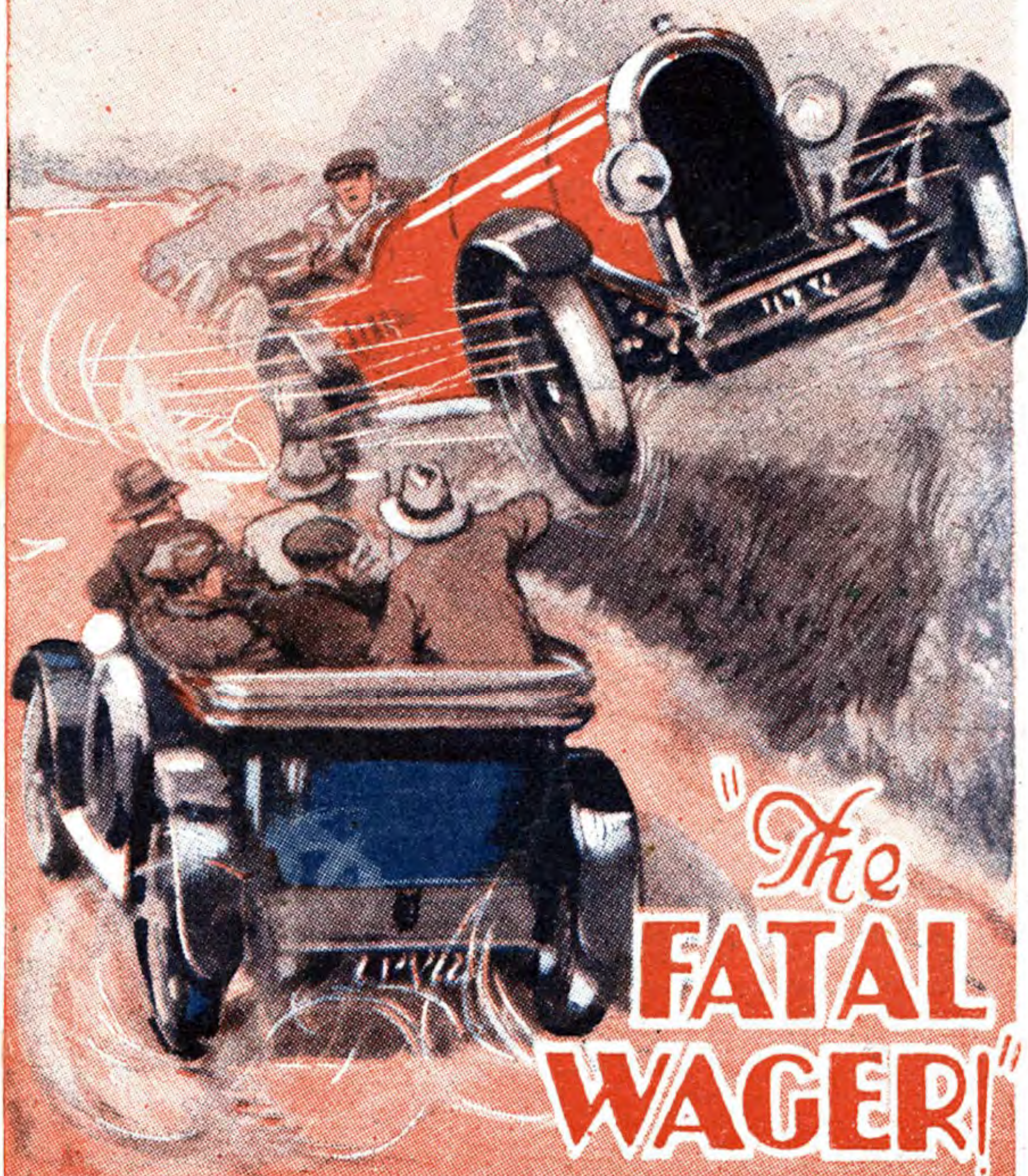


THE NELSON LEE

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"The
**FATAL
WAGER!**"

Detective thrills and exciting adventure in this grand long complete yarn featuring Nelson Lee, the famous detective, and his schoolboy assistants.

New Series No. 10.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 29th, 1937

The Laughable Larks of TUBBY AND SLIM!



The HUMAN STATUE!

Tubby doesn't like the look of Councillor Mugwump's statue—so he shows the populace how it SHOULD be posed!

The Night Mavraunders!

"HOOORAY!"
"Three cheers for Councillor Mugwump!"

The boys of Tumbledown Grammar School cheered themselves hoarse—with the exception of the Bootle brothers, Tubby and Slim. These two were glad enough of the half-holiday just given them by the Head, but they did not like the cause of it.

To-morrow would be a full day off instead of the usual half, and the reason was that Councillor Mugwump had presented the town with a statue of himself, and a big pot from London was coming down to unveil the thing.

"Blooming cheek, I call it!" said Benny Bootle, the stoutest of the brothers, generally known as Tubby to his friends. "I wonder what the colonel will say about it."

"He'll have a fit, I should think," remarked Bertie, the thin one. "He and old Mugwump love each other like poison, don't they?"

"Fancy the conceited ass giving a statue of himself to disfigure the park?" snorted Tubby indignantly.

"Cheer up, old man," grinned Slim. "We've got a holiday through it, and something will turn up to amuse us."

The expression of jollity, which was never long absent from Tubby's cheery face, returned as the boys went homewards.

Their guardian, Colonel Squint, met them on their entrance. A black frown decorated his purple face, and his bristly moustache stuck out belligerently. His two wards guessed what was exercising his mind. He had heard the news.

"Hallo, sir!" greeted the boys.

"D'you see this?" thundered the colonel, thumping a copy of the local paper which he held in his hand. "Insolence, sir, that's what it is—insolence!"

Councillor Mugwump had once defeated the little colonel in an election, and it had come to the ears of the vanquished that all had not been above board in the vote catching. Ever since then, the two men had been mortal enemies.

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Tubby brightly. "We'll do something to upset the blinking ceremony. How's that, Slim?"

"Well fielded, sonny. Top notch!" chorled Slim, with glee. "You leave it to us, sir. We'll think some thoughts which will do the trick."

"Thank you, my boys," growled their guardian gratefully. "I'd give a lot to turn the whole business into a fiasco."

"Fiascos are our speciality," was Tubby's parting remark, and the youngsters went to their den to think out some plan, however mad it might be, knowing that it would receive the sanction of the colonel if only it achieved its purpose and put the kybosh on the ceremony.

Late that evening, two figures could have been discerned leaving Colonel Squint's house, quietly, unostentatiously, but apparently with set plans in their minds.

Slim appeared to be almost as stout as his brother; this was due to the fact that some yards of linen was wrapped around his slender figure, and on top of the linen a coil of thin, strong rope. It was all concealed beneath his overcoat, this precaution being taken in case they ran into one of the night policemen. They did not wish to be mistaken for burglars.

Tubby's freight consisted of several lengths of cane and a strong, thin-bladed saw, and with this bundle stuffed up his back, he did not feel exactly comfortable.

The two boys headed for Tumbledown Park, in which the site for Councillor Mugwump's statue had been chosen. They reached it without mishap and, climbing over the railings, were soon inside. They now worked very speedily. Reaching the centre of the park, they removed their overcoats and relieved themselves of the odds and ends which had been carried under their respective coats.

A small space had been fenced off, and in the middle of this the offending statue reared its shrouded bulk. Tubby pulled off the enveloping sheet and revealed the statue, posing heroically on its plinth. Seizing the special saw, he climbed up and began cutting through the cement under the feet of the effigy. His brother, meanwhile, was engrossed in fixing up the canes and linen into the form of a gigantic kite.

"Wind's in the right direction," said Slim, with a smile of anticipation. "Everything is going according to plan, eh, Tubby?"

"Fine!" replied Tubby, making his last cut in the cement. "I'm finished. Is the balloon ready to go up?"

"Quite ready! Here's the rope—tie the knot tightly round the blighter's neck."

Quickly Tubby made a running noose and fastened it round the neck of the statue. Then he jumped down and assisted Slim to manipulate the man-lifting kite. Released from its moorings, the aerial contraption flew into the wind, nearly dragging the two lads with it. They let go in time and the kite went higher until there came a sudden strain and the rope attached to the statue became taut.

Cr-ra-aack!

The kite won the tug-of-war, and the statue of Councillor Mugwump soared ungracefully into the upper atmosphere. The boys watched it carried away in the strong breeze.

"End of part one!" chuckled the Bootle brothers, clapping each other on the back.

And in great spirits at the success of the first part of the proposed fiasco, they got out of the park and reached home safely and without discovery.

Mugwump's Misfortune!

NEXT morning all the town had turned out to see the unveiling ceremony performed in connection with the statue of himself so kindly presented to the people by Councillor Mugwump. To make the occasion more impressive, Lord Penniless had been prevailed upon—for a consideration—to take chief part in the proceedings.

Colonel Squint was amongst the crowd, as also was Slim, but no trace could be seen of his brother, Tubby.

The original of the statue, Councillor Mugwump himself, was much in evidence, smirking all over his dial and feeling very important. He was a vain man, and this performance was gratifying to him.

The mayor was there in full regalia, and last, but not least, Lord Penniless stood about polishing his monocle, whilst sundry Press photographers snapped him from forty-seven different positions.

At last all was ready, and with a fanfare of bugles by the local Boy Scouts, Lord Penniless approached the sheeted statue. He was to pull a cord, when the sheet would fall away and reveal the work of art to the admiring—or perhaps not—onlookers.

A slight hitch occurred when the string was tugged by the lordly hand, for the sheet didn't fall off as it ought to have done. Several of the photographers rubbed their eyes unbelievably as the statue appeared to rock slightly. However, Lord Penniless had another go, and this time put his weight into the pull. The cord snapped and the important gentleman went backwards, to rise again sheepishly with a nice patch of mud adorning the rear of his previously immaculate trousers.

His object had been achieved—the statue was unveiled. But what a frost!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Rasberry!"

The crowd swayed with mirth. Cries and shouts of laughter went up from the amused townsfolk, and Councillor Mugwump put a feeble hand to his forehead and wondered if the whole show was a nightmare.

The exposed statue looked more like a low comedian than a figure of traditional white sculpture. Dressed in long, baggy trousers, much patched with different coloured materials, a battered topper of concertina design and a nose of pillar-box redness, the get-up was sufficiently startling and unexpected to fluster the ironest of nerves. To cap it all, Slim pulled out a tin whistle, and to its thin strains of music the "statue" did a step dance on the plinth!

Perhaps it is needless to state that the substitution was our friend Tubby. He was thoroughly enjoying himself and clowning it

to the full. The onlookers were now in a state of helpless hilarity, and at each fresh antic of Tubby's, there were further roars of laughter.

Lord Penniless had discreetly retired to the background, and Councillor Mugwump was looking dazed and horrified. The mayor puffed out his bewhiskered cheeks and scratched his nose with a puzzled frown.

As for Colonel Squint, that dapper little soldier was having the time of his life at this ludicrous downfall of his enemy. It was rich. These little beggars of his wards had certainly been thorough in organising the fiasco. His usual good manners slightly deserted him, and as poor Mugwump turned a bewildered face in his direction, the colonel burst into a deep, booming guffaw.

"Hoh, hoh, hoh!"

This sound was like a red rag to a bull, and the councillor strode over to the colonel, fury raging in his eyes.

"What are you laughing at, you undersized little man?" snarled the councillor.

Colonel Squint sprang erect as if he had been shot. He was rather touchy about his size—or lack of it. Drawing off one of his yellow gloves, he gave Mugwump a smart slap in the face with it.

"Take that!" he snorted wildly. "You conceited son of a mangold wurzel. I challenge you to a duel. Now! At once!"

The little fire-eater drew up his umbrella in the manner of a fencer. Nothing loth, the councillor, eager for the opportunity of venting his spite on somebody, snatched an umbrella from one of the crowd and set to with energy. The combatants used their umbrellas more in the nature of broadswords than rapiers, and slashed and cut at each other with the fury of long pent-up emotions.

Slash! Bang! Biff! Wallop!

To and fro they stamped, cheered on by the spectators who were now thoroughly pleased with the morning's entertainment.

Tubby, seeing the diversion caused by the combat, slipped off his perch and tried to efface himself, his work now being accomplished. But P.-c. Coppem was out to earn medals and, pushing his way along, he collared Tubby before that youth had gone more than two paces. Joined by a brother officer, the two yanked the stout lad along, anxious to get away from the crowd in case any attempt at rescue was made.

The duel was still fiercely progressing, and the mayor thought it time to intervene. It was not seemly that one of the councillors should be mixed up in a common brawl.

Clash! Slosh!

The umbrellas were whizzing to and fro, and Mugwump tiptoed to make the hit of the morning. Raising his weapon in both hands, he made a mighty swipe at the colonel. The little soldier dodged it with agility, but the mayor stepped into the breach just as the blow fell. His worship stopped it—with his ear.

"Yowl!" he screeched, and his primitive instincts coming to the surface, he grabbed the colonel's umbrella and started belabouring Mugwump with all his strength.

Colonel Squint looked surprised at having his antagonist bagged before his eyes like this, but at this moment Slim dashed up to him and pulled his sleeve.

"They've pinched Tubby!" he stated excitedly.

"They've what?"

"Pinched Tubby! Nabbed him, collared him! You know, going to lock him up!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the soldier, straightening his tie and shaking his clothing into some sort of order. "I must go and bail him out."

"Bail him out!" cried Slim, as they hurried from the park. "But that won't stop him from going to prison if they cut up nasty about this."

"Good gracious!" again gasped the colonel, in horrified tones.

"If we can do something quickly," suggested Slim to his guardian, "they might not find out who it is. The police won't recognise him in that comedian's dress, and Tubby won't give himself away if he can help it."

They were within sight of the police station, and could just see Tubby being hiked inside by the two constables.

A music shop was open close by the police station, and this gave Slim an idea.

"Wait a minute," he panted to his guardian. "Give me some money; I'm going to buy a gramophone."

"My poor boy," said the colonel kindly. "This excitement has been too much for you. I feel myself to blame."

"It's all right," assured Slim. "I'm not barmy. Give me some money—quick."

With some notes in his hand, the boy dashed into the music shop and asked for a cheap portable gramophone. This was soon forthcoming, and he next wanted a record.

"You've got a descriptive record called the 'Battle of Bakerloo,'" he chattered to the assistant. "I want it, sharp, and a box of very loud needles."

He got them. Armed with his parcels, the boy raced out of the shop and nodded to his guardian to follow him.

"We're going to break into the back of the police station," announced the lad, and the colonel believed him. He would have believed his wards capable of anything after to-day's occurrences.

Round to the back of the lock-up they went. There was little risk of their being seen, as most of the townspeople were still in Tumbledown Park, and the police were no doubt there also, with the exception of Coppem & Co. within.

After peering carefully into the ground-floor window, Slim lifted the sash and climbed into the room. The colonel handed him the gramophone and record, and was then ordered to go round to the front and watch out for emergencies. Like a good soldier he went without question.

Slim acted with great swiftness. He crossed to the door and applied his eye to the keyhole. He was looking into the charge-room and could see Tubby still in

his grotesque make-up. Sergeant Squiffy was questioning him and the constables stood close by.

Satisfied that his brother was still unrecognised, Slim silently placed a chair under the handle, so that no entrance would be possible from the charge-room. Next, he wound up the gramophone and put the record in position. Then he placed the whole outfit by the door, and adjusting the very loud needle, he set the disk in motion. He was instantly rewarded.

so loud that the direction of the sound was lost. The policemen didn't dream of looking in the next room.

Sergeant Squiffy, who was taking down particulars of the arrest, sprang to his feet as the first bang of the tin-tray guns was heard.

"What on earth's that, Coppem?" he demanded of his subordinate.

The constable looked startled, but merely



Councillor Mugwump made a hefty swipe at Colonel Squint, missed, and caught his Worship the Mayor a hefty wallop on the ear.

Bang! Cr-aa-sssh! Rattle—rattle—boo—oomini!

The guns were firing—and it was a very loud needle.

Ta-tarara! Tum-tum-tum!

The bugles and drums were at it.

Slim peeped again into the charge-room, and then scooted to the window and slipped out. A tremendous booming, like the rattle of a thousand tin trays, issued from the hornless gramophone, and the thin youth grinned in his childlike manner.

"Some record!" he said, as he joined the colonel at the front of the building. "It must have been a terrible battle."

"'Pon my word!" muttered the colonel. "It almost sounds like the real thing."

Inside the charge-room it did seem like the real thing. It came so unexpectedly and was

shook his head. A roll of drums and the rattle of machine-guns was heard.

"Crumbs!" shouted the other constable. "It sounds as if there's a riot."

"Riot!" Squiffy sang out. "It's another war started, that's what it is! Come on, you two! We must investigate."

The three doubled out of the station and forgot all about Tubby, who followed close upon their heels. The police force raced towards the park, but Tubby found his way barred by the Colonel and Slim.

"There's a 'bus over the road," chuckled the colonel throatily. "Perhaps we'd better catch it!"

(Next week you'll meet three new chums in Conkey, Whacky and Bob—known as the **THREE TERRORS**. Prepare yourselves for plenty of laughs in this topping new feature.)

The FATAL



CHAPTER 1.

The Making of the Wager!

THE big two-seater sports car appeared as though from nowhere; it came swinging round the bend on the wrong side of the road at high speed, and William Napoleon Browne, at the wheel of his Morris-Oxford tourer, did a bit of quick thinking.

He acted a split second afterwards. It was impossible to cut between the oncoming sports car and the road bank, and in order to avoid a head-on collision he swerved acutely to the off-side of the road. The driver of the other car, with a yell of startled anger, applied his four-wheel brakes with

full force, and the powerful sports car leapt on to the grass border, rocked for a few yards, and came to a standstill with the radiator a mere foot from a gatepost.

"You infernal young fool!" roared the driver angrily, turning in his seat and glaring at Browne. "You might have killed the lot of us!"

Browne climbed out of his driving seat, as cool and as self-possessed as ever. His passengers were shaky. They tumbled out, talking excitedly. Stevens was one of them. The others were Willy Handforth, Juicy Lemon, and Chubby Heath. In a word, five leading lights of Nelson Lee's Detective Academy. The car, let it be mentioned, was not Browne's own. His own Morris-

—FEATURING NELSON LEE.

WAGER!

By

**ROBERT
W. COMRADE.**



Here's a unique mystery story with sustained thrills and unexpected situations and, still further, a totally unexpected climax!

Oxford saloon was in "dock" at the moment, and this tourer had been loaned to him while the other underwent repairs.

"Permit me to inform you, brother, that in all my experience of driving I have never before encountered a worse road hog than yourself," said Browne smoothly, as he approached the angry man in the sports two-seater. "I must point out that you were on the wrong side of the road, that you took the corner at a death-defying speed, and but for my agility in swerving——"

"Silence!" thundered the other. "The fault was entirely yours! Do you know who I am?"

"I confess that I am in no way interested in your identity," replied Browne. "I only know that your driving capabilities are negligible."

"You impertinent puppy!" snorted the other, red in the face with fury. "I am Sir George Bullton, and I'll have you know that I am a Justice of the Peace of this county."

Sir George Bullton was a big, choleric man, and although his present rage was quite unjustified—since his own bad driving had been responsible for the trouble—he placed the entire blame on Browne's shoulders. He found five pairs of eyes regarding him with intense dislike.

"The fact that you are a Justice of the Peace makes your offence all the more heinous, Brother George," said Browne smoothly. "In my humble way, I, too, am not unconnected with the law. My father happens to be no less a person than Mr. Justice Browne."

Sir George started.

"The judge?" he asked sharply.

"The same, Brother George," nodded Browne.

"How dare you call me 'Brother George,' young man?" demanded the baronet angrily. "Well, well! You can thank your lucky stars that there was no accident. In the circumstances, I'll say no more about it. But in future you'd better be more careful in your driving."

He pressed on the accelerator, revved the engine, and continued on his way, bumping and jolting for some yards until he was off the grass border. Undoubtedly, the revelation of Browne's identity had jarred him.

"A singularly unripe specimen," commented Browne, as the car vanished.

They walked back to their own car. This was a quiet stretch of highway in rural Essex, and the March evening was mild, but gusty. Browne and his companions had been sent on a special mission by Nelson Lee, and were returning triumphantly.

"Just a minute!" sang out Willy, who had not accompanied the others. "Come

and have a look at these car tracks, you chaps. A trained eye could pick this tyre out from a thousand."

