared, and it contained only the three victims, Sir Malcolm Sisley, and the Premier's secretary. Even Dexter—much to his disgust—had been removed. On the whole, however, the reporter was satisfied; he had got hold of a marvellous story. He had secured a tremendous scoop for his newspaper. Already the presses were at work. Enormous headlines would be on the front page of that special edition—"ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF PRIME MINISTER AND HOME SECRETARY."

Nelson Lee was telephoning to Gray's Inn Road. He was speaking to Nipper, his keen young assistant.

"Yes, Nipper," he said. "Dacca is responsible. We are quite out of danger now—and, indeed, I shall be hot on the trail within a very few minutes. There is something that you and the other boys can do."



"Name it, guv'nor!" came Nipper's eager voice.

"I hold the personal opinion that our man will attempt to leave the country," said Lee keenly.

"After this fiendish attempt to murder us, he would never dare to remain. It is more than likely that he will leave by air. Go to Croydon Aerodrome at once."

"And then, sir?"

"I can give you no exact instructions," replied Lee. "But that man must not leave England. You understand? At all costs, he must be detained."

"Leave it to us, guv'nor!" said Nipper.

And then Nelson Lee was obliged to cut short the conversation. For the Prime Minister himself was talking; he had recovered, and he was excited, agitated, and grim. There was a big bandage round his head, and his face was haggard and drawn. Indeed, he was feeble. Yet he was determined to carry on.

"And you assure me, Sir Malcolm, that we should have died?" he asked, after he had the details.

"You have to thank that young reporter for your lives, Mr. Mortimer," replied the physician. "His presence of mind in telephoning to me meant everything. It was Mr. Nelson Lee who directed him to telephone, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the young man displayed rare brilliance in acting as he did."

"I shall remember this," said the Prime Minister. "Good Heavens! And to think that I trusted that man! In cold blood he attempted to murder us! It is inconceivable—it is staggering in its horror!"

"I urge you, sir, not to exert yourself over much," said Sir Malcolm. "My orders are that you should go straight to bed and rest——"

"I cannot rest!" broke in the Prime Minister. "The Chief Commissioner of Police is already on his way to see me—and immediate action must be taken. Sir Akbar Laldhi must be stopped—and arrested. Ambassador or no ambassador, he shall answer for this foul crime!"

The Home Secretary was in no fit condition to take part in any conference. He had received a heavier blow from that ebony ruler than the others; he was only half-conscious, even now. He was gently carried out, and given into the care of expert nurses who had been hurriedly summoned.

The Chief Commissioner of Police was on the spot, and he and Nelson Lee and the Prime Minister held a quick consultation.

It was the Premier's suggestion that Sir Akbar Laldhi's house in Regent's Park should be seized.

THE telephones were busy.

Flying Squad cars raced through the West-End. Large numbers of Scotland Yard men surrounded the Balghistan Embassy—others surrounded Sir Akbar Laldhi's private house.

In both cases, the consequences were the same.

The birds had flown—the Embassy and the private house were empty. No response came to the repeated knockings. And when the doors were forced, startling things happened.

With a blinding, devastating roar, the Embassy blew up. And exactly the same happened with Sir Akbar's own house. As soon as the door was forced, the whole place went up in a tremendous explosion.

Many of the detectives were injured, although mercifully none was killed. Innocent lookers on and pedestrians were injured, too. Immense damage was done to surrounding property. And following the explosions there was fire.

Both establishments became raging furnaces within a few minutes. Sir Akbar, evidently, had taken full precautions. He knew that the game was up, and he did not mean the British authorities to obtain one atom of direct evidence.

And while these exciting things were happening in the heart of London, other dramatic events were taking place on the outskirts—to be exact, at the great aerodrome at Croydon.

CHAPTER 7.

The Fight At Croydon Aerodrome !

SIR AKBAR LALDHI, knowing nothing of the activities of Mr. Trevor Dexter—which were to make such a great difference to the murder plot—was quite at his ease. He was sure that he would be able to get out of England before there could be any breath of suspicion against him.

He felt that he had an excellent start. He calculated that a full hour must elapse before anybody could possibly get to know that anything tragic had happened to the Prime Minister or his companions. By then, of course, they would all be dead.

And by then, too, Sir Akbar would be out of England—in the air—winging off on his own great aeroplane which was waiting at Croydon, ready for instant flight. It was waiting there, with Sir Akbar's suite aboard. And who would know—until it was too late—that this departure was, in reality, a precipitate flight from justice ?

Thus, when the Balghanistan Ambassador arrived at Croydon Aerodrome, he was perfectly easy in mind.

Everything was ready. His plane was out on the aerodrome, waiting. There was no fog here and the sun was shining clearly. The officials buzzed round importantly, for Sir Akbar, of course, was somebody special. All the ordinary business of the aerodrome was set aside for the time being.

Sir Akbar's plane was a wonderful craft—a great all-metal monoplane. There was a saloon, sleeping compartments, a miniature kitchen, and every possible convenience. This machine was capable of flying direct from England to India in one hop.

"Everything is ready for immediate departure ?" asked Sir Akbar, turning to the official who had been instructed to look after him.

"Yes, Your Excellency," replied the official.

When Sir Akbar climbed into the great machine, he smiled almost amusedly to himself. How easy it was ! Not only was he getting away from England with perfect ease, but these fools of English officials were facilitating his departure to the very best of their ability.

And by this time England's Prime Minister was dead—killed by Sir Akbar's own hand ! When the news of that tragedy came out, he—Sir Akbar—would be in the air. And this machine would not come to earth again until Balghanistan itself was reached.

The hour had struck ! No more pretence—no more intrigue. From this minute onwards it would be action !

THERE were no last-minute hindrances.

As soon as Sir Akbar Laldhi was aboard the plane, the engines were started. The great machine taxied over the aerodrome, in readiness to take off up wind. Her engines opened out to their fullest extent, the propellers roared, and the mighty machine gathered speed and went racing along the ground.

Sir Akbar's complacency would have received a harsh jolt if he had known what was taking place in one of the official rooms of the aerodrome buildings at that very moment. The telephone had rung, and one of the officials had placed the receiver to his ear.

"Is that Croydon Aerodrome ?" came a sharp, incisive voice.

"Yes, sir," said the official.

"This is the Chief Commissioner of Police talking—from Scotland Yard," came the voice.

"Sir Akbar Laldhi, I believe, is preparing to leave the aerodrome in his own private 'plane ?"

"I believe that the machine has just got off, sir," said the official, somewhat flustered.

"Got off !" came the Chief Commissioner's voice. "Find out at once if that is a fact. Sir Akbar Laldhi's 'plane must be stopped at all costs !"

"But how, sir ?" asked the official, in amazement. "What authority——"

"Never mind how !" snapped the voice. "This is official. That aeroplane must not be allowed to leave England. You understand ? It must be detained, and Sir Akbar Laldhi himself must be kept under close guard until two Flying Squad tenders arrive."

There were other details. The official, who only filled a minor capacity, placed the matter in the hands of a superior. Not that it was any good. Sir Akbar Laldhi's 'plane was even now on the point of taking off, and nothing could be done to stop it.

But what the aerodrome officials failed to do—not because of any negligence, but simply because the instructions had come too late—was done by an amateur flyer. A more novice, with less than fifty hours solo-flying experience.



Even as Nipper and the other cub detectives rushed forward, Sir Akbar and his companions opened fire on the aerodrome officials.

The young man, arriving over Croydon Aerodrome in a Moth machine flown from Suffolk, either misunderstood the ground signals, or ignored them. It was a thing that might have happened on any day, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred nothing serious would have resulted.

This novice, throttling down his engine, and gliding towards the aerodrome, noticed, when it was too late, that he was in danger of landing in the path of a great all-metal monoplane which was attempting to take off. He opened up his engine, intending to zoom aloft, out of danger—but the engine spluttered, choked, and then became dead. The little Moth fluttered for a moment, side-slipped, and almost got into a nose-dive.

The inexperienced pilot got the Moth under control again with rare skill, and he succeeded in effecting a perfect landing—but he landed fully in the path of the huge, heavily-laden monoplane, which was on the point of taking off!

Sir Akbar Laldhi's machine was at the end of its run; it was just lifting. The pilot saw that a disaster was inevitable. He was required to think with the speed of lightning. If he jerked the joy-stick back, and leapt into the air—thus clearing the Moth which stood in front—it would

inevitably mean a crash. For the great machine might avoid a collision, but it would certainly nose-dive at once, since it would not have sufficient flying speed.

In a desperate attempt to overcome the difficulty which had so unexpectedly arisen, the pilot of Sir Akbar's plane wrenched at the controls. The great machine swerved; by inches it missed the tiny Moth, and went plunging on. But the monster was completely thrown out of balance, and she was heavily laden. One wheel of her under-carriage crumpled, and the whole machine sagged over.

There was a rending, grinding crash—a shrieking of metal. One wing tip struck the ground, dragged, crumpled up, and then the whole machine spun round like a top, the ground being torn up in a shower of dirt and grass.

Sir Akbar, thrown out of his seat, was shouting furiously. In the saloon with him were several members of his suite, and they were all wildly alarmed.

But no disaster followed. The great machine came to rest, leaning over in a crippled condition—her under-carriage ruined, one great wing battered and crumpled and wrecked. Only the skill of the pilot had saved the machine from tipping up on her nose and capsizing completely.

“**G**REAT Scott! The Ambassador's machine has crashed!” said one of the aerodrome officials, staring blankly.

The accident had happened at the far side of the aerodrome, long distant from the hangars and the aerodrome buildings. Immediately, tenders set off at full speed towards the scene—full of officials and mechanics.

Like lightning the news had spread. Orders from Scotland Yard to have Sir Akbar Laldhi detained! And now, as though by Fate, Sir Akbar's machine had met with a mishap, preventing him from getting into the air.

“Well, it's a funny business, but we can hold him now!” said an official grimly. “Lucky thing, that young idiot landing as he did. It's prevented Sir Akbar leaving, anyhow. We'd better get busy.”

It was felt that it would be a comparatively easy matter to inform Sir Akbar, politely and gently, that he and the members of his suite were required at the aerodrome buildings.

And Sir Akbar—so the officials felt—would naturally accept the situation with the dignity that was to be expected of his high position.

“**B**Y Jingo! Just in time!” said Nipper eagerly.

Two car loads of excited, breathless boys had just arrived at the aerodrome. They were the members of Nelson Lee's Detective Academy. They had sped from London, in answer to Nelson Lee's telephone call.

They were all there—Nipper, Handforth & Co., Reggie Pitt, Browne, Archie Glenthorne, Fenton, Willy Handforth—in fact, the whole bunch. They knew that something very special was “on,” although as yet they had no idea that the situation was as desperate as it actually was.