Browne and his companions retraced their steps. There was one spot on the grass border where there was a patch of damp earth, and one of the car wheels had passed right across this, leaving a clearly defined track. The imprint was almost as perfect as a plaster cast.

"A Stars and Stripes tyre—practically new," commented Browne.

"Marvellous!" grinned Stevens. "Any ass could see that."

During the detective lessons at the academy the boys had been made familiar with the treads of every known car tyre. Such work as this was part of their regular training.

The Stars and Stripes tyre was a well-known American brand—although it had not been long on the British market. The tread was distinctive because it consisted of alternative squares of stars and stripes.

"But there's nothing to distinguish this particular tyre from any other of the same make," said Chubby Heath, staring. "As a clue, it wouldn't be worth a red cent."

"You always were dull, Chubby!" said Willy tartly. "What about these characteristic little touches which stamp this tyre with an individuality?"

They all bent down closer, and Willy explained.

"See this patch of stars?" he said. "Look at the end star on the off-side—two of the points gone. And look at the middle stripe, a little further along—there's a diagonal cut across it. And just here, between the next patch of stars and stripes, there's a metal stud of some kind embedded in the tyre. The impression is perfectly clear."

"A stud from a golf-shoe, perhaps," remarked Browne. "Or more likely an ordinary boot-stud from a workman's foot-gear. Well done, Brother William! As you say, these little individualistic touches give this tyre a personality. The tread may be commonplace, but there can certainly be no other Stars and Stripes tyre with these exact characteristics."

"And where does this lead us to?" asked Stevens politely.

"Nowhere," replied Willy. "But it's always interesting to make a note of these things. I don't suppose we shall ever see this track again."

As events were to turn out, Willy was quite wrong!

SIR GEORGE BULLTON, his anger gone, strode boisterously into the big, stately library at Halford Towers, the noble pile which was owned by the Marquis of Halford. He found three men seated round the fire, and there was a lively discussion afoot.

"Come in, George—help yourself to a cocktail," said Lord Halford genially. "Good man! You're earlier than I expected. Time for a cigar before dinner."

"Thanks," said Sir George, who was as much at home in his neighbour's house as in his own. The Bullton estates were only seven miles away, and Sir George was a frequent visitor at the home of his bachelor friend.

"You know my nephew, don't you?" went on the marquis. "This other youngster is Dick Sylvester—one of Tony's former Oxford friends. Tony was just telling us about a plot for his next novel. Go on, Tony—let's hear the rest."

Sir George shook hands with Tony Westerham, the tall, alert, eager-faced young man who was sitting on the arm of an easy-chair. Sir George and Tony were old friends. Dick Sylvester, the other young man, was a newcomer.

"Don't take any notice of my uncle, Sir George," grinned Tony. "He's only trying to chip me about my new plot. A fat lot he knows about story construction! If I took any tips from him my publishers would soon give me the bird."

Sir George chuckled as he lit his cigar.

"Not much fear of you getting the bird, I fancy," he said dryly. "You're so busy writing best-sellers that we scarcely see you down here nowadays."

"Best-sellers!" repeated Tony, with a grimace. "Is that another of my uncle's jokes? I have had some moderate success. I'll admit, but I'm not in the best-seller class yet—and it is as much as I can do to keep afloat."

"Well, you can always count on me, Tony, you know," said Lord Halford.

"Decent of you, uncle, but I want to hoe my own row," replied the young novelist. "And this new yarn of mine, I think, will knock 'em cold. If it's a success, I'll soon have plenty of money."

"Independent young cub," growled Sir George, as he settled himself back in one of the easy-chairs. "He knows deucedly well that he's coming into all your money, Halford. But there! Most youngsters are independent nowadays. Well, let's hear all about this plot of yours, Tony."

"It really revolves on the question of circumstantial evidence," said Tony, lighting a cigarette. "The hero of my story is a private detective at enmity with the Yard. He wants to prove that the Yard's methods are wrong—especially in regard to circumstantial evidence. So he fakes up a murder, with himself as the murderer, arranging with a man to pretend to be killed."

"And what about the body?" asked his lordship.

"Naturally, there'll be no body—and that's the whole point," replied Tony. "Every scrap of evidence will point to this private detective as being the murderer, and his whole object in doing it is to get the laugh over the Yard. He maintains that he'll be convicted without the body being found."

"And I suppose the murdered man turns up and everybody lives happily ever afterwards?" asked Sir George dubiously. "I don't think it would work, Tony. In the

first place, the police couldn't convince any jury of the man's guilt unless the body was found. That sort of thing isn't done. Ask any criminologist."

"It's done in certain circumstances," persisted Tony. "I could quote several cases of men being hanged for murder—in this country, too—and no body has ever been found. But there's more in my plot than you know of yet. There are some crooks working in the background."

"I was wondering when we should come to the crooks," smiled his uncle.

"They're keen on getting rid of this detective, so they kidnap the supposedly murdered man, and keep him a prisoner," continued Tony. "Can't you see the dramatic possibilities? When the hero wants his man to turn up, he's vanished! Not only that, but the poor chap will be found guilty, condemned, and the kidnapped man doesn't escape until the morning of the execution. Then there'll be a wild motor ride, with the hero being saved just as the executioner is about to operate the drop."

"Pretty good," commented Dick, with a chuckle.

"Good in its way—but you're taking some chances, my boy," said Lord Halford, shaking his head. "I'll admit the dramatic possibilities, and I dare say the plot will make a good yarn, but you're not going to convince me that the police would obtain a conviction against your hero. I'll go as far as to say that they wouldn't even hold him."

"You mean that they wouldn't arrest him for the crime?"

"Of course they wouldn't," replied his uncle. "Without the evidence of the body, the rest would be purely circumstantial, and so palpable that they'd guess it was faked."

"Not they," said Tony. "I maintain that the official police would regard that evidence with joy, and be completely sucked in. That's the whole point I shall attempt to prove—that the police are too ready to accept the obvious. They'll be quite content to take the surface evidence at its face value."

"You're wrong," said Lord Halford. "Absolutely wrong. The police may make blunders—they do—but they wouldn't be such mugs as that. No, Tony, I can't agree with you. You'd better think of another plot. The weakest point about the whole thing is that the body of the murdered man will not be found."

"The weakest point!" repeated Tony indignantly. "But, man alive, that's the strongest point! That's the point I'm aiming for all the time. I say that the police *will* make an arrest, and that they'll build up a case against their prisoner, too, on the circumstantial evidence alone."

"Nonsense," said his uncle.

"Will you bet on it?" demanded Tony, a sudden gleam entering his eyes.

"How can I bet on a thing like that?" smiled the marquis, amused by his nephew's excitement. "Cool down, Tony! There's no need to—"

"I'll wager you a hundred pounds that the police *would* do exactly as I have outlined," interrupted Tony tensely. "And you, uncle, will be the murdered man."

"I?" ejaculated Lord Halford, startled.

"I'll murder you to-morrow night!"

"You crazy young idiot——"

"Not really, of course," grinned Tony. "Look here, uncle, didn't you tell me that you're going to Bath on Friday for a course of the waters? Your gout is troubling you a bit, and——"

"Gout be hanged!" snapped Lord Halford. "What do you mean—gout? I've never had gout in my life! But Dr. Avery tells me that nothing will relieve my rheumatism except a fortnight at Bath. Not that I can see——"

"You've never been to Bath before—nobody knows you there," said Tony. "Look here, I'm as keen as mustard on proving this point. You've always been a sportsman, uncle, and you're a bachelor. Nobody will be worried if there's any dramatic shock. Why shouldn't we really fake up this supposed murder?"

"But, my dear boy, it's unthinkable," protested Lord Halford.

"Infernally silly!" growled Sir George.

"It could be worked as easily as pie," declared Tony, now full of enthusiasm. "And with no inconvenience to yourself, uncle. Supposing I come here late to-morrow night, and have an unholy row with you? We'll let it rip—we'll let all the servants hear. That's the first bit of evidence."

"Good heavens! You can't seriously mean——"

"Listen!" urged Tony. "After that row, I'll go—storming out of the place and slamming the door. When everybody's asleep—about one o'clock in the morning—I'll come back and fake up enough evidence to hang me a dozen times! This room in disorder—bloodstains everywhere—tracks across the garden to the mere. By Jove! That's a brainwave, too! Isn't the mere supposed to be bottomless?"

"In one part, yes," admitted Lord Halford. "But hold on, my boy! Not so fast! You talk glibly about bloodstains. Are you suggesting that you should really knock me on the head, or something equally unpleasant?"

Tony grinned.

"Bloodstains are easily faked," he replied. "As for the blood, I've always got plenty on tap. Dick knows that—don't you, Dick?"

"It was a standing joke at Oxford," agreed Dick Sylvester, with a chuckle. "You couldn't enter the ring for a friendly sparring bout without getting a nose-bleeder inside two minutes. But I didn't know that you were the same now."

"Just the same," said Tony. "I can supply enough blood to fool the police up to their eyes. A spanner from my car—one or two of your grey hairs, uncle, stuck to the bloodstained end of it. Footprints to the mere—everything! I tell you, the thing would work like a dream. And I'll wager

you a hundred pounds that I'd be arrested within six hours, and charged with murder."

Lord Halford was flushed. Seldom, indeed, could he resist a wager.

"You arrogant young rascal, I've a good mind to take you on," he said gruffly. "It'll prove how wrong you are—and I know well enough that you can't afford to lose a hundred pounds. I'd take your money even if you had to have the brokers in!"

"You'll never take it—I'll take yours," said Tony, with serene confidence. "Be a sport, uncle! What's to-day? Wednesday. Well, you can go to Bath on Friday just the same."

"But I've written to the Spa authorities and made all arrangements, and I've reserved rooms at the hotel——"

"That doesn't matter," broke in Tony. "You can't keep your appointments if you're murdered, can you? All you've got to do is to wire on Friday morning, using an assumed name, and go as somebody else—and to a different hotel. Who's to know? You can take your course of dirty mud baths exactly the same, and have a regular bit of fun reading the newspapers."

Lord Halford stroked his chin.

"Upon my word, it sounds easy," he admitted. "What do you say, George?"

"I say that if you agree, you're mad," retorted the baronet. "All the same, I'll help you, if you like. You've done a few mad things in your time, Halford, and you and Tony are a pair."

"That's settled then!" said his lordship grimly. "I'll take you on, Tony."

"Good man!" ejaculated Tony delightedly. "But I don't think we need any help from Sir George. The fewer complications, the better."

"Complications be hanged!" said Sir George. "How do you suppose your uncle is going to get to Bath—when he's supposed to be at the bottom of the mere? I'll have my car waiting along the road, outside the park gates, in the middle of the night. How's that, Halford? I'll motor you up to Paddington, so that you can catch the first train to Bath."

"Splendid," said his lordship. "And if Tony's right, he'll be arrested before I get to Bath. Gad, it'll serve him right if he spends a week in the cells."

"Just what I'm after," grinned Tony. "As a novelist, there's nothing I like better than first-hand experience—especially when I'm paid a hundred pounds for doing it."

"You'll get neither the experience nor the hundred pounds," said his uncle, with a snort. "And let me tell you this—I'm only staying at Bath for a fortnight. After then, I'm coming home. I don't mind helping you in this game as long as it doesn't interfere with any of my own plans. The Spa treatment will serve me just as well under an assumed name as it will under my own. You've got a fortnight, Tony—but no longer. If you haven't been arrested by then, you'll never be arrested at all, because I shall come back from the dead."

And so the wager was made—and the details were eagerly discussed.

CHAPTER 2.

Collecting the Clues!

NELSON LEE, the famous criminologist, lifted the receiver of his private telephone and pressed a button.

"Yes, sir?" came a prompt voice.

"I want you to send Nipper and Browne and Handforth minor to me at once," said Nelson Lee.

"O.K., Chief!"

Nelson Lee replaced the receiver and rose to his feet. The sunshine of the March morning was beaming through the windows of his famous consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road. A tap sounded on the door, and the trio appeared, having passed through the private communicating passage which led from the Detective Academy to Lee's own chambers.

"Good-morning, guv'nor!" said Nipper briskly. "I say, have you heard the latest about St. Frank's? The school is being rebuilt——"

"Yes, I have heard, boys," replied Lee, smiling. "Building operations are well in hand, and it will not be very long before the school is ready for occupation again. But forget that for now. Are you boys ready for work?"

"Rather, sir!" they chorused.

"Then get your coats on, and be ready within two minutes," said Lee. "We're going down into Essex."

"Important case, sir?" asked Willy eagerly.

"It looks like murder," replied Lee.

FIVE minutes later the great detective was at the wheel of his own car, and the latter was threading its way through the traffic of Gray's Inn Road. Nipper sat in front with Lee, and Browne and Willy were in the rear. They were agog with inward excitement; even the cool William Napoleon Browne was looking slightly flushed. This was an honour indeed! He and Nipper and Willy had been selected to assist their Chief in this particular case.

Lee drove out of London by way of Essex Road, Stamford Hill, and Tottenham. He said nothing to his three assistants until the car was speeding along the Southend arterial road. At this early hour of the morning there was very little traffic.

"Well, young 'uns, there's nothing much I can tell you," said Lee, at length. "I had an urgent telephone call from Poole, the butler at Halford Towers, just beyond Braintree."

"Why, we were motoring through that part of the country only on Wednesday, sir," said Willy.

"Halford Towers is the country residence of the Marquis of Halford," continued Lee. "Poole fears that his master has been murdered."



"Doesn't he know, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I gather that the body has not yet been found, although there is little or no hope that the marquis can still be alive," replied Lee. "I'm awfully sorry to hear it, because Lord Halford was a delightful man. I once recovered a valuable coin collection of his. That was some years ago, but Poole evidently remembers me, and I have no doubt that is why he rang me up."

They left the arterial road at Gallows Corner, near Romford, and before long they had left Brentwood behind. Then came Chelmsford and the somewhat lonely stretch between that town and Braintree. Just beyond Little Waltham, Leo observed another car in front. There was something familiar about the broad-shouldered man who was sitting next to the driver. Nelson Lee smiled and cheerily saluted as he overtook the other car.

"Morning, Mr. Lennard!" yelled Nipper, grinning.

Gravely Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Browne watched as the body of the murdered man was brought up from the mere in which it had been discovered.

"Well, I'm hanged!" came a roar from the broad-shouldered man.

"The Yard is soon on the job," remarked Lee. "This case must be a big one, for Lennard is an important man."

The celebrated private investigator and Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, were old friends. Lennard was a hard-headed man, with plenty of confidence in his own abilities; but he was never displeased to have Lee working with him. He had a very high regard for Lee's capabilities.

After passing Braintree, it was necessary to drive up a narrow little country lane for a mile or so, and then Halford Towers came

within sight. It was a fine old mansion, surrounded by a considerable stretch of parkland. As Lee's car drew up on the terrace, outside the front door, a police-inspector emerged, accompanied by an elderly, bent-shouldered man.

"It's Mr. Lee, sir!" said the elderly man, with eagerness in his voice. "Oh, I'm glad you've come, Mr. Lee!"

Before Nelson Lee could reply, the police-inspector pushed himself forward. If Poole was pleased, the police-inspector wasn't. He favoured Lee with a decidedly cold glance.

"I'm afraid there's nothing to interest you in this case, Mr. Lee," he said bluntly. "I was expecting Chief Inspector Lennard, from Scotland Yard——"

"Well, here he is," said Lee, with a smile.

Lennard's car came speeding up the drive, and almost before it was stopped the Yard man was out.

"So you thought you'd beat me to it, did you?" he said, with a chuckle. "Thundering pleased to see you here, Lee. Brought some of the menagerie, too, I notice."

The police-inspector saluted.

"I'm Inspector Davids, sir," he said. "Nothing has been disturbed."

"Good!" nodded Lennard. "Found the body yet?"

"No, sir."

"Well, before we make any search we'll hear a few details," said the Yard man briskly. "This gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, as you probably know, and I wish him to have every facility."

"And these—er—young gentlemen, sir?" asked the police officer, eyeing Browne and Nipper and Willy with some disfavour.

"The same applies to them," replied Lennard. "They're Mr. Lee's cubs—and one of these days they'll be attached to Scotland Yard, and don't you forget it! Mr. Lee is training them in the way they should go."

The police-inspector grunted; apparently he was not in favour of these "new-fangled notions," as he would probably have called them.

"Well, let's get inside," said Lennard. "You're Poole, the butler, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I am Poole," said the bent-shouldered old man.

He led the way through the spacious hall into a comfortable morning-room. Lennard set his hat down, removed his overcoat, and prepared for business.

"Now, tell me just what happened," he said, looking at Poole. "Who was the first one to find out that anything was wrong?"

"I was, sir."

"When was this?"

"At seven o'clock this morning, sir," said Poole. "I went into the library, as usual, to pull up the blinds and open the French windows. I always do that every morning, sir, just before the maid comes in to dust."

"Just a minute," said Lennard. "Lord Halford, I understand, is—or was—a bachelor?"

"Yes, sir."

"No relatives at all?"

"Not living at the Towers, sir."

"Have any of his relatives been informed of this business?"

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Poole. "There's only Mr. Tony. I tried to 'phone, but couldn't get through. So I wired."

"Mr. Tony, eh?" said Lennard. "Who's he?"

"His lordship's nephew, sir—Mr. Anthony Westerham."

"Nephew, eh?" said Lennard keenly. "Then if Lord Halford is a bachelor, this Mr. Westerham is the heir? Comes into the title and estates?"

Poole looked positively frightened.

"You mustn't think anything like that, sir!" he panted. "Mr. Tony is one of the best young gentlemen living——"

"Never mind that," broke in the Yard man. "If your master is dead, Mr. Westerham now becomes the Marquis of Halford."

"Yes, sir," admitted the butler shakily.

Lennard made a few notes.

"Now, about this morning. You say you went into the library at seven o'clock, as usual. What did you find to cause you to communicate with the police?"

"If you come to the library, sir, I'll show you," replied Poole. "Everything is in disorder. There are bloodstains, and—and there's a heavy spanner that seems to have been used as a weapon."

"Did you touch it?" asked Lennard sharply.

"No, sir."

"That was sensible of you. Go on."

"The French windows were open, sir, and when I looked outside I saw footprints leading down the gravel path—and more bloodstains, sir."

"What did you do when you saw all this?"

"I was frightened, sir—for it seemed to me that something terrible had happened," replied Poole. "I thought of the master, and ran indoors and went upstairs. I knocked on his bed-room door, but couldn't get any answer."

"So you went in?"

"Yes, sir. The master wasn't there—and the bed hadn't been slept in."

"Do you know what time Lord Halford retired last night?"

"No, sir."

"Why don't you know?"

"He told me he was going to sit up late," replied Poole. "I went to him at eleven o'clock, asked him if he required anything further, and he told me to go to bed. He said that he would lock up and put the hall lights out."

"You heard nothing unusual during the night?"

"No, sir."

"Nor any of the other servants?"

"No, sir."

"I've questioned them," put in Inspector Davids. "They all seemed to know nothing; they're as frightened as a pack of rabbits. There's a cook and three maids and a boot-boy."

"What about a housekeeper?"

"Mrs. Brent left yesterday, sir, owing to her rheumatics," said the butler. "A new housekeeper is coming in to-day—not that she'll be needed now, by the look of things."

Nelson Lee was purposely keeping in the background; he preferred to watch and listen. He was gaining all the information he needed, and he was better able to observe. Browne and Nipper, and Willy kept back, too, and they were eagerly interested.

"Well, we'll have a look at the library," said Lennard abruptly.

They all went across the hall, and Poole threw open a great oaken door and stood aside.

"Hallo—hallo!" ejaculated Lennard, as soon as he got over the threshold. "Look at these footprints!"

"There was a shower last night, sir," put

footprints very clearly defined, but he was generous enough to supply us with a well-nigh perfect set of fingerprints, too."

"Fingerprints?" ejaculated Lennard. "Where?"

Lee pointed. The polished mahogany desk was smeared at one corner, presumably where somebody had leaned heavily against it. Lennard bent down and whistled softly.

"This is a smear of blood," he said tensely. "And, as you say, Lee, there's a perfect set of fingerprints impressed here. Of course, they might be Lord Halford's. The photographers will be down soon, and we'll make a record of these."

"The fellow must have worn tennis-shoes, by the look of it," remarked Inspector Davids. "No mistaking those ribbed impressions."

Lennard nodded.

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in Inspector Davids; "and most of the ground outside is clayey. Somebody was in here last night in addition to Lord Halford, and there must have been a pretty violent struggle."

"So it seems," nodded Lennard grimly.