They had heard, however, that there had been a dastardly attempt to murder their Chief—Nelson Lee—and the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. And their feelings, in consequence, were super-charged. They only wanted to get their hands on Sir Akbar Laldhi.

“There's been a crash, hasn't there?” asked Handforth, breathing hard. “By George! Just as the dirty dog was taking off, too! We've got him now, you chaps!”

“But what can we do?” said McClure.

“We can grab that blighter—and hold him!” retorted Handforth.

He was reckoning without the aerodrome officials, however.

“Now then, you boys, you can't come out here like this,” said one of these gentlemen, approaching the “cub” detectives. “Who let you get past the barriers, anyway?”

“We're here under orders—from Mr. Nelson Lee,” said Fenton. “You'd better be careful with Sir Akbar Laldhi. He's capable of any kind of treachery.”

“You've got it all wrong, young 'un,” said the official. “Sir Akbar is being detained—with all his suite. There's not going to be any more excitement.”

“Don't you be too sure,” said Fenton. “We'll form a bodyguard, if you like——”

“Quite unnecessary,” said the other, his tone becoming short. “What do you think this place is—a battlefield? There's going to be no scrapping here.”

“No scrapping!” yelled Handforth, pointing. “What do you call that, then?”

“Great Scott!” ejaculated Nipper.

They all stared.

Sir Akbar Laldhi and a number of other members of the Balghanistan Embassy were being conveyed across the aerodrome—under escort. It was not, however, an armed escort. The aerodrome officials had never imagined that arms would be needed.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Pandemonium reigned. Suddenly, Sir Akbar and his companions had taken drastic action. They had shot the driver of the car they were in—they had leapt out. Officials and mechanics were backing away, stupefied and amazed by this melodramatic development.

Just near by stood a huge three-engined mail-plane—an all-metal monster nearly as big as Sir Akbar's own crippled machine. It was waiting to take off—engines ticking over, everything ready.

“Come on!” shouted Nipper breathlessly.

They went rushing towards the scene of action—with crowds of excited men. Here was a scrap, and, danger or no danger, the cubs were determined to be in it. They arrived just as

Sir Akbar had climbed aboard the mail-plane. All round stood the members of his suite—seven or eight dark-skinned men in ordinary European attire, and each man armed with an automatic pistol.

Crack! Crack!

"The devils!" shouted Edgar Fenton furiously. "They're shooting our men down!"

It was true. Several of the officials and mechanics had fallen. One or two were killed outright, others were badly injured.

With one mad rush, the young detectives threw themselves into the battle. It was a risky thing to do. But for the fact that the machine was on the point of taking off, they would probably have suffered severely. As it was, they arrived just in time to get to close grips with the armed desperadoes. The latter were taken at a disadvantage because they were obliged, at that moment, to run clear of the now-moving mail-plane.

Sir Akbar had won!

He, at least, was on that stolen machine. The pilot had been overpowered, and flung out. Sir Akbar's own pilot was in his place.

While the schoolboy detectives pounced on the enemy and threw them to the ground, the big aeroplane moved off, gathered speed, and finally zoomed upwards into the air.

At the very last moment, in spite of all the efforts to hold him, Sir Akbar Laldhi had escaped!

CHAPTER 8.

A Startling Proposition!

NELSON LEE, back at Gray's Inn Road, heard the news without any feeling of surprise. "Thank Heaven none of the boys was injured in that scuffle," muttered Lee, as he slowly paced his consulting-room. "They did well—they did the best they could—but I was afraid, from the first, that Laldhi would escape. A clever man—cunning, relentless, desperate."

The great detective was feeling ill, but he had shaken aside his physical disabilities. He needed all his wits about him now. Mercifully, the after-effects of that poison were only slight; the antidote had been miraculous in its effects.

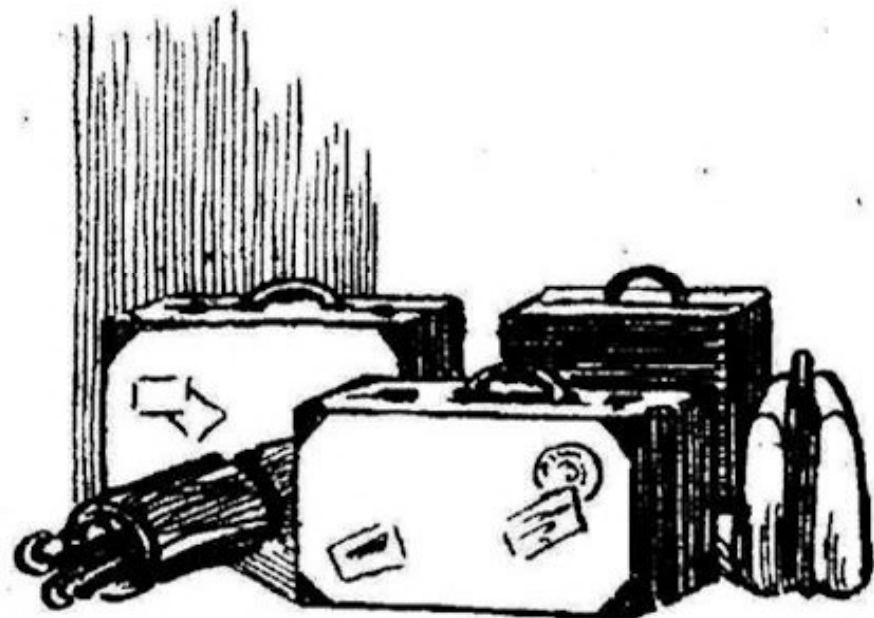
"I wonder!" he murmured, as he came to a halt. "Laldhi is a man of extraordinary power. His plans were ambitious, stupendous in their far-reaching effects. He has been compelled to abandon most of them."

An idea had occurred to him. Was it possible that Sir Akbar Laldhi was something bigger than he pretended to be? Lee already knew that Sir Akbar was also Dacca the Dwarf. But was he somebody else, too?

This brown-skinned master-criminal was a man of exceptional personality. He was a phenomenon. And Lee remembered that the Ameer of Balghanistan was a mysterious personage. He had never been known to leave his native country—he had seldom, if ever, been seen by white men. He always preferred to remain hidden away in the City of Balghan, the capital of the State. The Hidden City! The mysterious city in the hills, far away from the white man's influence! Balghan! The very name was synonymous with all that was mysterious and dreadful.

What was brewing there? What devilry was afoot out there in the East? And the Ameer—

that Eastern monarch with untold powers over his subjects? Was it possible that Sir Akbar Laldhi was the Ameer himself?



THE consulting-room door opened—violently. A broad-shouldered, well-knit figure entered, and a glad cry sounded.

"Lee!" came a breathless voice. "Lee, old horse! By the Lord Harry! It's good to see you!"

Lord Dorrimore dashed in, seized Nelson Lee's hand, and wrung it warmly. There was a world of affection in that grip, and in the look that Lord Dorrimore turned upon his old friend.

"I'm all right, Dorrie," smiled Lee.

"Gad, but I nearly had a fit when I got hold of a newspaper, about half an hour ago," said the sporting peer. "I was lounging in the Wayfarers' Club, half asleep. Then somebody brought in a paper. There was a lot of talk. I saw that there had been an attempt on your life. Did I get out of that chair? Man alive, I nearly had five fits on the spot!"

"It was a close call, Dorrie—as close as any I've had," admitted Nelson Lee. "It's an ugly business altogether."

"I'll bet it is," agreed his lordship, looking at Lee closely. "Old man, you look positively groggy."

"I can't afford to be groggy, Dorrie," said Lee, shaking his head. "There's work to be done—although I must confess that I don't quite know how to start."

"Any chance for me to butt in?" asked Lord Dorrimore eagerly. "I'm a pretty handy chap in a scrap, you know. I'm awfully glad to find you alone—we can have a heart-to-heart talk. I went to Downing Street first, but they told me that you were here. By glory! What's all this about this Laldhi cove?"

"Sit down, Dorrie, and I'll tell you," replied Lee quietly.

Dorrie already knew a good many of the facts. He himself had had an exciting adventure over Balghaniestan: he had nearly shared the fate of all those Indian mail-liners which had so mysteriously disappeared of late. He had been in England for over a week, and he knew a good deal concerning Nelson Lee's activities. He now listened with eagerness while Nelson Lee put him in touch with all the latest details.

"Glory!" he ejaculated, at length. "It certainly is a big business. This Laldhi fellow is a feeman worthy of your steel, Lee. You're not going to let him get away from you, are you?"

"Unfortunately, Dorrie, he's gone."

"You don't happen to be chained up," said his lordship. "Can't you follow him?"

"I think it is the only thing to be done," agreed Lee slowly. "If only I could think of some method——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "Defer thinking until I've split a large-sized mouthful of wisdom. Lee, prepare yourself for some good news. I've got a wheeze."

"Now, look here, Dorrie——"

"Steady! Give a man a chance!" protested his lordship. "I've got something more than a wheeze—I've got the greatest plane that was ever constructed. I'm just back from Bedfordshire, where this machine was built. Ready to fly at a moment's notice. Something extra special."

"You don't mean Raymond Gray's machine?"

"Yes, I do," said Dorrie. "I was telling you about it the other day. You remember Gray, don't you? One of the cleverest engineers in the world. I've already handled two of his aircraft, and, as you know, they're different from everything else. But this new one is—Well, I can give you my word that it's simply a miracle."

"Wasn't this machine constructed especially for you?"

"Of course it was—and I came to England to take delivery," replied Dorrie.

"My latest fad. An air yacht, by gad! We've got to do something to keep up with the times, Lee, and as I'm a millionaire I'm able to indulge in these little fancies. Well, I've seen this machine, and I'm telling you, man to man, that it was built for just this job."

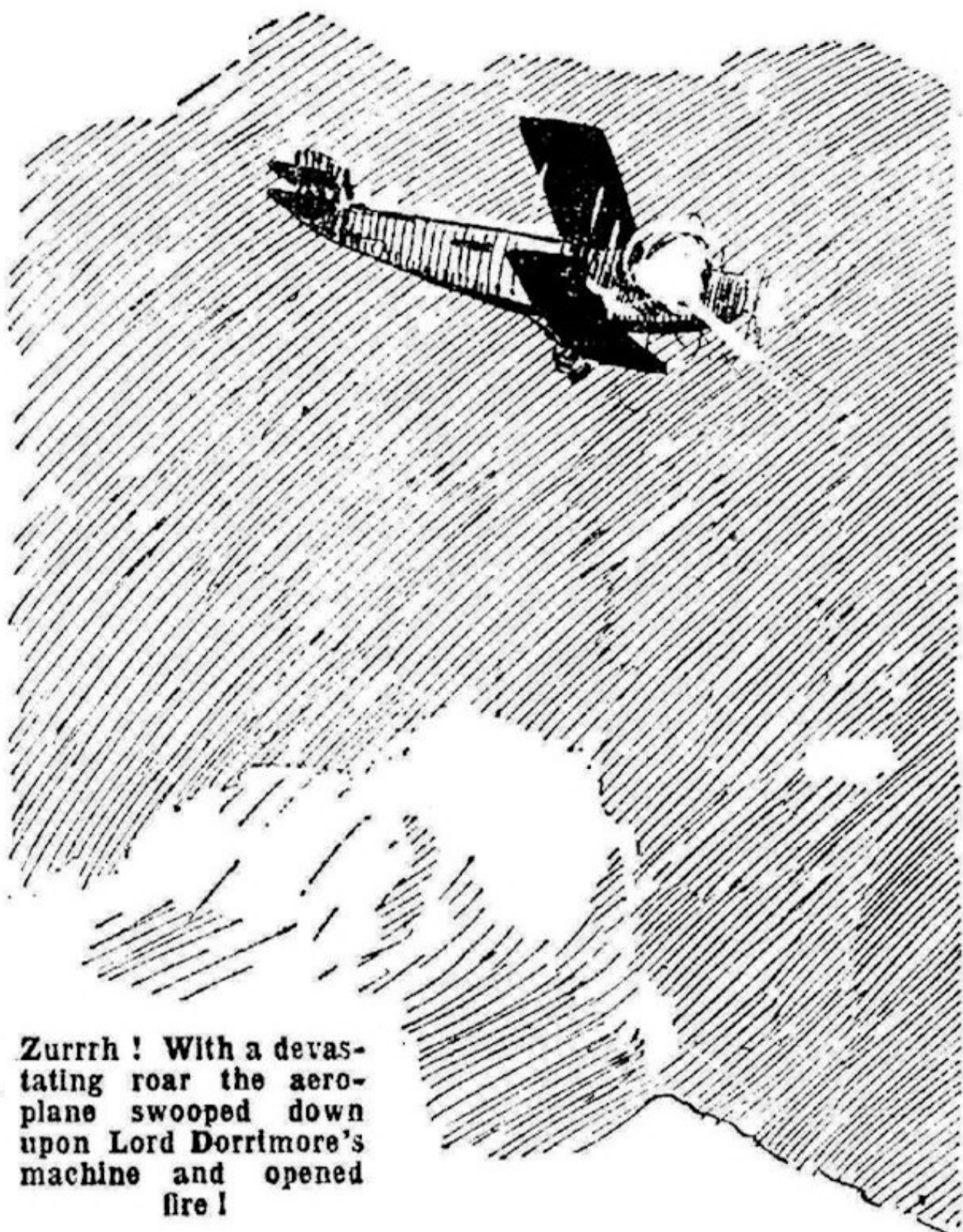
Nelson Lee was beginning to catch some of Dorrie's excitement.

"You say that this machine is ready to take the air—without any delay?" he asked.

"Ready within an hour, if necessary," replied his lordship. "Capable of three hundred miles an hour—accommodation for fifty—cabins, saloons, lounges, sleeping accommodation—everything! As I told you, a yacht of the air."

"If we started at once, we could almost be in Balghaniestan before Sir Akbar himself," said Lee dreamily. "The machine he has stolen is a fast one, but if this one of yours can do three hundred miles an hour, Dorrie, it will overtake it easily."

"It's my latest luxury," said Dorrie. "Hang it, man, I'm paying a hundred thousand pounds for this aircraft—so it ought to be something special. Gray's idea was for me to tour the world in it, and to demonstrate its commercial possibilities. That's all very well but I'd rather go off on



Zurrrh! With a devastating roar the aeroplane swooped down upon Lord Dorrimore's machine and opened fire!

this adventure. You know me, Lee—I go all rusty and creaky unless I'm mixed up in some sort of excitement."

"It's kind of you, Dorrie——"

"Kind be hanged!" snapped Dorrie. "This machine of mine is at your disposal—and you're welcome to it. It's a great all-metal monster——"

"All metal?" broke in Lee sharply. "Then it won't do, Dorrie. Don't forget what happened to the all-metal machines of the Indian Air Mail."

"Yes, they vanished, didn't they?" said Dorrie. "Well, it's my opinion—and yours, too, I think—that those machines were affected by some kind of influence which attracted the metal. There's some radio-magnetic devilry at work. Gray's machine won't be caught in *that* trap, old man, for it is entirely built of a secret alloy."

"Something that will not be affected by this influence?"

"So I believe," replied his lordship. "I had a long talk with Gray on the subject—knowing, as I did, what had been happening to those mail liners. Gray assures me that this metal of his is not influenced by any kind of magnetic attraction. Don't you see? My wheeze is for us to fly out East at once—starting within three or four hours, if you like. We'll solve this infernal riddle, Lee! You and I! What about it?"

"And even things up with Sir Akbar Laldhi at the same time," muttered Nelson Lee tensely. "Dorrie, it sounds almost too good to be true! You'd better come with me at once."

"Where to—Bedfordshire?"

"Later on, perhaps—but for the present we'll have an interview with the Prime Minister," said Nelson Lee grimly.

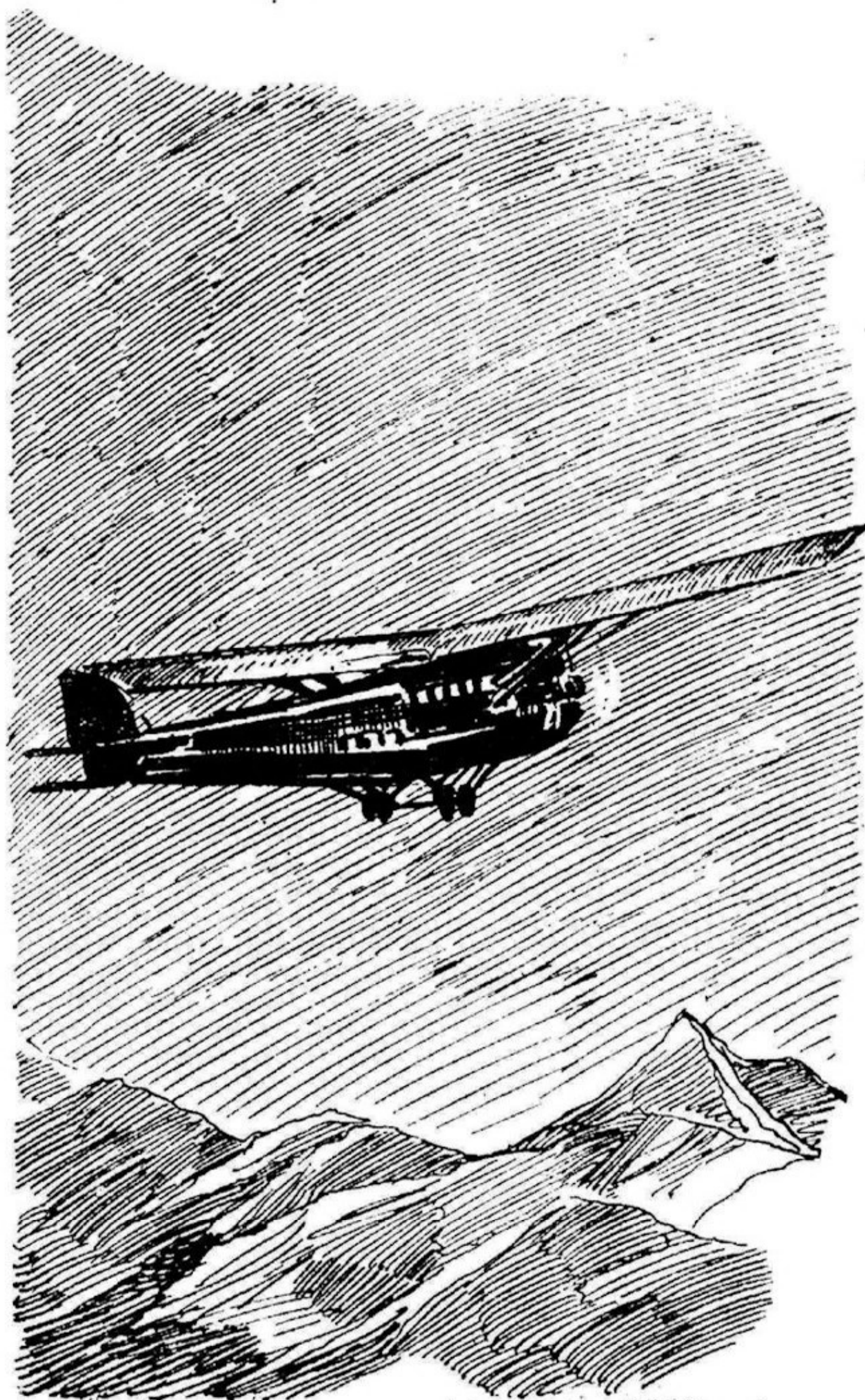
M^{R.} DOUGLAS MORTIMER, pale and haggard, offered Nelson Lee his hand.

"There is no need for me to repeat, Mr. Lee, my expressions of regret for the manner in which I treated you this morning," he said gravely. "I now know you to be a man of courage and enterprise. I wish to Heaven that I had believed you at first! In my folly I discredited your statements, and I nearly paid with my life."

"And what is your decision with regard to this new proposition, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Go ahead with it, by all means," said the Prime Minister. "I place my trust in you now, Mr. Lee—implicitly. If you think that you can do any good by flying to Balghanistan, fly there without a moment's unnecessary delay. My colleagues are of the opinion that it would be as well—at present—to proceed with caution."

Two or three hours had elapsed since Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had spoken together at Gray's Inn Road. The Prime Minister had called a hurried Cabinet meeting. The Cabinet had come to a decision.



"We prefer to leave this matter in your hands, Mr. Lee," said the Prime Minister. "We have discussed the question thoroughly, and if we come out into the open—if we take official action—it will inevitably plunge Great Britain into a war in the East. And nobody can possibly foresee the consequences of such a war. Indeed, we are not prepared for war just now."

"You desire me, then, to conduct a private investigation?"

"That is the proposal, Mr. Lee," said the Premier. "Fly to Balghistan, and, if possible, discover the meaning of Sir Akbar Laldhi's amazing activities. It will be possible, I think, for the Government to quieten any misgivings that the general public may feel. There will be questions in Parliament, no doubt, but we shall be prepared. And while we are getting ready for any drastic step that may be necessary, you can be carrying on your preliminary inquiry."

"I have your permission to take with me whom I please?"