The library was in disorder. The hearth-rug was turned up and in a heap; several chairs were overturned, and the heavy desk was askew, many of the papers having been scattered over the floor. A high pedestal was lying on its side, with a flower vase smashed to fragments near by, the flowers being strewn about in disorder. The footprints that were so noticeable were mostly in evidence near the French windows, which were standing wide open.

"Well, what do you make of it all, Lee?" asked Lennard.

"I would rather not venture an opinion just at present," replied Lee slowly. "I will only say that the intruder was singularly careless. Not only does he leave us his

"Did Lord Halford ever wear shoes of that kind?" he asked, glancing at the butler.

"No, sir—never."

"Do you know of anyone who does—anyone who is familiar here?"

"I—I don't think so, sir," muttered the butler, becoming agitated.

"You don't think so?" repeated Lennard sharply. "I'll talk to you later, Poole."

"These footprints are all down the gravel path—right down to the mere," put in Inspector Davids. "We shall find the body there, as sure as fate."

"You've got your men ready, I suppose?" asked Lennard, looking at the local inspector.

"Yes, sir; but we haven't started any dragging operations yet," replied Davids. "I thought I'd better wait until you came."

Willy tugged at Nelson Lee's sleeve.

"These footprints weren't made with tennis shoes, Chief," he whispered.

"What's that?" demanded Davids, over-hearing the words.

"The youngster is quite right, inspector," said Lee mildly. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, these impressions were made by golf shoes—with heavily-ribbed rubber soles. A new pair, too."

The local inspector looked rather crest-fallen.

"Well, I knew they were rubber shoes of some sort," he replied. "Not that I can see it's a matter of any importance."

Lennard was bending down and examining the heavy spanner which was lying near the hearthrug. He went on his knees and looked more closely.

"This is ugly," he commented. "Come and have a look at this, Lee. More fingerprints—and the end of this spanner is thickly bloodstained."

Nelson Lee bent down, too, and the others watched eagerly.

"Lord Halford's hair was grey?" asked Lee suddenly.

"Very grey, sir," replied Poole.

"This looks very bad, then," said Nelson Lee. "Do you see the grey hairs sticking to this spanner, Lennard? Quite a number of them. All the evidence indicates that there was a violent quarrel, and that Lord Halford was struck down with this spanner."

"And then dragged to the mere, eh?" said Lennard, nodding. "What I can't understand is how a quarrel of this sort could take place, and nobody in the house should hear it." He looked closely and searchingly at Poole. "You're quite sure you heard no quarrel in the night?" he asked. "No disturbance—no unusual sounds?"

"We heard nothing, sir—nothing," said the butler. "Oh, I'm sure the poor master is dead! And it's just as much a mystery to us as it is to you!"

Nelson Lee picked up something from behind one of the chairs.

"Do you know who this scarf belongs to, Poole?" he asked quietly.

The butler spun round, his eyes starting out of his head, his jaw agape.

"Scarf, sir?" he whispered huskily. "I—I think it's one of the master's."

Lennard's face became grim.

"Look here, Poole," he said in a kindly, but determined, voice. "It won't pay you to keep anything back. You know perfectly well that this scarf was never the property of Lord Halford. Come along—out with it! You needn't think that you can play about with me! You know who this scarf belongs to, don't you?"

"I—I— No, sir!" said Poole, and a fierce, defiant look came into his eyes.

"That's a lie!" snapped Lennard. "You're keeping something back, Poole. Your whole manner is strange. What is it? What are you keeping back?"

"I'm keeping nothing back, sir," said Poole hoarsely. "I don't know who murdered the poor master—any more than you do!"

"But you know who this scarf belongs to, eh?" said Lennard. "Hallo! What's this tab?"

"There are some initials on it, Lennard," said Nelson Lee. "The initials 'A.W.'"

"'A.W.'?" repeated the chief inspector.

"They fit the name of Anthony Westerham," said Lee.

"No, no!" shouted Poole wildly. "I won't have it! Master Tony never did this! It's a lie—a lie! I know Master Tony—I've known him since he was a baby!"

Lennard took the old man by the shoulder.

"Come, come," he said sternly. "Young Westerham was here recently, wasn't he? Tell the truth, Poole! When was young Westerham here last? It won't do you any good to hold anything back; there are plenty of sources from which I can get this information. Pull yourself together, Poole. Was young Westerham here yesterday—last night?"

The old man wrung his hands.

"It's not fair!" he complained. "It's not fair to accuse Mr. Tony! That quarrel he had with his uncle——"

He broke off, a frightened look coming into his eyes.

"Quarrel?" rapped out Lennard. "Oh-ho! Now we're getting somewhere! So the young man was here last night, was he—and he had a quarrel with Lord Halford!"

CHAPTER 3.

Closing the Net!

POOLE was shaking as though with the ague.

"Come on, Poole, you can trust me, can't you?" asked Nelson Lee gently. "If Mr. Tony is innocent, there is nothing for you to fear. He was here last night, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Poole.

"He was wearing a plus-four suit?"

"Yes, sir," said Poole, wincing. "How did you know?"

"A man in golf shoes usually wears a plus-four suit," replied Lee dryly. "He brought this scarf with him, too, didn't he?"

"Master Tony was here last night—but he didn't kill the master!" said Poole defiantly. "He couldn't do such a thing—it isn't in him!"

"We're not interested in your opinions, Poole," said Lennard. "We're dealing with facts. And it's a fact that Mr. Westerham was here last night. You spoke of a quarrel. Let's have the full truth."

"I don't think it was much, sir——"

"Never mind what you think," interrupted Lennard. "When did Mr. Westerham come—at what hour?"

"It was late, sir—about nine o'clock."

"How did he come—by train?"

"He came in his car, sir."

"Was he looking the same as usual?"

"A bit flushed, sir, and excited."

"And this quarrel? When did it take place?"

"Soon after Mr. Tony went into the library," replied Poole. "I heard their

voices raised, and I was surprised. I've never known the master to quarrel with Mr. Tony before. They've always been such friends—more like father and son."

"What did you do?"

"I came out into the hall, and all the servants were there, too," replied Poole, speaking more easily now, that this revelation was inevitable. "I—I thought of going into the library, but I didn't care to."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing of importance, sir."

"You heard something, then?"

"The master and Mr. Tony were shouting at one another," replied Poole reluctantly. "I heard Mr. Tony saying something about money, and he was calling the master mean."

"Money!" said Lennard, with a glance at Lee. "He came here to get money. Do you know if he went away with it?"

"I—I don't think he did, sir. He suddenly flung the library door open, and shouted that he'd never ask his uncle for another penny. Then—then he stormed down the hall, flung open the front door, and slammed it after him."

"Did he say anything else, Poole?" asked Lee, looking hard at the old man.

"Anything—else, sir?"

"Didn't he utter any threats against your master?"

"No, sir—no! I—I mean—"

"Where are the maidservants?" demanded Lennard abruptly. "Inspector Davids, you might go round and round them up, will you? If Poole is so reluctant to speak, these girls might—"

"I—I'll tell you everything, sir!" broke in Poole wretchedly. "Mr. Tony *did* threaten the master. He

—he said that he'd come back later, and that if the master laid hands on him again he'd finish him!"

"Oh, did he!" retorted Lennard. "And what did Lord Halford say to that?"

"The master shouted that if Mr. Tony came back he'd horsewhip him—and Mr. Tony replied that when he came back he'd bring something with him to make the master see reason."

Lennard's eyes turned upon the spanner.

"He brought it!" he said grimly.

THE other servants were questioned—and their evidence corroborated Poole's. They were less reluctant to speak than the old butler. The full story of the quarrel came out. Evidently, it had been a very violent affair, with Tony uttering all manner of wild threats against his uncle.

Nothing, apparently, had been said by Lord Halford to Poole or any of the others after Tony had gone. He had calmed down, and he had remained in the library after the rest of the household had gone to bed. Poole and the other servants slept, it seemed, in a far wing, well out of earshot of the

library. It was quite natural that they should have heard nothing unusual during the night.

"Afraid you're wasting your time here, Lee," said Lennard, after a while. "This case is A.B.C. A quarrel between nephew and uncle over money—wild words. Nephew comes back later on, after the servants are in bed. Another quarrel—more wild words—and then perhaps a hurriedly-struck blow. The rest is obvious."

"Perhaps it is too obvious," said Lee dryly.

Lennard stared.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "It's just a case of two and two making four."

"Don't be so sure, old man," said Nelson Lee. "Aren't you making two and two into a dozen? Bloodstains—footprints—fingerprints—a scarf with an initialled tab. This young fellow, Tony Westerham, must have been an arrant fool."

"But the crime wasn't premeditated," argued Lennard. "Obviously, it was done on the spur of the moment."

"How do you make that out? Wasn't there an earlier quarrel?"

"Well, yes—but I don't suppose young Westerham meant to kill his uncle when he came back," argued Lennard. "The quarrel was resumed—and it became hotter. As I said, a violent blow, and it was all over."

"What are you going to do?" asked Lee.

"I am going straight to the 'phone—and if a warrant isn't sworn out for the arrest of Mr. Anthony Westerham, you can call me a Dutchman."

"But there's no direct evidence of murder."

"No evidence? What do you call all that shambles in the library?"

"I mean, you haven't found the body yet."

"We shall find it—and within the hour," declared Lennard. "Davids and his men are getting to work with their drags at once."

He went off to the telephone, and Nelson Lee returned to the library. He picked his way carefully across to the French windows; Browne and Willy were just outside. Nipper had gone down to the mere.

"Browne and I have been having a talk, sir," said Willy. "We've been trying to put ourselves in the place of the murderer. Supposing we had committed this crime? Should we be likely to drag the body out and throw it in the lake?"

"It is one way of getting rid of it, Willy," said Lee.

"Of course, sir—but a murderer would only want to get rid of a body in that way if he had decided to put the police off the scent. This fellow has done everything he can to indicate his movements."

"He was either very careless—or highly agitated, eh?"



"It looks squiffy to me, sir," said Willy, shaking his head. "It's all very well for Mr. Lennard to be so cocksure, but I believe there's more in this case than meets the eye."

"That's the spirit, young 'un," said Lee approvingly. "We have only just started the investigation. If we are diligent, perhaps we shall come across some additional evidence—evidence which will throw a completely new light on the whole affair. So far, everything is too simple. A murder might be committed during the heat of a quarrel; but after the fatal blow had been struck there would be a reaction. The murderer would do everything in his power to cover up his tracks."

"And these tracks lead right to the mere—showing us exactly where the body is to be found," commented Browne. "I am beginning to wonder, Chief, if the body is really there."

"The chances are that it isn't," replied Nelson Lee promptly. "I may be wrong, but it seems to me that this plain track leading to the mere is a kind of red herring drawn across the trail—to confuse us."

They walked slowly through the gardens. There was a wide gravel path leading from the rear terrace towards the lower part of the gardens. There were lawns on either side, looking gay and fresh with all the spring flowers in full blossom. And on this wide gravel path there were many traces of the curiously distinctive footprints. There were other signs, too. The gravel had been dragged and scraped, as though some heavy object had been dragged along. At the lower part of the grounds there was a bigish lake, or mere, three of its banks being thickly overhung with trees. The bank on this side, however, was more or less open. Nipper came striding up.

"I think it will pay us, boys, to make a thorough examination of the grounds," said Nelson Lee. "Nipper, you go off to the left—Browne, you take the right. Willy, you had better have a close look at all the flower-beds. If you find anything of interest, come and report to me."

"O.K., Chief!" chorused the trio.

The chief inspector came striding down from the house as the "cubs" moved off to their duties.

"Told you so," said the chief inspector, in a satisfied voice. "I reported the whole thing to the assistant commissioner, and he's getting a warrant sworn out at once. We're not actually arresting Westerham for murder, but we're going to hold him until we've made further inquiries."

"You think you'll catch him, then?" asked Lee.

"Well, I don't know," said the Yard man, frowning. "If the fellow has any sense at all, he'll be well away by now. But he won't go far. All the ports have been warned, and he'll be a smart man if he gets through the net."

THREE Scotland Yard detectives mounted the stairs of a big block of chambers in Dover Street. Tony Westerham's flat was on the third floor.

"Be ready for a bit of trouble," said Detective-inspector Harrison, as he and his companions paused outside the door. "The fellow may put up a fight."

"If he's at home—which I doubt," said one of the others.

The inspector pressed the bell. But although he thought he heard the sound of a door being cautiously closed within the flat, there was no reply to the ring.

"I believe the blighter's here!" muttered Harrison. "Anyhow, the porter tells me that he hasn't been out this morning—and that he was here at breakfast-time. We'll try again."

He rang harder this time, keeping his finger on the bell-push so that the bell could be heard ringing continuously somewhere within the flat. Footsteps sounded, and the next moment the door was slightly opened. In the crack there appeared a haggard face.

"What is it?" asked a tremulous voice.

"Are you Mr. Anthony Westerham?" asked Inspector Harrison.

"Eh? Yes! I—I mean, no——" The man on the other side of the door paused, breathing hard. "What do you want?"

Harrison inserted his foot insidiously between the door and the doorpost.

"I am a police-officer, Mr. Westerham, and——"

"A police officer!" gasped the other. "What do you want with me?"

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd like you to open this door," said Harrison.

Tony Westerham seemed to fight for his breath; then he opened the door wide.

"Come in!" he said, with forced calmness. "Oh, it's all right. I'm not going to cause you any trouble. But I'd like to know what you mean by demanding entry into my flat."

They followed closely on his heels as he led the way into a comfortable room. Tony himself was a sight. His hair was tousled, his clothing was dishevelled. He was wearing plus fours—and on his feet there were rubber-soled golf-shoes. Inspector Harrison was brief and to the point.

"You are Mr. Anthony Westerham?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tony defiantly.

"We have reason to believe, Mr. Westerham, that your uncle, Lord Halford, was murdered during the night," said the inspector. "We think it possible that you might be able to help us in the investigation, and if you will accompany us to the police-station, we shall be obliged."

"Do you mean that you are arresting me?" asked Tony hoarsely.

"I have a warrant in my pocket, and you can see it if you wish," replied Harrison. "And I must warn you, Mr. Westerham,



The suspected man leaped forward and faced Nelson Lee threateningly. "You hound!" he said ferociously.

that anything you may say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

Tony groaned.

"All right—better take me," he muttered. "But you're wrong—you're wrong! I didn't kill my uncle."

His whole manner was highly suspicious. He was agitated—he was wild-eyed. In Detective-inspector Harrison's mind there wasn't a shadow of doubt regarding his guilt.

"Fetch his hat and coat, Wilson," said the inspector. "You'll remain here, Denny."

"Yes, sir," said Detective Denny, saluting.

EXACTLY twenty minutes later Tony Westerham was in a cell. He was alone—and he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Good egg!" he chuckled to himself. "By Jove, it worked like a dream! That hundred quid is already mine!"

CHAPTER 4. Discoveries!

"**I**NTERESTING," murmured William Napoleon Browne softly. "Not to say fascinating."

The lanky Browne was standing at the rear of a plantation, not far from the mere. For some time Browne had been watching the dragging operations—not without a subdued thrill. The police were going about their task deliberately and methodically. They were using two rowing-boats, and they were dragging the lake with care. The fact that it was supposed to be bottomless did not discourage them. They had heard of these "bottomless" lakes before.

Already there had been a significant discovery. A smoking-cap had been found floating in the lake—caught beneath a mass of overhanging branches from the bushes. And the lining of this smoking-cap, wet though it was, showed traces of blood. There seemed hardly any doubt that Lord Halford's body would be found in the lake in view of

this. Sooner or later, the final evidence of the crime must come to light—the evidence which would prove, beyond all question, that murder had been committed.

Browne, pursuing his own task, had pushed his way through this plantation. Now, in a little clearing on the top of a rising knoll, he had discovered something of considerable interest.

Footprints.

There was a bare patch of ground here, with scarcely any grass on it; and that patch was literally smothered with footprints. They were superimposed, one on the other, but as far as Browne could see they had all been made by the same man. It was easy enough to read the significance of this. Somebody had been standing here—watching the house, perhaps. And that somebody had been standing for quite a considerable time.

"We'll see what the Chief has to say," murmured Browne.

He went back towards the lake, and he soon came across Nelson Lee. Willy and Nipper were there, too, having reported. They had made no discoveries.

"A small item, Chief," said Browne. "Somebody was in the plantation during the night—watching the house."

"How do you know?"

"Footprints, sir," replied Browne. "If you will have the goodness to come with me, I will demonstrate."

"Footprints made by the same man, Browne?" asked Nipper.

"No, Brother Nipper—footprints of a different kind," replied William Napoleon. "Distinct evidence of a third party. There may be no connection between these footprints and the murder; but one can never tell."

"I'm not satisfied about that smoking-cap," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "Why was it found in the lake?"

"It must have dropped off the murdered man's head when he was thrown in, sir," said Nipper.

"That is the inference—but it doesn't fit," said Nelson Lee. "The cap is bloodstained inside—on the lining. Thus it would seem that Lord Halford was struck down whilst he was wearing his smoking-cap. The lining would then naturally be bloodstained—and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the cap would be found floating on the surface of the lake."

"Then where's the difficulty, sir?" asked Nipper.

"The weapon with which this murder was committed—or, at least, the weapon with which it was supposedly committed—has a number of grey hairs sticking to it. Surely



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

More Important!

Two Scotsmen were climbing in the Alps, and one had had the misfortune to fall into a deep crevasse.

"Bide a wee, Jock, I'll hae ye oot o' that," called his companion. "I'm awa' to yon village for a rope."

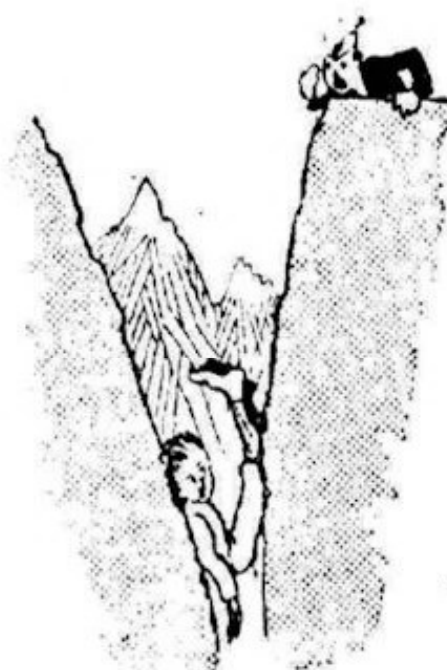
Two hours later he returned.

"Ar-re ye still there, Jock?"

"Aye," came the faint response.

"It's nae use, mon, they're asking feeftteen shillings for the rope!"

(J. B. Tebbett, 21, Hotel Street, Coalville, Leic., has been awarded a handsome gill watch.)



Misunderstood!

Husband (feeling a twinge in the thigh while experimenting with wireless set): "Oh! I believe I've got sciatica!"

Wife (occupied with needlework): "What's the use of that, dear? You won't be able to understand a word they say."

(E. J. Styler, 2/9, Hewell Road, Redditch has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Sensible Fellow!

O'Shinty was a new man at the job, and when he failed to come down from the top of a tall building, the foreman shouted up at him:

"Come on, O'Shinty! What's keeping you?"

"Shure," cried O'Shinty, "an' I can't find my way down."

"Well, come down the way you went up," returned the foreman.

"That I won't do!" answered O'Shinty. "I came up head first."

(F. J. Limb, 19, Owen Street, Easton, Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Safety First!

Housekeeper (waking out of her sleep): "Is that you, Fido?"

First Burglar (to Second Burglar): "Lick her hand, Bill!"

(R. Napper, Smithbrook, Cranleigh, Surrey, has been awarded a penknife.)

that is evidence that Lord Halford was bare-headed when he was struck down?"

"By jingo, sir, that's funny," said Nipper, staring.

"I tell you, it doesn't fit," repeated Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "There's something here that we haven't elucidated yet. Well, we shall see. And now for your new footprints, Browne."

They went through the plantation, Lee still in perplexity. When they came to the little clearing, Browne pointed.

"You see, Chief?" he said. "One can obtain a fairly clear view of the terrace from here. And look at these footprints. Don't you think it's possible that some interested cove was standing here on the watch?"

Nelson Lee looked at the ground closely. The others stood round, taking care to remain on the grass.

"This man had decidedly big feet," said Lee.

"Size number eleven, I should judge, Chief," nodded Browne.

"Yet the man was not of the labouring class," continued Lee. "These footprints were not made with hob-nailed boots, or any kind of ordinary workman's boots. The soles, as you can see, were handsewn. There is not the slightest indication of a stud or brad."