"Certainly, Mr. Lee," said the Premier. "You realise, of course, that this expedition of yours will be fraught with peril? If by any chance, you land in Balghistan, it might mean death for you. We know what kind of a man Sir Akbar Laldhi is—and it is an established fact that his countrymen are hostile towards all men of British blood. If you ever get into their hands, it will mean the end."

"I am quite prepared," said Lee, and inwardly he glowed with eagerness to be off.

When Nelson Lee left the Prime Minister, he took Mr. Mortimer's good wishes with him. Lee felt that he was on the threshold of the greatest adventure of his whole career!

CHAPTER 9.

Off Into The Unknown.

LORD DORRIMORE pressed the detective's arm affectionately.

"Well, old boy, it's a go!" he said contentedly.

They were sitting in a taxi-cab, being driven to Gray's Inn Road.

"Yes, Dorrie, it's a go," agreed Lee. "And the sooner we can start, the better. There's nothing more for me to do in England. With the departure of Sir Akbar Laldhi, so the conspiracy and the intrigue will cease. The action of this drama is being transferred to Balghistan."

"Then Balghistan is the place for us," said the sporting peer.

"If only we can solve the mystery of the missing air liners, it will be something," continued Lee. "England and the world, of course, will know little or nothing of the real facts behind to-day's exciting events. The newspapers will report the blowing up of the Balghistan Embassy, and of Sir Akbar's private house. The newspapers will also print stories concerning the affair at Croydon Aerodrome. But much will be hushed up; and it is better so, for it would not be wise to cause a widespread alarm, with a hint, perhaps, of war."

"Never mind that," said Lord Dorrimore. "Let the newspapers get on with it. We'll discuss our own plans. The question is, how soon can you be ready?"

"I'm ready at once," said Lee promptly. "We'll start for Bedfordshire within the hour, if you like."

"Good man!" chuckled Dorrie. "And the boys?"

Lee shook his head.

"I don't know about the boys," he replied slowly.

"You don't? Then I do!" said his lordship. "The boys are coming."

"Nipper, perhaps——"

"Nipper, and all the rest, too!" said Dorrie. "No, no, you can't leave them behind! That wouldn't be playing the game. The whole bally crowd—and don't you forget it!"

"There will be many risks in this enterprise, and it wouldn't be fair to subject these boys——"

"Nonsense!" broke in Dorrie. "The chances are there'll be more danger at home. What about that affair in the House of the Rats? What guarantee have you got that Laldhi's agents won't try to wipe out the whole crowd as soon as your back is turned?"

"That's true," admitted Lee, frowning.

"Laldhi has gone—but what of his organisation?" went on Dorrie. "These confounded people have got their knife into you—and into the whole Detective Academy. Better take the youngsters along, Lee. It'll be safer in the end."

"There may be something in what you say."

"Well, whether there is or not—my bus is only at your disposal if you agree to take the youngsters," said his lordship grimly. "That's final, old horse!"

"It seems that you have definitely made up my mind, Dorrie," said Lee dryly.

"I have!" retorted the other. "These boys have been in the adventure from the start—and they deserve to come along. Besides, won't they be useful? There's heaps of accommodation for them on the plane—food and everything. And don't forget that you can't call for any military help once you get out East. If you do, you'll disturb these infernal diplomatic relations!"

Dorrimore spoke in a somewhat disgusted voice. He was essentially a man of action, and he had no sympathy with the politicians.

And now that Nelson Lee thought the matter over there was certainly something in his lordship's idea. Yes; all the boys would accompany him and Dorrie to Balghistan!

"YOU did very well, young men, and I am very pleased that none of you met with any serious injuries," said Nelson Lee.

He was in the Common Room of the Detective Academy. All the "cubs" were there. Fenton and Browne and Handforth and the rest. They were looking eager and excited.

"What's the next move, guv'nor?" said Nipper. "Sir Akbar has gone now—and I doubt if the authorities will be able to trace him. That mail plane was one of the best machines in the service—fully fuelled, too."

"We are going after Sir Akbar," said Leo briefly.

"Don't tantalise them, man," grinned Lord Dorrimore, who was also present. "Boys, get ready to cheer. I know you'll be glad to hear the next bit. We're all off to Balghanistan, to run this Laldhi rat into his lair."

"All of us, Dorrie?" asked Nipper. "You mean——"

"Our plane's ready, and you fellows had better throw a few things into your suitcases as quickly as possible," said Dorrie. "You've got to be ready within the hour."

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne, consternation in his voice. "Imposs, old thing! Absolutely out of the question! It'll take me at least two dashed days to get ready."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, a frightful amount of things to attend to," continued Archie. "Suits and shirts and neckties and so forth!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to make do with a few things chucked into a bag," chuckled Dorrie. "If not, Archie, my lad, we shall have to leave you behind."

"Bother Archie!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "By George! We're all going to Balghanistan. Good egg! I'll bet we have some high old times!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

Nelson Lee checked the noise and excitement by raising a hand.

"You mustn't get the idea, boys, that this is going to be a picnic," he said warningly. "You mustn't think that it is to be a sort of holiday trip. Practically speaking, we are venturing into the Unknown. There will be serious dangers to face."

"We've faced plenty of dangers in England, guv'nor—and we can face some more in Balghanistan," said Nipper.

"Hear, hear!"

"And if we can solve the riddle of the missing air liners, and bring Sir Akbar Laldhi to justice, we shall begin to think that the Detective Academy is a worth-while proposition," declared Fenton. "If you're going after Laldhi, sir, it's our duty to go with you."

THE next two or three hours were hectic.

Lord Dorrimore dispatched urgent telegrams to the private aerodrome where the great new machine was in its hangar. The boys of the Detective Academy packed their suitcases, and the majority of them made rush trips home to say good-bye to their people.

Nelson Lee was busy making arrangements with the authorities. At all the important aerodromes on the way East the officials would be on the look out. Everything would be done to facilitate the great flight. But it was anticipated that Dorrie's machine would make a non-stop run, and these arrangements were only made as a precautionary measure.

It was evening when the party arrived at the aerodrome in Bedfordshire. The boys were fascinated by the sight of the great monoplane which was to carry them Eastwards. The machine was incredibly vast.

There were six engines of enormous power, and they were built into the front of the big main plane. Within the plane, too, the great storage tanks for petrol were concealed. The body was roomy and sumptuous. There were two floors—one with a saloon, a lounge, sleeping cabins, etc., and the other for dining, and with more cabins. There were wash-rooms and big compartments for cargo and—if necessary—mails.

The whole machine was made of a curious metal which glowed and shimmered with a bluish-green brilliancy. In the forepart there was the totally-enclosed navigating chamber, where the pilot and the mechanics were accommodated. This big monoplane, in fact, was the very last word in flying machines.

It was just like Lord Dorrimore, of course, to place it entirely at Nelson Lee's disposal. Dorrie, however, declared that his motive was entirely selfish. He scented an adventure here—and he was ready enough to be off on the track of it.

So, in the gathering dusk, the enormous machine, with its precious human freight, took off from that obscure aerodrome in Bedfordshire. And off it went on its long, long flight—off into the Unknown.

CHAPTER 10.

The First Round With the Enemy!

"IF this is Balghanistan, I don't think much of it," said Handforth disparagingly.

Days had passed. It seemed to the boys of the Detective Academy that weeks had passed. And during all these exciting hours—by daylight and by darkness—the great machine had flown on and on. Not a hitch of any kind had occurred to mar her progress. Her engines were running perfectly, and her supply of fuel was still very far from exhausted.

Right across Europe—following the exact route of the normal Indian Mail Air Service. Then into Asia Minor, and so on over the Persian Gulf towards Balghistan. Bushire had been reached—and passed. Now they were in the danger zone. For they were on that last lap—that fatal lap, where so many great machines had mysteriously vanished.

Almost from the start of the journey Nelson Lee had been in wireless communication with the various aerodromes along the route, and he knew that Sir Akbar Laldhi's stolen plane was many hundreds of miles behind. Although Sir Akbar had been overtaken, nothing had been seen of his machine during the trip. But it was known that he had passed over, or near, many towns. It was believed that he had once descended in some obscure region—probably to re-fuel from a hidden source of his own.

"Balghistan seems to be a rotten sort of place," continued Handforth, as he stared down upon the landscape from one of the saloon windows. "Look at it—nothing but hills and rocks and barren wastes. And where's Balghian, anyhow? Where's the Hidden City?"

"The gov'nor knows," said Nipper, nodding. "What's more, we're heading for Balghian now. We're going to fly right over the place. That's the gov'nor's plan."

The boys watched with ever-growing interest. Very little was said on the subject, but the chief thought in all their minds was connected with the unknown peril. They were right in the danger zone now. Would their machine, too, share the fate of all the others?

NELSON LEE and Lord Dorrimore were in the navigating compartment, in the fore part of the machine. Dorrie himself was at the controls, with Lee standing near. This was not an ordinary cockpit, but quite a little room, where it was possible to move about in comfort. And there was a maze of instruments—dials and levers and indicators.

"Getting near now, Lee, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "This is just about where I was flying when I saw that mail 'plane zooming upwards into outer space."

"Then something ought to happen before very long," said Lee, who was looking grim and alert. "I'm not sure that we oughtn't to have stopped back in Bushire. We ought to have landed the boys there——"

"There you go again!" interrupted his lordship. "Why leave the boys behind? I'm not such a cautious old stick as you are. These youngsters want excitement—let 'em have it!"

"I don't want them to go to their death, Dorrie."

"Well, if it comes to that, I'm not particularly keen upon going to mine," retorted Dorrie. "Here we are. Here's a likely-looking pass. I think we'll shoot across this way."

He was gazing out through the navigating window. For many miles they had been flying parallel with a rugged mountain range, but just here there was a wide opening between two of the peaks—a sort of valley. The 'plane's course was altered, and she now left the normal air route, and struck inland—towards the Hidden City of Balghian!

"**B**Y Jove!" said Nelson Lee tensely.

Only a few minutes had elapsed. Suddenly, Lord Dorrimore had noticed a queer disturbance of some of the delicate instruments. An oscillation of a needle, perhaps—an indication that something was not as it should be. Except for these trifling signs of a hidden influence, nothing had happened. The machine was flying as steadily as ever, under perfect control.

Lord Dorrimore glanced round.

"Can you see anything?" he asked curiously.

Nelson Lee was staring upwards, through the dome-like roof of the navigating chamber. It was all of special glass, and Lee could see far, far above, into the infinite blue of the heavens. The day was fine and cloudless, and even at this height the heat was considerable.

"There's a 'plane up there," said Lee, with a note of surprise in his voice. "She must be thirty thousand feet up, at least. She's flying in the same direction, Dorrie—keeping above us all the time."