"There's a little footpath beyond here, sir," continued Browne. "The footprints are visible in one or two damp patches. Two sets—one going, and the other coming. This man, whoever he was, came to this spot so that he could watch the house. He remained here some time, and then returned."

"Yes, I fancy you have read the signs correctly," nodded Lee. "The question is, where do these footprints lead to? It will be worth while following them."

Nipper and the others followed Lee eagerly. They all took care not to tread on the footpath itself; they kept to the coarse grass of the plantation. Here and there an occasional footprint could be seen. Lee stopped once or twice to examine them. As Browne had said, there were two sets—one leading to that vantage point, and the other going the other way. Presently the footpath led out on to a small by-way. It was little more than a cart-track—a narrow lane.

"This is merely a backwater," commented Nelson Lee, as he looked up and down. "It leads from the road to a storehouse on the other side of the plantation. Very little used, I should think. Hallo! What's this?" he added sharply.

He strode across the lane, staring at the damp ground. He halted after going ten yards. On the ground were some distinct

Complicated !

The big Irish policeman on point duty held up his hand, and the car stopped.

"Howld on there, me bucko, not so fast! Have ye got a licence?"

"Of course I've got a licence," said the chauffeur, putting his hand in his pocket. "Do you want to see it?"

"An' phwat would Oi want to see it for as long as ye had it wid ye?" replied the policeman. "Sure, Oi only want to see it whin ye haven't got it. Droive on!"

(D. W. Denman, Roundwood House, Roundwood Avenue, Meliden, near Prestatyn, N. Wales, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Hard Luck—and Hard Labour !

Burglar (who has just been arrested and speaking very bitterly): "Just my luck! After six months of making friends with the dog, I goes and treads on the rotten cat!"

(C. Smith, 14, Carnarvon Road, Woodford, London, E.18, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Optimistic !

A customer went into a chemist's shop and asked the man behind the counter if he had anything to keep moths out of the house. The chemist mentioned moth balls, and the customer took half a pound.

The next day he again entered the shop, this time looking very angry.



"What do you mean by saying these moth balls get rid of moths?" he demanded of the surprised chemist. "I tried all day yesterday, and didn't hit a single moth!"

(R. Cowling, "Parkside," Ilkley, has been awarded a penknife.)

The Guard's Mistake !

The little boy had asked the railway guard time and time again to tell him when Derby was reached. At last the train drew up in this station.

"Here you are, sonny," said the guard cheerfully. "This is Derby. Out you get!"

"I don't want to get out," came the boy's answer. "But mum said I could begin to eat my sandwiches when we reached Derby."

(A. Waters, 83, Northampton Buildings, London, E.C., has been awarded a penknife.)

The Biggest Lie !

The minister discovered some small boys seated in a ring round a dog.

"What are you boys doing?" he inquired.

"We're having a competition," replied one of the boys. "Whoever tells the biggest lie wins the dog."

"When I was a boy I never told a lie——" remonstrated the minister gently.

"Give the gent the dog!" cut in one of the boys promptly.

(J. Dunn, 490, Crown Street, Glasgow, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

tyre marks. A car had been standing here quite recently; and the impressions were so deep that it was obvious that the car had remained at rest for a considerable period. It had been driven into this backwater, and had then reversed out.

"The nephew's car, Chief?" asked Browne wonderingly.

"Hardly," replied Lee. "Why should young Westerham bring his car into this out-of-the-way spot?"

"Well, he came back to the Towers in secret, more or less, sir," said Nipper.

"In that case, he would have left his car out in the main road—outside the lodge gates," said Nelson Lee. "No, I don't think Westerham brought his car here. Yet there was a car here during the night. These tracks are quite fresh."

"It's a funny thing—they're Stars and Stripes tyres," remarked Willy, as he closely examined the marks. "Only on Wednesday we saw some car tracks of the same kind, and I was pointing out to the chaps that those particular tracks had an individuality of their own."

"You mean there were certain distinguishing features that no other tyres of the same make could have?" asked Lee. "That was keen of you, young 'un—"

"I say," burst out Willy. "These *are* the same tracks. They were made by the same car!"

"Is it possible?" murmured Browne.

"Look here—look at the two points missing from one of the stars," said Willy keenly. "And look at the stripe next to it—with a diagonal cut across."

"Brother William, this is indeed a remarkable discovery," said Browne. "There is a distinct possibility that the mysterious individual who stood watching the Towers was none other than Sir George Bullton himself."

"Sir George Bullton?" repeated Lee sharply. "How do you know this, Browne?"

Lee was quickly informed of that motoring incident which had happened on the Wednesday.

"Sir George was most impolite, Chief," said Browne. "Seldom have I encountered a more objectionable blister. But for the mention of my renowned pater's name—"

"I see," interrupted Lee, nodding. "And you think these tracks were made by the same car—by Sir George Bullton's car?"

"I don't think anything about it, sir—I know," replied Willy. "I spotted the car tracks at the time—and I pointed out these little characteristics."

"Well done, young 'un," said Lee approvingly. "It just proves the usefulness of making observations. At the time, perhaps, they are of no particular importance; but you can never tell. Solely owing to your keenness, we now know that the car which stood there during the night was Sir George Bullton's."

"It's the training, sir," said Willy cheerfully. "You're always telling us to keep our eyes open—and to use them."

"If Sir George himself came here in the night, what can his connection be with the

mystery?" mused Lee. "Why should he come here at all? Obviously, he did so in secret, or he would not have driven his car into this backwater. A surprising development, young 'uns."

"And who is Sir George Bullton, anyhow?" asked Nipper.

"That we shall find out," said Lee. "The name is not unfamiliar to me, and I fancy he is a fairly prominent landowner living in this same district. A few inquiries will make certain."

"Well, here's something the police don't know, anyway," said Willy exultantly. "They're so jolly certain that Tony Westerham committed the murder that they're not bothering about any other investigations. Yet it's a bit thick to think that Sir George Bullton could have done the dirty deed. What could his motive have been? Then, again, what about all the other evidence? Did Sir George fake it up to implicate Lord Halford's nephew?"

Before Nelson Lee could make any comment there came the sound of shouts from the direction of the lake. Lee and the boys stood listening. Lennard's voice came clearly, authoritatively.

"All right!" came the words. "Be careful what you're doing with it—bring it ashore carefully."

"They've discovered something else, sir!" ejaculated Nipper.

"The body!" murmured Browne.

"I wonder?" said Nelson Lee, pursing his lips.

He did not wonder for long. When he and the others had made their way back through the plantation, and when they came out upon the lake side, they beheld a grim little procession. Four of the police officers were in advance, carrying something up from the lake side to a grassy stretch. Chief-inspector Lennard and Inspector Davids were bringing up the rear.

And that object that was being carried was—the dead body of Lord Halford!

CHAPTER 5.

Nelson Lee Seeks an Interview!

THE dead body of Lord Halford!

Neither the police nor Nelson Lee was particularly surprised, for, after all, they had been expecting this development. Yet Nelson Lee was puzzled; he had had an idea at the back of his head that the body would not be found in the mere.

"It's wrong!" he muttered. "The further we go, the clearer the case becomes. And it's too clear. That's the trouble—much too clear!"

Poole, the old butler, came running down from the house.

"Oh, the poor master—the poor master!" he was wailing. "They've found him! Oh, the poor master!"

"Now, then, Poole, it won't do any good to get hysterical," said Lennard sharply. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer you to keep back,

or, better still, go back to the house and ring up for a doctor. Tell him to hurry."

"Is—is he really dead, sir?" faltered Poole.

"Dead? What do you expect him to be after we've brought him up from the bottom of the lake?" said the Yard man impatiently. "Inspector Davids, I think you'd better send one of your men to telephone."

A policeman went off at once, and Poole, who was nearly in a state of collapse, was led back towards the Towers by another officer. The chief inspector and Nelson Lee bent down over the body; Nipper and Browne and Willy hung back. If not awed, they were at least deeply impressed. They were up against realities now—grim realities.

"Scarcely any water in the lungs," remarked Nelson Lee, after the body had been gently turned over. "Look here, Lennard."

He pointed to the unfortunate peer's head.

"The skull is fractured, eh?" said the Yard man. "The blow must have killed him instantaneously."

There was a horrible wound on Lord Halford's head—on the side, just over the right ear. He had evidently been struck a violent, heavy blow by some blunt instrument. The spanner in the library—Tony Westerham's spanner!

"No question about it being murder," said Lennard, stroking his chin. "That blow could never have been self-inflicted. A rotten sordid business, Lee. The poor old boy was struck down, and then dragged out here to the lake and thrown into the water."

"Why?"

"What do you mean—why?"

"In Heaven's name, Lennard, what was the object of bringing the body out of the library and flinging it into the mere?" demanded Lee impatiently. "The man was dead—brutally murdered. What possible motive was there for carrying—or dragging—the body out into the night? Why didn't the murderer leave it in the library?"

Lennard scratched his head.

"I can't quite understand that myself," he admitted.

"It would be a totally different thing if Lord Halford had been only stunned," continued Lee. "The murderer would then have thrown him into the lake to finish him off—presumably being too shaken up, or too squeamish, to strike another blow."

"Perhaps he wasn't killed immediately?"

"But he must have been—there's no water in the lungs at all," insisted Lee. "Besides, any doctor will tell you that this unfortunate man's skull is fractured. I should say that death was instantaneous. Why, then, carry the body out to the lake?"

"To conceal it."

"Conceal it? Man alive! What are you talking about?" said Lee. "Does a murderer attempt to conceal his crime by leaving footprints all up and down the garden

paths—by allowing the murdered man's smoking cap to float on the lake? The whole crime was as easy to read as an open book."

"Exactly," said Lennard. "That's why I say that you're wasting your time here, Lee. There's absolutely nothing for you to do. The case is as straightforward—"

"Too straightforward, Lennard," broke in Lee impatiently. "I tell you, I'm not satisfied."

"Well, we've got young Westerham—thank goodness."

"You've heard from the Yard?"

"Not ten minutes ago," nodded Lennard, in a satisfied voice. "Some of our fellows went to his flat, and found him there. I

understand he's being brought straight to Chelmsford—on his way now. That's all to the good, because he'll have to appear before the magistrates in the morning. I shall only bring formal evidence, of course, and then we'll get a remand for a week."

Nelson Lee had a sudden idea.

"Would you grant me facilities, Lennard, for having a talk with young Westerham?" he asked, looking

at the inspector.

"What do you want to talk to him for?"

"I'm not satisfied that he committed this murder," replied Lee grimly. "Oh, it's all very well for you to stare—but unless Westerham is stark, raving mad, he couldn't have done this thing. Why, he's absolutely put the noose round his own neck. And no man, no matter how flustered or frightened, would act with such imbecility."

"I don't know about your interviewing the prisoner," said Lennard dubiously.

"Hang it all, he'll have a lawyer, won't he?" demanded Lee. "He'll be allowed to prepare his defence, surely? Let me act on his behalf—until a lawyer can be appointed. I promise you, Lennard, that I won't prejudice your case in the slightest degree. But I do want to have a talk with young Westerham at the earliest possible moment."

"Good enough," said Lennard, making up his mind. "I know you wouldn't make this request, Lee, unless you had a good reason. You can rely upon me to give the necessary authority."

"That's good of you, Lennard," said Lee, with satisfaction.

DR. AVERY, a grave, white-haired old gentleman, appeared soon afterwards. He was a local practitioner—the family doctor. He had attended regularly at the Towers for over thirty years. And now, as he bent down over Lord Halford's dead body, his eyes were rather moist, and his kindly old face was haggard.

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!" he muttered. "We were very great friends, and I am





At about three-thirty in the morning Sir George Bullton drove home, little realising that his arrival had

deeply distressed over this appalling tragedy. The very last man in the world I should expect to die such a violent death. A splendid man—generous, clean-living, God-fearing. One of the best in the world, gentlemen. It is hard, indeed, that he should have gone this way."

Lennard coughed.

"We would like your opinion, doctor, as early as possible," he said gently. "Can you tell us how Lord Halford died—and at approximately what hour?"

Dr. Avery was not long in making his examination.

"I should say that he died some time between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m.," he said at length. "Death must have been instantaneous. The base of the skull is badly fractured. It would have been impossible for him to have survived such a brutal blow."

"He was stone-dead before he was thrown into the lake?"

"Oh, yes—undoubtedly," said the doctor. "The condition of the lungs proves that beyond question. Poor Halford! What an infernal shame!"

"Dead before he was thrown into the lake," muttered the chief inspector. "H'm! Darned funny!"

The body was carried up to the house, Lennard superintending the operations. He was called away to the telephone, and shortly afterwards he buttonholed Nelson Lee.

"Just been talking to the Yard," he said. "Young Westerham is maintaining a stubborn silence—won't give any account of his movements last night. His car has been searched, and a big spanner is missing. And, to clinch the whole thing, there's a smear of blood on one of the off-side doors. I tell you, Lee, the rope is already round that young fool's neck."

"But it hasn't been drawn tight yet," said Nelson Lee calmly. "By the way, do you know if Lord Halford left any will?"

"He did," replied Lennard. "I took charge of all private papers as soon as I got here. The will is amongst them—dated two years ago."

"Anything interesting in that will?"

"I only gave it a cursory examination," replied the chief inspector. "The property is entailed—goes to the next-of-kin with the title. But Lord Halford has made several big bequests. Ten thousand pounds to an old friend, Sir George Bullton, for example."

"Oh," said Lee slowly.

"Ten thousand pounds and, I believe, the cancellation of some old mortgages," continued the Yard man. "Then there's five thousand pounds to Bullton's daughter, and an annuity of a thousand a year for her, too. The old boy seems to have been pretty thick with these Bulltons. Poole, the butler, comes in for two thousand pounds, if you please! Why didn't I become a butler instead of a policeman?"

Nelson Lee was thoughtful after he had parted with Lennard. He found Nipper and

Browne and Willy out on the terrace, rather at a loose end. He soon gave them something to do.

"I want you to stay here with Willy," he said to Nipper. "Keep your eye on things in general, but look out particularly for a golf club."

"A golf club, guv'nor?" repeated Nipper curiously.

"It is most likely to be a driver or a brassie, with the shaft broken—or at least split—and the head bloodstained," continued Lee. "I have very little hope that you'll find it, for it is most likely to be at the bottom of the lake."

The boys all stared.

"But the murder was committed with that spanner, sir!" ejaculated Nipper.

"Was it?" said Lee grimly. "Well, anyhow, keep your eyes open for that golf club."

"If it's a wooden driver and it was thrown into the lake, it wouldn't sink," put in Willy.

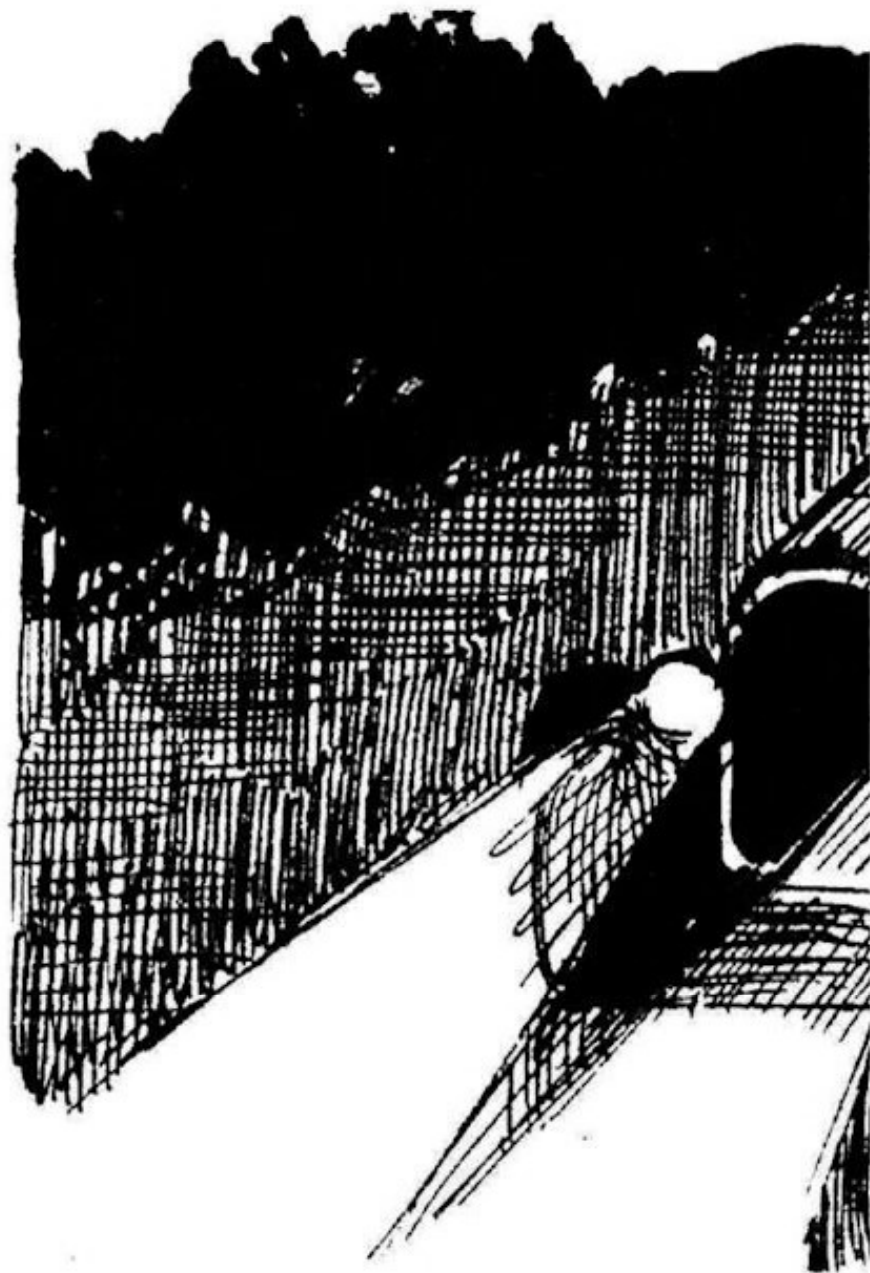
"That's true," said Lee, with an approving nod. "There is more than a chance, then, that the club is not in the lake. Browne, I've got a special job for you."

"Name it, Chief," said Browne.

"I want you to go to Bullton Court."

"I'm half-way there already!"

"Don't go openly, but just make a few casual inquiries," said Lee. "You'll know best what to do when you get there. Find out, if possible, what Sir George Bullton was doing last night—but on no account let Sir George himself know that you are interested in him or his movements."



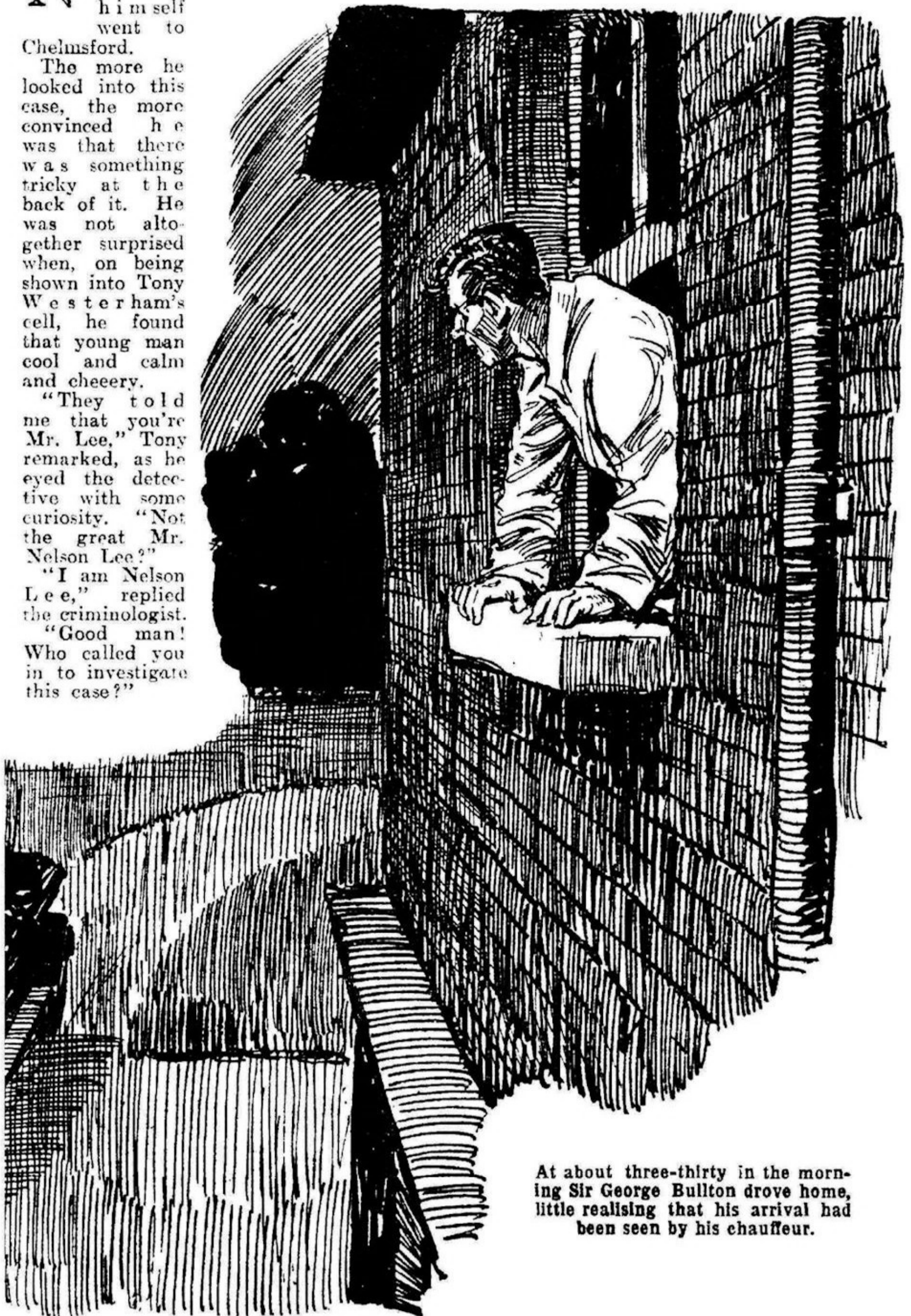
NELSON
LEE
himself
went to
Chelmsford.

The more he looked into this case, the more convinced he was that there was something tricky at the back of it. He was not altogether surprised when, on being shown into Tony Westerham's cell, he found that young man cool and calm and cheery.

"They told me that you're Mr. Lee," Tony remarked, as he eyed the detective with some curiosity. "Not the great Mr. Nelson Lee?"

"I am Nelson Lee," replied the criminologist.

"Good man! Who called you in to investigate this case?"



At about three-thirty in the morning Sir George Bullton drove home, little realising that his arrival had been seen by his chauffeur.

"Poole, your uncle's butler——"

"Ah, Poole," nodded Tony. "Sound old fellow, Poole!"

"Forgive me for speaking bluntly, Mr. Westerham, but your manner is singularly flippant, considering the gravity of your position," said Lee. "Perhaps you do not quite realise——"

"Thanks for the warning, Mr. Lee, but I realise everything," interrupted Tony, his manner changing. "It's a rotten sort of business, no doubt; but I did not kill my uncle. I've nothing to fear. As an innocent man, I have an easy conscience. Sooner or later these blundering police will have to let me out."

Tony, to tell the truth, was feeling so bucked with himself over the success of his little plan that he had allowed his good spirits to show themselves too prominently. He now affected a manner of greater gravity; but it was too late. Nelson Lee had already observed the young fellow's twinkling eyes, his general bearing of quiet

contentment, as though he were enjoying some private joke, and the detective was more certain than ever that there was something at the back of this case which had not yet come to light.

"I have been granted very special facilities for having this interview with you, Mr. Westerham," said Lee. "You say that you are not guilty? You will, therefore, put in a defence?"

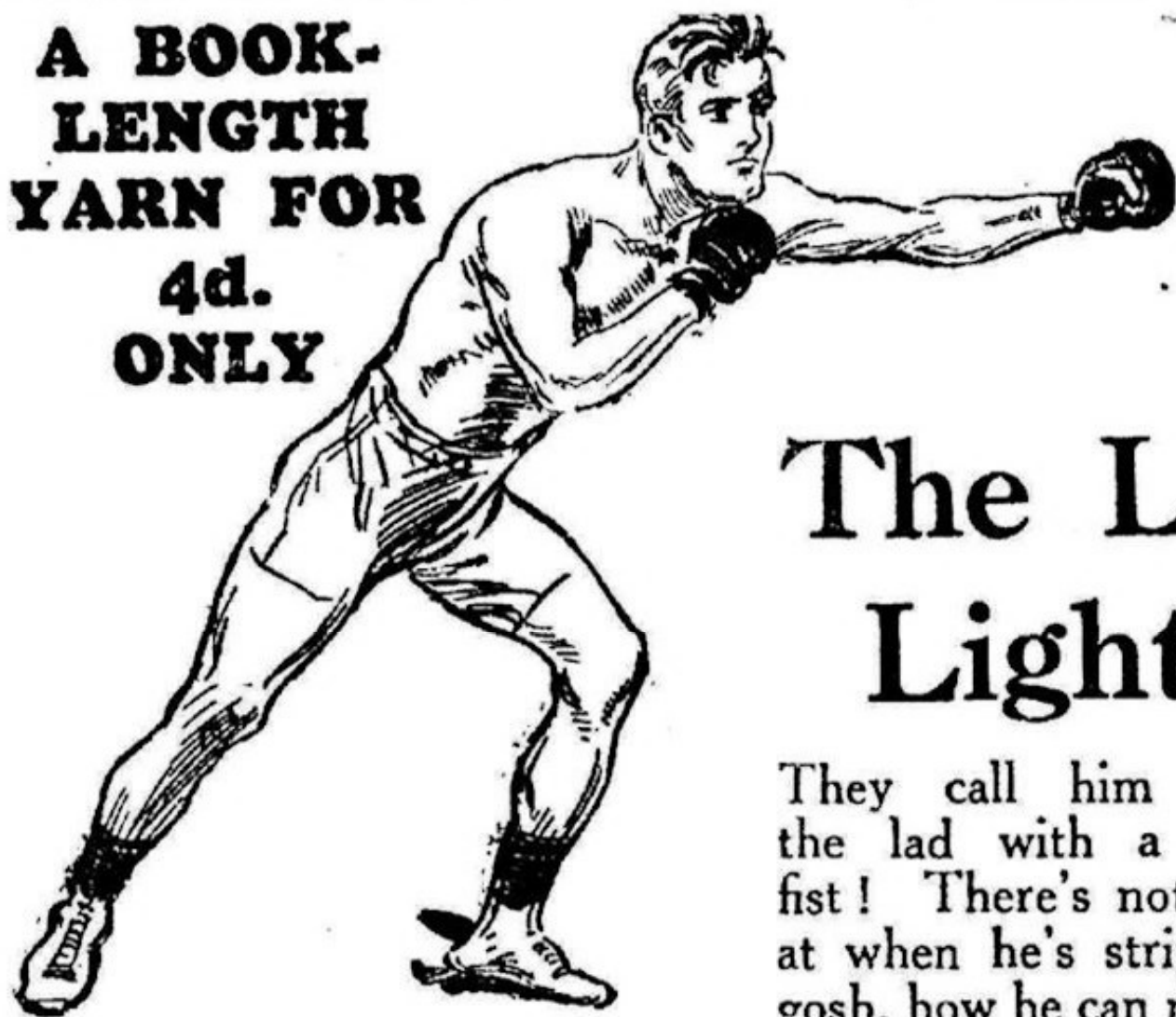
"Of course."

"Do I understand, by that, that you desire me to pursue my investigation of this case on your behalf?"

"Well, no," said Tony, becoming thoughtful. "If it is all the same to you, Mr. Lee, I really don't think that your services are necessary. All I shall require is a lawyer."

It suddenly occurred to Tony that Nelson Lee's intervention might be awkward. Neither he nor his uncle had anticipated that Poole would call in such a famous private detective.

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"Very well," said Lee quietly. "I have no desire to force my services upon you, Mr. Westerham. Before I go, however, I must tell you that the evidence against you is very black. The police are in possession of a great many significant facts."

"It's up to them to prove their case," said Tony. "I'm not making any statement at all. They tried to get me to say something, but I refused. I'm reserving my defence."

"It may be a good policy for you to do that—but is there any need for you to be secretive with me?" asked Lee. "It has been established that you went to Halford Towers last night, that you quarrelled with your uncle, and that you even threatened him."

"Really?" murmured Tony. "Well, I'm not saying anything."

"Footprints which are known to be yours lead from the library to the mere," continued Lee, in a relentless voice. "A spanner, belonging to your own motor-car, has been found in the library—bloodstained."

"Well, well!"

"I will confess, Mr. Westerham, that I am puzzled by your attitude," said Lee, eyeing the young man very closely. "Again I tell you that you do not realise the gravity of your position."

"I think I do," replied Tony. "The police have arrested me on suspicion—and it's up to them to prove their case. No doubt they have already found the body?" he added, a slightly mocking note in his voice.

A gleam came into Lee's eyes; he felt that he had hit upon something vital.

"Your tone is significant, Mr. Westerham," he said. "You doubt the ability of the police to find your uncle's body, eh?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"As I have said before, it's up to them," he said. "I'm not worrying in the least."

"The police are smarter than you give them credit for being, Mr. Westerham," said Nelson Lee evenly. "Your uncle's body was recovered from the mere a little over an hour ago."

A change came over Tony's face; his eyes filled with incredulity and amazement. He stared at Nelson Lee as though he had suddenly become dazed.

"What—what did you say?" he stammered.

"I said that your uncle's body was recovered from the mere just over an hour ago," repeated Nelson Lee.

"No, no!" shouted Tony hoarsely. "It's a lie—a lie!"

Horror was in his eyes now—stark horror. Every atom of colour had fled from his face, and he stood there, facing Nelson Lee, trembling in every limb!

CHAPTER 6.

Nelson Lee's Promise!

NELSON LEE was startled at the change in the young man, but he was not surprised. Tony's former lightheartedness had been significant.

And Lee knew that he was now on the verge of an important revelation.

"You hound!" panted Tony, with sudden ferocity. "You dirty liar! You're trying to force something out of me, aren't you? You know well enough that my uncle's body has not been found! It couldn't have been found!"

"Steady, Mr. Westerham," said Lee quietly, as he took the young man's arm. "I felt from the first that you were singularly indifferent to the fate of Lord Halford. Don't you think you had better be perfectly frank with me? I repeat, in all seriousness, that your uncle has been murdered, and that his body has been recovered from the lake."

"His body! Recovered!" muttered Tony, passing a trembling hand over his face. "No! I don't believe you! My uncle's in Bath—he went down by the first train! Sir George took him in his car——"

"I can only assume that you have been deluding yourself," said Nelson Lee. "Lord Halford is dead—murdered. That is the grim fact which you must realise, Mr. Westerham."

Tony felt that he was going mad.

"But it can't be true!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "The whole thing was only a wager—just a practical joke!"

"Ah!" snapped Lee. "Now we're getting to it!"

"The evidence was manufactured—I 'planted' it myself!" went on Tony desperately. "The scarf—the footprints—the bloodstained spanner—everything! I tell you it was all a put-up job—a fake! My uncle was all right when I left him."

"Come, come! Pull yourself together," said Lee gently. "I can see that this news has hit you very hard, young man. Tell me everything. Let me know the details of this—wager."

Tony told him—haltingly, almost incoherently. And as Nelson Lee listened the great detective knew that he was hearing the truth. Indeed, in many ways Tony's story corroborated his own theories. From the first, Nelson Lee had been certain that there had been a great deal of fakery about all those glaringly-obvious clues. Tony's story explained everything.

"A terrible development took place after you parted from your uncle, Mr. Westerham," said Lee, when he had heard all. "You say that Lord Halford was cheerful and well when you parted?"

"Yes, yes—he was enjoying the joke as much as I was."

"What time was this?"

"It must have been shortly after one o'clock," said Tony. "I faked everything up, and when I parted from my uncle he was getting ready to go out to meet Sir George."

"And you?"

"I left my car round at the back of the big stables," replied Tony. "There's a side road there, and I didn't want any of the servants to hear the sound of my engine. I went straight off to London, and when the detectives came this morning I was expect-

ing them. I pretended to be flustered and scared——"

"Yes, of course—merely as part of the game," nodded Lee. "Well, Mr. Westerham, after you left the Towers last night somebody else came and murdered your uncle—and threw his body into the lake. That much is absolutely certain."

"Thank Heaven you believe in me, Mr. Lee!" said Tony fervently. "Your words prove that. You'll help me, won't you? Poor uncle! This is terrible—horrible!"

"You are not a particularly good actor, Mr. Westerham, and I should be a very poor judge of character if I refused to believe in your story," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "But you realise, don't you, that your position is perilous in the extreme?"

Tony was holding his head in his hands.

"It's all my fault," he muttered wretchedly. "I was a fool to suggest a wager like that! It was playing with death! But I never realised—I never dreamed——"

"That somebody would take advantage of the peculiar circumstances?" asked Lee. "It will be my task, Mr. Westerham, to find out who that somebody is."

Tony looked up, staring, a new light in his eyes.

"But who can it be?" he asked hoarsely. "There's nobody, Mr. Lee, nobody! My uncle hadn't an enemy in the world!"

"There you are wrong, for it was an enemy who murdered him."

"Just now you said that my position is perilous," continued Tony. "How? What about Sir George Bullton and Dick Sylvester? They know all about the wager—they were with me when——"

"One moment," broke in Lee. "Sir George Bullton is one of your uncle's oldest friends—and Sylvester, I hear, was at Oxford with you."

"Yes, but——"

"They are both unreliable witnesses, from the police point of view," said Nelson Lee. "My dear boy, do you think the police will believe this story of a wager? Get that idea out of your head at once! The police go upon facts—and the facts point to you as the murderer."

"But if Dick and Sir George explain——"

"If they explain, the police will hold the view that they are agreeing to this cock-and-bull story in order to save you from the gallows. They are your friends——"

"But it isn't a cock-and-bull story!" insisted Tony. "Sir George and Dick knew all about the wager——"

"The police will regard it as a cock-and-bull story," interrupted Lee. "If you had made a statement, immediately following your arrest, admitting this wager, the thing might have been different. But now that your uncle's body has been found—— Well, don't you see that the prosecution will immediately jump to the conclusion that you have invented the wager merely as a line of defence? I will, of course, see Sir George Bullton at once, and I'll get into touch with your friend Dick Sylvester, but I warn you

that their evidence will not be of much value."

"Then—then what am I to do?" asked Tony in despair. "It's a trap! I'm finished! My footprints—all that faked evidence—everything will be as black as night against me. What am I to do, Mr. Lee?"

"You can do nothing," replied the great detective. "It is for me to try to save you, Mr. Westerham—and the only way in which that can be accomplished is for the real murderer to be found."

Tony clutched at Lee's arm.

"You'll find him, won't you, Mr. Lee?" he asked tensely. "It's my only chance—and I can't help you! I don't know who could have done this horrible thing!"

"Hush!" warned Lee. "Somebody is coming—my time is up. Remember, Mr. Westerham, not a word of this to anybody else. We must reserve your defence—and the less the police know the better."

Nelson Lee left Chelmsford a much-enlightened man. Many things were becoming clear to him. But he realised that he would have to start his investigations all over again; he must ignore the false clues, and endeavour to find the real ones.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, self-possessed and cool, was on the job.

Bullton Court, he found, was a fine old country residence, standing in the middle of its own grounds, some six or seven miles away from Halford Towers, and buried right in the heart of an ultra-rural district, well off the main track. It was by no means such a large establishment as Halford Towers, and the house and the property in general were not in the best of condition. There were indications that Sir George was not exceedingly prosperous.

Approaching the place, Browne had been rather intrigued by the sight of a delightfully pretty girl crossing a stretch of open parkland towards the house. She had a couple of fox-terriers with her, and they were dashing about thoroughly enjoying themselves. Browne rather envied the fox-terriers. He had an eye for beauty, and this girl, as he had seen at first glance—without her being in the least aware of his scrutiny—was young, graceful, tastefully attired, and intensely troubled. Her mood did not match that of her canine companions. Indeed, Browne had an idea that she had been recently crying.

"Point No. 1," murmured Browne. "Damsel in deep distress—probably daughter of Sir George Bullton. Why the distress? I will confess that the idea of Brother George possessing a daughter of this sterling quality never occurred to me, and I would fain make her acquaintance. Alas! I must not forget that I am here more or less in secret. And there is work to be done."

He made his way towards a group of out-buildings, and he found a man in a yard, hosing down a car. The sight of the car made Browne's eyes gleam. He felt that a closer inspection was necessary. He ap-



the Benton gang, the greatest criminal organisation that has ever menaced Great Britain, is told in an amazing new series of thrill stories, the first of which will appear in next Wednesday's issue of the

NELSON LEE

THE HUMAN BIRD OF PREY!

They call Thurston Kyle the Night Hawk. Just like a hawk he flits through the air at the dead of night, a grim figure of vengeance, spreading terror among his enemies—in all truth a human bird of prey! How the Night Hawk sets out to exterminate

proached boldly now, and while he was some distance away he noted that the tyres of this car were nearly new. They were Star and Stripes tyres. The man, who was in his shirt-sleeves, paused in his operations, and regarded Browne with interest.

"A bright day, brother," observed Browne genially. "No doubt you will be Perkins, Sir George's chauffeur?"

"My name's Webb, if you want to know," said the man.

"Ah, Webb! Of course," agreed Browne. "I am wondering if I can obtain your car. Being Sir George's chauffeur, you will be naturally interested in cars. If Sir George is thinking of making a change, perhaps I can interest—"

"You can't interest me!" broke in the man with a grunt. "I'm leaving this place at the end of the week."

"A pity," said Browne. "As a representative of Messrs. Rolls-Royce, I thought perhaps—"

"I can tell you straight out, young sir, that you won't get any orders from Sir George," broke in Webb. "A Rolls-Royce, indeed! It's as much as he can do to keep this bus going." He came nearer, and lowered his voice. "Besides that, I ain't so sure that Sir George himself will be here much longer."

"On his last legs, eh?" said Browne. "Gout, perhaps? I have been told on the best authority that gout—"

"It wouldn't surprise me if the police got hold of him," said the chauffeur darkly. "And I wouldn't be sorry, either! Cantankerous old codger! Never could please him—and he gives me the sack just because I'm five minutes late. How could I help being late? This bus looks all right, but you can take it from me that her engines are wore up. If it wasn't for me tinkering with her from morning till night, she'd rattle like a bag of bones."

"I can offer quite a fair allowance—"

"You can't do no business here, so you needn't think it," interrupted Webb. "Not as things won't be different now," he added,

with a wink. "Like as not Sir George will come into a bit o' money—from Lord Halford. Rummy business that, eh? I suppose you've heard of the murder?"

"Considering that the countryside is teeming with people whose conversation consists of nothing else but the murder, yes," said Browne. "A most regrettable occurrence, by all that I can understand."

The chauffeur leaned forward, and his tone became very confidential.

"Between you and me and this 'ere spare tyre, young gent, there's something rummy," he said. "I'd like the p'lice to ask Sir George what he was doing in the middle o' the night."

"Sir George?" repeated Browne. "But you're not suggesting—"

"I ain't suggesting anything," said the chauffeur. "All I say is that Sir George orders me to leave the car, filled up with petrol, outside o' the front of the house last night. But he doesn't want me to drive, bless you!"

"No?"

"Says he's going up to London—won't be back until midday to-day," continued Webb. "But I ain't a heavy sleeper, and I can 'ear this old bus a mile off. Other people couldn't, but she's sort of familiar to me. Off goes the guv'nor at about midnight last night—might have been later. And when do you think he comes back? Half-past three this morning."

"Somewhat earlier than he anticipated?"

"Half-past three he comes back," continued the chauffeur grimly. "What was he doing? And last night Lord Halford was murdered! They're saying that his nephew did it—but I'm not so sure! Here's my guv'nor, up to his eyes in debt—owing pots o' money to Lord Halford, too—"

"You pain me," interrupted Browne, shaking his head. "This is a sad blow. I had expected an order from Sir George. Really, brother, I don't think you had better continue to broadcast these views of yours. You might get yourself into trouble."

"It ain't me who'll get into trouble—it'll be Sir George!" said Webb, with a sniff. "And the more trouble he gets into, the better! I owe him one or two, I can tell you! Nasty, ill-tempered old blighter, that's what he is!"

Browne realised that Webb, being under notice, was prejudiced. All the same, there was a grim significance in what he had been saying. Browne remembered those car tracks near the mere—he remembered the footprints.

"You think, then, that it would be useless for me to go to the house and show Sir George an illustrated booklet of our latest models?" he asked. "It is your opinion that the old boy would give me the toe of his boot?"

"You wouldn't get so far as that—you wouldn't even see him," replied the chauffeur.