"Big machine?"

"Enormous, I should say," replied Lee. "As big as this one—if not bigger."

"By glory! Look at these instruments!" ejaculated his lordship. "That machine up there must be an enemy. Trying to put the 'fluence on us!"

Nelson Lee was beginning to feel that this was the explanation. That great machine, flying high above, was utilising some sort of deadly instrument. No doubt Mr. Robert Harding's great invention! Ordinary machines, particularly all-metal planes, were at once affected by that secret "'fluence." What happened to them after that was a matter for conjecture. Perhaps they were lured to destruction—perhaps they were compelled to climb higher and higher into the blue, as Lord Dorrimore himself had seen.

At all events, Dorrie's great machine was not brought under that mystic spell. Except for a slight disorganisation of the instruments, the big 'plane was unharmed.

However, it soon became apparent that the enemy aircraft was aware that something was wrong. For once it was failing to lure its victim away. For this great bluish-green machine continued serenely on its course, flying deeper and deeper into the heart of Balghistan.

"They're coming after us," said Lee abruptly.

"Good!" was Dorrie's prompt retort. "If they want a scrap, we'll give 'em one! We're not entirely helpless, old man. We've got machine guns aboard, and we can use them, if necessary."

It was no longer necessary for Nelson Lee to use the glasses. He could see the other machine plainly now. It was swooping down out of the blue, flying at an extraordinarily rapid speed. It was coming straight down to meet them.

Lord Dorrimore sent his own machine higher and higher—her engines now running all out with a deep, booming roar. Hitherto those engines had been half throttled down. Dorrie, with the sheer joy of action, was entering into the spirit of this duel.

"Better be careful, old man," warned Lee.

"Trust me," said his lordship. "I want to have a closer look at this merchant. Not much doubt that he is an enemy, eh? By the Lord Harry! I can see him now!"

The other machine was less than a mile away—and not much higher now. It was a vast biplane of a novel design. It seemed to be pale blue in colour—and difficult, in consequence, to distinguish from the sky.

"She's a wrong 'un, right enough," continued his lordship. "Not a mark on her—not a distinguishing sign."

Lee nodded.

"The machine belongs to Balghanistan," he agreed. "Well, I'm not proposing that we should run away, Dorrie—but it's good to know that we can outdistance this other plane, if needs be."

"Outdistance her?" replied his lordship. "Man alive, we can make circles round her! Those brutes aboard don't know what they're up against!"

"Careful, old man—careful," urged Lee. "Good heavens! They're coming straight for us!"

It was a fact. The blue biplane was diving steeply, and coming downwards upon her rival with terrifying speed. Lord Dorrimore pulled at the controls, and his own machine zoomed upwards, banking over to the left.

Zurrrrrh!

With a low, wicked, devastating roar, the other aeroplane swooped overhead. And that shattering noise was not merely caused by her engines. There was something else. Nelson Lee caught sight of some bursts of fire. They were accompanied by puffs of feathery smoke.

"They're firing at us!" ejaculated Lee grimly.

At the same second he felt the flooring quivering and shuddering beneath his feet. The great machine was in the throes of a tremendous vibration. In a second Nelson Lee knew what this meant.

They had been hit!

UPON investigation, it was discovered that two propellers had been damaged. The machine was now flying with four engines, and these alone were powerful enough to enable her to travel at a tremendous speed. Yet Nelson Lee immediately decided that here was a case where discretion was the better part of valour. It was no use taking any chances with a crippled machine; the only thing to do was to fly back to Bushire.

Accordingly Lord Dorrimore turned the nose of his plane and headed in that direction. The enemy craft was easily outdistanced, and soon gave up pursuit. Nelson Lee breathed a sigh of relief. Although they had come off second best in their first brush with the enemy, it seemed that no really serious harm would be the outcome. The famous detective was just a little too optimistic, however. Even as the thought passed through his mind the great machine suddenly commenced to vibrate violently. Lord Dorrimore uttered a sharp ejaculation.

"That's another propellor gone!" he muttered. "Good glory! This is bad, Lee!"

Then, with equal abruptness, the vibration increased. The whole air was filled with a shattering din. The machine began to fall.

"What is it?" shouted Lee.

"Two of 'em!" yelled Dorrie. "Both starboard engines, too! Gad! They must have been damaged during that scrap, and now they've given up the ghost completely. Couldn't stand the extra strain, I suppose."

"Then we're only running on two engines now?"

"That's all," said Dorrie, as he shut off the current from the affected motors, and brought the vibration to a stop. "Old man, we're helpless! Can't fly with two engines only."

"That means a forced landing," said Lee grimly.

"Afraid it does."

"Well, do your best," said Lee.

Lord Dorrimore breathed hard. He was grateful to the other for his even tone. Nelson Lee was taking this thing very calmly—very collectedly. Yet he knew, better than anybody else, that the failure of those two other propellers meant something very akin to disaster.

They were not out of Balghanistan—they were still within that mountain range. And they were being forced down in the enemy's territory!

LORD DORRIMORE performed something very near to a miracle. The dusk was deep, and darkness had practically descended. Yet Dorrie succeeded in bringing that great machine to earth without much damage, and without causing bodily harm to a soul.

As he neared the ground, he found himself gliding over a narrow valley, with great rocky gorges branching out from it. Towering masses of rock stretched up on either hand, but the floor of this valley, as Dorrie could see, was comparatively smooth. The great machine bumped, ran forward, slewed round a bit, bumped again, and then pulled up short.

(Concluded on page 43.)

ONE MAN v. TWENTY! There's no limit to Primo's amazing strength. He tackles the whole of a ship's crew, beats 'em to a frazzle—and thinks nothing of it!

PRIMO THE TERRIBLE



The Human Catapult!

PPRIMO the Terrible, King of the Rakatangans, snorted.

Primo, genial as a schoolboy when all went well, was speedily moved to anger, and since he had established himself as the ruler of these Javanese Islanders, he insisted that they should show him the deference which was his due. Yet he and his fellow-adventurer, Tim Murphy, were apparently being cold-shouldered by the tribe.

They had been on a hunting expedition which had kept them away from the village all night. Now they had returned, late in the morning, and there was none to welcome them! Generally Primo and Tim were met by the headmen of the tribe and escorted in triumph to the hut which was the "Royal Palace."

"For this I shall punish them!" growled Primo, and he strode with gigantic steps into the main street of the village.

It was Tim, however, who saw what was wrong. The village was entirely deserted! Not a wisp of smoke came from it. Not a child played in the dirtiness of the village

No. 3: Blackbirders of the Java Seas!

street. Tim's eyes grew wide with alarm. "Surely they can't have hooked it?" he gasped. "They know you're pretty terrible, Primo, but surely they are loyal enough now?"

He broke off suddenly. From out of the forest which hemmed in the village a figure staggered—a figure which both Tim and Primo recognised. It was a youth whom Tim had named Wanga. Wanga was bleeding profusely, and he staggered as he walked. He was the brightest of all the natives, and Tim had managed to teach him a little English. Wanga dropped to his knees before Primo and gave a gasp.

"Massa!" he cried in heartbroken accents. "Men come! Take away—all!"

He swept his arm around in a comprehensive gesture, and went off into a flood of talk. Tim listened eagerly. He had picked up a little knowledge of the native language, and he managed to get the gist of what Wanga was saying. His face was grave when he turned to Primo.

"Blackbirders!" he gasped. "Slavers! Forced labour they call it, but it's slavery pure and simple. Wanga says we'd no sooner gone yesterday than a crowd of men came and rounded up the best part of the village and marched them off across the river. A few natives got to the forests—Wanga amongst them. Wanga says the

blackbirders have destroyed all means of crossing the river!"

"What?"

Primo's rage was fearful to witness. One of his sudden changes of character had come to him. His eyes burned like red-hot coal, his face was distorted with rage, and his fists twisted as though he was slowly strangling someone. Then, in a flash, he was gone—running in long, gigantic strides down the path that led from the village to the river which led to the sea some distance away.

"Follow, Wanga!" yelled Tim, and immediately took to his heels after Primo.

Despite the sweltering tropical heat, they ran on, Primo a long way ahead, Tim behind him, and Wanga bringing up the rear.

Primo, raging like an animal, was rushing up and down the bank. From his dripping clothing Tim saw that he had essayed to cross the river in pursuit of the blackbirders, who doubtless had a vessel at anchor in one of the bays of the island. Unless Primo could reach them in time, the vessel would set sail, and the natives would never again return to Rakatanga!

Primo had failed to swim the river, for, mighty swimmer though he was, the torrent rushed down with such force that a man was swept away as soon as it caught him in its grip, and it had been with the utmost difficulty that he had managed to scramble back ashore. He turned upon Tim.

"How are we to cross?" he demanded. "Look! They have destroyed the native bridge. We are helpless!"

Helpless! It seemed a peculiar word to apply to Primo the Terrible, to whom nothing that required strength seemed impossible. But it was not strength that was required now—it was brains! And Tim Murphy was the "thinking" partner in the strange firm of Primo & Company.

Tim looked around, and his eyes brightened as he beheld a tall palm-tree growing on the river-bank.

"Primo," he cried, "could you bend that tree? Could you bring its top right down to the ground without breaking the tree?"

Primo said he could.

"Then do it!" Tim cried. "There's just a chance!" He wheeled round to Wanga. "A rope, Wanga!" he commanded. "The strongest you can get!"

Wanga was away in a flash back to the village. Primo, not understanding what was in Tim's mind, sprang to the tree. He scaled it a little way, and then, taking a firm grip around its trunk, began to heave at it. He gritted his teeth, and his muscles swelled, while his face was distorted with the effort he was making.

There came a creaking sound, and the tree began to bend. Slowly Primo toiled; the perspiration rolled down his face, and stood in great beads on his forehead, but he never slackened his efforts for so much as a second.

Bit by bit the great palm was bent slowly down.

By now Wanga was back with the rope. Tim laid it in coils on the ground. Then he knotted one end around him, and turned to Primo, who, every sinew standing out like wire which had almost reached breaking strain, was holding down the palm.

"Let go when I tell you!" cried Tim, and then, before Primo fully realised what was in the boy's mind, Tim had swung himself astride the bent palm.

Now Primo understood. The bent palm was to act as a catapult—and Tim was to be the missile that was to be fired across the river!

"No, Tim, I guess I can't let you—" he began, and stepped forward.

He was too late. For a moment he had relaxed his tremendous strength, and the palm, held in check so long, slipped out of his grip and straightened itself with a mighty rush.

Whiz! Like an arrow from a bow, Tim was shot into the air, and the rope which was tied to his waist uncoiled itself with a rush as Tim went flying through the air!

The Leap of Death!

CRASH!