"He ain't shown himself this morning. I tell you, there's a rare to-do in the 'ouse. I've been having a few words with Mary,

the scullerymaid, and Jim, the boy. Nobody daren't go near Sir George this morning. He didn't come down to breakfast, and there's his daughter crying her eyes out, and lookin' as scared as a young bird. I saw her out just now with the dogs—pretendin' that things were usual-like. But you can't fool me! I tell you, there's something fishy about all this. Where was Sir George durin' the night? Why won't he show himself this morning? What's he scared about, anyway?"

And the man, with a knowing wink, picked up his hose again.

"Ah, well, it is really none of my business," said Browne, with a sigh. "I'm really awfully sorry I can't do any business to-day. Good day!"

And William Napoleon Browne departed—feeling that his time had not been entirely wasted.

CHAPTER 7.

On the Trail!

BROWNE had come over on a borrowed bicycle, and as he thoughtfully pedalled down a rural lane he heard the sound of an approaching motor-car. He drew to the side, and then his eyes opened wider as he recognised Nelson Lee's powerful roadster. He jumped off at once.

"Well met, Browne," said Nelson Lee, as he stopped the car. "Anything to report?"

"A little, Chief," replied Browne. "I hardly expected to find you here——"

"The circumstances are altered, Browne," interrupted Lee. "Fresh facts have come to light, and I must change my methods accordingly. I will give you some details later, when I return to the Towers. Now for your report."

Browne explained his chat with Webb, the chauffeur, and for once he was brief. He

Nipper and Browne grabbed the man as he attempted to escape. In his fear he fought like a maniac.



dropped his long-winded style of delivery, and rapped out his facts briskly.

"There is nothing much here which is new," commented Lee, at length. "We already knew that Sir George Bullton—or, at least, his car—had been at Halford Towers during the night. We guessed that Sir George himself had penetrated the plantation, and had stood for some time watching the house. Webb's story, with its innuendoes and veiled accusations, support this."

"You think that Brother George is a bad lad, sir?"

"No, Browne, not necessarily," said Lee slowly. "I have interviewed Westerham, the accused man. It is consistent with what he told me that Sir George Bullton should have been at Halford Towers last night."

Indeed, Lee knew that Browne's evidence corroborated Tony's story of the wager. However, he was certainly puzzled as to why

Sir George had not come voluntarily forward to-day. It was evident that he had heard of the murder of his old friend.

"You've done very well, Browne," said Lee approvingly. "Get back to the Towers now—and wait for me. There will probably be some more work later."

"O.K., Chief. The more, the better," said Browne, saluting.

Lee drove on to Bullton Court. Leaving his car in the roadway, he walked boldly up the drive to the big house. He rang the bell, and the door was opened by an agitated-looking maidservant.

"The—the master isn't it, sir," she said, in answer to Lee's inquiry.

"No?" said Lee, dryly.

Across the big hall, one of the doors was slightly ajar, and a deep, agitated voice was making itself heard. The maid, following the direction of Nelson Lee's gaze, gave him a swift, appealing look.

"I quite understand," said the detective, nodding. "You have been instructed to inform all callers that your master is not at home. Nevertheless, I want you to take in my card. I fancy he will change his mind."

"Very well, sir," said the maid with obvious relief.

She took the card, and Nelson Lee stepped in, closing the door after him. The girl went to the door that stood slightly ajar, tapped, and entered.

"No, certainly not!" came an angry voice. "I won't see him! Send him away!"

"Yes, sir," came the maid's frightened voice.

Nelson Lee made a quick decision. He strode across the hall, and patted the startled Lucy reassuringly on the shoulder as she came out. Lee stepped into the room.

"I hope you will forgive this intrusion, Sir George," he said quietly.

He beheld a room which was evidently



a library; standing in front of the fireplace was a heavily-built man with a haggard face. Near the window stood a fresh young girl, her eyes red, her whole attitude suggestive of terror.

"Upon my soul!" exploded Sir George Bullton. "How dare you, sir? Get out of my house at once! What do you mean by forcing your way in like this?"

"The circumstances are so peculiar, Sir George, that I am sure you will forgive me—"

"I'll forgive nothing!" roared Sir George. "This is an unwarrantable intrusion."

"It is an intrusion, I will admit—but not unwarrantable," said Lee. "I have just come from Mr. Anthony Westerham, who is in a cell at Chelmsford. It is at his express wish that I am here."

Sir George opened his mouth, seemed to choke, and then he subsided. The girl ran forward, caught Lee's arm, and looked up into his face.

"Is—is Tony all right?" she asked eagerly.

"Mr. Westerham is in a very awkward position, I am afraid," replied Lee. "However, I am convinced of his innocence, and I am doing everything in my power to help him."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!" cried the girl, hope in her voice.

She ran out of the room without saying another word, and Nelson Lee looked at Sir George.

"As I think you know, my name is Lee," said the detective. "I am here because young Westerham has told me the full details of the wager that he made with his uncle. You were present at the Towers on Wednesday evening, Sir George, and you know of this wager."

"I know nothing!" said Sir George hoarsely. "Wager? Nonsense! I know nothing of any wager."

Nelson Lee looked at him steadily.

"Do you deny, Sir George, that young Westerham wagered his uncle a hundred pounds that—"

"I tell you I know nothing!" shouted Sir George in a strained voice. "It's nonsense! Arrant nonsense! Are you hinting that you suspect me? Do you think I took any part in this foul crime against Lord Halford?"

"Please calm yourself," said Lee quietly.

"I am suggesting nothing. But you were at Halford Towers last night between the hours of midnight and three a.m., when the murder was committed—"

"I was not!" panted Sir George.

He had moved forward, and he clung to his desk; he was almost on the point of collapse. His face had become chalky-white, and his eyes were filled with fear.

"I think you had better be quite frank, Sir George," said Lee grimly. "Your car was at Halford Towers last night. The marks of the tyres are plainly visible—"

"Marks—of tyres!" babbled Sir George.

"Well, what of it?" he went on, trying to pull himself together. "Somebody must have taken my car there! I wasn't there! Get out of my house! I won't be browbeaten

and questioned and cross-examined like this!"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, Sir George," he said. "I take it, then, that you deny all knowledge of this wager, and that you are willing to leave young Westerham to his fate."

He turned on his heel, and strode out.

THERE was a burning light in Nelson Lee's eyes as he strode down the drive, away from Bullton Court. His interview with Sir George had been entirely unsatisfactory; but, at least, Lee was certain that Sir George knew a great deal more than he was prepared to say. Was his knowledge innocent—or was it guilty?

Nelson Lee was keen; his interest was intensely aroused. He could not help feeling inwardly amused when he thought of Chief Detective-inspector Lennard and the local police. They knew nothing of Sir George Bullton, or of his connection with the crime. They had satisfied themselves that Tony Westerham was their man, and they were placidly building up their case against him.

Nelson Lee had reached the road, and was about to get back into his car, when he noticed a small two-seater drawn into a private gateway a little further along. There was a footpath there which led across the grounds, past a shrubbery, to the house.

"H'm!" mused Lee, very alert.

He walked to the car, but could find no evidence of its ownership after an examination. The number was a London one. He climbed over the gate, and walked along the footpath. Presently, as he went round the shrubbery, he beheld two figures some distance ahead. His face cleared. He recognised one as the girl he had seen in the library with Sir George Bullton. Lee immediately guessed that she was Winnie Bullton, the baronet's daughter, and, although he had never seen Dick Sylvester, he knew that the stalwart young fellow with the girl was he. Lee was in no way surprised to see Dick, for the detective had 'phoned him, and had urged him to come down—as Dick's evidence, in the light of Tony Westerham's statement, might be important.

"Oh, I'm glad you haven't gone, Mr. Lee," said Winnie, as the detective came up. "This is Mr. Sylvester."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Lee," said Dick eagerly. "I went to the Towers, but heard you had come on here—and I couldn't wait. I've just been telling Winnie that she can count on me to help all through."

"That's very good of you, Mr. Sylvester," said Lee.

"It's a perfectly rotten business, and I'll never believe that Tony did it," declared Dick. "Why, he's almost like a brother—we were at Oxford together, and we've been pals ever since. The whole thing's unthinkable."

"I only want a short chat with you, Mr. Sylvester," said Lee. "And as you are here, I think it would be advisable for you to remain. Sir George is greatly upset, and

your presence will no doubt have a calming effect upon him."

"Thank you, Mr. Lee," said Winnie gratefully.

"I'll send Mr. Sylvester in within five minutes," promised Lee, taking Dick's arm.

The girl seemed to understand that she was not required at this interview, and she went off at once. Lee, still with his arm in Dick's, walked slowly back to the road.

"This is a bad business, Sylvester," he said. "We've got to do all we can to help young Westerham. I understand that you were at the Towers on Wednesday evening?"

"Yes, of course."

"Can you tell me what took place?"

For a moment Dick Sylvester hesitated.

"You mean—the wager?" he asked shrewdly.

"Exactly."

Dick explained the full circumstances, and corroborated Tony Westerham's story in every detail. Lee listened, his mouth hardening somewhat. Here was a different story! Sir George Bullton and Dick Sylvester had both been present—according to Tony's story—on Wednesday evening, when the wager had been made. Dick supported this story, but Sir George Bullton denied it! Lee knew that he had been wise in getting hold of Dick before he could go indoors. There had been no time for collusion.

"So, you see, all this evidence against Tony was faked," concluded Dick earnestly. "The staggering thing is that Lord Halford's body should have been found in the mere! I was stunned when I heard the news. It's horrible! And for the life of me I can't possibly imagine who could have done it!"

"We'll leave that for the moment, Mr. Sylvester," said Lee. "Thank you for your very candid statement—which, for the present, we will keep quite to ourselves. Now, tell me, did you help young Westerham in any way?"

"Help him? How do you mean?"

"Did you assist in this faked evidence?"

"Good Lord, no," replied Dick. "I returned to London on Wednesday night, and knew nothing further until I heard the news of the murder this morning. Naturally, I grinned at first—I thought that everything was going smoothly. But when I was told that Lord Halford's body had been found—well, it nearly knocked me cold."

"As I can well imagine," agreed Lee, nodding.

CHAPTER 8.

The Clue of the Moved Stone!

AS Nelson Lee approached Halford Towers, he seemed to be on the lookout for something—something either on the roadside, or within easy distance of it.

He even drove past the lodge gates and turned up a by-lane which led, by a semi-circular route, back to the main road farther

along, in the direction of Braintree. And it wasn't long before he found what he sought. He pulled the car to a standstill and looked about him closely. The keenness in his eyes increased, and there was a satisfied light in them, too. He did not spend much time here; he got out of the car, moved about for a minute or two, and then drove off.

The first person he met on the terrace was Chief-inspector Lennard.

"Hallo! I thought you'd gone," said the Yard man in some surprise. "Surely you're not carrying on with this case, Lee?"

"Before long, Lennard, I'm going to give you a surprise," replied Lee.

"If you think you can prove that young Westerham didn't commit the murder, you'd better wake up," replied Lennard genially. "My dear man, the thing's as clear as daylight. He hasn't got a loophole of escape. The evidence is definite. We've got the golf-shoes down from Westerham's London flat."

"And they fit the prints?"

"Like a glove," said the Yard man.

"Can I have a look at those shoes?" asked Lee.

"You can see them if you want to," replied the chief-inspector dryly. "Inspector Davids is indoors—he's got them. Ask him to let you have them. It'll be all right."

Lee went off, and met three very disappointed cubs on the steps. Nipper and Willy had been unable to find any trace of the mythical golf-club. Browne had joined in the search after returning, and he, too, had been unsuccessful.

"Well, I didn't expect you to find it, so I'm not disappointed," said Lee, after he had heard the report. "There wasn't much chance that it would be in the mere—but I fancy I may be able to locate it."

"There's something else, sir," said Nipper eagerly. "Half an hour ago Mr. Lennard was comparing those footprints with Westerham's shoes, which had just arrived from London. Willy and I watched."

"Well?"

"Willy is pretty keen, guv'nor—and after the inspector had gone, Willy pointed out that there was something rummy about those footprints," continued Nipper. "So Browne and I gave them a closer inspection—"

"Splendid!" interrupted Lee. "You found that while some of the footprints exactly fitted the shoes, others revealed a discrepancy."

"How did you know, Chief?" asked Willy wonderingly.

"I was going to examine those footprints myself—and, according to the theory I have formulated, there *must* be two sets," replied Nelson Lee. "One set made by young Westerham, and another set made by the real murderer."

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "You mean that he was wearing ribbed golf-shoes of the same pattern as Westerham's?"

"If this murder was committed by somebody else, there must be two sets of prints,"

said Lee grimly. "When I examined them for the first time, I assumed that the murderer must have made several journeys from the house to the mere and back. So much the footprints told. I am now convinced that Westerham left only one trail—from the house to the mere and back again. The other footprints were made by the murderer, who committed the actual crime after Westerham had gone—leaving behind him what he thought to be identical footprints. But let's go and see."

Lee's examination was thorough. Much to the amusement of Chief-inspector Lennard, who watched him from a distance, the great detective even went on his hands and knees and examined the footprints with the aid of a powerful magnifying lens.

"Like one of these darned story-book detectives," grinned the Yard man. "Oh, well, he's not doing any harm, and I dare say it pleases him! Educating the young mind! It's a wonder he didn't bring his microscope!"

Nelson Lee, oblivious of these murmured comments, and watched closely by his three young assistants, put his lens away with a satisfied expression. He next produced a tiny folding measure and proceeded to take careful measurements.

"If the climax of this case was not close at hand—as I fully believe it to be—I would take plaster casts of these footprints," he said at length. "At a casual glance they appear identical."

"That's what we thought, guv'nor," said Nipper. "But in some of the impressions of the right shoe the ribs are intact, and in others the first inner rib is distinctly cut. There's no mistake about it, because they're all the same, right down the path—all the impressions of that particular line."

"And, to clinch matters, there is a shade of difference in the size," declared Lee. "Either the second pair of shoes are a half-size larger, or they are marked the same size, but of a different fitting. Shoes, nowadays, are made in two or three fittings to each size. An important point, although a small one."

He rose to his feet, and considered for a moment.

"Now for that golf club," he said crisply. "See if you can find a long rake, Nipper—one of those wooden farm-rakes, if possible. I dare say the gardener will help you. Meet me at the lodge gates in ten minutes. You others had better go, too."

Lee strode off, and Browne sighed.

"I fear, brothers, that we have been both blind and dull," he said with regret. "The Chief knows no more than we do, and yet he has this case at his finger-tips. At any moment he will probably pounce on the murderer."

"Jiggered if I can understand it," said Nipper, frowning. "Why is he so sure of a golf club? And what are we going to do with the garden rake? Beats me!"

IN the great hall, Lee encountered Poole, the butler. The old man had got over the first shock, but he was still haggard and tremulous. Just now he seemed to have a fresh worry on his mind; for Lee had found him staring anxiously out of doors.

"Are you expecting somebody, Poole?" asked Lee.

"Everything's gone wrong, sir," replied the butler. "I've done the best I can with the cook and the maids, but I can't handle them. Mrs. Simkins, the new housekeeper, ought to have been here hours ago."

"Yes, you mentioned her to me some time ago," nodded Lee. "Well, Poole, you can't expect things to run smoothly at a time like this."

"It's a pity she couldn't come—just when she was needed so badly," complained the butler. "The master—Heaven rest his soul—told me he was writing to Mrs. Simkins yesterday, instructing her to be here at eleven o'clock. He'd already interviewed her, and she only lives in Chelmsford."

"Well, perhaps she'll turn up later," said Lee soothingly. "After all, Poole, it's only a trifle. I suppose you saw that the letter was posted yesterday?"

The butler started.

"Why, now you come to mention it, sir—" He broke off, a startled look in his eyes. "I don't believe the letters were posted!" he added blankly. "What with Mr. Tony coming and having that quarrel with the master—"

He broke off again, went to an old-fashioned mahogany letter-box on one of the walls, and unlocked it. It was evidently placed there for the general use of the household, and it was somebody's nightly duty to empty it and take the letters to the post.

"Why, bless my soul, they're here—four of them, sir," said the butler. "And Mrs. Simkins' is amongst them. No wonder she didn't turn up."

Lee took the letters, and a steely light entered his eyes.

"I'll take charge of these, Poole," he said quietly.

Without another word he strode into the morning-room and closed the door. Quickly he ripped open one of the letters; and that steely light in his eyes increased as he read.

"I was right!" he muttered tensely. "I had my case clear before this—but this clinches the thing up to the hilt. Yes, I'll certainly have a surprise for Lennard before long!"

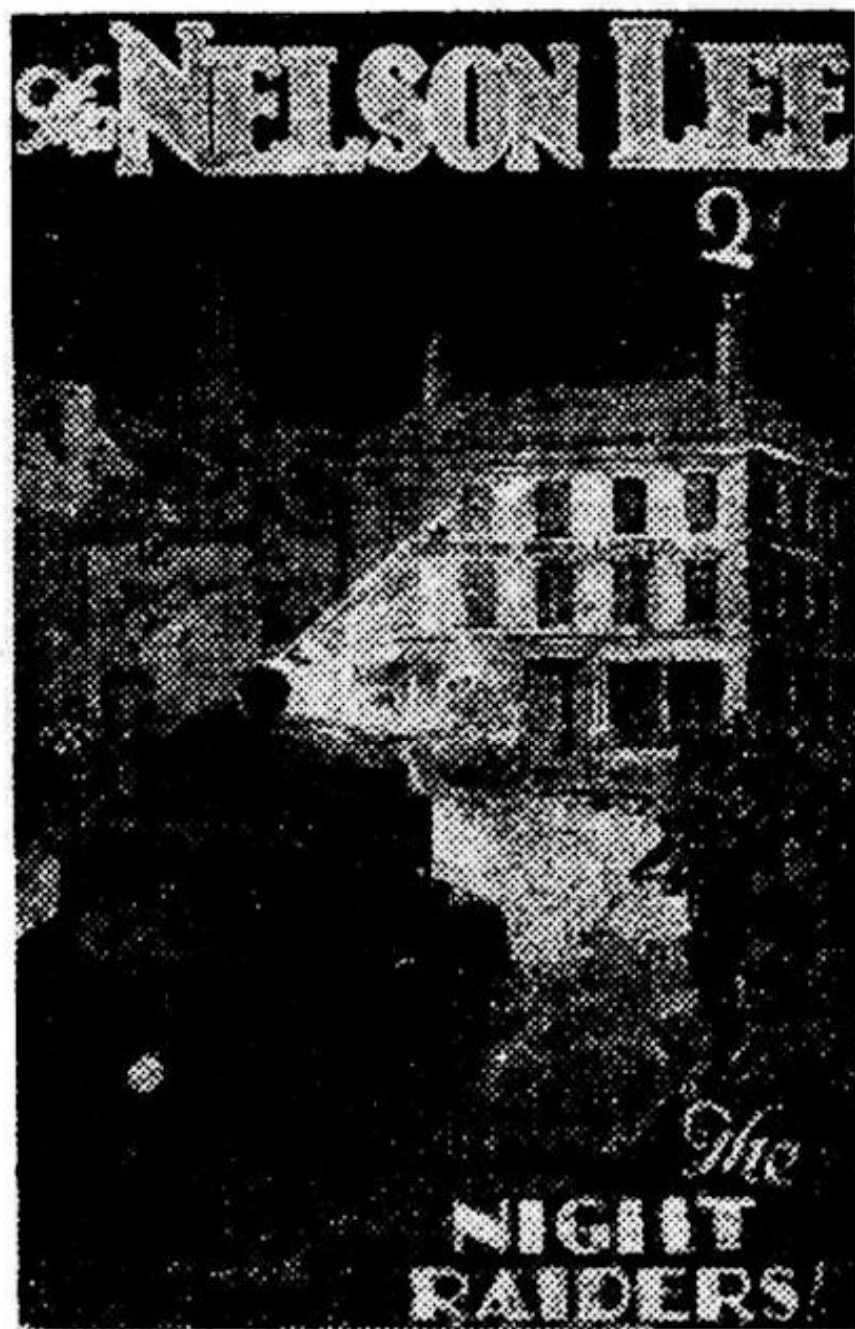
AT the lodge gates Lee found his three cubs, and they had in their possession a long-handled wooden rake.

"The very thing," said Lee approvingly. "This way, young 'uns."

He led them to the spot where he had stopped his car some little time earlier. There was a small pond by the roadside just here.

"By Jingo!" said Nipper. "You're going to drag this pond with the rake!"