The suddenness of his crash into the trees on the other side of the river almost dazed Tim. He flung out his arms and gripped a branch of the tree in which he had landed.

He hung there a few minutes to recover his breath, and then slid down the tree-trunk to the ground. He was safe, and, with the rope around his waist, he had bridged the river!

It was the work of a moment to make the rope fast to the trunk of the nearest tree. In the meanwhile, Primo and Wanga, on the opposite side, had made the other end fast, and the rope now stretched across the raging torrent. Wanga crossed first, swinging himself across by his arms, holding tightly on to the rope.

Then came Primo. The rope strained and sagged terribly beneath his weight, but it was a stout native-made rope, and it withstood even his weight. Before long Primo had joined Tim, and with Wanga to guide them, they made off along a hardly discernible path through the jungle.

Eventually Wanga motioned them to stop and proceed warily, and in single file they pressed forward. They came out on the top of a bluff which overlooked a small bay, and Primo's nostrils distended as he saw what lay below.

A trading vessel was anchored in the bay, and even as they watched they saw the last boat-load of unfortunate natives being taken aboard. Primo gave a snarl and darted forward, but Tim placed a restraining hand on his arm. Tim had realised that without a boat they could not reach the trading ship, and the clank of the anchor being

heaved aboard warned him that they had no time to lose.

Quickly he glanced around. The entrance to the bay was very narrow, and it would take the sailing vessel some time to clear the entrance. His quick eyes showed him that the vessel would have to come very near to the bluff on which they stood, high above it.

But it would be impossible to leap down to her deck. Such a leap could only end in the most terrible injuries if, indeed, it did not lead to death. Tim turned to Primo, and started back.

Primo's rage was terrible to witness. He looked little more than a primitive cave-man now. The knowledge of his inability to help the unfortunate natives seemed to have stung him to a fury, and Tim shuddered as he imagined what would happen if Primo laid hands on the blackbirding scoundrels who had cleared out his village.

Then it seemed that Primo went mad. He dragged a great hunting dagger from his belt, and before Tim could restrain him he leaped from the bluff, brandishing his hunting dagger aloft, and uttering great cries of uncontrollable rage. Down, down he hurtled, straight for the trader beneath!

And then Tim gasped as he saw what was in Primo's mind!

If Primo struck the deck, he would crash, a mangled heap, upon the boards. But it was for the great bellying mainsail that Primo had leaped. There came a sharp, smacking sound as he struck it—a sound that was changed to one of ripping canvas. Tim took a deep breath.

For Primo had struck at the strong canvas with his hunting dagger, and the dagger had gone through the mainsail, checking Primo's downward flight. The canvas ripped beneath the sharp blade of Primo's dagger. Down went Primo—still hurtling towards the deck, but with the speed of his descent greatly checked.

Fascinated, Tim watched, and he saw Primo make a mighty effort and swing himself outward. The next moment he was clinging to the shrouds of the vessel—but it was only for a moment. Then he was on deck, and the startled crew of the blackbirder scuttled away before him like a crowd of rats.

Straight for the poop Primo dashed, and the man at the wheel, beholding the mighty giant bearing down upon him, did not wait an instant. In a flash he had run to the side and leaped overboard.

There came a crash of breaking wood as Primo flung himself upon the wheel and literally tore it to pieces. The next moment the ship gave a lurch, and shuddered terribly, for with its steering-gear rendered useless by Primo's mad onslaught upon it, the ship was helpless, and a sudden gust of wind piled her high and dry upon the rocky reef that jutted out at the entrance to the bay.

Primo Sees Red!

FOLLOW me, Wanga!" yelled Tim, and the next minute he was scrambling madly down the side of the bluff to the rocks below.

The mainsail of the trader was flapping idly in the breeze, and the vessel itself was piled up so high on the rocks that it was a comparatively easy matter for Tim, once he had gained the reef, to scramble aboard. With Wanga close behind him, he clambered up a rope that was hanging from the bulwarks of the wrecked vessel.

As he sprang to the deck an amazing sight met his gaze. The blackbirders had rallied in force on the main deck and were making for Primo. One, evidently their leader, was levelling a revolver at Primo, who, in the excess of his rage, was storming about the poop wrecking everything within his reach. He had seized a great belaying-pin and was laying about him with vigour.

Crash! Crash! Crash! The noise of splintering wood was almost deafening. Merely wrecking the vessel did not seem to satisfy Primo. He seemed to be determined to smash it to matchwood.

"Look out, Primo!" yelled Tim; and the warning was just in time.

Primo looked down to the maindeck, saw the sallow-faced man about to fire, and dropped the belaying-pin with a cry of rage. The next moment he had leaped through the air, and before the astounded captain of the blackbirders—the scum of the Java seas, and almost entirely composed of half-castes—could press the trigger, Primo was upon him.

Crash! Down they went to the deck, but the next moment Primo was on his feet again, and the blackbirder was in his grip.

The amazed man never properly realised what happened to him. He was whirled into the air and sent swinging around Primo's head like a mighty flail. Then, with this novel weapon, Primo advanced upon the others.

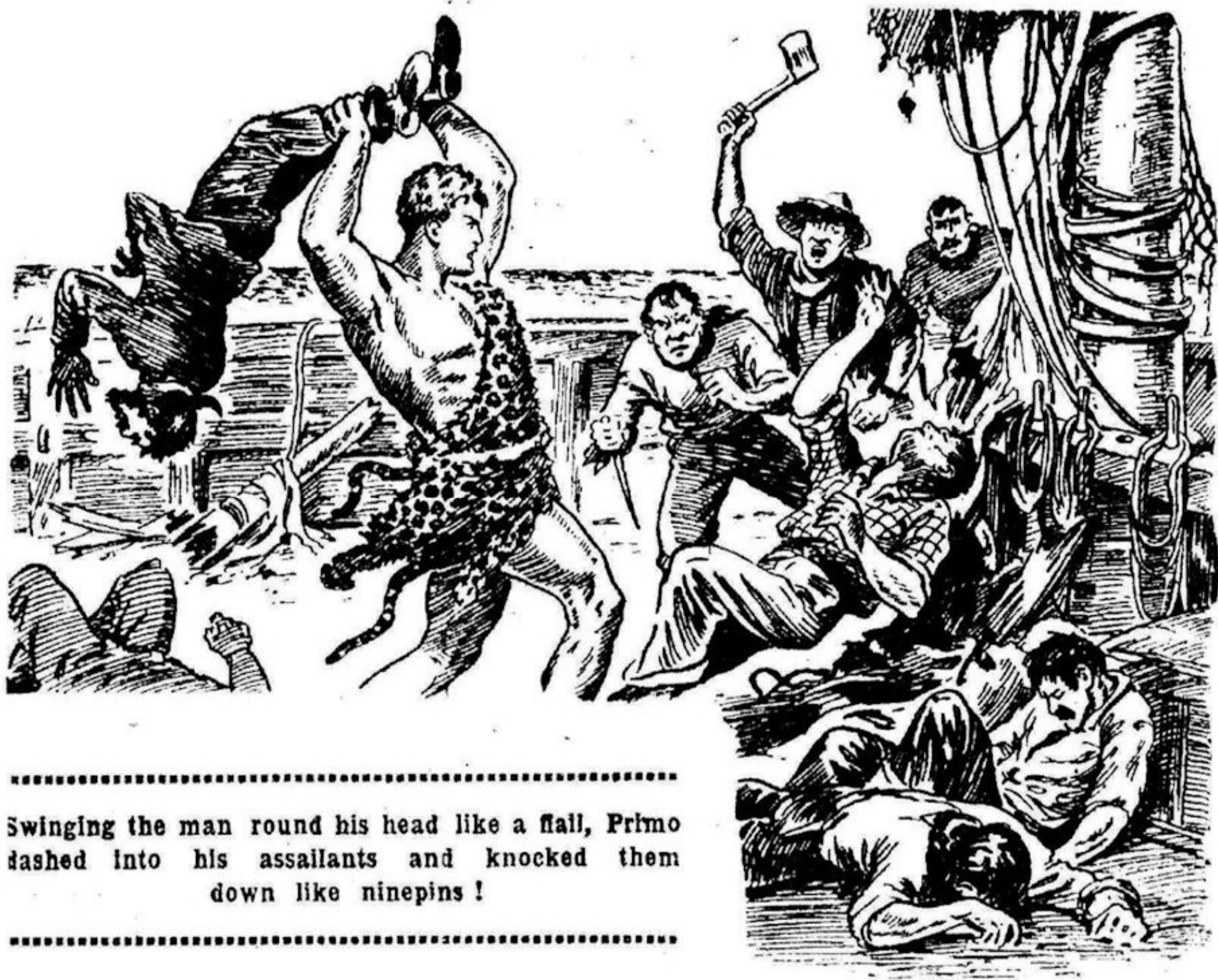
Crash! Crash! Crash! Men went over like ninepins, bowled down by the whirling body of their leader. It seemed that Primo, in his rage, was intent upon pounding them all to a jelly—and using their captain as the weapon with which to pound them!

They staggered to their feet, and went down just as quickly as Primo swung the captain round once more upon them.

Then Primo seemed to tire of his curious weapon, for with a mighty heave he sent the blackbirder captain whirling through the air over the side, to fall with a mighty splash in the waters of the bay.

The other blackbirders did not give him much opportunity to experiment upon them. Totally demoralised by this wild onslaught, they scrambled to the bulwarks and leaped overboard—anywhere to get out of the reach of this magnificently terrible creature.

Some of them were helped in their object by stinging blows from Primo—blows that almost knocked them unconscious. In a few



Swinging the man round his head like a ball, Primo dashed into his assailants and knocked them down like ninepins!

seconds the deck was cleared, and Primo made a spring for the hatches of the vessel, beneath which the unfortunate natives had been battened down.

It had taken the crew some considerable time to batten down those hatches. It took Primo merely a matter of seconds to rip them bodily from their places and hurl them overboard. And then, with cries of thankfulness for their deliverance, his natives came scrambling up from below.

Primo paused and took a deep breath. He looked around him, and Tim, seeing the mad gleam in his eye, feared that Primo would go on destroying the vessel and everything in it.

"Steady on!" he said. "They've quitted—every man jack of them! Gosh, Primo, don't overdo it!"

Primo stood still a moment, and then the look of madness faded from his eyes, and the cheerful grin came back to his countenance.

"Yes," he said, "I mustn't overdo it. I must reserve my strength."

"Reserve it? Gosh!" gasped Tim. "If that's what you call reserving it, I don't ever want to see you let it go in earnest! But let's get back to the village. You need a rest."

"Oh, no!" Primo grinned again. "You

forget, Tim, the blackbirders destroyed the bridge. Luckily, though, we've got a rope across it, and that helps things."

"I'd forgotten about that," said Tim. "Well, we'd better camp somewhere, for I don't feel like dragging myself across the river on a rope to-night."

"You won't need to," said Primo, "for I'm going back to the village to-night, and I'm going to build the bridge so that all the natives can go back, too."

"You don't mean—" began Tim.

"Come on," said Primo. "I've got to get that bridge built!"

The bridge was built by midnight—a very rough and ready bridge, admittedly—and Tim was the witness of an amazing spectacle of strength.

Arriving back at the river, Primo's first task was to uproot with his bare hands a number of long, slim trees in the vicinity. These he lashed together, and then, standing them all on one end, he gently lowered the improvised bridge across the river.

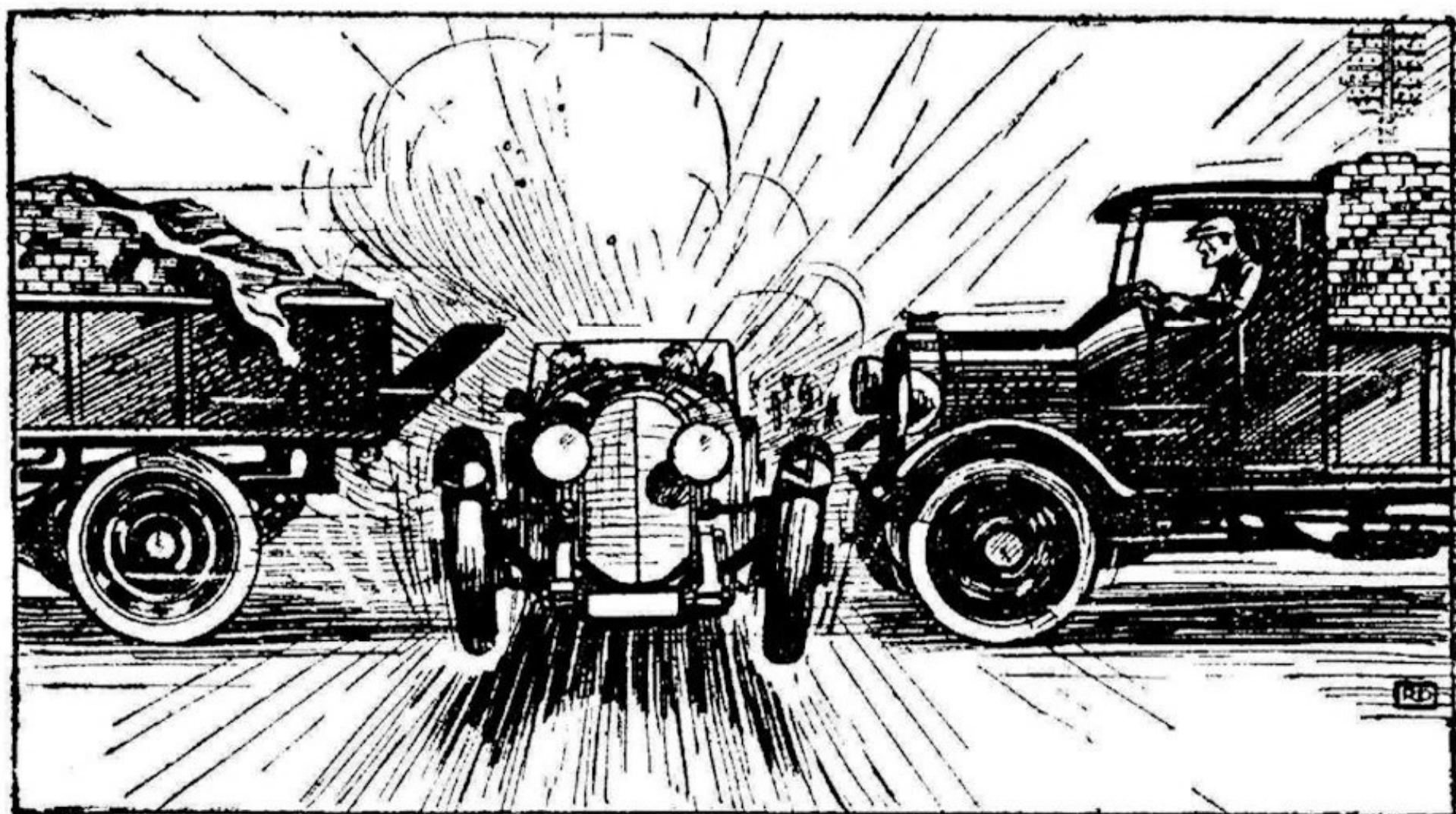
Tim gazed in awe. There seemed to be no limit to the strength of this amazing young giant who called himself Primo the Terrible!

(Look out for another thrilling story featuring Primo in next week's NELSON LEE.)

THRILLS GALORE IN THIS WEEK'S STIRRING INSTALMENT OF—

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR



Lon Stargie is undoubtedly a crack speedman. But he makes a dangerous enemy, too—as Jim Ross is to discover to his cost!

The Unfinished Message!

"JIM, I've got him!" Joe's voice split the silence in the room like a pistol-shot as he leaped from his bed and landed on the shoulders of Lon Stargie.

The grim-featured Ace speedman staggered backwards, then Jim was out from between the sheets, hurling himself at the midnight prowler.

As his feet touched the ground he saw the man reach round, grab Joe and send the boy mechanic flying across the room with a single swing of his muscular arms. Something smashed as Joe fell, and then Jim was at Stargie, lashing out with both fists.

Twice his punches got home, then what felt like the boss of a hammer thudded to the side of his head and he was sent reeling. He tripped and fell, to come to his feet again in time to see Joe making a dive for the speedman's legs.

He got a grip and Stargie went down with a crash that shook the stable building. Jim flung himself forward, to see Stargie twist, half-stun Joe with a shattering blow, and then go scrambling from the room.

He slammed the door in Jim's face, and by the time Jim had it open again, Stargie was in the darkness at the foot of the stairs beyond. Jim went down them in one wild leap and saw the driver heaving himself through an open window at one side.

Joe came tumbling down the stairs, and he hurled himself at Jim's heels as the latter chased Stargie along a grass-grown gravelled path. Stones jarred the bare feet of the running boys, and the fellow gained on them. He raced around the front of the garage, ran for twenty yards along the road, and then took a flying leap into a waiting car.

Jim was still short of the machine when its engine roared and the car went away, slinging grit and dust from its spinning rear wheels as they threshed for grip on the road.

Panting, Jim stared after the man, and Joe came pattering up at his side.

"The blighter got away!" the mechanic gasped. "I saw him nearly all the time he was in the room. What was he after?"

"I don't know!" Jim answered. "He said: 'I've come to warn you——' and then you did a swallow dive on to the back of his neck and the scrap started!"

"He must have been after something!" Joe said. "It's—— I say, what about the racer?"

The idea that some damage might have been done to the Ross Eight sent them both tearing back to the window. Lights were on when they got there and they saw Steve half-way down the stairs, with a giant spanner in his hand.

"It's us, Steve!" Jim yelled, and climbed through the window. "Lon Stargie's been in our room, and we nearly caught him. Has he done anything to the car?"

The stall in which the racing machine stood was just at hand. So far as they could see the machine was absolutely untouched. Steve spent ten minutes in silent examination of it; at the finish he was certain that it had not been tampered with. He listened to what the chums had to tell him about the affair, and a furrow came between his eyebrows as he sat on a wheel of the car and stared at the two.

"I've come to warn you!" he repeated. "What was the idea of that? What's Stargie got to warn you about, Jim?"

"I don't know," and Jim grinned cheerfully.

"I lay doggo when I saw him come through the door," Joe said. "I thought he was going to knock Jim over the head, or something. That reminds me, he didn't half look at Jim when we were at the Ace works this afternoon! I'm beginning to get an idea that he doesn't like you!"

"Perhaps he doesn't, but we'll see him when we get to Brooklands with this speed-iron," Jim said slowly. "Then I'll ask him what he was going to say!"

"And you might mention that there's no need for him to break into our place to say it, either!" Steve said grimly. "To-morrow, I'll fit some locks on our windows that can't be opened from outside!"

They searched the whole of the garage and the stable buildings, just to make certain that the rival speedman had not left any friends, and then, still mystified, turned in again. The boys talked it over for a long while before they went to sleep, and Joe's last remark was:

"Anyway, the ugly blighter was after something. I'm goin' to take a sledge-hammer to bed with me in future!"

Bound for Brooklands!

STEVE planned to take the Ross-Eight racer to Brooklands four days before the actual date of the 200-miles race. As Jim and Joe were going with him, it was necessary to close down the garage during their absence. They could not afford to spend more than four days over the race, because it would mean losing money.

The three worked like niggers until they finished all the repair work in hand, and then made ready for departure. They had a light, open lorry, and on this the shining racing machine was loaded, with its spare parts and everything that they were likely to want.

With the garage locked up behind them, and with Steve at the wheel, they started the long southward trek to the famous track, Jim and Joe riding with the racer in order to see that no harm came to it. The car was sheeted over with a tarpaulin, and the boys sat on cans of the special "doped" fuel which Steve had prepared for the machine.

It was late afternoon when they trundled through the big, red-painted iron gates which formed the entrance to the Brooklands track. They rode down a narrow road, fringed by pine trees, and as they went they heard the screeching roar of cars passing on the concreted speedway just beyond the trees.

Both stood up, and they had a momentary glimpse of a long white machine skimming the very lip of the banking, slinging grit and dust and fragments of the track into the branches of the trees. The car was past in the instant that they sighted it, to be followed the fraction of a second later by a red machine, which went by with a furious howling note that sounded long after the car had vanished.

"They're practising!" Joe's eyes were alight as he spoke.

"They must have been travelling!" Jim gasped. "They were right on the top of the banking. Did you see 'em, Steve?"

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

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

JOE COOPER, who acts as a mechanic at the small garage owned by the two brothers. Jim learns that his father was deliberately killed by

LON STARGIE, the crack speedman of Ace Motors. The boy decides he would like to meet Stargie! One night the two chums are asleep. Jim suddenly awakes to see somebody creeping up to him. It is Stargie! "I've come to warn you—" hisses the speedman; but is allowed to say no more, for at that moment Joe springs upon him.

(Now read on.)

"Yes," his brother answered shortly, and Jim saw that Steve's face was set as he drove on the lorry.

The road wound around a curve and then dropped steeply to where a tunnel passed beneath the track. As they came out of the shadow the two saw the stalls and buildings of the paddock in front, while on either hand the grey concrete of Brooklands track swept away.

They had a glimpse of the two cars they had heard, now on the distant Byfleet banking, going round as though they were flies on a wall, with the red machine just beginning to pass the white one.