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"And, unless my theories are all wrong, we shall find something of interest," nodded Nelson Lee. "The murder was not committed with Westerham's spanner, and I believe that a golf club was employed. If so, we shall find it in this pond."

"How can you be so sure, guv'nor?"

"The murderer would not dare to conceal his weapon in the mere, for he knew that the mere would be dragged, and the weapon might come up by accident," replied Lee. "He couldn't very well bury it, and it would be difficult to conceal it in any other way. So I looked round for a pond—and, as I expected, I found one."

"But, dash it, sir, you can't be sure that this is the pond," protested Nipper.

"Look!" said Lee grimly. "I'll tell you at once that I had reason to suspect this particular pond. And see what I find."

He pointed to a spot near the pond's edge where there was a number of heavy flint stones, partly moss-covered, partly choked with ferns. There was a gap in the midst of those stones.

"You mean that one of the big stones has been taken away, sir?" asked Willy.

"Not necessarily taken far," replied Lee. "The missing stone, I should imagine, must weigh ten or twelve pounds. It's nowhere in sight—it hasn't been dislodged by accident. Who would carry off a big stone of that sort?"

"A brain-wave, Chief," said Browne admiringly. "Nobody would carry off such a

stone, but it would be very handy as a weight."

"Exactly," nodded Lee. "Let's get busy with that rake."

Nipper handed the rake to the detective, who immediately commenced dragging operations.

His task was brief. The pond proved to be fairly shallow, and after half a dozen unsuccessful manoeuvres with the rake, during which a number of old cans and bottles came to light, Lee felt a much heavier drag on the rake. When it was cautiously drawn out of the water the head of a golf club appeared—a stout wooden club with a brass plate on the base of the head.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper. "You were right, guv'nor!"

Lee made no comment. He was looking at the find. Not only was there this golf club, smashed and splintered in the middle, but a pair of new ribbed-soled golf-shoes.

"The other pair of shoes!" breathed Willy. "I say, this is exciting!"

"I wasn't sure of the shoes but their discovery is a distinct step forward," said Nelson Lee.

And Lee, disentangling the "find" from the rake, deliberately flung the shoes and the golf club back into the middle of the pond. The others watched in astonishment.

"I thought you were going to show those shoes to Lennard, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"So I am—but not yet," replied Lee.

"There is a little experiment that I have a

fancy to try. If the ruse works, we shall bring this case to a satisfactory conclusion within the hour. We're having a most interesting time, boys, eh?" he added with twinkling eyes.

"Oh, frightfully interesting," agreed Browne. "The trouble is, we don't know what you're getting at. If it wouldn't be out of order, Chief, may we know how you found out about the golf club?"

"It was partly guesswork," admitted Lee. "When I examined the library this morning, one glaring thing demanded attention. The evidence was faked. Those hairs had been stuck on the spanner; it wasn't the real weapon. Close to the desk I found a small splinter of wood, and there was no accounting for its presence. It was hickory wood."

"And golf-club shafts are made of hickory," murmured Browne.

"A golf club was just the type of weapon that could have delivered that smashing blow," continued Lee. "In all probability, the shaft would smash at the moment of impact. So I thought it worth my while to set you to find the golf club. There's no time for any more questions now—we've got to get indoors."

"And this find of ours, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Must remain our secret for the moment," replied Lee. "Remember, boys, not a word to anybody."

CHAPTER 9.

The Trap!

INDOORS, Lee acted swiftly. He went straight to the telephone, and got through to Bullton Court. It was Winnie who answered.

"I'm afraid father won't come to the 'phone, Mr. Lee," said the girl, after she had heard the detective's request.

"Your father's presence at Halford Towers is imperative, Miss Bullton," said Lee. "Please tell him that unless he comes voluntarily, and at once, he will undoubtedly be fetched. Mr. Sylvester will bring him in his car. His presence is needed here, too."

Lee hung the receiver up, and for the next fifteen minutes he stood at the window of the morning-room. A look of satisfaction came over his face as he saw Dick Sylvester's car turn into the drive. Sir George was in it.

"All right, Poole," said Lee, hurrying out into the hall. "Show Sir George and Mr. Sylvester into the morning-room, as I told you. Where's Mr. Lennard?"

"In the library, sir, with the other London gentlemen."

Lee went to the library, took Lennard by the arm, and almost dragged him into a sun-parlour, which was next to the morning-room. The communicating-door was slightly ajar; and Lee heard Poole ushering the two visitors into the adjoining room.

"What's the idea, Lee?" demanded Lennard, in astonishment.

"You're all wrong about this case, Len-

nard," replied Nelson Lee. "You've got the wrong weapon, the wrong shoes, and the wrong man."

"What on earth——"

"Young Westerham did not kill his uncle," continued Lee, as the amazed Yard man tried to interrupt. "And although I may not be able to tell you who *did* the murder, I can at least show you the spot where the real weapon is most likely to be concealed. Another pair of golf shoes may be there, too."

"You're crazy!" protested Lennard. "We've got all the facts——"

"There are two sets of facts in this case—and you've got hold of the wrong set," declared Lee. "Lord Halford was struck down by a golf club—not by a spanner. The murder was committed after Westerham had left these premises. Come! No more talk. I'll show you the spot I mean."

With three rapid strides, Lee reached the communicating door. He flung it open. The morning-room was empty.

"Quick!" snapped Lee.

More bewildered than ever, Lennard accompanied him. They raced across the garden, leapt a hedge, and Lee pulled up short behind another hedge. Lennard was amazed to see Nipper and Browne and Willy concealed here, too.

"Look!" said Lee quietly.

The Yard man parted the upper twigs of the hedge. He beheld a man frantically dragging a small pond with a rake. And even as Lennard watched, the golf-club and the shoes came to the surface.

"Hi!" thundered Lennard, breaking through the hedge. "What do you think you're doing?"

The man with the rake turned. His face was ashen. So altered was he in appearance—so great was the terror written on his countenance—that the chief inspector hardly recognised Dick Sylvester, although he had met him earlier. With a hoarse cry, Sylvester dropped the rake and bolted, but he had hardly gone four yards before Nipper and Browne sprang out of the edge and grabbed him. He fought like a maniac.

"Good glory!" ejaculated Lennard.

He ran up, and Sylvester fairly screamed.

"Let me go—let me go!" he panted.

"You've got nothing against me! You can't prove a thing! I didn't do it! Westerham killed his uncle!"

"Steady, young man," growled Lennard. "Your behaviour is so extraordinary that I think you'll have to be detained on suspicion. We'll have to make a few inquiries about you."

He snapped a pair of handcuffs on Sylvester's wrists, and just then Inspector Davids and a sergeant appeared. Lennard gave the new prisoner over to their care, and Sylvester was literally carried away, almost foaming at the mouth.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Lennard, turning to Lee. "I've never seen guilt so plainly written in a man's eyes in all my experience!"

(Continued on page 42.)

PRIMO THE TERRIBLE!



A Shock for Tim!

A STENTORIAN snore almost shook the hut in which Primo the Terrible, King of the Rakatagans, slept. Primo, tired out with the labours of the day, had thrown himself down on his bed, and had dropped off to sleep instantly. At the other side of the "royal palace" Tim Murphy lay—also asleep!

There was no guard at the door of the hut, for the natives were now firm supporters of their mighty king, and the only enemies whom Primo and Tim possessed were a gang of scoundrelly black-birders, who recently had been rounded up and who were now safely locked in the strongest hut which the village possessed.

And yet it would have been wiser had Primo put a sentry on duty that night, for, while the village was wrapped in slumber, a figure wriggled out of a hole which had been scraped under the wall of the hut which held the blackbirders.

Rising to its feet, the figure darted into the forest, and returned in about half an hour. Then the man slipped cautiously into the "royal palace," and holding a handkerchief above the head of the sleeping Primo, shook it. Something dropped from it and fell lightly upon the face of Primo. Then, with a subdued chuckle, the blackbirders slunk out of the hut and made his way back to his companions.

"It is good!" he informed his waiting com-

panions, speaking in Portuguese. "Tomorrow this man of strength will find himself as weak as a kitten, for I secured a venomous spider from the forest, and have placed it in his bed. One bite from the spider—and we will only have the boy to deal with!"

Morning came, and Tim Murphy, early astir, walked around the village to make sure all was well. He had not proceeded far, however, before a cry made him turn around, and he saw Primo stagger from the hut. Then, to Tim's amazement, the great primeval

giant crumpled up like a piece of tissue paper, and dropped to the ground.

Instantly the village was in an uproar! The natives flocked around their fallen master, and Tim bent down over Primo.

"Say! What's happened, Primo?" he gasped.

Primo tried to raise his hand, but it fell back against his body. Then, in a voice that was utterly unlike his

usual bull-like bellow, he replied:

"I guess I'm done, Tim! I'm just as weak as a kid. I—I can't even walk!"

Tim turned to the natives, and commanded them to pick up Primo and carry him into the hut. As they were about to place the giant on his bed, Wanga, the brightest of the natives, gave a cry and dashed forward. With a piece of wood which he snatched up, he slashed at the bed, and Tim saw a dark stain appear where the venomous spider—which had drunk its fill of Primo's blood during the night—had been battered to death by Wanga.

No. 7.

The Downfall of Primo!

The world's strongest man no longer, but now as weak as a kitten! That's the amazing situation in which Primo the Terrible finds himself in this week's stirring yarn.

Wanga's face was grave as he turned to Tim.

"Very bad, master!" he reported. "It is the evil tarantula, and if it has drunk of the king's blood, then he is poisoned!"

Tim started. Primo poisoned. Then that accounted for his sudden weakness. Even so, however, he did not suspect treachery. He turned to Wanga.

"Is there a cure for the poison, Wanga?" he demanded.

"It is said, master——" Wanga began, but got no further, for at that moment a cool voice interrupted, and Tim, Wanga, and the natives turned to the door of the hut.

Lounging there nonchalantly was the figure of one of the blackbirders, and there was an evil grin on his face. He held a revolver in his hands, and the muzzle was pointed at Tim. Not only had he managed to escape from the hut, but he had also found the place where the weapons taken from the blackbirders had been stored.

"I guess your Primo person's going to hand in his checks, kid," he said. "I'll thank you to put up your hands, and tell these niggers o' yours not to try any hanky-panky. If they do, I'll drill you, sure!"

Several of the natives had started towards him menacingly, but at a word from Tim they fell back. Tim knew that the scoundrel would not hesitate to carry out his threat.

"I guess we're in possession now," said the blackbirder, as others of the gang came up to the door of the hut. "Now, I don't bear malice, and if you behave yourself, we'll let you go. All we want is no interference."

"So that you can take off these natives and sell them into slavery?" retorted Tim. "I guess I'm not letting you do that if I can help it."

"Say, kid, you've got the wrong end of the stick," said the man. "We came to this island looking for labourers, but I guess we've found something better." He crossed over the hut, and kicked an object which lay on the floor. It was the great metal idol which Primo had split in twain when he first came to the island. "I guess we'll take away this god, and we'll call things square."

Tim looked at him in amazement.

"What good can that old god be to you?" he demanded. "It's just old junk."

"Is it?" replied the man. "It may be junk to you, but if you'd taken the trouble to examine it properly, as I did when I was last in the village, you'd have found that it's pretty good junk. Underneath the grime and dirt of centuries, my boy, that idol's pure gold—and we're going to have it!"

The Last Chance Gone!

PRIMO made a desperate effort to spring from his bed, but the poison that was in his veins was too powerful for him, and he dropped back in pain. Tim stood as though petrified. The idol gold! He could hardly believe it. Neither he nor

Primo had given any further thought to it after it had been broken, but, apparently, when the blackbirders had ransacked the village they had examined the idol, and doubtless planned to come back for it after they had taken away their forced labourers.

"You're talking rot, man!" gasped Tim, and the man laughed.

"Just look at it, kid," he said, and bent down to scrape the grime from the idol.

That was the moment for which Tim had been waiting. He darted forward. His foot shot out, catching the man fair and square, and toppling him head-first on the ground. The revolver dropped from his grasp, and the next second Tim had snatched it up, and darted for the door.

Two or three of the blackbirders tried to stop him, but he pressed the trigger, and one



of them collapsed on the ground. The others fell back, and, swift as a gazelle, Tim darted from the hut, and streaked into the forest, bullets following him as the blackbirders tried to bring him down.

But Tim knew the forest, and they did not. Dodging, twisting and turning, he ran on, and did not come to a halt until he had placed a safe distance between himself and the village, and the sounds of pursuit had died down. Then he sat down to think over the position.

Primo was powerless, and the natives, without him to lead them, were as helpless as children. What was Tim to do? He thought first of going to the beach where the blackbirders' boats were, and stoving them in, but he hesitated, for he might need the boats some day.

He did, however, start off for the beach, with the intention of endeavouring to float the boats, and then rowing them to some hiding-place. But, as he proceeded through the forest, he suddenly stopped, and whipped out his revolver. Someone was approaching

him—someone had tracked him through the forest!

His finger tightened on the trigger as a screen of bushes parted; then he gave a laugh, and thrust the revolver back into his belt. For the newcomer was the faithful Wanga!

"Wanga!" he gasped. "How did you get here?"

"I slip away, master," said Wanga. "They not see me!"

"And Primo—how is he?"

"Bad, master—very bad!" replied the native. "If he is not healed soon he will die!"

night we must carry him to the medicine man. Will you do this?"

"I do what my master commands," said Wanga, and Tim hastily outlined his plans.

The blackbirders were not interfering with the natives. They were too occupied in breaking up the golden idol, preparatory to leaving the island. Tim would wait in the forest, near the village, and Wanga would arrange for bearers for Primo. The blackbirders, believing Primo to be incapable of moving, were not likely to keep a watch on him.

Wanga departed, and Tim waited anxiously for night. Hours passed and nothing happened. Then, when Tim had almost given up hope, several stealthy figures stole away from the village, bearing the giant form of Primo with them.

What followed next was like a nightmare to Tim. Primo was now unconscious, and Tim saw that unless something was done quickly, the giant would die of the poison. Through the forest they went staggering along as best they could in the pitch blackness.

Wanga went first, showing the way, and eventually they staggered out of the forest into the bleak, rocky district which stretched at the foot of the hills. A narrow, tortuous path led upward to where, in a cave, dwelt the medicine man to whom Wanga had referred. And, as they went on, the moon rose and bathed the scene in bright white light.

"Here, master, is the home of the medicine man," announced Wanga at last, pointing to a cave entrance in the rocky cliffs. "I will

call him."

He raised his hands to his lips, and sent a weird cry echoing into the night. Tim looked around him. The cliffs beetled above the cave entrance, and looked as though they might topple down at any moment. Tim could hardly repress a shudder. And then, as a wrinkled figure came stealthily out of the cave, what Tim had feared, happened!

There was a sudden crash, and a mass of rock toppled down from above. The wizened medicine man was not quick enough to avoid it. The next moment he was covered with



Primo picked up the blackbirders two at a time, banged their heads together, and then hurled them out of the hut like projectiles from a gun!

"Wanga, is there a way of healing him?" gasped Tim. "Can we find some medicine for him—some antidote to the spider poison?"

"There is but one man who can do it!" replied Wanga. "In the hills he lives—a very old medicine man. But he could not come to the village—the bad men would kill him!"

Tim was deep in thought for a few moments, and then, suddenly, he brightened up.

"Then we must take Primo to him!" he cried. "Listen, Wanga. To-night, when all is quiet, you and some of the others must go to Primo's hut and carry him out. To-

earth and rocks as a landslide swooped like an avalanche down the side of the cliffs above him!

The only man who could cure Primo was buried beneath an overwhelming mass of rock!

Primo's Revenge!

THE landslide stopped, and Tim dashed madly forward. He flung himself on the rocks as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses, and began straining at them. The bearers put down Primo and also went to the work of rescue. Bit by bit the rocks were thrown aside, and Tim gave a gasp of relief as he saw that the medicine man was still alive.

But one great mass of rock pinned him down by the leg, and, although Tim and the natives tore at it, they could do nothing to shift it. Tim groaned. The perspiration was pouring down his face and down those of the natives, but the combined efforts had no result!

"If only Primo was well!" gasped Tim. "He could shift this rock in no time!"

Tim looked around. Primo had regained consciousness, and was gazing at the scene in bewilderment. He seemed incapable of understanding what had happened, for the poison had also affected his brain as well as his body.

"Primo, old scout, if you could only——" began Tim, and then he stopped.

For Primo, as though in a trance, had suddenly sprang to his feet and darted forward. There was a vacant stare on his face which showed Tim that he hardly knew what he was doing. But something had touched a responsive chord in his memory, and for the moment Primo had forgotten that he was a sick man!

Someone was in difficulties and needed his help! That was all Primo knew. But he was soon to learn that he had lost his strength, for, as he caught hold of the rock and gave a heave, he collapsed again and dropped to the ground.

"Primo!" gasped Tim, and dashed forward.

But Primo was not to be beaten. He struggled slowly to his feet, and then, summoning up every ounce of his failing energy, he flung himself on the rock again. The agony which he endured must have been terrible, but he gritted his teeth and tugged and strained at the rock.

He seemed to have turned into an animal—an animal possessed of one grim, powerful resolve! His brain was incapable of grasping anything save the fact that he *had* to shift the rock. He refused to be balked by the poison which had gripped him, and he flung himself on the rock again and again as a terrier flings itself on a rat.

Tim and the natives fell back, stupified. Tim tried to speak—to warn Primo against over-exerting himself—but he could see that it was useless to speak to the giant. Primo

was mad—mad with rage because he could not now accomplish a feat that at one time would have been easy for him.

And it was Primo's very madness that won the day! Suddenly there came a crash, and the mighty rock rolled over, releasing the medicine man. And Primo dropped to the ground, a crumpled heap!

Tim bent over him, wondering whether the effort had been too great. But Primo's heart was beating, and Tim gave a sigh of relief.

The medicine man had first to be attended to, and Tim saw to this without delay. Then, through the medium of Wanga, he explained the reason for his visit, and the medicine man, grateful to Primo for his help, brought out from the cave an earthenware jug, which he raised to the lips of Primo.

The effect was almost electrical! Primo recovered consciousness at once, and as the potion began to have effect, became stronger and stronger. Eagerly Tim watched, and by the time a half-hour had passed, Primo looked—and felt—his old self again.

He sprang into the air with a cry, and then, to show that his strength had returned, he picked up the mighty piece of rock and hurled it through the air as easily as if it had been a cricket-ball. Then, thanking the old medicine man, they left, and Tim outlined a fresh plan as they made their way back to the village.

The next morning, when the leader of the blackbirders entered Primo's hut, to taunt him with his impotence, Primo remained lying down. It was not until all the blackbirders were gathered together in the hut, and were packing up the broken idol, that Primo, with a wild yell, sprang from his bed.

The blackbirders must have thought that a hurricane had suddenly struck the hut. Two by two Primo picked them up, banged their heads together, whirled them through the air, and shot them out of the door like projectiles from a gun. In ten minutes the blackbirders, shaken and sore, were lying on the ground outside the hut, unable to do anything save groan.

"Wanga!" announced Primo. "You will be responsible for looking after those men, and to you I depute the task of running the village until I return." He turned to Tim. "What say you, Tim? Shall we make for the mainland in the blackbirders' boats, and take the broken idol with us? The gold will enable us to purchase a steam yacht, and when we have that, we can return again to these faithful subjects of mine!"

"Sure thing!" said Tim, with a twinkle in his eye!

THE END.

(Look out for the first of a new series of thrill stories, introducing *Thurston Kyle*, the *Night Hawk*, in next week's issue of the NELSON LEE.)

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR

(Introduction on page 41.)



The Brooklands Blaze!

JIM was roused by the sound of Joe's voice, and by the roar of petrol-fed flames. He rolled out of his blankets, to see that the hangar was filled with a ruddy glare. When he came to his feet, the stack of petrol cans was sending a wild sheet of flame towards the roof, and the wall of the building was already burning.

Blazing liquid was reaching out over the wooden floor towards the car. Steve was already awake, tearing off the tarpaulin which sheeted the machine while he yelled: "Get the car out—quick! Open the doors!"

Jim rushed for the hangar doors, wrenching away the wooden bar which secured them and heaving out the two great iron bolts. From the tail of his eye he saw Steve snatch at the one fire-extinguisher they had brought from Woodburn; he crashed the knob of it against the floor, then shot the broad-spreading stream of chemicals at the petrol which was swamping towards the machine.

Joe hunched himself at the tail of the car as the doors were opened, trying to shove it forward, forgetful of the chocks under the wheels. Jim leaped to aid him, strong hands wrapping about the tyre of one front wheel, heaving with all his strength.