The lorry rolled into the paddock and rumbled across it. The boys saw a little stand, and cars scattered about below it; three were racing machines, with mechanics working on them, while a fourth was just being pushed on to the track for a practice run.

It went off, engine crashing out and its fish-tail exhaust crackling on a piercing note. The boys wanted to stop and watch it as it went around, but Steve drove grimly on to where a narrow black road cut across the grassland forming the interior of the speedway, making for dun-coloured aviation sheds by the Byfleet banking.

"Ever been here before?" Jim asked Joe.

"No. It isn't half a size, isn't it?"

"Nearly three miles round—look at that car now!"

The machine which had come from the paddock was streaking with rising speed down the railway straight. They watched it tilt on to the Byfleet banking and then go coursing along it faster than the red and the white machines had travelled.

"That's an Ace!" Jim gasped suddenly. "I bet Stargie's on it! Look at him!"

The Ace disappeared behind the sheds, then came into sight again and rocketed into the curve which led down to the fork, where the track ran almost parallel with the road the lorry was following. The boys were hardly fifty yards from the car when it went by.

The driver's head barely showed above the rim of the narrow cockpit. They had a hint of goggled, intent features, then the thing was past, leaving behind faint dust that swirled and shattering sound which slammed madly to the ears of the boys.

"Gosh!" Joe gasped.

Jim's eyes were shining as he watched the machine. He was gripping the side of the lorry and about his lips was a taut little smile.

"Imagine having the chance to go as fast as that!" he breathed. "Steve!" he called to his brother. "Did you see that one go by? Was it Stargie?"

"It was," came Steve's voice.

"Then you've got to shift if you're going to lick him!" Jim yelled, but he got no answer as the lorry followed a curve of the road and trundled up to the sheds.

They were very old and dilapidated, and had been used as hangars in the early days of aviation, when Brooklands had been the only aerodrome in England. They were derelict now, and some were cluttered up with lumber.

One of these was to form the racing camp for the Ross-Eight car. Since funds were limited, the boys and Steve were to sleep with the machine in the shed. They had brought blankets on the lorry, as well as some food.

Steve stopped the lorry by one of the buildings, and the chums pushed open the great doors at the front. The wooden floor inside was littered with broken timber, rusted parts of old cars, the skeleton of a broken aeroplane wing, and at one side was the heavy, red mass of a rusted-up aero-engine which had been abandoned.

"Home—for four days!" Joe commented as he looked around the place. "Well, it'll do us! Clear some of this junk away, Jim, then Steve can back the lorry in and we'll get the car off."

For two hours the trio worked, and anyone looking into the place at the end of that time would never have recognised it for the lumbered-up building it had been beforehand. Joe had rigged a work-bench out of old boxes and planks, and on it Steve's oiled tools were laid out.

Jim had built a table, using two barrels and some more planks, and on this were set tin mugs and plates and food. Out at the back Joe had made a fire on the flat, grassy stretch between the rear of the old hangar and the edge of the track. Here the speedway formed the Byfleet banking as it went around in a huge curve, and the top of this banking—fringed by little fir trees—was almost as high as the roof of the hangar.

All the time the three cleared-up, cars were streaking past, the shattering echoes of their exhausts and the blare of their engines howling into the rickety building. The sound was music to Jim and Joe.

By the time they had eaten a meal it was getting dusk. Steve started to make the Ross-Eight ready for its first real trial spin in the morning; the boys helped him for a while, then went off on their own to look at the other racing camps which had been established on the track.

In the hangar at the end was a French racing team. Two British crews shared a near-by bungalow. By some sheds near the paddock the boys discovered some Germans working on their very low, fierce, white-painted machines. Their guttural tones, and the sight of a mechanic stolidly eating his way down the length of a fat red sausage, fascinated Joe.

In a line of garages beyond the track Jim found tremendous activity. The Ace team

was here, with some Italians and two other British racing camps. Mechanics were working by the light of acetylene flares and headlamps, or by high-powered electrics rigged in the garages.

They saw nothing of Lon Stargie, but they sighted Sniff Dix busy with a dismantled engine. He did not see them, however.

It was late when the two started back to their own little racing camp, and both were tremendously impressed.

"All these teams have got at least three cars in the race," Jim said. "And they look as though they mean business, too!"

"The Five-Hundred is a big race," Joe said. "It was all right to think about what our Ross'ud do, and to have dreams about it, but it looks a long sight different when you're here!"

"Still, what a joke if we lick 'em all!" and Jim laughed a little.

"Gosh, that'd be something!" Joe breathed, and they walked on in silence.

Steve now had the car all ready for a run as soon as the track was opened in the morning. The petrol tank was filled, and the engine was as fit as he could make it. He was studying the race regulations when the boys arrived.

Before he went to sleep that night, Jim also knew the regulations off almost by heart. He discovered that in this race a driver could carry a mechanic if he wished, and he asked Steve about it.

Steve said he wouldn't have either of the boys as his mechanic; he intended to ride the race alone.

His tone was curt. Jim wondered what was the matter with him. During the night he was roused by Steve moving about the hangar, apparently unable to sleep. After a while Jim guessed that his brother was anxious about the car.

The machine was relatively untried. For all he knew it might be a complete failure.

Early in the morning the Ross-Eight camp was astir. The lorry towed the racing car down to the paddock, and it was first out on the track when the course was opened for practice.

The two brothers and Joe were on tenterhooks as they made a final and careful examination of the racer. This was her first try-out. Was success to attend all their weeks and weeks of hard work? Or failure?

Success or failure—which will be it? You'll know next week, chums, when you read the following instalment of this exciting serial. Don't miss it on any account—it's the best yet!

DACCA, THE DEVIL DWARF!

(Continued from page 35.)

"Well done!" said Lee quietly.

"Wait a minute—I haven't finished yet," said his lordship. "Didn't you spot those great masses of overhanging rocks? We'll taxi a bit. Don't want those beggars to spot us from the sky, do we?"

He kept his engines running, and he took the machine on—almost into one of the gorges. Far overhead there was a towering confusion of rock. It jutted right out, almost like a roof. The great plane at last came to a final standstill under this natural canopy.

The boys were the first out, and they were impressed and awed by the loneliness and grandeur of their surroundings. In the deep twilight the place looked like a nightmare scene.

"What now, gov'nor?" asked Nipper breathlessly.

"For the time being, we must be thankful that we have landed safely," replied Nelson Lee. "It seems to me, young 'uns, that it's up to us to wage this battle against our enemies alone. It is for us to solve the great riddle, and to——"

"Alone, sir?" asked Handforth. "But can't we get any help?"

"Here! Help?" said Nelson Lee. "We are completely cut off from our own kind. It is impossible for us to trek back to Bushire over all this wild country. We are in Balghanistan—in the land of the enemy."

"Then we'll go forward, sir!" said Handforth eagerly. "We'll go onwards towards Balghan—the Hidden City! We'll uproot its secrets!"

"Well said, young 'un!" declared Lord Dorrimore. "That's the spirit, Lee! By glory! We're not going to admit defeat, are we? We'll make this place our headquarters—tons of grub aboard the machine—water, too. We're all right here. And we'll push on into this infernal country, and do the job entirely on our own!"

The little band of adventurers had taken on a big proposition. They had been forced down in the heart of Balghanistan. They were taking the fight right into the enemy's territory. Another clash with Dacca the Devil-Dwarf was close at hand!

THE END.

And what a clash it is, too! Dacca has good reason to hate Nelson Lee, and he'll go to any lengths to get his revenge. "The City of Hidden Dread!" is the title of next week's grand yarn—and it's the most thrilling in this series so far!

The Laughable Larks of TUBBY AND SLIM!

(Continued from page 5.)

expressions the behaviour of this stranger. "Pass, pass, pass!" hissed Tubby, snapping his fingers, but the lions simply looked the other way and pretended not to hear him. "Come out, you lazy blighters!" he stormed at them. "Come out!"

He leapt into the cage and collared one of the animals by the scruff of the neck and the tail, and pitched it outside. It stayed where it landed and began to wash its face, cat-like. Seizing the other two, Tubby hauled them out and jumped after them.

Then, after much coaxing, he finally got the three lions under the archway leading to the arena.

"Oh!"

The cultured yell of one of Slim's captors drew first attention to the animals, and everybody looked round to see what he was pointing to.

"Wow! Lions!"

"Help!"

One and all bolted for their lives, leaving Slim alone in the arena quite calm. He could see his brother in the archway, and guessed what had happened.

Tubby suddenly saw a way of turning matters to their advantage. Snatching up the ringmaster's megaphone, he placed it to his lips and yelled in stentorian tones:

"All right! It's all right, people! Leave it to me!" Then, turning to his brother, he stage-whispered: "Grab one of those lions, Slim; they won't bite."

Slim promptly grabbed one of the animals and held on to it while Tubby caught hold of the other two by the manes. Standing thus, the two boys faced the jumbled-up audience, who, on hearing Tubby's reassuring shout, had cooled down.

"Bravo, kids!" piped a voice, and the "kids" bowed their acknowledgments.

Panic had ceased and admiration had taken its place as, amidst the clapping of hands, Tubby and Slim led the lions back to their cage.

"Come here, my boys," cooed a gentle voice; and behold, the Mayor of Tumble-down was one of the audience. The brothers approached the great man, and he patted them both on the shoulder.

"Bravest thing I've seen this week," he said, and this wasn't extravagant praise, as it was now only Monday.

The mayor, however, made a speech to the crowd, and, fumbling about in his waistcoat pocket, brought out two tin medals. He fastened one on the breast of each of the boys, an action which brought forth thunders of applause from the onlookers.

The boys thanked him and left his gracious

presence. Outside the circus tent, they stopped and shrieked with merriment.

"I like circuses," opined Tubby.

"So do I!" agreed Slim.

(Another screamingly-funny Tubby and Slim story next week, claims.)

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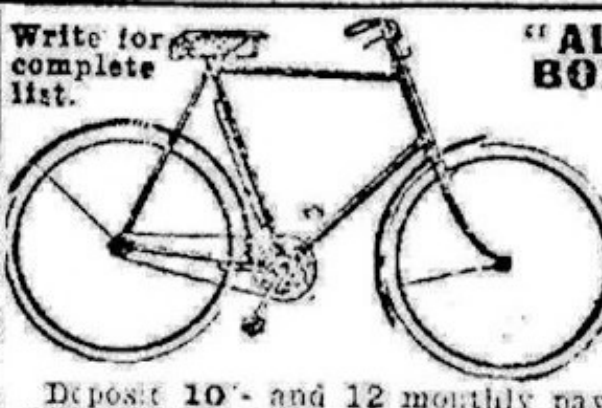
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