The silvery racing machine bumped over the chocks, then the two were rushing it to the open. The heat of the sudden fire was terrific, it seemed to reach out after them. Burning petrol was everywhere, driv-

ing Steve back as he worked ineffectively with the extinguisher.

"Get help!" they heard him yelling. "Get more extinguishers—sand—anything!"

The racer's tyres grated on the surface of the road. The boys rolled it clear of the hangars, turned to rush back—then stopped dead.

From the rear of the building a man was running. Flames and smoke streaked from his clothing. They saw the fellow take a headlong dive into the lank, damp grass between the blazing hangar and the track, rolling over and over.

The flames fluttered wildly as he spun himself, died, rose once more, then finally extinguished themselves. The startled, spellbound boys saw the man jerk to his feet, leap for the track, then go running along it until the darkness swallowed him up, charred cloth falling and a few sparks still flying

through the thin smoke which he left behind him.

"Who was that?" Jim gasped.

"The bloke that started the fire!" Joe ripped. "Here, run and tell those Frenchmen—I'll get some of our stuff out! We haven't time to chase him now!"

Jim started off at his words, racing past the open front of the hangar. The entrance seemed to be one broad sheet of flame. He had a glimpse of Steve flinging their kit to the road, and he saw Joe jump at and lift a case of spare parts, tossing it clear of the fire.

The Ross Eight trapped in a blazing garage on the eve of the big race. Desperate situations call for desperate measures—and Jim and Joe do the necessary!

The French racing team was in the end hangar. The doors were fastened, and Jim hammered on them with his fists, yelling at the top of his voice. He heard sudden shouts from inside, then the doors opened.

Jim knew no French, but he didn't need it. The blaze seemed to be lighting up half Brooklands. The man who had come to the door cast one glance outside, then turned and bawled at the others.

Fifteen seconds later a dozen Frenchmen were throwing themselves from the hangar, bringing fire-extinguishers, buckets of sand and shovels. Jim headed them in the rush to the scene, while more men came running from the bungalows near at hand, roused by the reflection of the flames in their windows.

Streams of chemicals hissed at the red-hot petrol tins. Men slung sand and dirt on the flames, and some entered the next hangar, to smash down the intervening wall and prevent it setting fire to the roof and spreading the blaze.

Some braved the heat to help Jim and Joe salvage the Ross-Eight kit. Two climbed on to the roof with an extinguisher and put out the tongues of flame which were licking there.

In fifteen minutes the blaze had been blotted out by masses of treacle-like foam, flung by the extinguishers, suffocating the flames. Electric torches and handlamps showed that the inner wall of the hangar had been almost completely burnt out, while there was a huge gap in the flooring.

Smoke rose stifflingly. Everything was grimed and blackened and splashed with chemicals. But the fire was out and the racer was unharmed.

"How did it start?" asked somebody.

"I don't know," Steve answered. "But it's burnt up every drop of the special fuel we use in our machine—and we can't get any more in time for the race!"

"Shan't we be able to run?" Jim gasped, and he stared at Steve's grimy features.

"We can run all right," Steve said, "but the car won't be able to show its speed on ordinary petrol."

He was silent for a moment, then turned to look at the debris. The boys, standing together, heard him say over his shoulder:

"That means we stand no chance of winning, now!"

On the Starting-Line.

THE Frenchmen went back to their hangar, and the remainder of the helpers cleared off. Jim and Joe shoved the racer and the rest of their gear into another hangar a little distance away, lighting the place with a hurricane lamp which they borrowed.

"Who d'you reckon that chap was—the one we saw with his clothes alight?" Jim asked.

"Who d'you think?" Joe growled. "Who did we see hangin' about here just before we turned in?"

"Sniff?" asked Jim.

"It's a million to one it was Sniff," Joe said. "We put the breeze up the Ace team with the way you made our car go, see? Sniff couldn't get at the machine, because we were sleeping round it, so he set light to our petrol, hoping it'd burn the car!"

"Well, it hasn't!" Jim answered, then jerked upright and strode towards the doors. "I'll have a word with Sniff Dix about this," he said grimly.

"Don't be a chump!" Joe grabbed him and jerked him back. "It might not have been him, and, if it was, you can settle with him later on!"

"I will, too!" Jim said, and his fists bunched.

"Besides, he must have got blistered a bit!" Joe said. "Let's go and have a look where he rolled in the grass!"

They took the lantern and went round to the back of the still-smoking hangar. The place where the man had rolled was easy to see. The grass was all flattened down, and to it clung bits of charred cloth, with half a coat-sleeve.

Jim picked this up and examined it. The cloth had been burnt away from the man's arm, and it looked as though it might be part of a grey jacket they had seen Sniff wearing.

"It was him, all right!" Joe muttered. "Still, we won't do anything about it just now. Next time we see him, have a look and find out if he's got any blisters!"

"If he has, I'll give him a few bruises to keep 'em company!" Jim said, and they turned back to the hangar to find Steve there.

He was leaning against the tail of the racer, frowning, and he looked up as they neared him.

"It was Sniff Dix that fired——" began Jim.

"Never mind who it was," Steve cut in. "It's done now! We can settle all that later. The point is that we run our car on a special fuel, and it's all been burnt up. I've got to get some more, somehow, if the car's to have a chance in the race."

"You can get high-compression petrol off one of the firms in the paddock!" Joe told him. "Won't that do?"

"No. We can use it at a pinch, but it will make the car slower," Steve answered. "You see," he turned to Jim, "dad left a formula for the fuel to be used in this engine, and if I can get the chemicals, I can make up some more easily—I just dope the ordinary petrol."

He glanced at his wrist-watch, then went on:

"It's three o'clock in the morning now. If I could borrow a car, I might run up to London. There's a chemist in Wigmore Street who's open all night. I might get the stuff there."

"Try it—or I'll go for you!" Joe said quickly.

"I'd better go myself. The chemicals are poisonous, and they probably wouldn't trust

you with them," Steve said. "The race starts at eleven o'clock. I could be back in about three hours. I wonder if all those Frenchmen have turned in yet? They might lend me a car."

"We'll jolly soon ask 'em!" Joe said, and started off with Jim.

Some of the Frenchmen were still awake. At the side of the hangar they had four cars parked in the open, which they used for odd jobs, running messages and making short journeys. Steve knew a little French, enough to explain what he wanted.

Those Frenchmen had all worked late, re-tuning their racing team because of the speed which the Ross-Eight had put up earlier. They were rivals to the chums, but that made no difference. Three of them got up, started one of the machines outside, and handed it over to Steve, shaking hands with him and wishing him luck!

He went off on the road to the paddock with a furious roar, stamping the throttle of the fast car wide open. As he disappeared, Jim and Joe thanked the Frenchmen as well as they were able, then returned to their own hangar.

"I can't sleep any more," Jim said. "Let's make some tea. It won't be long before daylight."

"You ought to have a sleep," Joe told him, "if you're going to drive to-day. That's going to take it out of you."

"I'll be all right," Jim assured him. "Where's that old kettle? I'll get some water."

The grey of dawn was beginning to tint the purple sky when the kettle boiled and they made tea. Almost with the first hint of daylight the racing camps at Brooklands roused anew. Sunrise found men who were still working, men who had laboured all through the hours of darkness.

The boys loaded up their lorry with stuff for the replenishment pit. After that, they had breakfast, and it was barely seven o'clock when they were all ready to move off from the hangar. But there was still no sign of Steve.

They dared not let the racing-machine out of their sight after what had happened, so they towed it round to the pits, arranging all their tools, spare wheels and other gear there in readiness for the race.

After that, they took the Ross-Eight to its stall in the paddock, where it had to wait until an hour before the race started. It was nine o'clock then.

"What's happened to Steve?" Jim wanted to know. "He ought to be back by now. If he can't get the chemicals, we'll have to run on ordinary petrol."

"He'll get 'em," Joe assured him. "Old Steve's like that. He doesn't give up unless——"

"Ross! Anybody by the name of Ross?" One of the track attendants was coming along the line of stalls, yelling to the mechanics tending the cars which had now been placed in them. The man held the orange envelope of a telegram, and Jim yelled to him.

The wire was addressed to "Ross—Brooklands Track—Weybridge." And he opened it.

"It's from Steve!" he told Joe as he glanced at the signature. Then read aloud: "'Gone home for the stuff.' What does that mean?"

"He couldn't get it in London, so he's gone up to Woodburn!" Joe exclaimed. "He'll never get back in time for the start now!"

"Then what'll we do?"

"Wait until the last minute, and fill up with high-compression petrol. You watch the car, and I'll go and arrange it."

Joe arranged for the substitute fuel, and the petrol company sent cans of it round to the pit. An hour before the start the boys moved the Ross-Eight to the pit near the starting-line, then settled to wait again on the chance that Steve might yet turn up.

Both watched the Ace pit, which was next their own, looking out for Sniff Dix. They saw nothing of him.

"Perhaps the blighter got burnt properly last night!" Jim said.

"He's supposed to ride as Stargie's mechanic," Joe answered. "He must be pretty bad if he isn't turning out. An' that reminds me, I'm comin' in the car with you!"

"Oh?" said Jim. "We can't leave the pit with no one in it!"

"We can," Joe said, "and we're going to! Lots of the drivers are taking mechanics."

"I can't go so fast with a passenger!" Jim growled.

"That doesn't matter—I'm coming!" said Joe, and it was as he spoke that they saw other cars beginning to move on to the starting-line, while an official came along the pits calling the rest of the cars out.

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, daring, is a born racing driver. His father, now dead, was a star speedman, and Jim is following in his footsteps. The boy's brother,

STEVE ROSS, has just completed building a special racing car known as the Ross Eight, and they take it down to Brooklands for a big race, which is due to be run in a few days. They are accompanied by

JOE COOPER, Jim's chum, who acts as mechanic. Jim is to drive the car in the race, and he realises that his most dangerous rival is

LON STARGIE, the crack speedman of Ace Motors. On the night before the race, while the boys are sleeping, a figure creeps into the hangar containing the Ross Eight and sets fire to the tins of special petrol which the car uses. In a second the place is a blazing inferno!

(Now read on.)

"It's no good waiting for Steve any longer!" Jim exclaimed. "We'll have to fill up with the petrol we've got and chance it!"

Both got busy, filling the Ross-Eight's capacious tank. Jim gave one look around for Steve before he started up the engine. There was still no sign of his brother.

The Ross-Eight roared furiously, then the engine steadied to a war-like note.

"Sounds O.K.!" Jim commented. "I expect we shan't notice the difference in the juice until we're doing about 120 m.p.h."

Five minutes later the Ross-Eight rolled away from the pits, and officials waved the machine on to the starting-line.

The sleek, silvery machine slid into position, then stood there with her engine firing smoothly and the wide-open exhaust spanging wickedly, adding its vicious roar to the thunder of the machines around.

Four rows of cars were drawn up across Brooklands track, all thundering and throbbing as they waited for the starter's flag to fall. The bright morning sunshine picked out their colours and the smooth helmets of the drivers.

Four low-built, white German cars were in the front row, looking grimly efficient, flanked by two flaming red machines from Italy and one British car. The machines were all British in the second row, wearing Britain's international racing colour: green.

The aluminium Ross-Eight was in the middle of the third row, with the three Aces on its left and three long, blue, roaring French machines at the other side.

Behind were two cars from America—narrow, white-bodied machines with blue wheels; then three yellow Belgian cars and some more Italians.

The screeching blare of a powerful hooter signalled the fact that it wanted but five minutes for the start. All the drivers were in their machines now, but Jim, looking towards the Ace cars, saw that Lon Stargie was just moving into position—without a mechanic.

Even as he noticed this, Jim sighted Sniff Dix coming from the pit on the run. The Ace crack's mechanic wore long, black gauntlets, and as he drew nearer Jim saw that the fellow had a bandage close around his neck, beneath the collar of his overalls. One of his ears shone as though it was smothered with vaseline—and then Jim saw that Sniff had no eyebrows!

"Look at Sniff!" Jim gasped to Joe, and pointed. "See that bandage? And see how his eyebrows have been singed off. He's the one who started the fire last night!"

He squirmed in his seat as he spoke, but Joe clawed him back before he could get over the side of the car.

"Where are you going?" he gasped.

"I'm going to knock Sniff's head off!" Jim told him.

(Next week's instalment of this stirring motor-racing serial is packed with excitement—don't miss it!)

THE FATAL WAGER!

(Continued from page 34.)

How did you do it? And let's have a look at these things."

He examined the golf-club and the shoes, which were lying at the edge of the pond, where Sylvester had dropped them. While he was doing this Sir George Bullton came up, pale and agitated.

"What has happened?" he asked hoarsely. "Where's Sylvester? He suddenly ran out of the morning-room, and told me to follow him to his car. I lost sight of him, and then I heard a commotion over here—"

"I am afraid you have been badly deceived by Sylvester, Sir George," put in Lee. "Am I wrong in suggesting that he rang you up this morning and warned you to say nothing about young Westerham's wager with his uncle if there should be any inquiries?"

"He did—not half an hour before you came," replied Sir George. "I had not long heard the dreadful news about Halford, and I was half insane with worry."

"Sylvester was very cunning," said Lee. "After warning you to say nothing of the wager, he openly gave me all the details. His reason for that was obvious. While he thought that the case against Westerham was cast-iron, he felt that there might be a crack somewhere. He meant to direct suspicion against you, and your denial of the wager was very suspicious indeed."

"The young hound!" ejaculated Sir George hotly. "But you're not telling me that he murdered poor Halford? It's unthinkable! Why, Dick was on the point of asking me if he could pay attention to my daughter."

"And Lord Halford knew it," said Lee grimly. "I suspected Sylvester from the first, notwithstanding the fact that the footprints and tyre-marks proved that you, Sir George, had been here in the middle of the night."

"This beats me," growled Lennard. "What's all this about a wager?"

"I'll give you all the details later, Lennard," promised Lee. "It was when I heard about this wager from Westerham that I suspected Sylvester. Only he and Sir George knew of that foolish bet; and although Sir George benefits largely under Lord Halford's will, I ruled him out. None of those footprints leading from the library could have been made by Sir George—for the simple reason that he could not possibly wear such small shoes. I wired for Sylvester to come down. Without his knowing it, I examined his car; and although he had taken great care to remove all mud stains from his clothing, he had overlooked the car. On the control-pedals I found distinct traces of bluey-black clay. This suggested a pond—particularly as I knew Sylvester must have concealed his weapon somewhere. I looked for a pond—and found one. And when I saw that a heavy stone was missing from its normal place I felt sure that I was on the right track."

(Continued on page 44.)

The St. FRANK'S LEAGUE GOSSIP

The Chief Officer always welcomes letters from his fellow members of the St. Frank's League; he is always willing to give help and to give advice. Here's his address: The Chief Officer, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Laughs and Thrills!

BY the time you come to read this "Gossip," I expect most of you have seen the announcements earlier on in this issue concerning the two new features which are due to start next week. I want to take this opportunity of impressing upon you that these coming series of short stories are real top-notchers. They are of two distinct types, yet, for all that, I am sure that they will appeal to every reader.

If you want laughs, then the Three Terrors will oblige. Conkey & Co. well deserve their title—you'll never find a livelier trio of lads. The rollicking adventures of these three hair-brained chums will keep you in fits of laughter.

Then there's the other new feature which introduces an amazing character in Thurston Kyle, known as the Night Hawk. This is where you get thrills—thrills galore. Imagine it: night-time, a man flying through the air like some mighty bird of prey, ready to swoop down upon his enemies. Sounds exciting, doesn't it? And it is exciting! Just wait until you read the first enthralling story in this stirring series next Wednesday.

A New Secretary!

AND now for League topics. Here's news of a change in the secretaryship of the World Wide Correspondence Club. Alan Lambourn, who has held this position up till now, and who has done his bit towards making the club the success it is, has resigned. His place of office has been taken over by Geo. L. Lane, 14, Winslow Place, Burnage, Levenshulme, Manchester, to whom all correspondence concerning the club should now be addressed.

Congratulations on your appointment, George—and here's wishing you the best of luck!

Concerning St. Frank's.

I WAS very pleased to receive a letter from F. S. of London—pleased because he said quite a lot of complimentary things about the St. Frank's League! My correspondent is a staunch League-ite himself, and he has just succeeded in obtaining three new members. Cheers!

F. S. has asked me a question, the answer of which will interest all readers. Is St. Frank's being rebuilt? I am pleased to say that it is. Building operations are now well in hand, and it should not be very much

longer before the famous old school is completed. Readers will hear more about this later on.

Stamps—Free!

HERE'S something which will interest those of you who are stamp collectors. Messrs. Carreras, Ltd., the famous tobacco firm, is giving away free colonial and foreign stamps in every packet of "Turf" cigarettes. Tip the wink to your father, your big brother, and your grown-up friends. Ask them to buy these cigarettes and give you the stamps. Why, in less than no time you'll have a collection which will be the envy of your less lucky chums!

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

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All applications for Advertising Spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THE FATAL WAGER!

(Continued from page 32.)

"Sylvester," muttered Sir George. "It is amazing."

"Sylvester unconsciously gave him off away moreover, when I was talking to him," continued Lee. "He told me he was bowled over when he was told, this morning, that Lord Halford's body had been found. It was impossible for him to have known, then, that the body had been found! I had not told him, and the news was not in any of the papers. It was a fatal slip on his part. But, of course, it did not constitute proof. I had to find the evidence."

"What was his motive?" asked Sir George blankly. "The young dog! Tricking me like that, forcing me to lie to you, Mr. Lee. Naturally, I was alarmed, because I had been on the very scene of the murder. I thought Sylvester was genuine."

"His motive was a double one, I judge," replied Lee. "A letter, written by Lord Halford yesterday, is exceedingly illuminating. It was not posted, luckily enough, and it will prove to be a remarkably vivid piece of evidence. It seems that Sylvester came here on Wednesday evening, by Lord Halford's orders; they had a private talk after Westerton and you, Sir George, left. Lord Halford knew something about Sylvester's past which you did not. Being a generous man, Lord Halford kept this information to himself, giving Sylvester a chance."

"But what—"

"As you will see by the letter, Lord Halford put into writing the things he had said to Sylvester in person," explained Lee. "He knew that Sylvester was a bad lot, and he also knew that Sylvester was paying attention to your daughter, Sir George. As your oldest friend he put his foot down on that, and to the goodness of his heart he decided to give Sylvester a chance. It seems that this young rake not only married a girl in Paris, and deserted her, but he bigamously married another girl in Scotland—deserting her, too. Lord Halford was horrified at the thought of such a man paying any attention to your daughter, Sir George. Moreover, as the letter indicates, Sylvester owed Lord Halford a large sum of money; he presumed upon the old fellow on account of his friendship with the nephew. There can be no doubt that Sylvester feared an early expulsion—and possibly a prosecution."

"And then he heard of this wager," ejaculated Sir George.

"He knew of the wager before Lord Halford delivered his edict," replied Lee. "Don't you see the cunning of his plan? You know nothing—neither did your daughter. There was an opportunity to murder Lord Halford in comparative safety. He must have come here in the night, watched Westerton go, and then he struck the fatal blow—using

duplicate stones, so that the tracks were identical. And here that Tony Westerton would most probably be hanged! Then Sylvester would have the way clear to court your daughter, with whom he was already friendly. His debts wiped out in a blow, his secret protected—and a possibility of gaining a girl with five thousand pounds' legacy and a thousand a year. Sylvester played for a big stake."

"And you hear him all along this time?" said Sir George admiringly.

"Bravo, Chief!" chorused Nipper and Browne and Willy.

THE END

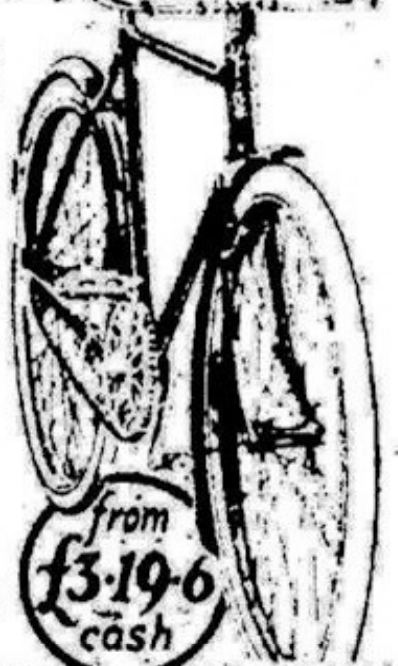
[Another grand story featuring Nipper Lee and his "pal" detectives next Wednesday. It's entitled, "The Night Riders" and it's a real thriller!]

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